

Colombian teachers strike to protest far-right violence

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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The *World Socialist Web Site* invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

Colombian teachers strike to protest far-right violence

The Colombian Federation of Education Workers (FECODE) held another nationwide strike on September 12 to protest the threats and murders that have been committed against them.

Teachers marched and held large demonstrations in Bogotá, Barranquilla, Bucaramanga, Cali and Medellín, while a number of other cities and towns also witnessed mobilizations.

The strike and protests followed by two weeks a national two-day strike that included,

in addition to the denunciations of violence against educators, demands to end the anti-worker National Development Plan of President Iván Duque and adequately finance the health care system, which is a shambles.

The situation has not improved. Recently, the FECODE executive committee received threatening e-mails from the Águilas Negras (Black Eagles far-right paramilitary group) on September 2 and 3, and a planned “caravan for life, peace and democracy” planned for September 6 was suspended.

Salvadoran municipal workers strike, protest pay raise inequality

Workers for the municipality of Puerto el Triunfo in El Salvador’s Usulután department began a strike on September 9 to protest “selective” raises given by the mayor, Javier Amaya, and city council. Striking workers shut the doors of the government building, preventing entry.

The workers claim that Amaya distributed US\$700 to five positions, among them his personal bodyguards. Meanwhile, according to a spokesman for the workers’ union, ASTRAM, there are employees who have worked for years who have never received a raise. The mayor claims that he raised salaries for 70 employees by US\$50 last March.

The workers also demanded that maintenance workers be provided with adequate tools to perform their duties.

Peruvian miners strike over wages, working conditions, health care

Members of the National Federation of Mineworkers of Peru (FNTM) began a strike September 10 over a number of demands, including the right to comprehensive negotiations, a wage raise, better working conditions and health care. The strike was called as a result of the refusal by the National Mining, Petroleum and Energy Society (SNMPE) and the Labor Ministry to meet to negotiate.

The main employers’ group called the strike a failure, claiming that mines were operating normally across the country.

Of particular concern is the National Competitiveness and Productivity Policy (PNCP), a decree approved by the president in July. According to a *peoplesdispatch.org* report, the PNCP “seeks to implement a series of regressive measures such as reducing the number of paid leaves, reduction of the Compensation for Time of Service (CTS), taking away retirement benefit, collective dismissals without compensation and temporary and contractual jobs without stability. It also takes away the right to bargain over wages and strike as well as the right to prosecute the company for dismissing a worker for an invalid reason.”

While profits in the Peruvian mining industry have reached 29 billion Soles (US\$7 billion) a year, workers only receive a 2 percent annual pay increase, according to the FNTM.

On the second day of the strike, hundreds of mineworkers and supporters marched through Lima to the Parliament building to plead with the legislature to resolve their issues. They were confronted and attacked by the police, who threw tear gas canisters at them and confiscated their banners.

Chilean metro cashiers strike against labor instability, schedules, poor pay

Some 400 cashiers for ECM Ingeniería, which contracts services for Chile’s Metro de Santiago, began a strike the morning of September 11. The cashiers took the action because their employer refused to agree to a contract that would “let them escape labor instability in which they find themselves, because of restrictive and discriminatory policies,” according to a statement by their union.

The following day, a group of cashiers held a protest demonstration in front of the Metro de Santiago headquarters while others held protests at various stations around the city.

ECM had submitted a proposal of a monthly raise of between 2,057

and 4,610 pesos (US\$2.90 and US\$6.55), which the cashiers rejected as “stingy and segregationist,” especially since their sector barely makes the minimum wage. In addition, the proposal would not apply to all cashiers.

The cashiers also complain of mistreatment in scheduling. Their shifts—from 4:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., and from 2:30 p.m. to 1:00 a.m., are over the legal limit of nine hours. Moreover, they are required to work six days a week, making it extremely difficult to share time with their families, take care of business, develop personally or even get a decent amount of rest before returning to work.

Talks between Children Services workers and county officials in Ohio collapse

Negotiations between officials from Children Services of Montgomery County, Ohio, and the union representing 272 members of the Professionals Guild of Ohio (PGO) collapsed September 11 as the two sides failed to bridge their differences on wages. The collapse of talks comes as a 60-day court injunction that ended a strike by the union expires on September 21.

The recent talks were preceded by closed-door discussions between the two sides that were attended by a judge. No details of the negotiations have been revealed. Back in July, the PGO was asking for a 6 percent wage increase.

Management has offered a 3 percent across-the-board wage hike along with a 1 percent range adjustment and a \$500 lump sum payment, something they describe as a “5 percent” wage increase. The union has indicated that it has been mandated by the rank-and-file to reject any offer that did not go higher than the county’s July proposal.

On September 25, the union went to court arguing that the judge had essentially stopped a legal strike back in July. The State Employment Relations Board backed up the judge’s decision by declaring the strike presented a “clear and present danger.”

Some 75 percent of the employees are caseworkers who attend to some 2,000 children in the county’s welfare system and handle more than 1,500 cases with 50 court hearings under schedule. The balance of the bargaining unit is composed of clerical, IT and other staff employees.

Health care benefits cut by Amazon-owned grocery chain

The grocery chain Whole Foods has altered the hourly qualification for part-time workers that will result in a loss of health care benefits. Previously, workers clocking 20 hours or more, received medical benefits, but beginning in January 2020, workers will have to log at least 30 hours.

The change is calculated to cause 1,900 workers out of its 95,000 workforce to lose benefits. Whole Foods was purchased for \$14 billion two years ago by Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos.

Newly unionized garbage disposal workers in Massachusetts on

strike

Two dozen striking trash haulers for Republic Services have tied up garbage collection in four Massachusetts cities—Marshfield, Rockland, Abington and Fall River. Members of Teamsters Local 25, who unionized six months ago, went on strike August 29 demanding wages and benefits equivalent to Republic workers at the nearby city of Quincy, Massachusetts.

Unproductive talks between the union and company broke off September 5. Republic has now brought in out-of-state strikebreakers and received a court injunction to bar strikers from blocking trucks. Local police are also escorting trucks through picket lines.

Michael DeVito told the *Patriot Ledger*, “We work at the same company as them but they have better health care, wages and a pension. We all do the same work at the same dump with the same equipment and the same danger. We just wanted to be compensated the same too.”

Workers in Cumming, Georgia, walked off the job September 9, and Teamsters members in McDonough, Georgia, and Evansville, Indiana, have honored Republic picket lines. Another strike against Republic Services broke out two weeks ago in San Jose, California. Republic is the second largest solid waste disposal company in the United States and Puerto Rico with some 35,000 employees. About 25 percent of the company is unionized.

Saskatchewan school workers push to strike

After voting overwhelmingly in favor of strike action earlier this year, 422 workers in the Prairie South School Division of Saskatchewan last week voted by 89 percent to reject the employers latest contract offer over issue of wages and benefit provisions.

Those members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) affected include support workers, bus drivers and maintenance workers, among others who turned out to defeat ratification votes held by their union over the past week. The two sides have continued mediated talks, and despite the clear message from its membership, the union says it has no immediate plans for job action.



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