

Argentine teachers set for national strike; Vancouver B.C. hotel workers walk out

## Workers Struggles: The Americas

24 September 2019

### Argentine teachers plan 24-hour strike over wage demands

A plenary meeting of secretaries general of the university and pre-university union CONADU Histórica announced last week that it will hold a 24-hour national strike on September 25. The announcement criticized the “lack of response to the demands” on the part of the national government.

The main demands of the strike are a salary raise to compensate for the loss of purchasing power due to inflation, a bonus of 5,000 pesos (US\$88), a “trigger clause” to adjust for inflation, an emergency increase for retired teachers’ pensions, and an increase in budgets for university social programs.

The announcement called for meetings with the Education Ministry to address these demands.

### State workers in Argentina announce one-day strike over salary “recomposition”

The State Workers Association (ATE) in the Argentine province of Santa Cruz announced a 24-hour strike on September 26 to press its demand for a salary raise “consistent with the cost of the basic family basket.” The announcement was made after fruitless parity talks with representatives of provincial governor Alicia Kirchner.

### Four-day strike by Argentine civil service workers over wages and labor conditions

Members of the Civil Personnel Union of Chaco, a northeastern province of Argentina, struck for four days last week to press demands including salary improvements, emergency aid for those affected by the food crisis, reclassification of subcontracted personnel to permanent status, and an open salary bill to keep pace with inflation.

Emergency and urgent services in hospitals, health centers and civil registries were maintained during the strike.

The last day of the stoppage, Friday, September 20, included a march to the Government House, where union president José Niz called for “dignified salaries and the definitive uprooting of labor insecurity.” Niz added, “With a dollarized [cost of living] basket and fees it is impossible to survive.”

Another four-day walkout was called for this week. According to a

chacodiapordia.com report, “The force measure will conclude with a provincial march on Friday the 27th to demand urgent responses of the provincial Executive to their demands.”

### Haiti: protests against gas shortages, corruption, inflation

Haiti’s workers and poor held protests in Port-au-Prince, Jacmel, Cap Haïtien and other cities last week. The nation has been faced with a gasoline shortage since mid-August, hampering the ability of working-class Haitians to cook, generate electricity and get to work. The government’s announcement of a hike in the price of gasoline has added to their ire.

In addition to the gas shortage, Haitians have protested corruption, the lack of jobs, and 20 percent inflation. They have demanded the resignation of President Jovenel Moïse. Schools, businesses, public services and transportation have been paralyzed by the shortages and the protests that have resulted.

On September 20, thousands of protesters in the capital Port-au-Prince marched to the Champs de Mars, not far from the National Palace, where they were confronted by police, who attacked them with tear gas, rubber bullets and in some cases live ammunition. Some protesters responded with rocks and other projectiles while others fled in panic. According to one opposition source, there have been three deaths, 69 injuries and 77 arrests since the protests began at the start of the week.

### Guyanese bauxite workers strike for one day over wage raise offer

Most of the 600 workers at a bauxite mine near the northeastern Guyanese city of Linden walked off the job on September 19 to demand a higher raise offer. Bosai Mineral Group Guyana (BMGG), a Chinese-owned company, which had been in stalled negotiations with the National Association of Agricultural, Commercial and Industrial Employees (NAACIE), unilaterally announced a raise of 6 percent for this year and 6.5 percent for the next two years.

The workers had been expecting something closer to 9 percent, especially considering the hefty profits that BMGG has been garnering. Shortly after the workers downed their tools, Bosai raised its offer to 7 percent for the two years. The union accepted the offer and called off the strike on September 20.

Meanwhile, management at another mine, the 90 percent Russian-owned RUSAL, refuses to budge from its offer of 3 percent, while the Guyana

Bauxite and General Workers Union is asking for 6.5 percent. The union is pleading with the government to intervene.

### **Teachers in Argentine province in tenth week of strike over pay, budget issues**

Last week, the Association of Education Workers of Chubut (ATECh), a southern province of Argentina, announced that the teachers will remain on strike this week. This will mark the tenth week that ATECh has carried out strikes.

The teachers have resorted to the actions in response to governor Mariano Arcioni's failure or refusal to pay the teachers on time, make improvements in infrastructure and restore cuts to social projects. ATECh is calling for Arcioni's resignation or impeachment.

Following a demonstration in the provincial capital Rawson, two teachers, María Cristina Agjilar and Jorgelina Ruiz Díaz were killed in an auto accident while returning home. Several teachers unions held one-day strikes in commemoration, and to bring up issues regarding pay and benefits for teachers, as well as the food crisis that has resulted in many students coming to school hungry.

### **Starbucks delivery drivers on strike in four states**

Some 300 delivery drivers for DPI Specialty Foods Inc. who deliver products sold at Starbucks metro locations in Chicago, Indianapolis, St. Louis and Minneapolis have gone on strike. Teamsters Local 710, which represents the drivers, had been negotiating for a five-year agreement but the company was only offering a one-year agreement for Indianapolis and a mere seven months for the other locations.

According to Teamsters secretary-treasure Mike Cales, "Starbucks is planning to move the work away from DPI and to a different company." Starbucks has said DPI is unable to provide the needed infrastructure for the company's future. In securing a future supplier, Starbucks spokesperson Reggie Borges stated that "we expect that workforce is going to include organized labor."

The Teamsters concluded contract talks with DPI back on August 23 and workers voted to strike. But union officials have not given any indications concerning contract terms that affect workers. There can be no doubt Starbucks will be looking to obtain lower operating costs involving delivery logistics.

### **University of Washington medical and dental residents and fellows to stage unity walkout**

Over 1,300 medical and dental trainees working at four University of Washington hospitals in Seattle have announced their intention to stage a 15 minute "Unity Walkout" on Wednesday, September 25 as part of their struggle against one of the lowest salary rates in the US for people in their profession and attempts by the university to impose cuts or freezes to stipends.

Residents and Fellows, paid \$1,000 a month less than their peers throughout the country, have been offered a miserly one percent increase for the first year, one percent for the second year, and no increase for the

third year, all in a city that has the fifth highest standard of living in the US.

The Residents and Fellows, organized in the University of Washington Housestaff Association, compose 20 percent of the doctors in King County and have been working without a contract since June. The UWHA has been able to win only marginal gains for its members for years.

The majority of medical students who are admitted to graduate school and complete an internship become Resident physicians for specialized training. Expected to usually work 80 hours per week for anywhere between two to seven years, residents are then, on the average, facing over \$200,000 in student loan debt. More often than not, they have little or no power to determine where they are matched for their training.

### **Vancouver hotel workers strike**

Nearly a thousand hospitality workers began an indefinite strike against the Hyatt Regency, Westin Bayshore, and Pinnacle Hotels in Vancouver British Columbia on Thursday, September 17.

Four hundred workers at the Hotel Georgia have been without a contract for eight months while hundreds more at the other hotels have been working without a contract for over 14 months. Room attendants, chefs, desk clerks and other unionized staff are fighting for improvements in workload, safety and job security in a new deal.

The labor action occurred during a weekend, which was busy for tourism with many conferences and 30,000 cruise ship passengers lodging in the downtown area. After 26 meetings between Unite Here Local 40 and the Vancouver Hotel Employers Association, the workers have rejected the hotels' 15 percent increase over four years and a vague offer of "better health and safety resources."

The union is calling the job action an indefinite strike action, saying that in addition to a fair wage, workers are fighting for stable employment. They cite the common practice of employers cutting full-time shifts when business drops, leaving employees short on benefits as well as a living wage.

### **Saskatchewan Crown Corporations brace for strike**

Workers at seven Crown Corporations in the province are currently authorized to take strike action as early as next week after recent votes were held by their representative union, Unifor.

They include SaskEnergy, SaskPower, SaskWater, SaskTel, SecurTek, DirectWest and the Water Security Agency, all of which saw strong votes in favor of strike action in recent weeks. The votes send a strong signal of opposition to the two-year wage freeze mandated by the Saskatchewan Party government of Scott Moe, who recently awarded himself a 2.3 percent wage increase.

At the same time, 422 school support workers in Saskatchewan organized under the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) voted 89 percent in favor of strike action last week over wage and benefit issues.



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