

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

20 September 2011

## **Mexican teachers continue strike over security issues**

Despite assurances from the state's governor, teachers in Guerrero's Acapulco-Coyuca zone decided to continue with their strike begun August 29 over security issues at local schools. The strike action is a response to threats made against teachers by gangs aiming to extort money from them. At some schools, messages have been left demanding half of the teachers' salaries and bonuses.

Guerrero governor Ángel Aguirre Rivero announced September 16 that security measures demanded by the teachers, including security alarms, troops and patrols, had been completed and urged the teachers to return to their classrooms. Aguirre Rivero added that the government would meet with the director of the sectional SNTE over the weekend to refine the measures.

The teachers remained unconvinced; in fact, in a press conference the next day, they announced a march for September 21 and called on Aguirre Rivero to come to face-to-face meetings at the educators' offices. The teachers demanded that he meet to listen to their proposed plans and redesign security strategy for the schools. If he does not attend, they will develop a plan of action to demand from the three levels of government that they institute the security measures that would allow the striking educators to return to their classrooms.

## **Puerto Rican teachers federation to protest visit by US "charter czar"**

The Puerto Rican Teachers Federation (PRTF) announced a protest march for October 16, the day before a visit to the island by US Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. Known as the "charter czar," Duncan has carried out the Obama administration's assault on public education with a vengeance, resulting in thousands of job losses and the shuttering of public schools or their conversion into for-profit charter schools. The PRTF has called on Puerto Rican residents to join the teachers in the march and rally.

Teachers who have managed to stay employed in US public schools have witnessed the deterioration of their

wages, benefits and rights during Duncan's tenure, while those hired at charter schools receive less pay and benefits and are subject to pressure to raise test scores regardless of conditions at the school.

## **Colombia pipeline project hit by oil workers' strike**

The construction of Colombia's Bicentennial Pipeline came to a halt on September 13 when 40 workers walked off the job near the eastern town of Hato Corozal over salaries and other issues.

According to a local union official, the Colombian state oil company Ecopetrol "is paying salaries below the legal limit for the oil sector." The official, local head Alvaro Nieto, also pointed out concerns regarding the environmental impact of the project, specifically the effect on the area's water resources.

Moreover, Nieto voiced doubts about employment prospects for communities along the pipeline route, which will be the longest in Colombia, stretching 960 kilometers (600 miles) from the central town of Araguaney to the Caribbean port city of Coveñas. EFE reported that "the engineering firm is expected to employ cutting-edge technology such as an automatic pipeline welding machine."

The strike, called by the Sindispetrol national petroleum workers' union's Hato Corozal local, is the third to hit the Colombian oil industry since June.

## **Argentina: Teachers reject retirement proposal, vote to strike**

By a vote of 13,990 to 10,784, teachers in Argentina's Santa Fe province rejected the government's retirement system reform proposal on September 16. In addition, the educators approved two 48-hour strikes September 20-21 and 28-29.

The teachers are members of AMSAFE (the Santa Fe Educators Association). AMSAFE Secretary General Daniel Couselo told reporters, "The results of the assembly were crushing, which showed the teachers' strong rejection of the provincial government's

proposal.”

Private school teachers, who are in a different union, SADOP, voted Monday, September 19, on the same proposal with similar results.

Changes to the retirement system that the teachers demand include a lowering of the retirement age, an agreed timetable for transfers, a selection process for promotions and income, submission of a housing plan for teachers, and a program for the formation of delegations in health and hygiene.

Mobilizations were planned to begin with a march September 20 from the Plaza de Mayo to the Plaza San Martín for a rally.

### **Argentinean doctors strike for 48 hours**

Doctors for Argentina’s OSEP (Public Employees Social Work) health agency in the northeastern city of Mendoza struck three hospitals on September 15 and continued the stoppage the following day. The doctors are members of the AMPROS health professionals union, and they were joined by workers in the ATE nonprofessional health workers union.

Another union, ATSA, which covers nurses, technicians and administrative employees, did not join the strike.

There are two principal motives for the action. One is the demand for additional pay for “psychophysical risk” (i.e., stress and infection) for all workers who have contact with patients. OSEP asserts that the agency does not have the finances for the bonus, a claim AMPROS contests, citing an agreement reached at another local hospital.

The other demand concerns group contracts at the Virgen de la Misericordia obstetrics hospital that AMPROS officials claim are in conflict with Health Ministry policy. AMPROS Secretary General Isabel del Pópolo told reporters, “OSEP continues with contracts that the Health Ministry had abolished.”

### **California nurses to hold sympathy strike on behalf of striking Kaiser Permanente workers**

The California Nurses Association (CNA) says it will hold a one-day sympathy strike September 22 on behalf of 4,000 health care workers at Kaiser Permanente who are opposing management’s attempt to cut health care and retirement benefits. Some 23,000 CNA nurses at 34 hospitals are expected to honor the call while another 2,000 stationary engineers, members of the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 39, are also planning to walk out.

Kaiser workers, represented by the National Union of Healthcare Workers, are slated to carry out a three-day strike from September 21 to 23. Kaiser Permanente, which operates under the non-profit moniker, is the largest managed care company in the United States with facilities in nine states, and in its most recent financial statement reported a \$1.3 billion net income based on \$42.1 billion in operating revenues.

### **Archdiocese closes Philadelphia high schools in response to teachers’ strike**

The archdiocese for Philadelphia-area Catholic high schools closed 17 facilities September 13 in response to a strike by 711 teachers. Members of the Association of Catholic Teachers rejected a September 6 contract proposal by the archdiocese and walked off the job to protest contract language that eliminates job security and opens the door to the hiring of part-time teachers.

The archdiocese also wants to integrate technology and online programs into the high school curriculum and lengthen the school day by half an hour. An ad hoc parents group has launched a Facebook page calling upon parents to withhold the \$5,600 annual tuition. About 16,000 students are affected by the work stoppage and school closure.

### **Strike deadline at Air Canada**

Negotiations between Air Canada and flight attendants are continuing in front of a September 21 strike deadline. Some 6,500 flight attendants at Canada’s largest airline have been without a contract since March 31. The airline says it is prepared to work on a partial schedule in the event of a strike.

Canada’s labor minister, Lisa Raitt, is set to intervene in the talks if no progress is made. Key issues include, pensions, wages for new hires, wages and working conditions. Flight attendants rejected a tentative contract in August.

If flight attendants walk out, it will be the second strike at the airline this year. Unionized ticket agents struck for three days in June before being forced back to work by strikebreaking legislation.

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