

Workers Struggles: The Americas

5 March 2013

Argentine teachers strike over poor wages

The vast majority of Argentine public school teachers went on strike February 25, the first day of the school year. The main issue is wages. With a yearly inflation rate of more than 25 percent, teachers' real wages are declining on a daily basis.

The teachers union has rejected a government offer of a 22 percent increase as insufficient. The government says it was their last and best offer and the administration of president Cristina Fernandez refuses to negotiate any longer.

Currently base monthly pay is US \$669; the union is asking for US \$726.

While the federal government fixes a wage floor for teachers, each province later reaches a separate deal, with a wage that may be higher. In this instance, Argentina's wealthiest province, Buenos Aires, is claiming that it has no money even to meet the federal minimum.

Mexican teachers protest government attack on education

Striking Mexican teachers in the southwestern State of Guerrero protested against the so-called education reform and new labor laws on February 25 and February 26 by marching, occupying 16 offices of the Education ministry, and blocking streets in the city of Chilpancingo. No end date was set for the strike, but its leaders said that they would evaluate the situation at the end of the week.

In all, over 3,000 teachers walked off their jobs and joined the protests, which intensified on Tuesday due to a public threat by State Education Secretary Silvia Romero that teachers' would lose wages for each day of the protest.

On Friday, Guerrero teachers once again occupied the offices of the education ministry.

Protests also took place in the states of Oaxaca, Michoacán, Nayarit, and Veracruz. In the city of

Oaxaca, teachers and student teachers took over 30 urban buses and blocked roads into downtown. Teachers vowed that they would not allow the new law to become effective in Oaxaca.

In Veracruz, thousands of teachers and parents marched in the city of Orizaba, while in Nayarit, teachers organized teach-ins.

Colombian coffee workers fight for wages; coffee truckers protest over fuel costs

Tens of thousands of small farmers and agricultural workers in Colombia's coffee-growing region marched this week, blocking roads and confronting the police in a protest over the price of their product. There are 560,000 coffee farmers and an equal number of agricultural workers that are affected by the low prices.

In part due to the 40 percent depreciation of the US dollar relative to the peso, the price of coffee has dropped down to 515,000 pesos per ton, nearly 200,000 pesos less than what it costs to produce. In response, the Colombian government of president Juan Manuel Santos has refused to negotiate with the demonstrators, claiming that the FARC guerrilla movement is influencing them. The government sat down instead with the National Coffee Growers Association, which represents owners of very large farms.

On Saturday, March 2, the coffee truck drivers protesting the high cost of fuel joined the coffee protesters. The government recently allowed the price of diesel to rise. The current price is 8,470 pesos and the truckers are demanding a 23.6 percent reduction (2000 pesos, or 1 US dollar). According to the Colombian Truckers Association, 340,000 trucks are on strike.

Thousands of Uruguayans repudiate Supreme Court Decision

On February 25 thousands of Uruguayans marched and rallied at the Supreme Court in Montevideo in the

wake of a decision that blocked legislation to place on trial those responsible for the crimes of the dictatorship during the dirty war of 1973-83.

The demonstration had been organized by the labor federation PIT-CNT and by Human Rights organizations. The marchers walked in silence holding signs denouncing the Supreme Court decision. There were no speeches at the rally, where the demonstrators sang the National Anthem before dispersing after about an hour.

Uruguay's Supreme Court has been handing out decisions that telegraph its class character as an organ of the oligarchy, including the suppression of a tax on very large parcels of land.

Strike by University Professors in the Dominican Republic

More than 3,000 university professors at the Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo, the Dominican Republic's largest University, went on strike last Thursday. The public university has 15 campuses across this island-nation, attended by 185,000 students.

Strikers have declared that the strike will continue until the University grants their demands for a 20 percent raise across the board. In an attempt to prevent the strike, on Monday the government offered a 10 percent raise in March and a 5 percent raise in April. Initially the professors accepted the raise, but demanded the entire 15 percent be paid beginning in March.

Currently, professors at that institution earn a monthly salary of between US\$ 980 and US\$ 1714; strikers report that it is barely possible to afford the basic breadbasket for a family, which is US\$ 620, according to the World Bank. Professors also say that since they received their last raise, in 2008, inflation has reduced their salaries' buying power by 34 percent.

The strikers are also demand that the government incorporate into the university a new oncology hospital.

Rio de Janeiro bus drivers walk out

On March 1, bus drivers walked off the job on strike in the city of Río de Janeiro, Brazil. The issue is wages. The workers are demanding either a 15 percent raise or a ten percent raise plus increases in other benefits.

Bus companies denounced the strike. Picketing bus

drivers threw rocks at those buses that were running. The bus drivers timed their protest to coincide with the day in which this sprawling city celebrated its 448th anniversary and President Dilma Rousseff's presence at the inauguration of an art museum.

Ontario teacher protests continue despite union surrender

Elementary school teachers in Ontario will continue their withdrawal from extra-curricular activities for now, but the union representing secondary school teachers have suspended their protest against government imposed contracts.

The Ontario Secondary Schools Teachers Federation (OSSTF) has urged its members to return to their voluntary activities, but it has left it to individual teachers to decide and many teachers have made it clear that they won't be returning to voluntary duties.

The shift in union tactics comes in the wake of the selection of new provincial Liberal Premier Kathleen Wynne, last month, who the union has portrayed as having a greater willingness to participate in the collective bargaining process.

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