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## Workers Struggles: The Americas

6 March 2018

### **Argentine teachers vote for limited strikes over wages and other demands**

Teachers in the Education Workers Confederation of the Republic of Argentina (CTERA) voted last week to hold a 48-hour strike March 5 and 6. The confederation, which represents about 420,000 public school teachers nationwide, claimed that the measure passed with a wide majority.

The vote was taken in rejection of the government's final offer of 15 percent, which is below the projected annual inflation rate of over 19 percent. Cabinet chief Marcos Peña, in addition to his predictable accusation that the teachers are playing politics with the education of the "little ones" (los chicos), has said that the unions should negotiate wages with the individual provincial governments, some of whom have offered raises of less than 12 percent.

In an extraordinary congress on March 1, CTERA delegates also voted to hold a march to the National Congress in Buenos Aires. In addition to the raise issue, the protesters will make demands regarding labor conditions and staffing.

The private school teachers' union SADOP voted to strike and join the mobilization, but only on March 5.

### **Peruvian doctors, nurses strike over privatization, pay, investment in hospitals**

Doctors in Peru's EsSalud health care system hospitals began a 48-hour strike February 27 to protest privatizations and to press other demands. Doctors held a protest demonstration at EsSalud headquarters in Lima. Elective surgeries, medical appointments and other services at hospitals throughout Peru were suspended except for emergencies, intensive care and critical treatments. The doctors were joined by nurses the next day.

A TelesurTV report said that the doctors "are demanding that the state not privatize hospitals through what they have called tertiarization or even public or private associations. They've said that the state's investment would go to third parties and not to the capacity and infrastructure of hospitals for the benefit of the users."

Other demands include better pay—especially for administrative personnel, who have suffered a pay freeze for

years—adequate, modern equipment and regular maintenance. National Medical Union of EsSalud of Peru general secretary César Portella told reporters that they will start an indefinite strike on April 12 if their demands are not met.

### **Colombian airline fires 46 pilots involved in unsuccessful 51-day strike**

Colombia's flagship airline, Avianca, began hearings last week against pilots who participated in a strike that began September 20 and ended in defeat on November 9. The firm had successfully filed a request to the Superior Tribunal of Bogota (STB) to declare the strike illegal due to its "essentiality." The STB ruled against the appeal by the pilots' union, ACDAC.

ACDAC had called the walkout to press demands for improved wages and conditions. Avianca refused to budge, and used threats, enticements, firings, scabs and other means, culminating in the court ruling, to undermine the strike. The strike was further hampered by the fact that ACDAC's 700 members accounted for little more than half of Avianca's 1,388 pilots. The other pilots did not join the walkout.

So far at least 46 pilots have been fired in hearings that have involved anywhere from 18 to 34 pilots at a time. An ACDAC statement claims that the hearings are designed "to intimidate union members and overwhelm the court's ability to adequately review sanctions" and called the firings an illegal breach of pilots' rights. Fired pilots have eight days in which to appeal their dismissals.

ACDAC head Jaime Hernández and his second-in-command Jorge Mario Medina were among the first to be sacked. About 240 pilots have been notified that they will be called to the hearings. The Workers Central Unitary, to which ACDAC is affiliated, asked the Labor Ministry to "effect actions directed at avoiding this labor massacre of the Avianca pilots." ACDAC has said that it will appeal to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the International Labor Organization.

### **Jamaican cane cutters strike over working conditions, mechanization**

Over 100 sugar cane cutters at the Golden Grove Sugar

Factory in St. Thomas, Jamaica went on strike February 21 to protest their working conditions. The workers, who had formerly been employed directly by Golden Grove, were made “redundant”—i.e., were fired—in 2016 and then hired by a contracting firm, Sankar Limited, which then contracted them to work at their former employer.

Workers complained of being underpaid and not given any benefits, and they demanded a meeting with management. Management called a meeting for February 22 but did not show up. On February 25, a mechanical harvester was brought in to do the work of the cane cutters. Rumors that two more mechanical cane cutters were on the way increased restiveness among the cutters. The workers accused Sankar of intimidation. As of February 27, the workers were still on strike.

The cane cutters were not the only aggrieved employees in the sugar sector. Clerical and administrative workers for the Sugar Industry Authority (SIA) and Sugar Industry Research Institute (SIRI) walked off the job February 20 over “a wage dispute following a reclassification exercise more than two years ago,” according to an rjrnewsline.com report.

On February 26, their union, the Union of Clerical, Administrative and Supervisory Employees, ordered them back to work, saying that it had arranged a meeting with the Ministry of Labour over the issue the next day.

### **California hospital workers initiate protest ahead of giant hospital merger**

Healthcare workers initiated demonstrations February 20 at some of the 28 California hospitals owned by Dignity Health as hospital management prepared a merger with another nationwide hospital chain. The demonstrations are to continue as Dignity merges with Catholic Health Initiatives ahead of the contract expiration for 15,000 members of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU).

Workers fear the merger will facilitate attacks on the wages and benefits of the current master agreement between the SEIU and Dignity Health. The company has sought to tamp down workers’ misgivings by claiming there is “no geographic overlap in hospital service areas” and management does not “anticipate any significant impact to local jobs in our service areas.”

Catholic Health Initiatives operates 100 hospitals in 17 states with \$15.5 billion in revenue and \$21.9 billion in assets last year. According to some analysts, hospitals are seeking a broader base for revenues as the crisis of the health care system intensifies with growing attention paid to clinics and outpatient care as opposed to the larger hospital systems and their reliance on inpatient care.

### **Strike postponed by Dallas teachers’ union**

The president of the Dallas Education Association changed the intent to strike date by the city’s teachers from March 5 to April 13 in what can only be seen as a betrayal under

conditions where teachers across the United States are being profoundly influenced by the courageous struggle of West Virginia teachers. It is widely admitted that the current negotiations are deadlocked and the board rejected yet another proposal last week by the union.

An attorney for the school board declared the latest proposal by the union as “something the district can’t afford.” Instead of pressing forward, union president Michael Cherinka defended the climb-down from a strike by declaring, “We filed an unfair labor practice and are waiting for that to play out.”

The unfair labor practice charge dates from last November when the school board refused to attend a scheduled negotiation session.

### **York University contract faculty and teaching assistants strike**

Contract faculty, teaching assistants, graduate assistants and librarians, all members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), rallied Monday on their first day on strike at Toronto’s York University.

A central issue for the 3,700 members of the bargaining unit is job security—the same issue that has dominated contract battles in previous years, not only at York, but at universities and colleges throughout Canada. This past autumn, 12,000 Ontario community college teachers struck for five weeks against conditions of precarious employment pushed on them by college management before the Liberal government outlawed their action and forced them back to work.

In 2009, the Liberal government also forced striking York contract teachers back to work. In a bitter month-long strike in 2015, strikers rejected agreements on two occasions that were recommended by their union leadership before finally settling. In the current round of negotiations, York University management has issued a letter to the CUPE members that once again seeks to intimidate them with the threat of anti-strike legislation.

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