

Colombian teachers hold nationwide two-day strike

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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Colombian teachers hold two-day strike over noncompliance with contract

Over 270,000 teachers in Colombia's public school system struck May 9 and May 10 to demand the compliance with provisions in a contract signed last year. The teachers already held a one-day strike in February over the same issues. The Colombian Federation of Education Workers, Fecode, issued the call for the strike.

Teachers are calling for improvements in the health care system—which has been plagued by suspension of cancer treatments, denial of emergency attention and lack of information about the health care network—the insecurity of over two thousand contracted and provisional education professionals, shortages of food for students, better pay and the total compliance of the government with the contract.

Teachers descended in large numbers on major cities like Barranquilla, Cartagena, Bogotá, Cali, Medellín, Bucaramanga and others. Smaller cities, including one on the Caribbean island of San Andrés, also had mobilizations. In Bogotá, protesters marched to the Ministry of Education, slowing traffic. Demonstrators held signs demanding “More books, fewer weapons” and other slogans.

Education Minister Yaneth Giha denounced the strike and protests as “unjustified,” claiming that nine of the 24 provisions had been fulfilled. Giha also said that the strike was illegal, since education is legally defined as an essential service, but did not threaten any reprisals.

Two-day strike by Argentine university professors over salaries, budget

With negotiations between teachers unions and the government at a standstill, university professors in Argentina struck on May 10 and 11. Two teachers union federations, Conadu (the National Federation of University Educators) and Conadu Histórica, called the limited action. Fifty-seven public universities were shut down for the two days.

The main demand of the unions is a 25 percent salary raise with a “trigger clause” pegged to inflation. The government has not budged from its proposal of a 15 percent raise doled out in increments of two percent in April and June, 5 percent in September and six percent in December. Inflation so far has already passed 20 percent. Other demands include an increased budget for education, especially science and technology; conversion of temp contract and “ad honorem” educators to permanent status; and funds for professional development.

The strike was also a protest against the recent decision by rightwing president Mauricio Macri to start talks with the International Monetary Fund for a \$30 billion dollar loan. Working-class Argentinians have bitter memories of the IMF's loan

that involved brutal austerity policies in the 1990s. To add to the acuteness of the current crisis, the peso has fallen against the US dollar, devastating already weak purchasing power.

Argentine unions have repeatedly held token 24, 48 and 72-hour strikes and protests over the attacks on workers' living standards, with no result other than further deterioration. The union federations have called for a one-day strike and “torch march” to the Plaza de Mayo this week.

Peruvian airline crewmembers consider strike over wages, working conditions

Nearly eight months of negotiations have passed between LATAM (formerly LAN) of Peru—a subsidiary of LATAM Airlines Group, one of Latin America's largest airlines—and the Cabin Crew of LAN Peru Syndicate without any resolution of outstanding issues, mostly centered on wages and working conditions. The airline is insisting on policy changes that will mean lower pay, less job security and worsening conditions for crewmembers. A new categorization scheme that LATAM wants to impose would make monthly pay for cabin crew 930 soles, or US\$285. The minimum wage is 850 soles.

In an interview with emol.com, union president Anna María Orellana has referred to the strike in April by cabin crew at LATAM's Chile subsidiary, in which the union unilaterally decided to return to work after 17 days without any improvements in LATAM's stance. The Peruvian branch is sure to follow suit. The policy of attrition was also employed by Avianca Airline's Colombian branch to break a pilot's strike in September-November 2017. Dozens of pilots were later fired for their role in that walkout.

Nicaraguan taxi drivers protest fuel price hike

Several dozen taxi drivers and “caponeros” (riders of three-wheeled motorized vehicles used to transport passengers) in Nicaragua's capital Managua and Ciudad Sandino, a municipality just west of Managua, held protests May 10 against high fuel prices. The cabbies are independent drivers and are not members of the official taxi cooperatives. The drivers briefly blocked traffic on some main streets and wrote slogans protesting the fuel prices on the windows of commuter cars. The protesting cabbies also complained of other expenses that have cut into their livelihood, such as fines and rising costs of renting cars.

Guatemalan teachers end partial strike for budget, pay

On May 11, the Guatemalan Teachers Syndicate (STEG) called off the partial strike that began on April 17, when it agreed to send teachers back to class on May 14. During the course of the strike at 6 of the nation's 22 schools, the educators had marched to government

buildings and occupied the Education Ministry as well as other buildings in Guatemala City and other locations nationwide.

The strike was called to push STEG's demand for an increase in the nation's education budget of roughly 128 million dollars, some of which would be applied to a five percent raise for teachers. In February, STEG and the ministry had already signed a collective pact, but after two months of government foot dragging, the strike was called.

During the strike, Education Minister Óscar López minimized the effect of the action while claiming that the teachers were violating children's human right to education, without emphasizing the right to a decent salary and an adequate budget. A meeting attended by officials from STEG, the Education and Labor Ministries, and the Human Rights Office resulted in the ending of the walkout.

The meetings will carry on discussions of the five percent raise as well as a bonus of 2,500 quetzales (US\$337) per year for teachers and another 500 quetzales (US\$67) for teachers with a university title.

Mexican public service workers strike for raise, insurance

Public service workers in the municipality of Tonalá, Jalisco, Mexico went on strike and held a demonstration in front of the mayor's office on May 11. The striking workers demanded that the municipality raise their monthly pay by 500 pesos (US\$25.74), the payment of life insurance to 35 families of deceased workers and the reinstatement of two workers who were unjustly fired.

The workers had made numerous appeals to the city council that went unanswered. The mayor claims that the strike is illegal and that there is no money to pay the raise.

Kansas City carpenters strike against concessions

Carpenters in the Kansas City area continued their strike despite a threat by Turner Construction to permanently replace those who did not return to work by May 8. Some 50 carpenters went on strike after the old agreement expired April 30 and in opposition to Turner's demands to wipe out pensions, reduce contributions to health care and slash hourly pay by \$15 an hour.

Management for Turner also wants to remove a clause that requires them to use union carpenters for any work it subcontracts to other firms. Turner Construction, one of the largest construction companies in the United States, subcontracts most of its work. Turner is a subsidiary of the German company Hochtief, which purchased the company in 1999.

Aerospace workers continue strike over work rules

Aerospace workers for United Launch Alliance are continuing a strike that began May 7 at locations in Alabama, Florida and California to protest working conditions. A combined force of some 600 workers assemble and launch rockets in Decatur, Alabama with another contingent of 220 at Cape Canaveral, Florida and 80 at Vandenberg Air Force Base in California. All are members of the International Association of Machinists.

The common concern among workers is an expanded contract provision that will allow management to force workers to travel to various sites to support launches. "Anybody at any time can be sent away for 30 days," striker Randall Springer related to the *Decatur Daily*. United Launch Alliance is a joint venture by Boeing Company and Lockheed Martin Corporation.

B.C. casino workers set to strike

Four hundred workers employed at the Hard Rock Casino in Coquitlam, British Columbia near Vancouver walked off the job last Friday after voting 99.5 percent in favor of strike action earlier in the year.

The BC Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU) has been in talks since last year for a first contract with the Great Canadian Gaming Corporation, which owns the casino, but despite mediation have not obtained a deal. The two sides are reportedly far apart on a range of issues including wages, benefits, pensions and work schedules. According to the union many of the workers at the Hard Rock have not had a wage increase in over 10 years even as the cost of living continues to climb. The final offer presented to the union by the employer contained a number of rollbacks according to union negotiators.

The company maintains that it is offering what workers at other casinos have been given in recent contracts and casino management have said that the casino will remain open despite any job action.

Westjet pilots push to strike

Pilots for Canada's second largest air carrier, Calgary-based Westjet Airlines, could be on strike as early as next week after voting overwhelmingly in favor of strike action last week in their bid for a first contract.

Although the pilots will be in a legal strike position by Friday of this week, their union, the Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA) have given the employer assurances that they won't walk off the job until after what is a long weekend in Canada, in order to avoid travel disruption. Negotiations between Westjet and the ALPA are ongoing, but the two sides are reportedly far apart on key issues such as wages, working conditions and job security.

Bookings with Westjet have fallen in recent days in anticipation of possible job action and their main rival, Air Canada, took the opportunity to announce expanded capacity on key routes that may be affected.

Three workers hospitalized in Ontario mining accident

A 56-year-old man is in critical condition and two others suffered serious injury in an industrial accident at the smelting facility of Glencore Canada's Falconbridge location near Sudbury, Ontario.

No statement has yet been made by the Mine Mill Workers union, which is part of Unifor, but one worker was reported to have come in contact with a dangerous substance. Neither the company, the police or the Ministry of Labour, which is conducting its own investigation, have released any details about the cause of what has been called a serious industrial accident.

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