

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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Confrontation between Lima police and striking Peruvian teachers

Latin America

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Confrontation between Lima police and striking Peruvian teachers

June 27 saw a violent confrontation between police in the Peruvian capital of Lima and teachers supporting an indefinite strike called by the regional SUTE-CONARE, a faction that has split from the main teachers organization, SUTEP.

The confrontation with the police took place in the city's main plaza facing the government palace. A large number of the demonstrators had come from the provinces to Lima to support the strike. After being evicted by the police from the plaza, the teachers proceeded to block the Metropolitano transit station in downtown Lima.

At least 5,000 teachers from the metropolitan Lima area have had their salaries withheld because of strike activity. The numbers are even larger in the provinces, where the strike has more support. At the same time, authorities have begun replacing striking teachers with scabs.

In a parallel development, police used teargas to disperse students from Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos (UNMSM), who had taken over the university administration building to protest against the lack of teachers and to demand the repeal of a General Studies Plan requiring all students, regardless of their majors, to take the same undergraduate courses.

Venezuelan health workers strike for wages, infrastructure, supplies

Nurses in Venezuela began an indefinite strike June 25 to press their demands for higher wages, improved

infrastructure and an end to shortages of supplies and medicines in the nation's health care system. The Federation of Colleges of Nursing Professionals, which voted for the stoppage after an assembly, claimed that 500,000 healthcare workers in 20 states adhered to the call.

The Committee against Hunger and for Life, which is coordinating the strike, also claims that other health professionals, including doctors, pharmacists, bio-analysts, and auxiliary staff, have also walked off the job. Emergency services and urgent needs such as immunization shots have been maintained.

Federation officials accuse the Maduro government of using bribes, in the form of bonuses and boxes of food, and of intimidation, such as threats of firings and threats by pro-government groups, to undermine the strike. They also disavowed salary talks held between the government and a group of doctors, saying that the federation is the only valid representative body for nurses.

The nurses are calling for their salaries to match those recently granted to members of the National Bolivarian Armed Forces of between 50 and 70 million bolivares (US\$500-700) per month.

Mexican municipal workers' strike ends after 16 days

On June 29 the Union of Service Workers of the Municipality of Mineral de la Reforma (SUTSMMR) announced the end of a walkout, having settled for a miserable 5 percent raise.

The city also agreed to reinstate 13 of the 35 discharged workers, with the rest supposedly to be reincorporated "gradually, without specifying a date," according to an am.com.mx report. SUTSMMR claimed, without giving specifics, that the agreement would restructure general working conditions and retirement.

Members of (SUTSMMR) in Hidalgo, Mexico went

on strike June 12 over demands for changes in their contract with the city, which covers 239 workers. The union had submitted a petition to the municipal authorities in October with demands including a 20 percent raise, medical coverage, uniforms, reinstatement of 35 discharged workers, respect for work schedules and workdays, and an end to harassment of workers, among others.

The municipal government turned a deaf ear to their demands and negotiations at the Local Conciliation and Arbitration Board fell through, resulting in the first strike by municipal workers in the city's history.

Two days into the walkout, SUTSMR said that it would accept a 7 percent raise, while police launched teargas during a confrontation between striking workers and nonunion personnel. Meanwhile, the mayor's office increased its intimidation tactics and met with some workers in an attempt to get them to form a faction in opposition to the strike.

The United States

Massachusetts gas workers locked out

About 1,100 gas utility workers were locked out by National Grid when they showed up for work June 25 at several locations across Massachusetts. The lockout of members of United Steelworkers Locals 12003 and 12012 came one day after the old agreement expired and the failure of management to compel workers to accept cuts in healthcare, pensions, the altering of overtime rules, the outsourcing of work to contractors and the lowering of wages.

Workers originally voted to authorize a strike back on June 20 when National Grid's demands hardened. Their proposal specifically targets new hires by completely axing pensions. The company has deployed management personnel and contractors to perform the bargaining unit labor.

Canada

BC casino workers on strike

More than 700 workers at four casinos owned by Gateway Casinos in southern British Columbia are on strike this week after walking off the job last Friday following overwhelming strike votes in early June.

The workers are members of the BC Government and Service Employees Union (BCGEU), whose negotiators say they are only fighting to bring wages

and benefits up to industry standards in the province. The workers affected include slot attendants, game table workers, cashiers and kitchen staff at the casinos.

Although their last contract expired in September of last year, the strike was only called after mediated negotiations broke down last week. Starting pay at the company is the legal minimum wage of \$12.65 an hour and workers are being offered an increase of only 85 cents an hour.

Manitoba long-term care workers set to strike

Workers at the Kildonan Personal Care Home in Winnipeg, Manitoba voted unanimously to reject the company's latest offer setting a course for strike action in the coming days.

The workers are members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) employed delivering personalized care at the long-term care facility, which is one of the largest of its kind in North America. According to union negotiators the company is offering far less than what it pays at its other unionized facilities. In addition, the union says they are fighting healthcare cuts from Manitoba's Tory government that are hurting patients and increasing job stress on healthcare workers in the province.

BC village workers set to strike

Municipal workers in the Village of Harrison Hot Springs, east of Vancouver, British Columbia could be on strike by next week if there is no resumption of contract talks before then.

The workers, members of CUPE, rejected the Village's final offer by a solid majority last week and the union is now engaged in mediated talks for essential services in the event of a strike, which could start as early as July 8. Workers affected by the dispute are employed in water services, public works and administration at Village Hall.

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