

Series of regional strikes hit Argentina

Workers Struggles: The Americas

12 February 2019

Light and power workers union in Argentina calls 48-hour strike over contract noncompliance

The Regional Light and Power Syndicate of Patagonia announced February 8 that its members in the province of Chubut would stop their labors for 48 hours beginning at midnight February 11. Union head Héctor González told reporters that the two-day walkout was called over the lack of a parity agreement and noncompliance with the approved protocol agreement.

The industrial action is also meant to protest the public cooperatives, who have not only delayed paying salaries, which lag behind inflation, but owe over 3,000,000,000 pesos (US\$79 million) to the CAMMESA wholesale power market administrator. Another complaint of Light and Power workers is the neglect demonstrated by the central government toward the Patagonian region, which has turned a deaf ear to their pleas.

Argentine bus drivers hold 24-hour strike against splitting, delay of wage payment

Bus drivers in San Miguel de Tucumán, capital of Argentina's Tucumán province, held a one-day strike to protest the nonpayment of their full wages. Public transport business executives claim that they do not have the funds to pay their complete wages, and have proposed the "folding" (desdoblamiento) of the drivers' pay in two 50 percent installments. They also want more subsidies.

The secretary general of the drivers' union, the UTA (Automotor Tram Union), said, "We are predisposed to offer a way out of this. But the ones who hold the key to the conflict are [the business owners], who have to make effective the 50 percent payment so that the fellow workers go to work." He added that if the drivers did not get their half-pay by February 11, the drivers would go on indefinite strike on the February 12.

The city's mayor has requested "obligatory conciliation" (i.e. binding arbitration) mediated by the Labor Secretariat. The

Labor Secretary responded by saying the province cannot dictate obligatory conciliation over such issues. However, he called for union and business representatives to attend mediated talks.

Strike at Argentine hospitals to demand indemnity for fired workers

Workers in two hospitals in Argentina's Neuquén province began a strike February 4 to demand the payment of damages to workers who were fired by a subcontractor. Over 150 security and cleaning crew workers at the Heller and Villa de Angostura hospitals were let go by the Limit SA outsourcing firm after it lost its bid, and the State Workers Association (ATE) says that the company had until January 31 to pay the Christmas bonus as well as 5,000 pesos (US\$132) that the government ruled was owed to them.

ATE has petitioned the Health Ministry to hold a hearing over the matter.

Strike by Mexican university workers enters second week

The strike by Autonomous Metropolitan University (UAM) workers reached its seventh day on February 8, with no agreement reached between representatives of the SITUAM union and UAM officials. The union and administration have held two meetings, with SITUAM secretary general Jorge Dorantes expressing the union's "openness" to compromise while criticizing the "rigidity" of university authorities.

UAM administrators have refused to share information about the university's budget, only saying that it cannot afford to pay more than a 3.35 percent raise, while Dorantes has said, "We aren't married to the 20 percent, but neither to a salary cap." SITUAM has also denounced the steady growth of nonpermanent workers at UAM. A February 4 meeting produced no agreement.

A group of preparatory students occupied some buildings for 24 hours after voting to support the strike. On February 8, students joined striking workers in a march down Paseo de la Reforma to central Mexico City's main plaza, the Zócalo, where they held a rally outside the building where President Andrés Manuel López Obrador was holding a press conference, to ask him to order the approval of the raise.

The next day, the union and administration met for the second time at the Federal Office for the Defense of Workers, and for the second time failed to reach a deal.

No negotiations after Ohio charter school authorizes strike

The management for the charter school Summit Academy in Parma, Ohio has yet to respond to teachers who voted to authorize a strike February 1. The 24 teachers, who are members of the Alliance for Charter Teachers and Staff (ACTS), are seeking better working conditions that affect not only teachers, but the students, of whom many have special learning needs such as ADHD, autism, and learning and behavior disorders.

Teachers first began organizing in the fall of 2017 and their first negotiations with Summit Academy began back in March of 2018. Teachers, whose annual salaries average only \$30,000, were more than a little miffed when they discovered that Summit's CEO just received a \$31,000 raise.

Summit management's initial contract offer impressed teachers not as a contract but a list of rules subordinating teachers to management whim and providing pretexts to fire teachers without specifying cause. Teachers complain they do not have official time set aside for lunch, planning periods or discussion with co-workers.

ACTS, which is an affiliate of the Ohio Federation of Teachers, is not uniting charter school teachers with public school teachers and has not yet organized the other 23 Summit Academy charter schools in Ohio.

Northwest Territory workers take job action

Workers employed by the Government of Northwest Territories (GNWT) will hold a one-day strike this week, initiating a series of limited job actions that their union, the Union of Northern Workers (UNW), has undertaken in their bid for a new contract.

The UNW, which is affiliated with the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC), is the bargaining agent for nearly 4,000 government workers in various departments and has been

without a contract since 2016. Negotiators say they are fighting against the use of relief workers by the government as well as for retroactive wage increases.

The job action amounts to a patchwork of limited strikes, which the union says are targeted at government Ministers who voted against a proposal for binding arbitration that the union was seeking. Mediated talks continued through last weekend but no deal has yet been reached.

Vancouver Art Gallery workers on strike

Citing a range of concession demands being advanced by the Vancouver Art Gallery (VAG), the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) called over 200 workers out on strike last week in a fight for what they are calling fair treatment in a new contract.

Two central issues in dispute include employer demands for a two-tiered system of working conditions and a wage proposal for VAG workers that the union says does not even keep pace with inflation or even at par with their counterparts across Canada. They also accuse the employer of seeking to bypass negotiations to force a "last offer vote" as allowed under B.C. labor law, which is to be held this week.

The striking workers have been without a contract since July of 2017 and their union, which has been in negotiations for eight months, has applied to the Labour Board for mediation.

GM Oshawa targeted by supplier walkout

A one-shift work stoppage by seat supplier Lear Corporation in nearby Whitby, Ontario forced the halt of production at General Motors' Oshawa assembly plant for three hours last Friday in a carefully calibrated effort by Unifor to dissipate anger and opposition over the planned closure of the plant later this year.

Unifor says the action by 350 unionized workers at the just-in-time facility was to pressure GM to extend production at the Oshawa plant until the end of the current contract in September of 2020. The planned closure will eliminate 2,600 jobs at GM and an additional 1,800 at companies that supply the Oshawa plant.



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