

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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The World Socialist Web Site invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

Strike continues at Chilean Starbucks

Some 200 Starbucks employees at the coffee house chain's Chilean locations are continuing their strike that began June 28. The workers' demands include better wages—currently about only US\$2.60 per hour—lunch and transportation stipends and enforced break times.

Under many union contracts in Chile, companies contribute to lunch and transportation expenses. In regard to breaks, according to the *Santiago Times*, “Officially, workers get one 10-minute break and one half-hour break. Breaks, however, are assigned by location managers, who often choose not to give them during ‘rush’ periods when the coffee shops are particularly busy.”

A statement from Starbucks Chile claims that most of its “partners” (i.e., workers) are satisfied with their wages and conditions, pointing out that 500 out of 700 employees at its 30 locations remain on the job. However, as barista Antonio Paez told the *Times*, “What they don’t tell you is that prior to the strike, there were only 500 employees. The extra 200 were hired shortly after the strike was announced.”

Paez and two other employees began a hunger strike on Monday to dramatize their demands.

Ecuadoran teachers end hunger strike

A group of eight teachers in Ecuador’s northwestern coastal city of Esmeraldas ended their 30-day hunger strike July 30 on behalf of 80 teachers whose contracts were not renewed. They have, however, continued a vigil that they say they will not end until the contracts are signed.

Originally, 11 teachers participated in the hunger strike in front of the city government building July 1, but three dropped out, citing health reasons. On July 29, negotiators for the teachers, the local government and federal government ministries worked out an agreement to renew the contracts. The first contracts would go to the 11 teachers, then to the other 69 by August 9.

On July 30, after 30 days on their fast, the eight teachers were taken to the Delfina Torres de Concha Hospital, Esmeralda’s principal hospital, and set up a tent in front. Álvaro Lara, one of the fasters, told reporters that they would stay there until the Provincial Education Office brought them contracts to sign. Teacher’s representative Cristhian Gaibor told *La Hora*, “If by that date they do not comply, on August 10 we will resume the hunger strike.”

Panamanian teachers unions hold 48-hour “warning strike”

On Friday, July 29, leaders of 15 Panamanian educators unions negotiated an agreement with the Ministry of Education (Meduca) regarding educational reforms. The accord followed a 48-hour “warning strike” begun on Thursday over curricular reforms.

In 2009, the government implemented a series of changes in curriculum in about half of the mid-level public schools, contending that the changes were necessary after decades of lagging behind private

schools. Teachers claimed that the reforms “respond to the needs of the business sector and not to a criterion of integral and humanist education,” according to an *El Nuevo Herald* report.

The agreement entails the establishment of a commission to study and discuss three main themes: labor conditions, curricular reforms and the quality of public education. Each union will accredit a representative and a substitute to participate in the dialog over each of the issues.

Striking teachers requested the inclusion of a promise of no reprisals, but it is not clear if it was added to the deal.

The teachers returned to work on Monday.

Mexican textile workers enter fourth week on strike

Workers at the Fábrica La Estrella textile plant in Parras de la Fuente, Coahuila, Mexico, are continuing a strike that began July 8 over company attempts to change wages and working conditions previously agreed to in collective bargaining.

Before the strike, workers at La Estrella earned up to around 1,300 pesos (US\$111) per week.

The plant employs about 400 workers who produce denim and other fabrics. Claiming that “disloyal” competition from Chinese textile factories is negatively impacting the industry, and citing the closure of several plants in the region, management is demanding the elimination of six clauses in the contract.

The changes sought by management involve cutting back or eliminating supply vouchers and a range of bonuses for efficiency, productivity, punctuality and attendance, suspension of the retirement fund for two years and changes in scheduling—to a four-day, 12-hour workweek—which would likely eliminate the night shift.

Strike settlement at New York nuclear plants

Workers at the Nine Mile Point nuclear plants in

Scriba, New York voted to end their 18-day strike and ratify a new four-year agreement. Members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) voted by a 395-64 margin to approve the new contract, which provides for annual 2 percent wage increases.

On the critical issue of pension benefits, which caused the walkout, the IBEW accepted a compromise that reduces benefits for older workers in an effort to improve benefits for younger workers. The previous agreement with Constellation Energy Nuclear Group, which operates the Nine Mile Point facility, had a wide disparity on pensions between younger and older workers.

Strike/lockout on hold at Saskatchewan transit

A confrontation was temporarily averted with a mediated agreement reached Friday, putting on hold a job action by the union representing Saskatoon, Saskatchewan transit workers.

The main issue in the dispute is wages, with the city offering 7 percent over three years and the Amalgamated Transit Union asking for 10 percent. The 374 workers involved in the dispute, including drivers and maintenance workers, voted overwhelmingly last week to reject the city’s latest offer.

These workers have been without a contract since 2009, yet the job action their union has prepared is merely to cancel selected routes in order to pressure the city to agree to mediation. The city had threatened a lockout in retaliation.



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