

Workers Struggles: The Americas

Brazilian general strike set for Friday

25 April 2017

The *World Socialist Web Site* urges workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature by emailing information to comments@wsws.org.

Brazilian workers to strike against austerity measures

With growing popular anger against the austerity policy of Brazilian President Michel Temer, the Central Workers' Union (CUT) has called a general strike for Friday, April 28. Temer is pushing a 20-year freeze on public spending and the gutting of pension and job protections. The strike is expected to shut down airlines, public transportation and other public sector work.

As *Telesur* noted, “According to recent polls, Temer—installed in office through a parliamentary coup against his predecessor Dilma Rousseff last year—has an approval rating of just 5 percent, while 93 percent of Brazilians reject his policies of neoliberal reforms and the dismantling of social plans carried out by his administration.”

Argentine port workers demand 40 percent wage increase

Port workers in Argentina's main grain hub of Rosario are holding protests to demand a 40 percent pay increase in upcoming negotiations. Teachers and other sections of workers have conducted strikes and protests to demand wage increases to meet rising inflation, which was 40 percent last year.

Argentina is the world's top exporter of soymeal livestock feed and soy oil, which is used in making biofuels.

More than 20,000 retired coal miners face loss of medical benefits

The April 30 deadline is fast approaching for 22,000 former coal miners and surviving spouses in West Virginia, Kentucky, Ohio, Pennsylvania and other mining states who face the loss of medical benefits paid

out by the United Mine Workers Health and Retirement Funds. Peabody Energy, its spin-off Patriot Coal, and other operators have long used the bankruptcy courts to skirt their obligations to pay into the funds.

The UMW has aided and abetted the coal companies by signing sweetheart contracts that reduced their payments into the trusts, and by blocking any unified struggle by miners and broader sections of the working class, including millions of retired truck drivers, who face similar attacks. The UMW and AFL-CIO are telling workers to look to Trump and Congress to back the Miners Protection Act, which would temporarily shore up the UMW trusts while likely cutting benefits for future retirees.

XPO misclassifying Los Angeles area port truck drivers

The California Labor Commissioner earlier this month awarded four port and rail drivers working for XPO Logistics (formerly Pacer Cartage) \$855,000 in back pay and legal fees after finding they had been misclassified as “independent contractors” instead of employees. The company is appealing the ruling as it has done others, which have awarded workers with \$36 million in stolen wages and penalties.

Hundreds of XPO and other harbor truck drivers at the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, California—America's largest port facility—have the cost of fuel, truck insurance, lease payments, maintenance and repairs illegally deducted from their paychecks, while being denied workers compensation, disability and unemployment benefits. The Teamsters union, whose opposition to the misclassification is chiefly motivated by its desire to gain new dues-paying members, has limited the struggle of the port truck drivers to isolated short-term strikes, appeals to stockholders and local Democratic Party politicians.

California Rite-Aid supplier workers threaten to

strike

An estimated 100 workers at Rite Aid's Thrifty Ice Cream plant in El Monte, California have voted to strike to stop company plans to force them to pay thousands of dollars in higher health care deductibles and co-pays. The workers, who are members of Teamsters Local 630 and 63, have not gotten a new contract since the last one expired in 2016.

Thrifty Ice Cream employees voted unanimously to walk out at Rite Aid operations throughout Southern California and other states as the company awaits anti-trust approval from the federal government of its proposed merger with Walgreens. This merger could result in 1,200 or more stores being sold to Fred's, a pharmacy chain from the South, and the loss of hundreds, if not thousands of jobs.

Ontario seniors' support workers set to strike

Workers at the Jasper Place seniors' assisted living center in Thunder Bay, Ontario could go on strike in the coming days if last-minute talks with a provincial conciliator is not successful. The workers, who provide support services and counseling to seniors at the municipally funded housing facility, are members of union giant Unifor.

Union negotiators say they put forward proposals six months ago for wage increases comparable to other municipalities but have received no response or counter offer.



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