

Workers' struggles: The Americas

Anger grows among US telecom workers

Our reporters
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The *World Socialist Web Site* urges workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature by e-mailing reports to comments@wsws.org.

Latin America

Puerto Rican workers strike against proposed labor law

Thousands of workers held strikes and protests in Puerto Rico last week against Chamber Project 938, a bill being considered in the legislature that would eliminate collective bargaining rights, increase privatization and reduce benefits, particularly health care coverage. The protests were called by several unions, including CFSE (Social Security employees), UTIER (electrical and irrigation workers), Uitice (electrical construction workers) and UIA (Independent Authentic Union).

Project 938, like other measures advocated by the Fiscal Control Board, including raising the price of water, would continue and ramp up the attacks on the working class to pay off the hedge funds and other large bondholders. Demonstrators gathered at the Capitol on April 28 to picket against the bill as it was being discussed. The bill is scheduled for a vote later this week and is likely to pass.

Guyanese workers protest planned closures of sugar estates

Some 600 workers for the Rose Hall Estate sugar plantation in Canje picketed the facility April 25 to protest President David Granger's plans to close other estates after the shutdown of Wales Estate last year. Rose Hall was not among those the president said would remain open, leading workers to conclude it would be slated for the ax.

Like the other estates, Rose Hall is run by the state-owned Guyana Sugar Corporation, or GuySuCo, and employs around 2,400 workers. Workers fear its closure would wreak havoc on surrounding communities that depend on sugar production for their livelihood. In the case of the Wales Estate, GuySuCo's promises of diversification and reassignment have not resulted in the absorption of the former workers, and severance pay has been inadequate, late in coming or nonexistent in some cases.

One-day strike by Bolivian hospital workers to demand supplies

Health workers at the Viedma Hospital in Cochabamba, Bolivia,

struck and held a protest April 28 to demand supplies, better labor conditions, child care for workers' children, an end to overcrowding and the dismissal of the hospital's top directors.

The striking workers complained of their requests for supplies being ignored. "There isn't any space in Viedma to attend to patients, we don't have supplies, we don't have beds, we even extend our schedules because we don't have personnel," a union representative said, with another adding that at least 3,000 items for nurses, medical professionals, technicians and auxiliary personnel are needed.

Argentine auxiliary education workers strike over parity talk demand

Auxiliary education workers in Argentina's Patagonia province began a strike on April 28. The workers, who are members of the State Workers Association (ATE), have called for the recategorization of more than 200 precarizados (casualized workers) to permanent status.

The next day, however, the ATE announced it had suspended the strike after receiving a communication from the provincial government summoning union reps to the "dialogue table" this week at the headquarters of the Department of Education Supervision.

Chilean teachers strike over lack of progress in contract talks

About 650 workers for the Primary Instruction Society (SIP), a network of private schools based in Santiago, Chile, stopped work on April 27 after talks between management and the Syndicate No. 1 union failed to reach an agreement over salaries, bonuses and evaluations.

The union has demanded a 6 percent salary raise for 2017 with a 4 percent increase next year; a two-year duration of contracts; Christmas incentive bonuses; a bonus of 100,000 pesos (US\$150) for national holidays; the development of a plan for applying evaluations; and a bonus for the end of the conflict. The SIP runs 17 schools in metropolitan Santiago with about 20,000 students.

United States

Anger growing as Communications Workers of America block s strike at AT&T Wireless

The Communications Workers of America (CWA) is ordering 21,000 AT&T Wireless workers across 36 states to remain on the job despite the expiration of their contract and the telecom giant's intransigent demands for health care and other concessions. After a publicity stunt at a shareholders meeting in Dallas, Texas, the CWA announced it was issuing a 72-hour notice to end the latest contract extension, "making a strike more likely than ever" and freeing the CWA to call a strike "at any time" starting May 1.

In addition to retail, call center and tech workers at AT&T Wireless, the CWA has forced 17,000 AT&T West Wireline and DIRECTV workers to work without a contract for more than a year. To dissipate anger, the CWA called a one-day strike in California and Nevada in March. Like the Verizon workers—whose six-week strike was betrayed by the CWA last year—AT&T workers are fighting demands for higher medical contributions, outsourcing and the destruction of jobs, and arbitrary disciplining of workers for the company's failure to upgrade its infrastructure.

Some 1,700 workers in New York and New Jersey, members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), remain on strike over similar issues at Spectrum, formerly Time Warner Cable. The IBEW and CWA are doing everything they can to prevent a unified fight by all telecom workers.

University of Illinois-Springfield faculty strike

More than 160 tenured and tenure-track professors walked out on strike Tuesday morning at the University of Illinois' campus in Springfield after negotiations for their first labor agreement broke down. The UIS United Faculty, a chapter of the Illinois Federation of Teachers Local 4100, said management had stonewalled its requests for a new contract containing fair wages and reappointment, tenure, promotion and grievance language. The strike was launched one week before final exams.

According to the *State Journal-Register*, "The two sides have been working on the first contract for the professors at UIS since October 2015. Faculty at the school was unionized when it was known as Sangamon State University, but when there was a merger with the University of Illinois in 1995 and it became UIS, that resulted in the end of union representation for the full-time faculty at the Springfield campus."

Teamsters issue another threat to call out UPS aircraft maintenance workers

UPS aircraft maintenance workers have been engaged in a three-year contract struggle against the giant package delivery company's demands for sweeping health care and other concessions. In a toothless maneuver, the Teamsters issued a letter to the company's shareholders meeting in Delaware, saying it would hold yet another strike authorization vote by 1,200 UPS air maintenance workers.

In November, workers voted 98 percent in favor of a strike. Trump's labor board officials blocked any job action, using the anti-worker US Railway Labor Act, which allows strikes only after federal authorities find that negotiations and mediation have failed. A strike would paralyze the company's fleet of air cargo plane and its massive Worldport operation in Lexington, Kentucky, which handles 115 packages a second or 416,000 per hour. The Teamsters contract covering 250,000 truck drivers, delivery and warehouse workers expires in July 2018.

Canada

Nurses look to strike at Windsor Fiat-Chrysler

Sixteen full and part-time nurses working at the Fiat-Chrysler Assembly plant (FCA) in Windsor, Ontario, could be on strike this week if there is no deal coming out of conciliated talks in recent days.

Only three of the nurses working at the plant are deemed full-time with the remaining part-timers receiving substantially lower wages that have not increased in over a decade; all are members of the Ontario Nurses' Association (ONA). The ONA is seeking an increase in both the number of full-time nursing staff and wages across the board in a new contract. Nurses at the assembly plant take care of workers on and off the floor.

Though any strike action is far from certain, local leadership of Unifor, the union covering 6,500 assembly-line workers at the plant, says picket lines by striking nurses would be respected by its membership. Nurses at FCA Windsor have been without a contract since the end of last year.

Canada Bread lockout ends amid massive scab operation

The month-long lockout of 120 workers at a Canada Bread warehouse in Laval, Quebec, ended last week when workers voted to ratify a new contract, even as the company continued operations at a facility in Ontario using scab labor.

In violation of Quebec labor code, Canada Bread had transferred operations to nearby Cornwall, Ontario, openly admitting it was using scab replacements to continue distribution uninterrupted throughout the lockout. Negotiators for the Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN) hailed the new deal as a victory even though wage increases will barely match the rate of inflation.

The union had sent busloads of workers to protest scab operations to Cornwall last week but has since expressed satisfaction over the new deal. It appears strikebreakers will continue on the job as operations resume in the coming days.



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