

Widespread strikes and protests in Brazil against labor law reform bill

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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Brazilian workers protest labor reform bill

Strikes and protests took place across Brazil June 30 to voice opposition to the labor law reform bill currently being discussed in the Senate. The bill, which has already passed the lower house, would lower wages, undercut labor rights, raise the retirement age and cut pensions.

The mobilization was the second this year. On April 28, massive demonstrations protested anti-working-class fiscal policies pushed by Michel Temer, who took over the presidency of Dilma Rousseff following her impeachment. This time, however, key transport unions in Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro refused to support the strike. Força Sindical and the UGT, two union centrals, did not participate, since they have reopened talks with the government.

In the capital, Brasilia bus and underground services were paralyzed and demonstrators barricaded streets. In Rio de Janeiro, police fired tear gas and rubber bullets at protesters. In Sao Paulo, marchers blocked main highways and impeded access to the nation's largest airport.

Mexican newspaper workers strike over benefit cut

Workers for the Mexico City-based newspaper *La Jornada* voted 133 to 64 (with six abstentions) June 30 to strike over management's cutting of benefits by around 50 percent. The benefits are part of the contract agreed upon between the paper and the Independent La Jornada Workers Syndicate (Sitrajor).

The paper's parent company, Demos (Desarrollo de Medios, Media Development), obtained a ruling by the Local Conciliation and Arbitration Board (JLCA) the week before endorsing the cuts based on the firm's claim that there was only enough "cash in hand" to pay 30 percent of the benefits. Demos asserts that the strike should be declared "nonexistent" in line with the decision.

The issue has festered for months. Sitrajor initially called a strike in April, but delayed it three times until the JLCA's final decision.

Costa Rican health workers strike, protest increase in pension fund deduction

Some 1,500 workers for Costa Rica's health sector struck on June 29 against the one percent increase in their pension fund payroll deduction recently announced by the Social Security System, known as the Caja.

The increase was to be applied in two 0.5 percent portions, on July 1 and January 1. The deduction would go from 2.84 percent to 3.84 percent.

Members of the National Union of Caja Workers gathered in La Merced Park in the capital, San Jose, and marched to the Caja's main building downtown. They were joined by groups of teachers and municipal and other public workers.

One-day strike by Uruguayan teachers over salaries, education budget

Secondary teachers in Montevideo, Uruguay held a 24-hour strike June 30, which included an assembly to analyze salary demands. Teachers in the Secondary Education Professors Federation (FENAPES) voted to delay the action, but the capital city's affiliate Secondary Education Teachers Association (ADES) opted to carry it out, in addition to holding an assembly.

Another issue under discussion is the national education budget. The recent budget report in the parliament recommended five percent of gross domestic product, while FENAPES is calling for six percent.

Meanwhile, students occupied the Artigas Professors Institute (IPA), a teachers college in Montevideo, on June 29. It was the latest occupation to demand building improvements that had been promised in 2015, but have yet to be started. The students, who also demand a bigger education budget, resolved to march to the Parliament the next day in solidarity with the ADES teachers.

Argentine social security workers strike after suicide of retired man

Workers for Argentina's National Social Security Administration (ANSES) convoked a national strike June 30 the day after a 91-year-old man shot himself at the ANSES office in Mar del Plata. The retiree, Rodolfo Estivil, took out a gun after an argument over administrative procedures, said, "This is my fate," and shot himself in the head. He died later at a local hospital.

The State Workers Association (ATE) blamed the government of Mauricio Macri, which has raised prices of gasoline, utilities and public transport, destroyed both public and private sector jobs, and has made it more difficult for workers and retirees to access needed services.

Pilots at Argentine airport protest noncompliance with contract

Beginning at 6:00 in the morning June 29, members of the Airline Pilots Association (APLA) held “informational assemblies” at the LATAM airline terminal in the Jorge Newbery Airpark north of Buenos Aires. Six LATAM flights were canceled as a result.

APLA called the action to protest LATAM’s noncompliance with several provisions of the contract, including “vacations not granted, unpaid travel allowances, lack of replacement of uniforms and scarcity of food for service on the airplanes,” according to APLA secretary general Pablo Biro.

Spectrum strike continues

The strike by Spectrum telecommunication workers in New York City and New Jersey is continuing without resolution, as the International Union of Electrical Workers continues to isolate and wear down strikers. There have been unconfirmed reports from strikers on the picket line that contractors who employ IBEW members are running a scab operation, doing the work of the strikers.

The corporate media has given virtually no coverage to the strike in recent weeks. A recent service outage at Spectrum in Queens was quickly blamed on “vandals,” but with few details to support the claim given.

AT&T wireless workers still without a contract

As the Spectrum strike continues, AT&T wireless workers are continuing to work without a contract. After a brief three-day strike in May, essentially a stunt, the Communications Workers of America (CWA) sent wireless workers back to the job, having long abandoned the principle of “no contract no work.”

As it has done in other strikes CWA claimed the brief strike nudged the company in the direction of negotiating “fairly.” A month later the workers still have no contract and AT&T remains intransigent in its demands. Small rallies and marches have been held by the union in an attempt to dissipate worker frustration. Meanwhile, workers in AT&T’s landline division in the Western US were sent back to work with a concessionary contract. No effort was made to join the landline workers with the wireless workers.

Likewise, CWA and IBEW have made no effort for a unified struggle uniting Spectrum and AT&T workers.

Workers reject concessions; continue strike at Hollister, California cannery

Some 100 workers at San Benito Foods in Hollister, California returned to the picket line June 26 after overwhelmingly rejecting a contract proposal that workers believe contains cuts and fails to provide sufficient wage increases. Workers first walked out June 23 after ignoring advice by Teamsters Local 890 to wait until after a final June 27 bargaining session.

“We don’t want a lot. We just want a \$1-an-hour raise,” said one worker. Full-time workers make \$11.96 an hour while part-time seasonal

workers only make the minimum wage and have to contend with the area’s high cost of living. Currently only 100 full-time workers are on the job and another 350 seasonal workers are expected to start work the middle of July when the canning season begins.

Alaska municipal worker strike ends

Municipal workers in Wrangell, Alaska, who walked off the job June 22 after the city’s Borough Assembly voted to implement their final offer, returned to work June 29 without a contract. The action involved 24 members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW). The two sides said wages were the main stumbling block, with the union demanding an hourly wage hike of \$2.50, while the city insists on its 75-cent wage proposal.

Behind the differences on wages, however, is a struggle over health insurance premiums. The union’s appeal for a higher wage rate is an attempt to mask increases in medical costs that would consume the city’s wage offer and probably more.

Akron Coca Cola workers strike

Workers at the Akron Coca Cola distribution plant are continuing a walkout begun last week after the collapse of contract talks with the Teamsters. The previous contract expired at the end of May. About 150 workers are involved in the action.

The company is continuing its operations with non-striking personnel. The union has not released any details regarding the outstanding issues in the dispute. The Akron facility was taken over earlier this year from beverage giant Coca-Cola by Charlotte-based Coca-Cola Bottling, an independent beverage bottler.

Ontario lottery-casino workers set to strike

Over 400 workers across southern Ontario employed by Ontario Lottery and Gaming (OLG), a crown corporation, are set to go on strike after their union requested a No Board Report setting a strike/lockout deadline of July 14.

The leadership of the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC), which represents workers at OLG in Brantford, Sudbury, Rideau Carleton and Toronto, Ontario, say that they are fighting a privatization scheme by OLG that puts in question their sincerity in negotiating a new contract. Most of the workers at OLG are part-time, with many making just above minimum wage even as the corporation posted over half a billion dollars in profit last year.



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