

## Support grows for General strike in Uruguay

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

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### Support grows for one-day general strike in Uruguay

Two weeks ago, Uruguay's PIT-CNT union federation's National Representative Board called for a 24-hour general strike on July 20. Since then, various unions have signed on to the industrial action. Public service workers have committed to joining the strike, as have mass transit workers and public and private school teachers.

The mobilization centers on the budget discussions currently taking place in the legislature. Under the slogan "Stagnation brings setbacks," the main demands will be "public investment, support of the development of national industry to increase quality jobs, promote salary increases...and the defense of public enterprises." PIT-CNT proposes that 6 percent of gross domestic product be devoted to these goals.

"Also included in the platform is the demand for better "truth and justice" with respect to the fate of the disappeared during the civic-military dictatorship," reported LaRed21.

### One-day strike by Peruvian teachers over salaries, budget, evaluations

Teachers in the Unitary Education Workers Syndicate of Peru (Sutep) held a one-day strike on July 13. The action was taken to press for a salary increase and the postponement of evaluations scheduled for next week. Thousands marched to the Education Ministry (Minedu) in Lima to voice their demands.

Sutep asserts that the former government of Ollanta Humala agreed to raise their pay to 2,000 soles (US\$616), but current president Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, claiming unforeseen expenses, announced recently that the salary would be raised only to 1,780 soles (US\$548) with the promised raise delayed until 2018. An increase in the number of hours worked per week, 30 to 32, has nonetheless gone into effect.

Sutep also wants to delay the Teacher Performance Evaluation—which would cover 6,000 teachers this year—since college directors and Minedu functionaries have not been accredited to administer them. They also call for a bigger education budget nationwide.

### Argentina: Cops attack sacked snack workers occupying former employer's plant

A group of laid-off workers at the PepsiCo snack food factory in Florida, a residential barrio in the Buenos Aires suburbs, were violently dislodged by riot-gear-clad police July 13. The workers had occupied the plant to protest the June 20 closure of the plant, which management claim is "unviable."

More than 530 workers lost their jobs when PepsiCo announced the shutdown, blaming the plant's location, costs and size for the decision to move operations more than 400 kilometers away to Mar del Plata. Management offered work at the new location to a small fraction of the workers, but most were forced to accept a severance package.

About 100 workers held protests, culminating in the occupation, where some local activists joined in. Hundreds of police wielding batons and shields and pepper spray broke through barricades and injured a reported 15-20 protesters, likely an underestimate. The Buenos Aires Security Ministry claimed that 15 cops were injured in the fracas.

### Argentine state workers hold one-day strike to protest high cost of living

The State Workers Association (ATE) in Argentina's Rio Negro province carried out a 24-hour work stoppage July 13, with the union claiming high participation with all sectors of the government affected.

The short walkout was called to highlight the difficulty of state workers to make ends meet on an average salary of 12,800 pesos (US\$760) when the cost of housing alone is around 7,000 pesos (US\$415). ATE head Rodolfo Aguiar asserted that President Mauricio Macri and Provincial Governor Alberto Weretilneck "trample the Constitution with adjustment and poverty."

He advocated "an official call to dialogue, because...it will be very difficult to put the brakes on protests," and declared that only the government could guarantee "social peace."

### Protest march in Barbados against tax hike

Four Barbadian trade unions staged a march July 11 to protest the

imposition of a 400 percent increase in the National Social Responsibility Levy (NSRL). The hike, introduced in the May 30 Budget, is imposed on imported and domestically manufactured goods. Ostensibly designed to finance the cost of health care and to ensure a clean environment, the NSRL increase falls hardest on the working class through higher prices.

The four unions—the Barbados Secondary Teachers’ Union (BSTU), the Barbados Union of Teachers (BUT), the Barbados Workers’ Union (BWU) and the National Union of Public Workers (NUPW)—held the march in Bridgetown to demand that the government reduce the levy.

The unions say that they will take industrial action if there is no reduction. Former Prime Minister Owen Arthur dismissed their protest and 48-hour ultimatum as “political theatre or gimmickry.”

### **National Public Radio workers threaten strike**

The negotiating team for employees at National Public Radio sought strike authorization Friday

from the national executive board of SAG-AFTRA. The old contract expired June 30, but workers had stayed on the job under terms of an extension.

Management is seeking major changes in contract language that would erode workplace protections. A major point of dispute is management’s demand for implementation of a two-tier wage scale, with new employees paid less than veterans.

### **Strike at New York beer distributor ends after 82 days**

Workers ended their 82-day strike against Clare Rose, a beer distributor in Long Island, New York, after ratifying an agreement reached on July 14. Details are limited, but apparently the company had to modify some of its concession demands.

After months of fruitless bargaining, workers struck on April 23 when Clare Rose management unilaterally implemented its proposal to end contributions to the Teamsters pension plan and cut wages by 30 percent. The company responded by informing workers they had been permanently replaced.

Despite efforts by the Teamsters union to isolate the strike and divert workers efforts into petitions to government agencies, support in Long Island’s working class emerged in indirect ways. More than three dozen local bars, stores, and restaurants felt compelled to publicly boycott Clare Rose deliveries and post signs reading “No Anheuser-Busch Sold Here Until Clare Rose Strike Ends.”

### **Casino parking workers conclude three-day strike without contract**

The 42 valet workers at Twin River Casino in Lincoln, Rhode Island, returned to work in the early hours of July 16 after a three-day

strike to oppose management demands to increase health care costs for workers and to strip job security. The highly profitable casino wants to outsource its parking services to a private contractor.

Valets make as little as \$4.50 an hour, not including tips. The casino concluded contracts with its other unions, but bartenders, servers, clerks, skilled maintenance and other union workers nevertheless honored 24-hour picket lines thrown up by valets.

Teamsters Local 251 sought to dampen the resolve of workers, claiming the three-day strike was only called “to make a statement” and that it limited the strike to three days in order not to inconvenience other workers.

### **Track workers locked out in Toronto**

Four-hundred workers employed by the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. (OLG) at the Woodbine racetrack north of Toronto were locked out July 14 after voting to reject a deal struck by their union on July 5.

Workers rejected the deal brought to them by the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC), which represented workers in contract talks with OLG earlier this year that would have effectively destroyed pension provisions.

A union bargaining team issued a revised offer last week that was then rejected by the employer. A central issue in the dispute is the designation of over 60 percent of workers at Woodbine as part-time even though they may have more than 10 years of full-time experience. Part-time workers are not entitled to paid sick days and can see their hours reduced from seven days to one day a week without notice.

### **Airport workers picket ahead of possible strike in Winnipeg**

Airport workers in Winnipeg organized under the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) will be in a legal strike position at the end of this week.

In anticipation of contract talks, workers held pickets outside the James Armstrong Richardson International Airport last week. The 150 workers include managers, trades people, and IT and maintenance workers. The two sides are now in federally mediated contract talks in a last-ditch effort to avoid job action.



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