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# Workers Struggles: The Americas

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returning to work, a number of the replacement workers that took over during the strike will remain on the job.

### Ontario, Canada aerospace workers occupy factory

Facing a shortfall in their pension plan, workers at Northstar Aerospace in Milton north of Toronto occupied the plant last week for two days and set up picket lines in protest as production at the facility winds down. The occupation began August 10 and shutdown production. There are about 200 workers employed at the facility.

Workers had been told that funding for their pensions would be short 24 percent and representatives for Unifor, the union that represents them in negotiations, said the company, which is preparing to close the plant, was refusing to negotiate. The company has claimed that it doesn't control management of the pension and that the shortfall was the responsibility of the union.

Heligear Canada Acquisition Co., which owns assets of the Northstar plant in Milton, plans to shutter the facility in the coming weeks. Unifor has a history of organizing protests such as this to defuse workers anger to maintain the union's authority. Unifor has refused to mount a struggle to defend the workers jobs, limiting the struggle to the question of pensions and then quickly shutting it down.

### Nova Scotia newspaper strike ends in defeat

After 19 months on strike workers at the Chronicle Herald in Halifax, Nova Scotia have been handed a concession-laden deal by their union, the Halifax Typographical Union (HTU), which is part of the Communications Workers of America Canada (CWA Canada) that will also eliminate half their jobs.

In addition to the layoffs the new eight-year contract contains a wage rollback of 5 percent and an increase in work hours, but with some wage increases over the life of the deal. In addition the new contract will mean cuts to pensions, vacation pay and sick leave. With only 27 of the original 61 workers who went out on strike

### Colombian hospital workers continue strike over unpaid wages

Nurses, doctors, auxiliary workers, specialists and other employees at Colombia's University Hospital of Santander (HUS), have been on partial strike since August 5 (see 8 August Workers Struggles), despite claims by HUS management that "there is normality in the attendance to patients."

The workers counter that external consultations, dispensing of medication, appointments with specialists and examinations are paralyzed up to 60 percent. They vow to continue with their "Plan Tortuga" (Turtle Plan) until they are paid in full for the three months of wages that they are owed.

Colombia's health care system is in a state of crisis. Santander governor Didier Tavera Amado blamed the so-called Health Provision Entities, known as EPSs, businesses that sell health service packages to the public, and contract such services with healthcare-providing institutions in the Public Hospital Network. There is rampant EPS nonpayment to the hospitals; EPSs owe some 300 billion pesos (US\$100.84 million) to HUS hospitals.

### Bolivian university workers strike over reduction in bonus, maltreatment

Workers at the Gabriel Rene Moreno Autonomous University (Uagrm) in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia stopped work August 7 as the rectory continued to show intransigence over their demands. Some strikers occupied rectory offices and declared themselves in "permanent vigil." Union officials locked the entrance to the campus and began a hunger strike.

The Uagrm union has submitted a 14-point petition that includes the full payment of a seniority bonus that the rectory had reduced. It is also calling for wage adjustments and better treatment of workers. Cleaning and security workers are demanding the firing of one manager, whom they accuse of abuse, verbal aggression and discrimination.

The conflict at Uagrm has been ongoing this year. After a number of 24-hour and 48-hour strikes, Uagrm authorities signed an agreement with the union on June 30. However, they have not honored it. In addition, they have not responded to the petition and have declared the strike illegal. The rectory claims that it has complied with all the June 30 provisions and Uagrm's legal team has submitted a lawsuit against the union directors.

### **Uruguayan anesthesiologists to strike again over salary demand**

After their three-day strike on August 2-4 (see: 8 August Workers Struggles) failed to get a response from Uruguay's State Health Services Administration (ASSE), the Surgical Anesthesiologists Syndicate (SAQ) has called for another limited walkout. On August 12, the SAQ announced that its members would stop work from the 21st to the 23rd to again press their demand that ASSE match their salaries to those of the private sector. Contradicting ASSE's statement that it has done so already, the SAQ accused it of trying to "confuse the public," when in fact their salaries have suffered a decline of 36 percent from 2011 to 2017.

As before, the strike will affect attention in polyclinics, as well as non-oncological surgeries, but visits with admitted patients will be maintained.

### **Argentine technical and scientific workers strike over contract violations, other issues**

Workers for the headquarters of Argentina's National Industrial Technology Institute (INTI), located in Buenos Aires province's Miguelete Technology Park, staged a one-day strike on August 8. The INTI State Workers Association (ATE INTI), which called the strike, denounced the agency's "syndical persecution, labor insecurity and corruption."

INTI is a federal agency in charge of the development of industrial technology. About 2,100 scientists and technical personnel work for INTI.

In a statement, ATE INTI described the walkout as a response to "the systematic violation of the Collective Labor Agreement by the authorities, delay in salaries, and the imposition of attendance control [presentismo], a disciplinary and flexible intent that principally punishes female employees." An ATE delegate further denounced "the diversion of funds and the emergency in security and hygiene that is endured" at INTI.

The strike had been originally planned for August 7, but management closed the building that day, claiming that there was no water for maintenance tasks and that it had notified the workers beforehand. ATE disputed the claim, calling the closure "an unprecedented deed in the 60 years in the life of the Institute."

### **Haitian motorcycle taxi drivers protest fees, security measures**

Motorcycle taxi drivers in Port-au-Prince, Haiti took to the streets August 7 in protest against a new fee and mandatory gear imposed by the city authorities. The requirements put the drivers in a Catch-22 situation. If they cannot pay the fee of 1,750 Gourdes—about US\$28—they cannot ply their trade. In addition, the government mandated that the drivers buy helmets and identified t-shirts, which are also out of reach for many of the drivers.

Poverty-stricken Haitians can obtain a small motorcycle with a loan, and use it to carry passengers (one—or more—at a time) to earn about US\$200 per month, out of which US\$40 is subtracted to repay the loan.

As paltry as the earnings are, few jobs for poor working-class Haitians pay as much. The risk is high, however, not only for the driver and the passenger, but for pedestrians who have the misfortune to get in their way on chaotic city streets. Accidents are a common occurrence.

The protesting drivers asked the mayor of Port-au-Prince to help them.

### **Seattle-area cement mixer drivers strike over stalled contract talks**

Concrete truck drivers for CalPortland struck company locations in Seattle, Kenmore, and Snoqualmie in Washington state, August 11 over unfair labor practices. Teamsters Local 174 represents a total of 294 cement mixer drivers and support employees at five different sand and gravel companies in the Seattle area and admitted that negotiations with all of them have broken down but only targeted CalPortland for strike action as "the worst offender."

The Teamsters unfair labor practice charges claim CalPortland "refused to bargain in good faith, refused to provide information necessary to continue negotiations, and rejected union proposals without explanation or counter offer." A statement by CalPortland attacked workers for walking off the job and leaving "dozens of projects incomplete resulting in tens of thousands of dollars in damages throughout the City of Seattle and the surrounding area" and called union proposals "economically unsustainable."

According to the Teamsters, the concrete drivers make less money than all other trades in the construction industry. New mediated talks are to restart with all companies on August 15.



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