

# Workers Struggles: the Americas

## Chilean educators hold 24-hour strike over new education law, unpaid bonuses

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Latin America

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Following an August 4 assembly vote, Chile's Professional Association of Professors called a nationwide strike for August 17 to protest a projected law of "New Public Education" (NEP) and to demand the payment of overdue pay and bonuses. In Santiago and other cities, teachers also marched and demonstrated.

The first Historic Debt dates to 1981—during the Pinochet dictatorship—when public schools were transferred to municipalities and a readjustment of salaries of between 50 and 90 percent of teachers base salary was rescinded. Not only do many municipalities now owe debts to teachers, but the city of Puento Arenas "for several days suspended classes for nonpayment of lights and gas, which impeded the functioning of the schools," noted a communiqué. In addition, teachers protested harassment on the job.

The union also called for a march to Congress building in Santiago for August 23.

### Guyanese school janitorial workers repeat protests against low pay, abuses

School janitorial workers—called sweeper-cleaners—in Guyana have held recent protests over low pay, inconsistent work schedules and abuses by administration. On August 8, 9 and 10, they demonstrated, respectively, in front of the Ministries of the Presidency, Finance and Education in the capital, Georgetown.

The sweeper-cleaners gathered at the Education Ministry of Education on August 17 and once again protested their low pay and the two weeks' delay in their pay. Some complained that they were not given advance notice in cuts in their hours and their unfair treatment, but declared their resolve to seek redress and continue their protests.

### Uruguayan labor federation calls for partial strike against "essentiality" decree

On August 18, Uruguay's PIT-CNT labor federation issued a partial strike call for August 23 to protest a decree issued by the Executive branch.

The August 9 decree declared ASSE services essential, making occupations at ASSE facilities illegal. It followed occupations by members of the Public Health Functionaries Federation (FFSP) organized to protest against changes to accountability reporting required to obtain a salary raise. The FFSP has resolved to strike the entire day.

### Argentine educational assistants strike over salaries, taxes

Some 30 out of 126 kindergartens, primary and secondary schools in Comodoro Rivadavia, southern Argentina were closed last week due to an educational assistants' strike that began August 14. The workers are demanding that provincial government classify them as having permanent status, since they work for the state, but are taxed as "monotributistas," i.e., independent or self-employed workers.

The workers are also calling for parity talks over salary equalization. Meetings between the Education Ministry and the State Workers Association (ATE) have been ongoing, but government representatives have offered nothing concrete, only promises.

In an assembly August 18, workers voted to continue the strike and to hold a mobilization on Wednesday in the plaza of School 83, the oldest in Comodoro Rivadavia.

### Argentine vegetable oil workers strike over safety issues following death of coworker

Workers at a soybean crushing plant in Timbues, about 30 km (19 mi.) north of the city of Rosario, Argentina stopped work on August 18 after a worker was killed and at least two others injured in an accident that morning. The contract worker, Brian Montero, was crushed by a beam that collapsed during remodeling work on the

plant, which is owned and operated by the vegetable oil processing firm Renova.

Workers at other oil processing plants, members of the Rosario Vegetable Oil Workers Syndicate (SOEAR), joined in the walkout, paralyzing activities at ports in southern Santa Fe province.

Processing and shipping of plant-derived oils and biodiesel fuel are sources of tremendous revenue for Argentine agribusiness. Workers accuse the firms of ignoring safety concerns in their drive for profit. According to SOEAR, a “Work Risk Law” passed in February has actually worked to the detriment of the workers.

Moreover, Montero’s death occurred in the midst of ongoing pressure by Argentine employer organizations for more labor “reforms” to “flexibilize agreements, inspired by the de facto government of Temer in Brazil, that will only generalize the labor instability and deterioration of labor conditions in our country,” declared a communiqué by the National Vegetable Oil Workers Federation.

### **Jamaican tanker drivers strike over delays in talks, representation poll**

Petroleum tanker truck drivers for Petrojam parked their vehicles in front of the firm’s oil refinery in Kingston, Jamaica August 15 in a protest over negotiation talks as well as to demand a representation rights poll. Most of the drivers want the Petroleum Tanker Drivers Association to represent them.

The truckers are currently represented by the National Workers Union, which they say has not been representing their interests. They tried unsuccessfully to get a poll held for three years, with no result. Drivers also oppose the lack of health care coverage. Nonetheless, the truckers decided to return to work the next day following two meetings with the Ministry of Labour and Social Security.

The United States

### **Workers strike Missouri manufacturer over wages and benefits**

Manufacturing workers at the Reyco Granning Suspension plant in Mount Vernon, Missouri went on strike August 14 to protest company offers on wages, insurance and vacation. Teamsters Local 245, which represents the 83 workers, has been in negotiations with the company since June. Workers twice rejected separate contract proposals before finally going on strike.

Reyco offered a two-year contract with wage increases of 2-3 percent in the first year and 2.8 percent in the second. But a looming 30 percent increase in health insurance has raised concerns among workers.

Reyco president, John Stuart, said the company “will continue to operate the plant using various options,” and that “there is work available for employees who desire to work and who are willing to cross the picket line.”

### **Two-hour strike at New Jersey clothing warehouses**

Some 200 workers struck for two hours August 9 in an unfair labor practices strike at the Freeze warehouse in Dayton, New Jersey. The workers have been seeking a living wage for years and last December contacted the Service Employees International Union.

The limited strike was in response to a letter from management threatening to replace workers should they go out on an unlimited strike. Freeze designs, manufactures, and distributes clothing and holds contracts with companies such as WWE, Nintendo, Amazon, Macy’s, and Burlington Coat Factory.

The company pays an average \$9.37 an hour to the mostly female workforce, comprised of immigrants from India and Central America. Northern New Jersey, where Freeze operates, is comprised of hundreds of distribution warehouses with access to major ports and airports while employing tens of thousands of workers.

Canada

### **B.C. casino workers to strike for first contract**

Over 1,100 workers at River Rock Casino in Richmond south of Vancouver British Columbia, the largest B.C. casino, could be on strike if mediated talks fail to produce a first contract this week.

Dealers, cashiers and other workers voted nearly unanimously in favor of strike action earlier this month after their union, the B.C. Government and Service Employees’ Union (BCGEU/NUPGE) was unable to win a contract after over a year of negotiations with the employer, Great Canadian Gaming Corporation.

In May BCGEU put forward a proposal for a modest wage increase, but the company replied with a plan for a wage rollback in July. The union has warned that a strike could cost millions in lost revenue.



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