

## One-day strike set by public workers in Uruguay

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

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### Public sector strike set in Uruguay

The Intersyndical Coordination Board of Enterprises, Uruguay's public enterprise workers' union federation, issued a call September 1 for a one-day strike on September 7. The themes of the protest action will be job security, increased investment in public enterprises and halting the "covert privatization" of public enterprises.

Currently there are 34,000 workers in public enterprises in Uruguay. Almost a third, 10,000, are of "precarious" status, i.e., under temporary contracts or part-time. At the same time, the board accuses the government of underfunding public enterprises and encouraging the privatization of these enterprises. According to the board, the government does not replace workers on a one-to-one basis, but closer to two for every three positions that become vacant.

Other issues are government declarations of "essentiality" of a service when workers strike as well as attacks on union rights.

### Mexican technical institute teachers and administrative employees strike over working conditions, lack of resources

About 170 teachers and administrative personnel at the Poniente campus of the Merida Technical Institute (ITM) in Merida, Yucatan stopped work on August 31. The walkout centered on the failure of the administration to deal with a number of problems about which the workers had complained.

A primary concern is the lack of decent equipment. There is a scarcity or lack of projectors, screens and whiteboards and undependable Internet access. Illumination is poor in many classrooms, as is ventilation. Technological materials are outdated or unavailable.

In addition, the strikers complain of the bad condition of the cafeteria, the dangerous, half-finished parking lot and the lack of timely, reliable transportation for students, which often results in them arriving late for class.

The strikers say they will continue their work stoppage until the problems have been addressed.

### Dominican Republic: Radiology personnel strike to demand new equipment

Radiology workers at the regional university-affiliated Jose Maria Cabral y Baez Hospital in Santiago, Dominican Republic struck August 31 to demand that the Public Health Ministry replace its X-ray apparatuses.

The workers have been pleading for months with the hospital administration to replace the outmoded equipment, but have received no response. A similar situation exists at another university institution, Doctor Arturo Grullon Hospital, where the X-ray equipment has been out of service for years, causing patients to be referred to other sites.

Spokespersons for the striking radiologists announced that they will march to the National Palace and deliver a letter to President Danilo Medina if the problem is not addressed in the next few days.

### Protests in Puerto Rico against fiscal control board's further austerity measures

Several hundred protesters demonstrated in San Juan, Puerto Rico on August 31 against the austerity measures carried out by the nonelected fiscal control board charged with making the Puerto Rican working class bear the brunt of the island's fiscal crisis.

Attendance at the mobilization was a far cry from the thousands who massed a year previously. The issues that sparked the 2016 protests remain, however. They include new taxes; rising utility bills; pension cuts; attacks on workers' rights, collective bargaining and wages; budget cutbacks for education and public services. Other issues have been added, among them furloughs and the end of the Christmas bonus, both of which would erode workers' earnings even more.

The crowd was observed by hundreds of Tactical Operations police deployed to prevent protesters from getting near the Popular Center building, which was damaged during a protest in May, and the World Plaza Building, which is where the board has its headquarters. Unlike last year, no confrontations were reported.

### Colombian small craft miners end protest strike after 43 days

A protest strike by some 10,000 small craft miners which began July 21 in the Colombian department of Antioquia ended with the signing of an accord August 31.

After almost six hours of talks between negotiators that included the national and departmental governments, Zandor Capital (subsidiary of Gran Colombia Gold), and the Miners Board (representing the craft miners), the parties reached an agreement.

## **Bolivian packaging plant workers strike for wage raise, bonus, job stability**

Workers at the Empacar packaging plant in Santa Fe de la Sierra, Bolivia went on a seven-day strike last week. Their main demands center on categorization of their job posts, wage parity, a production bonus and job stability.

In addition, they demand that Empacar withdraw its petition to declare the strike illegal. On this subject, an official with the Santa Cruz Industrial Workers Federation called the Labor Ministry “partial to the corporate side.”

The walkout included marches, vigils and other mobilizations. Police broke up a vigil in front of the factory on August 30.

## **Argentine judicial workers hold three-day strike over wage impasse**

The Buenos Aires Judicial Association (AJB) called a 72-hour strike August 30 to September 1 to press salary demands following fruitless negotiations with representatives of the provincial government.

On August 28, AJB bargainers rejected a new proposal, which it considered inferior to the previous one. AJB claimed that the offer “stirred up the spirits” of its members and encouraged them to participate in the temporary walkout.

AJB denounced unilateral actions by the government of provincial governor Maria Eugenia Vidal, such as a partial payment of 6 percent that “reflects the position of the government, which instead of sitting down to discuss, resolves things unilaterally.” AJB is demanding a 36 percent salary increase.

## **California Riverside County workers demonstrate, announce intent to strike**

Government employees of Riverside County, California, held a protest demonstration outside the Board of Supervisors’ meeting in the city of Riverside August 29 to announce a strike for the following week. The 7,000 members of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 721 work for the most part in the county health system and the Department of Public Social Services and have been without a contract since 2016.

In the past, the union and county have implemented labor agreements that, while providing wage increases, have gouged workers by imposing higher health care costs and reduced retirement benefits for new hires. In the current round of talks, the county is seeking to reduce pay increases.

The SEIU has filed 19 unfair labor practice complaints that include unlawful surveillance and harassment of hospital employees. The county has been seeking to bar some employees from striking on September 6 as essential to public safety and are voicing concern that a strike will disrupt health care at the Riverside University Health System–Medical Center in Moreno Valley.

The county has also declared an impasse in negotiations with the Laborers International Union of North America. The mandated fact-finding and mediated talks could result in the imposition of a contract by the county and a strike.

## **Texas aerospace workers continue strike over pay and benefit cuts**

Aerospace workers at the Wyman-Gordon plant in Houston, Texas are continuing a strike that began August 21 against pay and benefit concessions. The International Association of Machinists, the union representing the 271 striking workers, has been in negotiations for several weeks.

Workers are fighting a significant cut in starting pay combined with a freeze on wage increases for three years. Workers also face cuts in short-term and long-term disability pay. The company also wants a reduction in breaks from 20 minutes to 15 minutes, a major concern to workers given the facility is not air-conditioned.

Wyman-Gordon operates 13 plants in five countries. It became a subsidiary of the Fortune 500 company Precision Castparts Corporation in 1999. In January 2016, Precision Castparts became a subsidiary of Berkshire Hathaway.

## **Office staff continue strike in Seattle against union pension fund**

Some 100 office workers in the Seattle area from Office and Professional Employees International Union Local 8 are nearing the end of the second week of their strike against Welfare and Pension Administrative Services that manages union pension plans for about 250,000 workers in the Western US. The office administrators are fighting against company demands for concessions on seniority rights, medical benefits, pensions and salaries.

While keeping the strikers isolated, the union leadership is pointing to a halt to garbage pickups as a victory. In addition the strike has forced UPS to send management personnel to make deliveries to the building since UPS drivers are refusing to cross the picket line. These minor “successes” are being used by the unions to cover their treachery while they work to wear down the workers and eventually force them to end their job action.

## **Workers at Toronto women’s shelter vote to strike**

Twenty-seven workers employed by Juliette’s Place in Toronto have voted unanimously to go on strike after working without a contract since March of this year.

The workers are fighting against a range of employer demands for concessions in a new contract with their union, the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU). The workers provide services for women and children in distress and fleeing domestic violence in the Toronto area. Conciliated talks have so far failed to produce an agreement and no talks are currently scheduled.



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