

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

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Latin America

The World Socialist Web Site invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

## Peruvian and Chilean copper miners take strike action

Workers at Southern Copper walked out November 22 in an indefinite strike over economic issues. The action involves over 3,000 workers at the company's Cuajone and Toquepala mines and Ilo refinery in southern Peru. The two largest unions at the mines are involved, although several smaller unions did not join the walkout.

Workers protested on the train tracks leading from the mines to the refinery. Police arrested 24 workers and injured three others while dispersing the protest with tear gas and rubber bullets. Management claims its operations were not affected by the action. It is the second strike at Southern Copper this year, after a walkout in April that lasted two weeks.

Meanwhile, workers at the Escondida copper mine, the world's largest, in Chile's northern Antofagasta region downed their tools on November 23. The workers' Union No. 1 called the limited action following the firm's announcement of layoffs of about 120 operators. The strike involved some 2,500 miners.

Minera Escondida, owned by BHP Billiton, was the scene of a 43-day work stoppage (<http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2017/03/28/wkrs-m28.html>) last February and March. The union called off the strike without achieving any gains.

The layoffs represent about three percent of the Escondida workforce. Management claims that the adjustments are needed to streamline the production process. The union disputes that statement, saying that the growth of production—and of production targets—is “inconsistent with a reduction in personnel or operations.”

The union cited high participation in the walkout and said that it would call another limited action this week if Escondida did not rescind the layoffs.

## Mexican hospital workers strike over lack of supplies, poor working conditions

Doctors and nurses at the Aurelio Valdivieso Civil hospital in Oaxaca City, in the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca, began an indefinite strike on November 22. The medical workers, members of the National Health Workers Syndicate (SNTSA), took the action to press their demands for supplies and medications, demands that the Health Secretariat had promised to meet.

The immediate catalyst for the walkout was the failure of the Health Secretary to provide uniforms for this year; the striking workers are

now demanding cash for the clothing. However, shortages of supplies and equipment are severe. Doctors claim that the hospital has less than half of needed medications and that X-ray and PET scan devices often do not work.

Representatives of SNTSA subsection 07, which has about 1,800 members, met with the Health Secretary, but had not reached an agreement as of November 24.

Meanwhile, in the northern city of Juarez, Chihuahua, interns and resident doctors at the Juarez General Hospital stopped work November 23 to demand better security measures when working in high-risk zones. The strikers are demanding a signed protocol to be followed in instances of high risk in “insecurity zones.” Representatives of the striking workers and trainees began meetings with authorities from the State Fiscal Board, the Autonomous University of Juarez and the Security Board on November 24.

## Argentine health professionals to strike over firings

The Syndical Health Professionals Federation of Argentina (Fesprosa) called a one-day strike to protest firings at the Posadas Hospital in El Palomar, a town in the Greater Buenos Aires urban agglomeration. The walkout, scheduled for December 1, will be a protest against the sackings of four employees, two pharmaceutical workers and two technicians.

Fesprosa claims that the firings were in retaliation against the union for a recent court ruling in its favor regarding extension of the night shift from 10 to 12 hours. Union head Jorge Yabkowski accused the administration of drawing up a blacklist for firings, and warned that there were more planned in the near future.

Fesprosa called an assembly for November 28, and a mobilization and march to the Health Ministry on the day of the strike.

## The United States

## As UPS aircraft mechanics confront demands for massive cuts to benefits, union warns of possible strike

The union for aircraft maintenance workers at United Parcel Service in the US said that massive cutbacks in health benefits demanded by management might provoke a strike over the busy holiday period. The 1,300 workers, members of Teamsters Local 2727, are facing demands for increases in health care costs per family of as much as 430 percent.

Any strike would likely be illegal under reactionary provisions of US labor law that severely restrict the right to strike on the part of air transport employees. Airline contracts never expire, they only become subject to amendment. To be in a legal position to strike, the

mechanics would have to be released from negotiations by the National Mediation Board, something the government has refused to do despite repeated requests on the part of the union. Mechanics voted for strike authorization last year, but talks have dragged on.

UPS mechanics are stationed at more than 90 airports around the country. UPS exceeded its earnings estimate in the third quarter of 2017, taking in over \$1.2 billion in net income.

#### **New York hospital workers authorize strike action by large margin**

Technical workers at Nyack Hospital in Nyack, New York voted by a 93 percent margin November 22 to authorize strike action after working four months without a contract. The vote came after a rally by the 130 members of the Communications Workers of America Local 1103 the previous Saturday that failed to move the hospital's Board of Directors.

The workers, who include surgical technicians, respiratory therapists, and CAT scan and radiology technicians are seeking higher wages to bring them to parity with other hospitals, and improved health care coverage. The last wage increase under the old five-year contract was two percent.

Contract talks began six months ago and have gone nowhere since last September. Nyack Hospital, which joined the Montefiore Health System in 2014, began a \$22.2 million construction project in December of 2016 to add an addition to house its emergency department and outpatient facility. Management has declared that the current negotiations must conform to the "long term viability of Nyack Hospital."

Canada

#### **Quebec aluminum workers set for strike or lockout**

Over 1,000 workers employed at the ABI smelter in Becancour, Quebec, northeast of Montreal, could be on strike or locked out this week after a near-unanimous vote last week to reject the company's latest contract offer.

The ABI smelter is the second largest in North America and is jointly owned by Alcoa and Rio Tinto Alcan, who have been in contract talks with the United Steelworkers/Syndicat des Métallistes (USW) since early September. The main issues in dispute are a proposed two-tier pension plan by ABI that would disadvantage younger workers, and provisions for seniority rights in cases where workers are being transferred between jobs.

Workers have been involved in job slowdowns in the days leading up to the vote and last Monday a group of 70 or more retired ABI workers briefly blocked entry to the plant in protest.

#### **CEZinc refinery workers end 9-month walkout**

Following the ratification of a new agreement, 371 workers at the CEZinc refinery in Salaberry-de-Valleyfield, Quebec will be returning to work December 3. The walkout continued for nine and one-half months as the United Steelworkers isolated the refinery

workers' determined struggle. The facility is the second largest zinc processing plant in North America and is co-owned by Noranda Income Fund and Glencore Canada Corp.

One of the main issues in the dispute was pensions. The company demanded cuts to pensions despite the pension plan being overfunded. In announcing the settlement, the United Steelworkers said that the workers had successfully resisted demands for pension cuts. The union said it had agreed, however, to the elimination of the holiday premium.

#### **Toronto parking attendants set to strike**

Workers employed by the Toronto Parking Authority (TPA) in "Green P" parking lots voted almost unanimously in favor of strike action last week after working for months without a contract.

The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) called for a strike vote after abruptly halting negotiations earlier this month in the face of employer demands for a four-year wage freeze and deep concessions in benefits and job security. Although talks resumed late last week, the union claims it will not be intimidated into a contract that degrades the quality of jobs.

#### **Toronto youth shelter workers looking to strike**

Workers employed by Turning Point Youth Services in Toronto are set to go on strike December 2 if agreement on a new contract isn't reached before then.

The workers, who provide youth counseling services, shelter and residential care, are members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) and have been without a contract for almost four years. Union leaders say it is surprising that talks are not progressing but that the strike date could be extended if there is movement in negotiations. The employer says they have already made contingency plans for a strike, although services will be suspended. Contract talks resumed this week and are reportedly ongoing.



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