

## Chilean copper miners to strike against layoffs; Crane workers strike in Quebec

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

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### Chilean copper miners to strike against layoffs

On Sunday union leaders for copper miner Chuquicamata in northern Chile announced a strike over the sacking of 1,700 miners. The Chuquicamata mine complex consists of two mines, an open pit (the largest in the world) and a subterranean mine. Management had announced plans to restructure operations, including the closure of the open pit mine.

The miners are demanding that the open-pit mine be kept open and denouncing the mine administrators for its attacks on workers and working conditions. A date for the strike is yet to be announced.

### Argentine teachers demand wage reopener

On Tuesday June 19 the Teachers Unity Front carried out a march and rally Buenos Aires to demand the provincial governor, María Eugenia Vidal reopen this year's wage contract that is being wiped out by a dramatic increase in inflation.

The march and rally took place on the same day that the truckers union negotiated a national agreement of twenty-five percent for this year, breaking the back of the government-imposed limits on wage increases of 15 percent for all contracts, which the unions that compose the Teachers Unity Front, along with many major unions, meekly agreed to in February, below expected inflation for 2018.

These same leaders claim, dubiously, that "Reality has changed" and have asked for a "reopening of negotiations".

The union leaders are hanging on a court decision that mandated Vidal to use a so-called trigger clause from 2017 to match wages with inflation.

### São Paulo University workers protest attack on wages

Last Thursday, June 21, workers at the University of São Paulo

rallied at the University Center to demand an end to attacks on wages, in defense of the University Hospital and child-care, and in defense of the right to strike.

### Teachers continue mobilization in Mexico City

Last Monday, striking teachers from the CNTE union rallied at the offices of Azteca TV to protest a media misrepresentation of their strike and mobilizations, which are routinely described as an abandonment of classrooms and students by the teachers.

The CNTE teachers have occupied the area across the Department of Government for two weeks, during which they have marched demanding that negotiations be opened to modify the education reform law.

CNTE leaders point out that beyond minimizing their mobilization, the media attacks ignore the repression that they face and the working conditions that they endure; schools lack the most basic resources and many school buildings have yet to be repaired from the damage caused by last year's earthquake centered in Morelos state that left 225 dead and a vast area of destruction in southern Mexico.

### Illinois construction workers strike over doubling of insurance costs

About 100 construction workers went on strike against Mid-States Concrete Industries in South Beloit, Illinois, June 15 after the company wanted to drastically raise insurance premiums. Members of Local 464 rejected a pathetic 43 cents per hour wage increase while at the same time management wanted to double insurance premiums.

According to workers, Mid-States Concrete Industries has been steadily shifting the cost of healthcare onto employees over the course of the last nine years.

## **New York nurses union gives 10-day strike notice over wages, staffing ratios**

The New York State Nurses Association issued a ten-day strike notice June 22 on behalf of 1,200 nurses at Staten Island University Hospital (SIUH) over unfair labor practices. Pat Kane, an SIUH registered nurse, told SILive.com, “Management refuses to properly staff the hospital and refuses to discuss fair wages and benefits—all while the executives take home large compensation packages. It’s not right and it’s not fair.”

Nurses voted overwhelmingly back in May to authorize a strike. They charge that SIUH provides substandard wages and retiree benefits when compared to other hospitals in the region.

SIUH is owned by Northwell Health, a non-profit headquartered in New Hyde Park, New York. It is the largest healthcare system in New York and the 14th largest in the United States.

## **Quebec crane operators on wildcat strike**

Nearly 2,000 crane operators across the province of Quebec walked off the job illegally last week in protest against recent changes to training regulations and stayed off the job despite a Labour Board ruling ordering them back to work.

Their union, FTQ-Construction, has said that they did not organize the walkout and have issued a statement urging their members to return to work. The strike has also been declared illegal by the Commission de la construction du Québec (CCQ), which regulates the industry in the province and the strikers now face individual fines of up to \$10,000 a day. The strike expands the action undertaken by 50 crane operators at the Champlain Bridge site in Montreal who walked off the job on June 14.

In part the workers are protesting new policies introduced by the provincial government this year that reduces the required training and qualifications for crane operators, which is seen as less comprehensive and more dangerous.

## **Quebec liquor store workers set to strike**

Workers at 440 outlets of the Société des alcools du Québec (SAQ), a crown corporation that distributes alcoholic beverages in the province, are set to go on strike this week after their union, the Syndicat des employé(e)s de magasin et de bureau de la SAQ (SEMB) postponed strike action just prior to last weekend.

The 5,500 workers, who have been without a contract since March of 2017, were set to go on strike the day before the Quebec’s Fête nationale on one of the busiest weekends of the year for the SAQ, but according to the union the strike was postponed because the vote count took longer than expected.

The central issues for workers in contract negotiations are work

schedules and the lack of job security for part-time employees. The union had already agreed to allow 50 locations to operate during the strike scheduled for last weekend but it is not clear if that concession will apply to future action.

## **Montreal flight training company on strike**

475 workers at CAE (formerly Canadian Aviation Electronics) in Montreal went on strike last Friday after rejecting the company’s most recent contract offer by an overwhelming majority.

The main issues between the company and Unifor, the union representing workers, includes wages and pensions with union negotiators citing anger within the membership over changes in the formula that determines salaries that was accepted in the last contract, which expired last week. The workers had previously voted almost unanimously in favor of strike action.

While the company has said they will work in good faith to reach a new deal, they will use management workers to maintain production through the strike.

## **BC ruling decries company–union collusion against workers**

The British Columbia Labour Relations Board (LRB) issued a ruling last week against Best Service Pros and The Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC) in a deal that they say failed to “respect employees and their right to choose freely”.

Best and CLAC had entered into long-term contracts to prevent other unions from negotiating better terms for workers at cleaning companies who had been contracted for publicly funded schools in BC. Those 10-year deals contained no-strike clauses and poverty level wages for workers without benefits under CLAC jurisdiction to give the company a competitive advantage.

The LRB ruling made those contracts null and void finding that the union ratification vote did not ensure that workers understood the contract in part because many did not speak sufficient English and also citing the employers’ presence at those votes as an incentive to pass the contract. Despite these findings the Board did not impose any penalty on either the company or the union.



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