

Ontario salt-mine strikers blockade mine entry

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Honduran taxi drivers strike against fee increase

Taxi drivers in the Honduran capital Tegucigalpa struck and blocked traffic July 6 to protest a fee increase recently imposed by the mayor's office. The Taxi Drivers Association of Honduras (Ataxish) had announced the strike call the day before, citing continued efforts to meet with the mayor that were ignored. Ataxish vice president Rony Figueroa told reporters that over 3,300 units that serve 114 taxi stops would be out of service throughout the day.

The fees, which are calculated according to engine cylinder size, have increased the fee range from 780-1,400 lempiras (US\$32.50-58.40) to 1,370-2,000 lempiras (US\$57.14-83.40). In addition to the fees, cabbies have to contend with rising prices for fuel, tires and parts as well as extortion from violent criminal gangs who prey on drivers and their passengers.

Antiriot police and military units maintained an intimidating presence at various points during the protest strike, which was not restricted to demands to lower the fees. Ataxish also called for lower costs for tires and fuel, operation permits and living expenses. Some individual drivers called for the firing of the nation's president, Juan Hernández.

Antiguan dialysis nurses on "go-slow" over personnel shortages, overwork

Nurses at the dialysis unit at the Mount St. John's Medical Centre in St. John's, Antigua and Barbuda initiated a "go-slow" to protest shortages of personnel resulting in overwork. With a considerable increase in the numbers of dialysis patients over the last two weeks, nurses have been forced to work 12-hour-a-day round-the-clock shifts.

Patients are receiving two treatments a week, one less than the minimum. The nurses had been promised six additional nurses from Cuba, but they have not arrived. They also say they need orderlies to assist in moving the patients.

The nurses have made repeated pleas to hospital administration to no avail as of July 7. Chief Medical Officer Dr. Rhonda Sealey-Thomas, when asked about the situation, claimed no knowledge of it and said that she thought, based on a hospital report, that the nurses were sick.

Trinidadian cement workers protest working conditions

Workers for Trinidad Cement Ltd (TCL) protested outside the company's Claxton Bay plant in western Trinidad July 4 over bullying by management. They say that they have been told that if they want to keep their jobs they must have their phones on loud and nearby, even when sleeping.

The Oilfields Workers' Trade Union has also accused management of delaying the delivery of money that it has ostensibly deducted for union dues.

Furthermore, TCL has announced that it plans to retrench some 100 workers and is demanding that workers do jobs not in their job descriptions or risk being let go. As of July 7, TCL had not responded to the complaints.

One-day strike by Venezuelan professors over salary demands

University professors in Venezuela struck on July 6 for an increase in their salaries, which they say do not allow them to live a dignified life. It was the second work stoppage in a week, with the last being a 48-hour walkout on June 28-29. Members of the University Professors Association of Venezuela (APUCV) complained to sputniknews.com reporters that professors do not have appropriate clothes, cannot afford a balanced meal and do not have enough resources to travel. APUCV demands a basic monthly salary of US\$80-100.

The government accuses international financial institutions of a blockade and "economic warfare" in order to overthrow and replace it, and of provoking the increase in the prices of food, medicine and other products. President Maduro has said that he would regulate prices "the easy way or the hard way."

Teachers in Argentina hold fifth strike of year over salary and other demands

July 4 saw the fifth strike this year by teachers against the policies of the right-wing government of Mauricio Macri, including its refusal to grant a raise above 15 percent, as inflation currently runs at over 22 percent. Their demands also included a call for Macri to reestablish "the federal parity talks and the economic support to the provinces to resolve the open conflicts in seven districts." They also denounced the violent repression of a protest in Chubut province the week, where local police attacked protesting educators with rubber bullets and pepper spray.

The teachers, members of the Ctera education workers confederation, indicated that they would continue the strikes following the end of the winter break, July 16-27, if their demands are not met.

Argentine refinery workers occupy plant to protest firings

Workers at the Elicabe refinery in Bahía Blanca, Argentina occupied the facility and blocked movement following the firing of 200 of their coworkers on July 5. Management had cited the “mismatch” between production costs and the price of fuel as the rationale for the planned dismissals, which had 500 employees before the sackings.

The refinery, which began operations in the early 20th century, was acquired by Petrobras in the 1990s, and has gone through ownership changes and restructuring in recent years, the most recent being the purchase of the oil refinery, along with over 250 service stations, a lubricants plant and fuel storage terminal from then-owner Pampa Energia SA by commodities trader Trafigura on June 11. The refinery workers, members of the Petroleum, Gas and Biocombustibles Union, fear that the refinery could become a storage facility, resulting in a two-thirds cut in personnel.

Chicago window washers strike

Window washers who clean downtown Chicago’s high-rise buildings walked out July 2 demanding higher wages and improved benefits. The 260 members of Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 1 struck after their three-year contract expired June 30 and no new agreement was in place.

Past wages for window washers ranged from \$12 to \$20.50 an hour. The SEIU is negotiating for an increase that will hike wages to \$16-25 an hour.

The SEIU is also calling for increased health care coverage and a removal of a cap that limits companies having to contribute more than 60 percent of the cost. The union also opposes the demand by companies for a five-year contract.

Washington D.C. transit workers carry out job action

Management of Washington, D.C.’s Metrobus and Metrorail charged workers with an “unauthorized labor action” July 4 that caused delays and forced managers and supervisors to attempt to fill the gap.

Workers throughout the system reported late to work. According to management: 25 percent of bus operators, 16 percent of train operators, 25 percent of station managers, and 30 percent of railcar mechanics were tardy.

While the issues are not clear, over the past two weeks, Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 689 had been complaining about the possibility that Metro would contract out some custodial jobs.

California nursing home workers protest slow pace of contract talks

About 50 workers picketed outside the Windsor Care Center in Redding, California, to protest the slow pace of contract talks over the past year as they seek their first contract. The Service Employees International Union, which represents 80 nurses, housekeepers, food service and dietary aides, is negotiating over wages, benefits and staffing levels.

California recently passed a new state law that specifies more hours of direct care to patients in a skilled nursing facility. According to the SEIU, Windsor Care is seeking to meet the requirements without expanding the workforce.

Workers in food service are paid a mere 50 cents above California’s minimum wage

Ontario salt-mine strikers blockade mine entry

Striking workers at Compass Minerals’ salt mine in Goderich, Ontario on the shores of Lake Huron set up a blockade on the access road to the mine last week to prevent replacement workers from entering.

The 370 strikers, who include miners, production staff and electricians, have been off the job since the end of April when negotiations broke down over job security, benefits, pensions and the company demand to extend work shifts to 12 hours with mandatory overtime. The company has been using scab replacements since the outset of the strike, even reportedly flying some in from New Brunswick, and has said it is “in the process of undertaking enforcement measures” to end what they say is an illegal blockade.

The underground salt-mine in Goderich is the largest in the world and US-based Compass Minerals is the largest salt producer in North America and one of the largest producers of its kind in the Western Hemisphere.

BC casino strikers reject union brokered deal

The two-month long strike by 400 workers at Hard Rock Casinos in Coquitlam, British Columbia will continue at least another week after they narrowly voted last week to reject a deal accepted by their union, the B.C. Government Employees Union (BCGEU).

According to union negotiators, one of the obstacles to acceptance of the deal is the elimination of poker and craps tables that offer some of the highest paying jobs, but which they argue are not affected by the terms of the contract. At the same time, they acknowledge that many of the workers in this first contract dispute have not had a pay raise in 10 years.

The strike at Hard Rock Casinos takes place alongside the strike by 700 other casino workers on the BC lower mainland at four Gateway Casinos that began last week.



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