

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Latin America

Argentine truckers strike, block ports to demand higher rates

Access to ports in Gran Rosario, the principal locale for the export of grains grown in Argentina, was blocked by striking truckers November 8.

The strike and blockade, called by the Fleet Haulers Syndicate of Argentina, has as its main demand the raising of hauling rates for short-distance grain truck drivers. The truckers, who carry grain from farms and warehouses to ports, maintain that the rising costs of operation are making it more difficult to earn a living, necessitating a rate hike.

A communiqué from the union stated that the strike would be indefinite until rates are raised.

Colombian workers and students protest tax law, defunding of education

Workers in both state and private-sector unions joined students and agricultural laborers in protests across Colombia on November 8. The marches and demonstrations were called over the government's economic policies, which have negatively impacted working-class living standards and higher education.

Among the targets of the protesters' ire was the stated intention of the government of President Iván Duque to broaden the application of the Value Added Tax (VAT) on family expenses, the rise in taxes on housing and the defunding of higher education.

In the city of Popayán, units of the ESMAD national riot control police attacked a student encampment at the University of Cauca with tear gas. Journalists covering the protest were also attacked.

Belizean teachers protest foot dragging on negotiations, pay issues

On the morning of November 7, teachers in Belize gathered at a high school in the capital Belmopan and marched to the Civic Centre, singing protest songs en route. A number of union bureaucrats and opposition politicians then addressed the assembled educators. At some checkpoints, police stopped and delayed buses in which teachers had come from all six districts.

Over 1,000 teachers, members of the Belize National Teachers Union (BNTU), took the action to express their dissatisfaction with the pace of negotiations between the union and the Ministry of Education (MOE), as well as other issues. Of particular concern is Proposal 22, by which the government is supposed to pay teachers and staff at grant-aided secondary schools 70 percent of their salary while school managements pay the remaining 30 percent.

The school administrations, however, have not delivered on their end of the deal, so teachers in many schools are only getting 70 percent of their pay. The Prime Minister has claimed that the government would not be able to pay the shortfall. Other issues include travel and hardship allowances for teachers in remote areas, pensions for teachers at church-managed schools, intimidation by school administrators and disrespect for the teachers shown by MOE head Patrick Faber.

Although the BNTU has hinted at a strike, it has shied away from calling for one, instead sending a letter appealing to the Prime Minister to intervene.

United States

One-day strike at Coca-Cola distribution facility shuts down operations throughout Kentucky

The 28 workers at Coca-Cola Consolidated's distribution warehouse in Bluefield, West Virginia, went out on a one-day strike November 8. Another 130 workers at another four distribution centers across the state walked out on sympathy strike in support of the strikers, who are all represented by Teamsters Local 175.

The Bluefield workers voted unanimously back in September to authorize a strike after Coca-Cola management pressed for healthcare concessions that would have doubled medical deductibles and hiked out-of-pocket costs by nearly five times. Coca-Cola resolutely refused to accept a Local 175 offer to switch to a Teamster multi-employer health plan which the company would not control.

The Teamsters liquidated the one-day strike and then filed charges against the company with the National Labor Relations Board. Local 175 Secretary-Treasurer Ralph Winter said, "We hope this short one-day strike will minimize service disruptions and force the company to honor the law."

Coca-Cola Consolidated operates in 14 states and the District of Columbia. Some 14 percent of their workforce is organized by various unions, including the Teamsters, which represents some 1,500 workers. The company's largest customers are Walmart, Kroger Company and Food Lion.

Back in August, the Teamsters called off an 11-day strike by Coca-Cola UNITED workers in Alabama and Mississippi without obtaining a contract.

Canada

Rotating postal strikes extended under threat of criminalization

The ineffectual rotating strikes by 54,000 postal workers that began October 22 and hit over 150 communities across Canada will continue to broaden, according to union officials, provoking the federal Liberal to threaten criminalization under back-to-work legislation in the

coming days.

After appointing a special mediator two weeks ago, the federal Liberal government, which had until now said it would prefer a negotiated settlement, indicated last week that it may legislate an end to the job actions by the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW).

The workers, including letter carriers, workers at postal sorting stations, mail truck drivers and postal clerks, have faced deteriorating working conditions, speedups, forced overtime and understaffing for years under a bankrupt leadership that seeks to defuse the militancy of its membership with this demoralizing strategy of one-day actions. In addition, the workers are fighting increasing threats to job security as well as health and safety provisions, while seeking equal pay and benefits for rural and suburban letter carriers.

The union has imposed an equally ineffective ban on overtime work and has extended some of the walkouts to up to seven days, but has so far said nothing regarding the threat of back-to-work legislation.

One Saskatchewan Co-op strike ends, while another continues

The month-long strike by over 400 workers employed by the Moose Jaw Co-op came to an end last week with a negotiated settlement that favors the employer on the main disputed issues cited by the United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW).

Union leaders are hailing the new deal as a victory, even though it doesn't eliminate the two-tier wage system that particularly impacts female employees, and that the union membership overwhelmingly rejected in the contract proposal that took them out on strike over a month ago.

Meanwhile, the strike by 900 workers in the same union local continues at the nearby Saskatoon Co-op against similar contract concessions that took them out on strike over a month ago. The two sides in that dispute are not scheduled to meet until the end of the month.



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