

Police attack Buenos Aires Coca Cola workers; Spokane nurses protest attack on benefits

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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Police attack Buenos Aires Coca Cola workers

On February 28 Buenos Aires police violently assaulted a protest march by Coca Cola workers, their women's commission, and supporters in downtown Buenos Aires that planned to rally at the Labor Department against the company's decision to reduce its work force. At least 10 workers and their supporters were injured, two were hospitalized.

The union that "represents" the Coca Cola workers recently approved of the layoffs. Angry workers denounced that agreement and launched Thursday's protest. Twenty workers have been sacked; some report being callously sacked over the phone. Eighty more workers are to be fired this week.

FEMSA, the local bottling company for Coca Cola, has declared itself in financial difficulties and appealed to the administration of President Mauricio Macri for permission to carry out cutbacks and sackings. These petitions have become more common in Argentina and are being rubber-stamped by the Labor authorities as the economic recession rages on under conditions of unprecedented price inflation. The company intends to suspend employees at will and with little or no severance pay.

Teachers protest in São Paulo

About 100 striking São Paulo teachers occupied the city's regional education offices in the São Mateus area, interrupting a meeting between their union representatives and the education management. At issue is an attack on wages and pension rights by the education authorities and on the right to

strike.

The right to strike is being attacked by the São Paulo officials who are denying striking teachers their pay, and threatening to replace the teachers with strikebreakers. The day before the protest São Paulo Mayor Bruno Covas was filmed laughing at strikers that had surrounded him demanding their pay. The mayor responded by sending in police to disperse the protesters with tear gas.

Sonora, Mexico: wives of copper miners launch protest

On February 26, women spouses of striking copper miners launched a protest by blocking rail lines leading out of the Cananea open pit mine in support of the striking miners.

The wives are demanding state intervention and the presence of mine union president Napoleón Gómez Urrutia, a close collaborator of the United Steelworkers and the Industrial union. Gomez was accused of pocketing \$55 million from workers pensions and fled the country. "We demand that Napoleón show up at the mine to solve this problem. It began here and must be solved here," declared one of the protesters. The women said they will not lift their blockade until the issue is resolved.

Agua Prieta maquiladora workers strike in México

Not far from Cananea, in Agua Prieta, Sonora, which borders the US city of Douglas, Arizona, workers at the Global Feather Maquiladora are on strike, demanding improvements in working conditions the rehiring of fired workers and an end to harassment by police authorities. Among the issues that the strikers have cited are abuse by managers, unsanitary facilities, restrictions on the use of employee restrooms, denial of proper breathing masks (the workers clean and dye feces-covered

feathers) and non-payment of owed wages and benefits.

One month ago the company brought in a yellow-dog, pro-management union, the CROM, which further angered the workers. On February 25 the workers walked out.

Management has refused to negotiate with the strikers, who are blocking the entrance to the plant. Strikers have declared that though they are anxious to return to work, they will only do so under conditions fit for human beings.

Charter school strike in Parma, Ohio ends with establishment of labor-management committee

Teachers at Summit Academy in Parma, Ohio voted to end their nine-day strike March 1 and accept the most recent contract offer from management. The contract, according to the Ohio Federation of Teachers (OFT), purports to give teachers “a voice at work and establishes staffing guidelines” but avoids establishing wage rates until next fall.

Also included in the contract is the establishment of a labor-management committee. While the OFT provided no details, labor-management committees are meant to bring the union directly into management in order to subordinate workers’ interests to the profit drive of the owners.

The ratification vote followed an earlier rejection by teachers on February 26 of a contract the union admitted was “significantly worse than [management’s] pre-strike offer.” The delay until fall of a wage agreement gives an indication that OFT and Summit Academy hope to establish the labor-management committee in time to influence bargaining.

Spokane, Washington nurses oppose attacks on benefits and working conditions

Over 1,900 nurses organized in the Washington State Nurses Association are opposing demands by Sacred Heart Hospital in Spokane, Washington that they surrender paid-time off and medical benefits as well as increase their share of medical insurance premiums.

In a show of determination, on February 26, over 200 nurses braved bone-numbing cold to hold a rally at Spokane’s Riverfront Park in opposition to management demands.

The hospital agreed to meet with the WSNA in only seven negotiating sessions in the last four months as contract expiration nears. The hospital, part of Providence Health and Services which manages 37 hospitals and 250 clinics in the states of Alaska, Washington, Oregon, California, and Montana, has refused to hire more nurses and demands that

nurses work more than 12 hours a day and without breaks.

In addition to demands for increases to salaries and benefits, the nurses want hospital management to maintain a sufficient supply of nurses to ensure proper care for patients and for the safety of the nurses at all times, including those set aside for meals and breaks. They also want staffing levels that will allow nurses to maintain their right to paid time off. Nurses are well-educated and highly-skilled professionals employed in careers that are physically, mentally, and emotionally stressful. Since they work in hospitals, they do so in environments that have the highest concentration of disease in them.

Providence is attempting to impose similar conditions on more than 1,000 members of the Office and Professional Employees International Union Local 8 employed at its Regional Medical Center in Everett. The healthcare giant’s offer of only a 2.25 percent increase in salary over three years amounts to a pay cut, especially in the high cost-of-living Puget Sound area.

Northern Ontario airport workers set to strike

Workers at the Victor M. Power airport in the city of Timmins in northern Ontario are set to walk off the job this week after their union, the Union of Canadian Transportation Employees (UCTE) gave 72-hour strike notice going into the weekend.

The strike was called after the 19 unionized employees, including administrative, maintenance and airfield workers, voted overwhelmingly in favor of a strike against the city after working without a contract since 2016. While the city has given the public assurances that contingency plans are in place to avoid flight delays or cancellations, city officials have also indicated that a strike would pose a significant safety risk. The city has also applied to the federal government to intervene in the strike, which is expected to disrupt flight service to the area.

The union has accused the city of forcing the strike by demanding that workers take a cut in pay in a new contract. The two sides were ordered back to the bargaining table by a mediator last week but the union has said that the strike will proceed if a deal isn’t reached.



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