

Mexican paper workers strike, demand ousting of company union

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

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Workers at the Chile-based paper processing plant Absormex in Altamira, Tamaulipas, Mexico, went on strike March 29 to demand the expulsion of the Fasim union, which they accuse of being a company or “white” union (*sindicato blanco*). About 100 workers protested in front of the plant, impeding traffic and carrying signs saying “Fasim Out!” “Change the Union” and “Respect Article 123,” referring to the provision in the Mexican Constitution that recognizes the right to strike.

Among the complaints the workers expressed are low salaries, concealment of injuries from the Social Security Institute, and forcing over 200 workers to perform unpaid labor on days off. They denounced the director of the union as well, declaring that he does not fight for workers’ rights and is in management’s pocket.

The workers also asked for the Labor and Social Security Secretariat to intervene and audit the union.

Mexican professors’ strike enters second week

A strike by professors in the Biology Faculty at the University of Michoacán completed its first week March 28. The professors, members of the University of Michoacán Professors Syndicate (SPUM), occupied the administration building on March 21 over violations of the collective contract on the part of the administration.

The professors demanded that the rector, Juan Manuel Ortega Rodríguez, fire the Administrative and Academic secretaries whom they accused of being directly responsible for anomalies relative to the lack of educator promotions and not establishing the criteria for assignment of materials and promotions.

On March 25, Ortega Rodríguez met with SPUM representatives and promised to present various alternative solutions but conditioned on the professors returning to work. The striking professors rejected the offer and occupied two other buildings. They reiterated their demand for the immediate removal of the secretaries and resolved to maintain the strike and occupations until it is acted upon.

Guyanese cane harvesters strike over pay, treatment

Cane harvesters at the Blairmont Estate, a sugar plantation in Berbice, Guyana that is run by the state-owned Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo), began an indefinite strike on March 27. The workers, who had been transferred from the Rose Hall Estate following its closure 15 months ago, complain that they cannot harvest enough cane to meet their weight quota because the cane is short and thin. They are demanding a prearranged pay rate instead.

The workers also accuse GuySuCo management of discriminating against them, demanding that they work long, exhausting hours and not providing adequate transportation to the estate. Some have said that they will request severance pay if there is no improvement in working conditions. Already, of the 120 Rose Hall transferees, only 76 now remain at Blairmont.

Management has refused to change the pay calculation and has suggested alternative work, an offer the harvesters rejected.

Peruvian municipal workers strike for pay raise

Workers in three public sector unions—Public Security, Public Works and General Services—in the Provincial Municipality of Trujillo, Peru began a strike March 27 for an increase in their wages. Around 1,500 workers marched to city hall, where they whistled, chanted and carried signs.

Monthly salaries for municipal employees range from 824 to 900 soles (US\$248-271), according to General Services Union head Julio Huertas Chávez. The unions are demanding a raise of 500 soles (US\$150), though Huertas said that “we can dialogue.”

A particular irritant to the workers is the fact that the mayor, Daniel Marcelo, claims, “We cannot raise [the workers’ wages] because the law impedes it.” Workers note that no such impediment stopped Marcelo from hiking the pay of management employees recently.

The Regional Directorship of Labor declared the strike “inappropriate,” saying that it did not comply with guideline requirements.

Uruguayan anesthesiologists announce four days of strike over pay reduction in agreement

The Surgical Anesthetic Syndicate (SAQ) of Uruguay announced March 28 that it would strike April 3, 4, 8 and 9 over the contract signed the week before by the Medical Syndicate of Uruguay (SMU), which represents the SAQ among other unions, during negotiations with the government in the nation's Salary Council.

The result of the negotiations, according to SAQ, is that surgeons' and anesthesiologists' salaries will suffer a 10 percent cut. SAQ accuses the SMU of underwriting negotiations that harms the former's interests and insists on having its own subgroup for the negotiations.

Surgeries will be suspended during the strike days except for emergency and oncology interventions.

Argentine state workers to strike for wage hike

The State Workers Association (ATE) in Buenos Aires announced March 29 that its members are set to strike April 3 to press for the reopening of parity talks and demand a 23 percent raise. The ATE plans to have marches and other actions throughout the province on that day as well.

The ATE called a 24-hour strike the week before, but received no response. The union says that the walkout will be for 48 hours this time. It is also calling for a trigger clause to maintain purchasing power in the face of the nation's rampaging inflation rate.

Company responds to one-hour protest strike by Illinois workers with lockout

Non-union workers at Headly Manufacturing near Chicago, Illinois were locked out March 22 after they held a one-hour strike. Workers anticipated an attack by the company after seeing ads offering jobs with slightly higher wages but fewer benefits than those collected by current locked out workers.

The lockout also prevented workers from being able to collect their last paycheck. Many of the workers have worked for Headly for more than twenty years.

The workers are unofficially represented by Arise Chicago, a social justice organization. The National Legal Advocacy Network filed a complaint with the National Labor Relations Board that argued the protest was about discrimination and unfair treatment and is protected by labor laws and that the lockout was illegal.

University of Saskatchewan staff headed for strike

Support workers at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon are preparing for strike action pending a ruling this week by the Saskatchewan Labour Relations Board over the school's application to have them deemed an essential service.

The 1,900 support workers, who are employed in facility or operational services, gave their union the Canadian Union of Public

Employees (CUPE) a strike mandate last October, which led to unsuccessful mediation. While the two sides are reportedly at odds over wages, the main issue in dispute are pensions, with the school demanding reductions in its contributions to the plan, which it is calling unsustainable. CUPE points out that in fact the pension plan has been posting a surplus and that the average payout to a retiree is just over \$18,000.

A strike could be called by next week pending the outcome of talks that are scheduled for later this week. The workers have been without a contract since the end of 2015.

New Brunswick nursing home strike halted by courts

A planned strike by 4,100 workers at nursing homes across New Brunswick has been suspended pending a judicial review on the heels of a previous ruling denying a government request to have the nurses deemed ineligible to strike under essential service provisions.

The workers who include nurses, attendants and support staff, are members of the New Brunswick Council of Nursing Home Unions, which is part of CUPE, and have been working without a contract for over two years. Union negotiators have said that they are asking for wage increases that keep pace with the rate of inflation and for higher staffing levels to provide proper care to residents.

An appeals court will decide the case some time in April and with no contract talks currently scheduled, the union along with parties in opposition to the newly elected Conservative government are calling for binding arbitration to settle the dispute.

Ontario safety board workers launch protests

Workers employed by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) are initiating a protest campaign directed by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) to bring attention to increasingly intolerable workloads.

The union points to a 33 percent increase in injury claims in the past 3 years in Ontario while the number of front-line staff has been cut by 9 percent, leading to an increasing number on short-term disability leave, mostly due to workplace stress. CUPE leaders say the most recent protest was the first of 13 planned protests at WSIB offices across the province in the coming weeks.



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