Argentine bus drivers carry out one-day strike, judge orders fines for American Airlines workers over protest actions

Workers Struggles: the Americas

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One-day work stoppage by Argentine bus drivers over wage increase

Bus drivers across Argentina went on a 24-hour work stoppage July 12. The UTA transport workers' union called the strike after "obligatory conciliation" meetings with provincial employers—with one exception—failed or did not materialize July 11. The exception was in the city of Buenos Aires, where UTA and the FATAP bus owners' federation signed an agreement.

That accord, which applied to all of Buenos Aires province, provides for a basic monthly wage of 41,000 pesos (US$986), retroactive to June, and a fixed sum of 11,000 pesos (US$265) divided among three installments. Thus, while bus service was interrupted or halted in UTA-covered locales elsewhere, in Buenos Aires the buses continued to run.

In most provinces the walkout held. Drivers in Paraná in Entre Ríos province were already on indefinite strike over their demand for their unpaid end-of-year bonus (*aguinaldo*). On the other hand, drivers in Mendoza province, who are covered by a different union, did not adhere to the strike call.

A UTA statement criticized the FATAP, which had demanded a government subsidy to pay for the raises. If no progress is made, UTA stated that it would convene a meeting on July 17 to decide on the next step.

Bolivian doctors hold 24-hour strike over working conditions

The Medical College of Bolivia struck for 24 hours July 12 to demand better working conditions in public health care facilities. Emergency services were not struck, though surgeries and consultations were affected.

The immediate concern of the doctors is an outbreak of the arenavirus, which causes hemorrhagic fever. It has killed three people so far, including an intern who was treating a colleague. Doctors are demanding the declaration of a medical emergency and the provision of adequate supplies and equipment to treat patients who contract the virus, as well as for long-term needs. Some doctors are calling for the resignation of the minister of health.

Colombian taxi drivers strike, protest against digital-platform ride services

Thousands of taxi drivers in Colombian cities, including Bogotá, Medellín, Cali, Bucaramanga and Barranquilla, struck and blocked traffic on July 10 against the growth of app-based ride services like Uber, Cabify and In Driver. In some cities, confrontations were reported between the *taxistas* and private drivers—whom the cab drivers call "pirates"—as well as taxi drivers who did not comply with the strike call.

The cabbies claim that the government has not acted forcefully enough against the indiscriminate use of private cars and motorcycles. The result has been a fall in taxi drivers' incomes of at least 50 percent and the proliferation of what they consider illegal, unregulated vehicles that skirt around legal norms and requirements.

Last month, several hundred *taxistas* demonstrated in front of Uber's headquarters in Bogotá to demand the expulsion of the business. The digital-platform services, however, are already being used daily by thousands of riders, and the taxi drivers have been unable to secure the support of their union or of the citizens.

One-day strike by Panamanian teachers to demand improvement of education budget and infrastructure

Under the slogan "For the rescue of education," teachers in the National Educators Union of Panama (Unep) stopped work for 24 hours on July 12. The strike was followed by a march, described by the media as "meager," to the Panama City office of President Laurentino Cortizo, who assumed office July 1.

Unep officials admitted that their strike call and march, which they claimed had about 1,000 participants, did not get the response that they wanted from other unions, likely because it was so early in the new administration's term, which will last until 2024.

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However, at the end of the march, a Unep delegation handed over to the minister of education a document containing what the union said were “the first ten measures that the government should adopt to improve the quality of learning.” Among the measures were the investment of 6 percent of gross national product toward education, improvement of infrastructure, and class sizes of no more than 25 students.

Bermudian hardware store workers strike over health care coverage reduction

Workers at Gorham’s, the largest hardware chain in Bermuda, walked out of the company’s Pembroke store on July 11 to protest cuts to their health coverage. The striking workers picketed and closed the entrance gates to the store, but a nonunionized employee, claiming that they could not shut or block the gates, reopened them later.

The store’s general manager, claiming that rising premiums made coverage unsustainable, had told the workers via a June 26 memo that dental and vision coverage would be cut on July 1. The workers circulated a petition opposing the cuts, to no avail. The savings to Gorham’s, which one striking worker had told the *Royal Gazette* was “making money hand over fist,” would be about US$550 per employee, or a total of around US$22,000 for the 40 workers who are members of the Bermuda Industrial Union (BIU).

Although the BIU criticized the unilateral move as “dictatorial” and said they were carried out without consultation, its representatives held a meeting with management and called the strikers back to their jobs by 3:00 that afternoon. The BIU stated that the discussions would continue.

Federal judge demands unions crack down on mechanics’ job actions at American Airlines

A federal judge has ordered two unions at American Airlines to fine members who conduct job actions that disrupt the airline’s operations. Members of the International Association of Machinists (AIM) and the Transport Workers Union (TWU) are frustrated over the interminable contract talks and stalling by the airlines combined with the governmental restraints imposed by the National Railway Act. Workers have been conducting slowdowns and reporting mechanical issues that result in the groundings of planes to express their displeasure.

American Airlines has presented the court with data demonstrating that in June they suffered 20 times the number of flight cancellations as Delta Airlines, resulting in considerable losses. Senior District Court Judge John McBryde has instructed both unions to police their membership and fine workers who conduct job actions against the company.

The existence of two unions at the airline is the result of the merger of American Airlines with US Airways. Currently, they are conducting negotiations jointly, and the union bureaucracy normally is concerned about appearing too openly on the side of management and the courts. This is especially of concern given the fact that at the conclusion of contract talks at American Airlines, the joint membership will vote on which union will represent the workforce going forward.

At the same time, McBryde could level fines against the unions similar to the massive fines piled on the Allied Pilots Association (APA) by American in 1999. American Airlines ultimately forgave the fines with the APA becoming even more openly subservient to the company.

Lumber workers continue strike against concessions

Lumber workers in British Columbia are continuing a three-week strike against Western Forest Products opposing massive concessions, including changes to pensions and work rules, below-inflation pay rates and cuts to the pay of new hires.

The workers, members of the United Steelworkers (USW), returned a 98.8 percent strike authorization vote in June. However, the USW has sought to minimize the impact of the strike by allowing 121 contract companies to continue operations during the strike. Meanwhile, the USW has delayed the payout of strike benefits to a third week, despite sitting on a reported $500 million strike fund.

On July 11, the Labor Relation Board ruled that it was illegal for three of the subcontractors to be struck and that 105 workers must return to work. Both sides have indicated willingness to submit to mediation.

The company has said the strike comes at a difficult time due to a slump in demand for softwood lumber and import duties imposed by the US Trump administration.

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