

Buenos Aires metro workers strike over asbestos in trains

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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The Buenos Aires Subte (subterranean metro rail) Workers Association announced October 18 that it will carry out a number of industrial actions, including strikes and protests, in response to the presence of asbestos in the trains. Actions include the opening of turnstiles on October 21 and 22, and two-hour strikes on October 22 and 23 on two lines, B and D.

The trains were bought by the state-run Buenos Aires Subte State Society (SBASE) from a Spanish company and, although the European Union prohibits the sale of products containing asbestos, that did not prevent it from selling them to an Argentine agency. The manuals for such equipment are gigantic and it was not until the discovery of a sentence in “small print on page 473 of volume 4” that the presence of the substance was first exposed, according to SBASE head Eduardo de Montmollin.

Union delegates have asked the City of Buenos Aires to “initiate the purchase of a complete fleet free of asbestos and a plan of de-asbestization.” The presence of the carcinogen in coaches on line B has been known for years, but neither SBASE nor the private concern Metrovías, which manage infrastructure and operations respectively, have taken significant action to get rid of the contaminant.

Argentine airline cabin crews strike for overdue pay and bonuses

On October 16, the Argentine Aeronavigators Association (AAA) announced a strike against Andes Airlines. In announcing the strike call AAA head Juan Pablo Brey cited “the salary debt” and the now expired parity negotiations. The situation for workers has become “totally uncertain,” according to Brey.

Andes Airlines was started in 2005 to provide flights between the northwestern province of Salta and Buenos Aires. In recent years it has been impacted by the government of Mauricio Macri’s emphasis on cost-cutting at airlines—called the “airplane revolution” by the Transportation Minister—and as a result has cut flights, lost routes and planes and canceled expansion plans.

Brey added that Andes would “stop flying until October 24.” On that date, if the company has not responded, the AAA will hold a

general assembly to decide on the next steps to take.

Workers at Chilean mine strike for pay hike

After “obligatory mediation” with management proved fruitless, the Syndicate 1 negotiation commission of the Antucoya mine in northern Chile called for a strike beginning October 16. The Antucoya mine is located some 120 km (75 miles) northeast of Antofagasta, home of the headquarters of Antofagasta Minerals (AMSA), an affiliate of the Luksic Group conglomerate, which is owned by one of the richest families on the continent.

After starting the strike on the morning of the 16th, a group of mineworkers went to Antofagasta, where they marched from the bus station to a sports complex and held an assembly. Union representatives explained that AMSA’s last offer did not represent a real salary improvement, nor did it raise the monthly and yearly production bonuses, considered essential for the workers.

Syndicate 1 has about 600 members, relatively small compared to other mineworker unions. However, the strike has been described as “historic” by the media, due to the fact that it is the first walkout in the history of Luksic enterprises.

Paraguayan soccer players threaten strike over unpaid wages

Players in the Paraguayan soccer team Club General Díaz announced on October 18 that they would not show up to play a game scheduled for the next day due to unpaid wages. The players delivered a letter to the Football Association of Paraguay (APF), of which the team is a member.

The money owed by management was five or six months overdue. Through social media, the players urged players in other FAP teams to support their strike, since nonpayment of wages to soccer players is becoming more common.

The players decided to play the upcoming game when management paid one of the six overdue monthly payments. The issue of the remaining payments is still unresolved.

Guyanese linesmen strike over wages, safety issues, dismissals

Workers for the Lines Department of the Linden Utility Services Coop Society Limited (LUSCSL) downed their tools on October 14 over a number of issues. The decision to take the action was made by the workers independently of their union, the Guyana Bauxite and General Workers Union.

The list of workers' grievances includes pay not commensurate with their skill and the risk involved in their work; management's inconsistent criteria for raises; the lack of height and risk allowances; and inadequate equipment and safety concerns. In addition, workers complain that when they bring up these issues with management, they get no response, management makes empty promises (for example, the purchase of appropriate gloves over a year ago), or they are subject to retaliation. The recent suspension of one employee and dismissal of another added to their anger.

Though the union had not initiated the walkout, field officer Alieshaw Barker declared its "solidarity" with the workers and immediately met with management to put an end to the strike. On October 15, Barker announced that the union and LUSCSL had signed a Terms of Resumption (TOR) document that contained a promise by management to begin negotiations for a Collective Labour Agreement "within seven days following the full resumption of work."

Guyanese sugar workers strike, protest to demand raise and fair treatment

Following an October 14 picketing protest that did not achieve satisfaction, workers for the Blairmont Estate in Guyana went on strike October 15 over a number of issues. The immediate cause for the walkout was the promotion of a coworker who they claim did not deserve it. They complain that other workers who have more years' experience and skill were bypassed. Estate management has so far held firm to its decision and refuses to negotiate. Seventy-two workers downed their tools in the strike.

Another central demand is for a wage hike. Workers at Blairmont have not received a pay increase since the 2015 restructuring that involved closures and consolidations of some estates. The workers held another picketing protest action on October 16.

According to a Guyana Standard report, the strike and protests come on the heels of a petition signed by over 3,500 field and factory workers, members of the Guyana Agricultural and General Workers Union. The petition, submitted to the Guyanese Sugar Company, called for a raise to counteract the rising cost of living. In addition to Blairmont, workers from two other estates, Albion and Uitvulgt, signed the petition.

Vallejo, California auto mechanics rally as strike enters second month

Mechanics at a Toyota dealership in Vallejo, California rallied October 18 as workers enter their second month on strike over benefits and the future of union representation. The 22 members of International Association of Machinists Local 1173 have been in negotiations with the dealership for three years, are without a raise for six years, and are opposed to the company's demand to end family medical benefits for future new hires.

In the current negotiations, the company has offered workers a mere 75 cents an hour wage increase. The union has also filed a complaint with the Solano County District Attorney's office over Toyota Vallejo's advertising "for open positions without disclaiming there is a labor stoppage, which is against Labor Code."

General Motors resumes production at Oshawa, Ontario factory

GM says it has resumed production at its Oshawa, Ontario facility that had been idled due to the strike by US workers. The plant is slated for closure later this year, with a loss of some 5,000 assembly and supplier jobs. It was targeted by GM along with four factories in the US. The sellout contract deal negotiated last week by the United Auto Workers sanctioned the closure of three of those four factories.

The Unifor union sanctioned the closure of the Oshawa facility in exchange for the promise of a relative handful of jobs.

GM had idled the Oshawa plant due to parts shortages related to the strike in the US. About two-thirds of the 1,100-hourly workforce at the GM St. Catharines, Ontario plant remain on layoff. The plant makes transmissions. The GM CAMI plant in Ingersoll, Ontario has continued production throughout the strike.



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