

Dominican public defenders in three-day strike; workers at DSI Tunneling in Louisville, Kentucky, walk out

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Three-day strike by Dominican Republic public defenders

Public defenders in the Dominican Republic, who provide free legal aid to persons of limited means, began a 72-hour strike on August 5. The action was called by the Dominican Association of Public Defenders (ADDP) to protest delays in payments from the National Office of Public Defenders. An ADDP circular also cited the fact that public defenders have been notified that their vacation bonus has been eliminated.

The circular noted that “all the personnel of the judicial branch receive it, all the employees of the MAP [Public Administration Ministry] receive it, the employees of the Central Bank, the Superintendence, among others” as well.

“Public defenders deserve to work in better conditions; therefore, the board of this association calls all public defenders and contracted attorneys to a 72-hour labor stoppage,” an ADDP statement declared. While the director of the National Office of Public Defenders granted the justice of their complaints, he opposed the strike call.

Public defenders in the Dominican Republic conduct around 75 percent of criminal proceedings, each handling between 300 and 400 cases, and they have worked throughout the coronavirus pandemic. Salaries vary from 60,000 to 80,000 pesos (US\$1,025-US\$1,367) per month. They have been demanding a raise for three years to no avail.

Municipal workers in Dominican Republic protest firings

Several dozen former employees of the Santo Domingo Oeste municipality in the Dominican Republic protested in front of the town hall August 7. They held the protest after waiting a week for a response to their complaints about massive firings without receiving letters of cancellation or payment for their last month of work.

A number of these workers have over a decade of service at their jobs, but will find it difficult to get jobs, considering their age and the crisis brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Spokespeople for the protesters claim that the firings violated Dominican labor law. The municipal Council of Aldermen met the day before the demonstration and formed a commission to investigate the charges against the city. Meanwhile, the discharged workers and their families will have to fend for themselves.

Wives of Mexican mine workers protest and hold blockade for resolution of strike

A group of more than two dozen women, wives of Mexican copper miners, blocked a railway and a highway in Cananea, Sonora, on August 5. The women acted in support of their husbands, who have been in a labor conflict for over 13 years with Grupo México, a mining conglomerate owned by billionaire Germán Larrea Mota-Velasco. The women issued a call to President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, aka AMLO, to carry out his promise to mandate negotiations between their husbands’ union, the National Union of Mine, Metal, Steel and Allied Workers of the Mexican Republic Section 65 and Larrea Mota-Velasco.

When the strike and occupations of some mines began in 2007, Larrea Mota-Velasco brought in scabs from other regions, leaving Cananea, located south of the Arizona border, “in ruins,” according to a *La Jornada* report. The women have endured temperatures of up to 45°C (113°F) as well as the risks of the pandemic to press their demand. They have vowed to expand their blockade until it becomes permanent if they get no response to their petition.

One of the women, Clarissa Clark, told *La Jornada* reporters that AMLO had promised in July 2019 to set a negotiation meeting within 10 days, but “Grupo México shows its power and does not sit down to negotiate, despite AMLO asking us not to occupy the mine and [promising that] he would give us the 10 days that didn’t arrive. This fight has cost us truncated careers, deaths and family separations.”

She also advised the president “not to forget where the Revolution began,” referring to the famous 1906 Cananea Strike, in which mine workers confronted and courageously fought federal troops sent by dictator Porfirio Díaz as well as a posse from Arizona requested by the then-American-owned company. Although the strike was violently crushed, it is considered by Mexicans to have heralded the 1910 Mexican Revolution.

Haitian professors protest back-to-school order, declining salaries

On August 7, teachers in Haiti denounced the government’s order to resume classes on August 10. The National Confederation of Haitian Educators (CNEH) called for protests and boycotts. CNEH also criticized the 50 percent fall in real pay due to rampaging inflation and the depreciation of the Haitian gourde against the US dollar.

Colombian medical workers complete one month on strike for overdue pay

Doctors, nurses and auxiliary staff at the Rosario Pumarejo de López Hospital in Valledupar, Colombia, have been on strike for over a month to demand payment of between 7 and 11 months of unpaid salaries. In that time, they have not received a response from the health secretary.

Some 700 hospital employees have been affected by the nonpayment of salaries. Four of the doctors initiated a hunger strike on August 2. One doctor, who has been at the hospital for 20 years and has not been paid for eight months, told *El Espectador*, “We have 32 days of ceasing programmed activities. We only attend to consultations of vital urgency. Nobody offers the required solution to this situation; nobody looks our way. We have exhausted all the channels, talking with the president, with the ministers, with the governor, with the health secretary and with the director. ...” The doctor, Luis Eberto, joined three other doctors on a hunger strike on August 2.

The only result of the meetings has been a promise to pay one month of salaries, a proposal that another hunger-striking doctor called “indecent.”

Louisville, Kentucky, industrial workers strike after fruitless negotiations

Workers for DSI Tunneling in Louisville walked off the job August 4 after a unanimous strike vote the previous day. Members of Teamsters Local 89 are frustrated by interminable contract talks that have accomplished nothing since workers first unionized in November 2019.

DSI Tunneling hired professional anti-union lawyers during the unionization drive and then rehired the same firm to conduct negotiations. One of the tactics to undermine bargaining has been to refuse to release workers to bargain during their day shift. Instead, they are required to bargain in the evening after completing a grueling 10-12-hour shift.

According to the Teamsters, “It became abundantly clear the Company hired these union-busters not to negotiate a first contract, but to ensure perpetual negotiations in order to prevent a contract from ever being ratified.” At the same time, the union has left the strike isolated. Teamsters Local 89 has more than 15,000 members in Kentucky, but it will not bring this force to bear in the struggles of its membership.

DSI Tunneling provides customized tunneling systems and equipment for the mining industry. It has 2,000 employees who provide support to operations in 70 countries internationally.

Cleveland city administration issues outdated coronavirus protective equipment to trash workers

The union representing Cleveland trash collectors reported outrage among members when the city’s Division of Waste issued expired personal protective equipment (PPE) last week. Management distributed unlabeled spray bottles and sanitary wipes whose expiration date was March 2008.

The city called the botched distribution a mistake and says it has adequate supplies. Already, two city waste workers have testified positive for COVID-19

British Columbia hotel workers launch hunger strike protest against COVID impoverishment

Hotel workers from throughout the province began a hunger strike at the British Columbia legislature Monday to highlight the increasing hardships they are facing. Over 50,000 workers have been laid off from hotels in the province since the beginning of the coronavirus crisis. Food insecurity and arrears in rent payments have become a reality for the workers and their families over the course of the summer, particularly in the expensive cities of Vancouver and Victoria.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s federal Liberal government’s Canada Emergency Response Benefit of C\$2,000 per month expires next month. The termination of the program is designed to force workers back into the labour market at a time when cases of the virus in the province are once again increasing.

The action, organized by the Unite Here union, is billed as a “Fast For Our Jobs” protest. From the standpoint of union leaders, it is seen as a token stunt to divert the enormous buildup of anger among workers over the pro-corporate policies of the big business Trudeau government.

Hotel workers and community supporters will take one-week-long fasting shifts before being replaced by a new set of hunger strikers at the end of each week. The action follows socially distanced demonstrations undertaken this past June and July in both Vancouver and Victoria.

The British Columbia government of New Democratic Party premier John Horgan has yet to respond to a demand from the province’s Tourism Industry Association for a C\$680 million bailout package. Tourism is the third largest private sector industry in the British Columbia economy. The bailout package, if ratified, would take more than a third of the government’s C\$1.5 billion COVID support reserves. Workers, cognizant of the fact that such bailout packages are used to buttress the profit levels of the hospitality companies, are demanding that any funds dispensed by the government address first and foremost the need to recover the jobs and wages of the laid-off workers.



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