

## Teacher strikes and protests in Haiti and Uruguay

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

25 August 2020

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

### **Nationwide strike by Education workers in Haiti**

Teachers unions in Haiti announced last Wednesday that they would carry out a national protest strike beginning August 24 to demand better working conditions and in opposition to the victimization of militant teachers.

Since classes began on August 10 teachers and students at both public and private schools have engaged in a series of demonstrations and rallies over wages, back pay and promised health measures in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. On Monday, August 17, hundreds of high school students from the Lycée Pinchinnat, in the southern city of Jacmel, marched alongside their teachers.

### **Uruguay: Education workers protest**

Education workers launched a week of protests against budget cuts. On Thursday, the National Federation of Secondary School Teachers carried out a protest demanding that the Uruguayan government assign six percent of the gross national product to education. The week-long mobilization was called by the Education Union Federation.

In addition to demanding that the education budget be increased to six percent of GDP, the teacher unions are demanding an end to austerity measures that are cutting

public services across Uruguay.

Uruguay's government, under President Luis Lacalle Pou, is proposing budget cuts of 15 percent relative to 2019 to erase the fiscal deficit, currently 5.5 percent of GDP, despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Brazil's Homeless Movement (Movimiento Sin Tierra, MST) protests government evictions**

Homeless workers are pushing back with the creation of a "resistance camp," to provide refuge and push back against the policies of the government of President Bolsonaro to terrorize homeless families. "We are learning how to become stronger," declared MST leader Tuira Tule; this land is ours and we will not give up one centimeter."

Last Wednesday hundreds of police invaded the city of Campo do Meio, in Minas Gerais State, to expel 450 homeless families from the Quilombo Campo Grande camp. Many of these families had been expelled from another homeless camp in July.

MST leader Tuira Tule pointed out that the expulsions have become the new normal for landless workers in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Paraguay workers stage protest over government corruption and COVID response**

On August 14 hundreds of workers marched and rallied in Asunción, Paraguay's capital, in opposition to government corruption and against the way that the

government of President Mario Abdo Benitez is handling the COVID-19 pandemic.

The demonstrators marched from Democracy Square to the Ministry of Commerce, demanding the resignation of Benigno López, who heads that ministry. They also demanded that the government make use of 1.6 billion dollars to fight the pandemic, specifically to provide hospitals and clinics with much needed medical supplies and equipment.

One of the main demands of the march was a call for levying heavy taxes on the Paraguayan plutocracy and large landowners.

### **Portland, Oregon grocery workers demand restoration of pandemic bonus pay**

Workers at the New Season Market Concordia store in Portland, Oregon, held a demonstration August 20 demanding the reinstatement of their “Thank You” bonus pay, which was terminated back on June 30. The pay amounted to \$150 for full-time employees and \$100 for part-time workers per bi-weekly pay check.

New Seasons marketing director Julie Teune, in denying a restoration of the bonus, told Street Roots, “While we don’t share our financials, we can confirm that expenses related to COVID-19, including Thank You bonuses, have had a significant impact on the financial state of the company.”

Workers at the store set up a meeting with the grocery chain’s CEO, Forrest Hoffmaster, to present him with a petition containing 7,000 signatures backing their demands, but were stood up. Workers are also seeking a further limitation on the number of customers currently allowed in the store at one time.

According to company statistics, nine workers at six separate New Seasons stores have contracted COVID-19. Grocery workers in Portland have also staged protests at Whole Foods and Green Zebra Grocery, where workers walked off the job on July 31.

### **Dominion grocery workers in Newfoundland strike**

Thirteen hundred low-wage workers at 11 Dominion food retail stores across Newfoundland and Labrador began a strike on August 22 after overwhelmingly rejecting a tentative agreement recommended by the Unifor union. Workers have been without a contract for the past 11 months. Designated as “essential” workers, they have continued working through the entirety of the pandemic that began in March.

In June, Loblaw Companies Limited, the parent group of the Dominion chain, ended their short-lived \$2 per hour pandemic pay increase for the portion of front-line staff eligible for the payment. The rejected contract offer only provided for a miserable \$1 per hour raise spread over the next three years.

Workers have not received a contractual pay increase since early 2018. In 2019, management cut more than 60 full-time positions. Today, over 80 percent of the Dominion workforce are low-wage part-time employees with virtually no benefits. The Loblaw conglomerate is the largest retail food distributor in Canada, employing 200,000 workers. It is owned by the Weston family, the third-wealthiest family in the country, with an estimated net worth of \$7 billion.



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