Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Meatpacking workers occupy Arrebeef plant in Argentina

On February 26, hundreds of meatpackers took over their plant in the Ramallo district in northern Buenos Aires Province. At issue is the defense of wages and jobs. Workers are protesting wages that have not kept up with inflation. One worker indicated that with what he gets paid he can no longer buy sneakers for his children. The occupation elicited messages of support from many workers along the industrial belt of Buenos Aires and Santa Fe provinces.

The occupation is being carried out in defiance of their union. “We demand that the company negotiate directly with us,” declared a leader of the occupation. “The union is all for the company and nothing for us.”

Chile: Thousands demand release of political prisoners and are savagely repressed by the police

Special Forces repressed last Friday a peaceful demonstration by thousands in Santiago’s Plaza Dignidad Square demanding freedom for political prisoners, most of whom were arrested in the mass protests of 2019 against the Piñera administration and for a repudiation of the Pinochet Constitution. Most of those arrested in October 2019 are still in jail. Only three were released, after being held in jail for 10 months, for lack of evidence.

New protest demanding resignation of Haitian President Moïse

On Sunday, February 21, hundreds of Haitian workers mobilized on the streets of Port-au-Prince against President Jovenel Moïse, whom they accuse of setting up a dictatorship. The peaceful marchers were accompanied by musical groups.

However, when the marchers reached Champs de Mars Plaza, across from the government house, the protest was confronted by tear gas from the police attempting to disperse the crowd.

Chicago grocery warehouse workers vote to strike in near-unanimous ballot

Warehouse workers in the Chicago, Illinois region voted on February 26 by a 98 percent margin to authorize a strike against the grocery chain Jewel-Osco. Teamsters Local 710 described the last bargaining session as “abysmal,” as management is demanding a second lower wage tier and wants to increase the costs of workers’ portion of health care while slashing funding to the 401(k) retirement plan.

Workers complained of understaffing, with management requiring six-day workweeks, making it impossible for workers to schedule COVID-19 vaccines. Furthermore, crowded warehouses are creating conditions for increased infections with the coronavirus.

During the early months of the pandemic, Jewel-Osco paid an additional $2 per hour hazard pay. This was abolished last July.

The contract, which covers 850 workers, expires March 6. Jewel-Osco is owned by Albertsons, the

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second largest grocery chain in the United States. Its president and CEO, Vivek Sankaran, raked in an annual compensation in 2019 of nearly $29 million. Jewel-Osco has the largest number of grocery stores in the Chicago region.

Bend, Oregon hospital charges workers with preparing illegal strike

Management for the St. Charles Health System in Bend, Oregon filed a suit to bar a March 4 strike by 156 medical tech workers. The suit charges the Oregon Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals (OFNHP) with declaring an illegal strike and that “the general public will be irreparably harmed given the possibility of delays in medical care and vaccine administration.”

The workers have been negotiating with the hospital for more than a year, and negotiations deadlocked back in December over wages and pay increases. The workers charge that their living standards have fallen in relation to the rise in cost of living and voted by a 94 percent margin to strike.

The union gave a 10-day strike notice on February 22. St. Charles management, rejecting any attempt to settle, filed a charge with the National Labor Relations Board claiming the OFNHP must give a 30-day notice to permit mediated contract talks.

Sam Potter, with the OFNHP, responded, “We were driven to do this by the hospital. Our members have been waiting for and fighting for fair pay and a fair contract. We’ve waited long enough.”

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