

Puerto Rican electrical workers hold one-day strike; Canada Post COVID cover-up exposed

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Latin America

Puerto Rican electrical workers union calls one-day strike over government energy contract

On March 3, the Electrical and Irrigation Workers Union (Utier) of Puerto Rico announced a 24-hour strike to begin at 10 PM, March 8. The purpose of the stoppage will be two-fold: to hold a protest at the Capitol and to publicly attend a presentation outside the Chamber of Representatives as part of the investigation of the contract between the administration of Governor Pedro Pierluisi and the Electrical Energy Authority (AEE) with LUMA Energy.

Union president Ángel Figueroa Jaramillo stated that the strike was called so that “all the AEE workers, represented by Utier, can see the presentation that the Alliance of Active and Retired Employees will put on this coming Tuesday where we will expose the truth of the contract with LUMA Energy and the government of Pedro Pierluisi that has already cost us more than \$80 million, raises rates, eliminates the collective contract, the retirement system, employment stability and the guarantee of all acquired rights.”

Pierluisi, a member of former governor Ricardo Roselló’s New Progressive Party, has faced allegations of conflict of interest, nepotism and corruption throughout his political career. He was first declared governor by Roselló when the latter resigned in 2019. The Supreme Court ruled Pierluisi’s accession to the governorship as unconstitutional and he was ordered removed in August 2019. When he ran for governor in 2020, he won with 32.9 percent of all votes among six candidates.

Mexican medical workers protest lack of vaccine

Nurses, doctors and other medical personnel in Tlalpan, the largest of Mexico City’s 16 boroughs, protested March 2 against the lack of COVID-19 vaccine. The protesters chanted, “We want vaccines!” and alleged that only doctors and residents, not nurses and other health workers, have been vaccinated.

The demonstrators carried picket signs saying, “We demand the anti-COVID-19 vaccine for all health personnel!” and “We do not refuse to work; we want safety! Vaccinations now!” The demonstrators called for equity and transparency in the distribution of the vaccine.

Although the National Institute of Rehabilitation, where they work, is not specifically for treatment of COVID-19, the protesting workers say that they have encountered cases and attended to those patients. The doctors said they will continue to treat patients, but they demand to be vaccinated.

Police were sent to the protest site, but they only redirected traffic, which had been impeded by the protest.

Bermudian quarry workers implement sick-out strike against management policies

About 60 workers at a government quarry in Bermuda returned to work March 2 after three days of calling in sick. Though reporting on the action was not specific, other than to say that the workers were accusing management of not following the collective agreement, one worker told reporters that a manager, whom he did not name, “wants to be down there dictating and running the place like it’s his business.”

The sickout took place a day after about 100 workers downed their tools and demanded to talk to the Minister of Public Works. On the second day, Bermuda Industrial Union (BIU) and Public Works officials met to discuss the workers’ concerns. When they left the meeting, one BIU official announced that “things went smoothly” and “we came up with a win/win solution” without revealing any details.

According to the *Royal Gazette*, the union official, Arnold Smith, “declined to comment on claims made last week by the public works ministry that the union did not approve of the industrial action.”

Haitian hospital workers strike over killing of pediatrician

Workers at several hospital centers in Port-au-Prince, Haiti went on strike March 3 to protest the murder of a popular pediatrician during a failed kidnapping attempt. Ernest Pady was shot in the head on February 28 as a group of criminals attempted to kidnap him as he was leaving a clinic in the capital.

Violence, including kidnappings and assassinations, is a regular occurrence in Haiti, and has increased with the deepening of the political crisis of the government of Jovenel Moïse. On February 7, claiming that there were coup plans against him, Moïse announced his intention to remain in power until February 2022, a year beyond his term.

Protests have been met with violence by police, the military and gangs. Moïse’s goal in the meantime is to eliminate any obstacles to his plans to

tighten his dictatorial grip. The Biden administration has voiced its support for Moïse while at the same time deporting planeloads of Haitians who had fled the violence.

Dominican Republic: Former municipal workers protest for unpaid benefits

Several dozen former employees of the Municipality of Santo Domingo Este held a protest March 5 to demand benefits owed them. The protesters were let go nearly a year ago, and despite having processed their claims with the Public Administration Ministry, they have not received the legally required money.

The protesters warned that they will continue their protests until they receive what is due them for their years of service.

Jamaican airlift workers strike for overdue pay

Airlift workers in Kingston, Jamaica's Norman Manley International Airport began a strike March 5 to demand the payment of their wages, which are in arrears since December. The workers say that a change in management has brought on worsened conditions, and the National Workers Union (NWU) claims that it has been unsuccessful in getting a response from Airlift Handlers United, the employer.

The NWU says that it supports the action by the workers, but that Airlift Handlers management "has refused to declare ownership of the staff." Workers have expressed disappointment with the NWU bureaucrats, with one worker telling reporters that "he is not sure if they are on the side of management or that of the workers."

Protesters in Paraguay demand more decisive government response to pandemic

Protests broke out March 5 in Asunción, Paraguay's capital, over the government's wretched mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic, which as of that date had resulted in nearly 166,000 cases and almost 3,300 deaths in the nation of seven million.

Angry demonstrators assembled at the Congress Building, chanted and carried signs with slogans saying, "Corruption out," "Not one more victim!" and "Corruption kills!" Police fired rubber bullets and tear gas at protesters, some of whom threw rocks, burned barricades and broke down barriers.

Health Minister Julio Mazzoleni, who has been harshly criticized by health care workers, their unions, and families of victims for not providing adequate protections for health workers, and for Paraguay's less than 0.1 percent vaccination rate, submitted his resignation on the same day.

However, their rage was not limited to one official. They have also demanded the resignation of President Mario Abdo Benítez. One protester told Al Jazeera, "There have to be clear signs of change. We've had a year already with excuses, that we're going to have a working group, personnel, supplies, medications, reagents, and they didn't arrive!"

United States

Medical tech workers strike Eastern Oregon hospital over wages

Medical tech workers at the St. Charles Health System in Bend, Oregon walked off the job March 4 to secure wage increases and to oppose management's demand for an open shop. The 156 members of the Oregon Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals (OFNHP) have been negotiating for 18 months to obtain their first contract while management broke off negotiations back in December leading workers to vote by a 94 percent margin to strike.

Frank DeWolf, a catheterization lab technologist told the *Bulletin*, "Our salary is lower than our counterparts in Western Oregon. Our salaries are lower across the board." The OFNHP has charged that an ultrasound technician in Portland can make \$10 to \$15 an hour more than one at St. Charles.

Hospital management has hired strikebreakers, but pickets report surgeons are refusing to work with replacement workers. The St. Charles strike comes on the heels of a \$21 million loss for the hospital in 2020 and a \$4.9 million loss in January, despite receiving \$52 million overall in CARES Act funding.

Pennsylvania public workers strike concludes with paltry settlement

The South Whitehall, Pennsylvania Township public works department strike came to an end March 1 after 29 members of Teamsters Local 773 voted by a narrow margin to accept the new offer from the board. Workers struck February 4 demanding increased health care and pension contributions.

According to press reports, the final agreement left health care issues unchanged from the old contract and offered a wage settlement containing a 2 percent increase in the first two years of a four-year agreement and 2.5 percent increases in each year of the third and fourth years.

The strike was punctuated by union and township appearances before a Lehigh County court where a judge ultimately granted the township an injunction based on its claim that the strike represented a "clear and present danger or threat to the health, safety or welfare of the public." The judge gave the township board the power to recall a set of workers back to their jobs.

Canada

Canada Post covered up COVID outbreak at Toronto area facility

The Canada Post Corporation did not report an outbreak at its Mississauga Gateway sorting plant to federal authorities as required by law. An outbreak in the facility, which employs 4,500 workers was first detected on January 5. By the end of the month over 300 postal workers had been infected. One postal worker died from the virus. Peel Region, where the sorting plant is located, has been one of the hardest hit regions in the country regarding virus spread.

Yet Canada Post, a Crown Corporation, did not notify the federal Employment ministry when first becoming aware of the outbreak nor did management file any evidence of an investigation of the "hazardous occurrence." Both actions are required by the Canada Labour Code.

Even as cases were spiking by mid-January, management did not begin virus testing for all employees. Rather, testing and quarantine measures were undertaken for only one shift in the sprawling plant under the order

of the regional health authority. Mandatory testing of all employees was not undertaken until January 29. Testing ended on February 7 with those workers under temporary precautionary quarantine returning to work in the ensuing days as infections began to wane.

Yet throughout the entire outbreak, sorting operations continued at the complex. No attempt was made by the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) to safeguard the health and safety of its membership at Gateway through the organization of a work stoppage in the face of a rapidly spreading virus in the plant.



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