

Manitoba Hydro workers call rotating strike; Santa Fé, Argentina teachers authorize strike over pay

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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Canada

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

Rotating strikes at Manitoba Hydro

Two thousand three hundred Manitoba Hydro workers are in the first week of a rotating strike against the provincial government of right-wing Progressive Conservative Premier Brian Pallister. The hydro workers, members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), have been without a contract for three years. The job action began after union negotiators rejected the latest offer by the Crown Corporation. Manitoba Hydro had put forward a derisory three-year wage offer covering the years workers had laboured without a contract. The proposed deal saw no wage increase for the first two retroactive years and a miserly 0.75 percent increase for the current year.

The deal mirrors much of the Pallister government's wage restraint policy guidelines. In 2017, the government passed Bill 28, which imposed a two-year wage freeze on all public employees with a meager 0.75 percent wage increase in year three of any new contract, followed by 1 percent in year four. But last year, a provincial court, calling the bill "draconian," struck down the legislation as an infringement on the constitutional right to free collective bargaining. However, the government has appealed the decision and insisted that public employers negotiating with any public sector union continue to follow the wage restraint advice outlined in the original legislation.

IBEW officials have already signaled to management that a showdown with the anti-worker Pallister government is not on their agenda. Union business manager Mike Espenell made it clear to reporters last week that the IBEW is "just trying to minimize the disruption for our customers at this point." In any case, essential worker regulations provide for the maintenance of basic services. As far as union wage demands are concerned, Espenell also made it clear that the union would not necessarily insist on a wage deal that even covered inflationary increases. The union is trying to achieve basic cost-of-living increases, he told reporters, or "anywhere close to that."

The dispute with the hydro workers heralds growing unrest among thousands of public sector workers in the province who are moving into negotiations for their own contracts. Health care, education, social service and child care workers, as well as employees in the crown corporations, all have been without a contract for at least the past three years.

Latin America

Argentina: Teachers reject salary offer, approve two-day strike

Teachers in the Teachers Association of Santa Fé (Amsafé) voted March 10, 12,657 to 11,576, to reject the provincial government's salary offer of a 35 percent raise. The vote was a surprise to the Amsafé leadership, since President Sonia Alesso had told the teachers that it was a good offer.

The provincial government had claimed that the raise would be above the rate of inflation, but official projections are usually low. Nonetheless, other Argentine teachers unions, as well as public employees unions, have ratified raise offers of from 30 to 35 percent.

Alesso tried to explain the vote by saying that the number of voting members was smaller due to the pandemic, that the margin of defeat was not large and that there was a component of "discontent" due to the extraordinary conditions of 2020: the pandemic; the lack of a salary proposal by the government, the conflict generated by "detitularization" (revocation of professional status) and replacement of teachers.

In addition to the rejection of the raise offer, the teachers voted to strike on March 15 and 16, and if there is no better offer, on March 23 and 25, since March 24 is a national holiday, the Day of Remembrance for Truth and Justice.

Mexican health workers strike to demand vaccinations

The National Health Secretariat Workers Syndicate's section 35 in the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca called out its members for "permanent assemblies" March 12 to press their demand for COVID-19 vaccinations. The Health Secretariat still has not administered vaccines to 5,000 union health workers, or 30 percent of the membership, a union statement pointed out.

The union's secretary general told reporters that many of the workers have what are classified as administrative jobs, but they are nonetheless exposed to infected people. Some have been sent on vaccination campaigns without having received the shots themselves, especially in remote areas. He also lambasted the lack of training of protocols in case of adverse reactions and disorganization that often results in unnecessary delays.

The announcement said that emergency, hospitalization and meal services would continue, but all others would be shut down, and that if there is no response from the authorities, workers will not take part in vaccinations.

As of March 12, 1,834 Health Secretariat workers have been infected, of which 30 have died.

Haitian Education Ministry workers threaten strike to demand payment of salaries

Unions representing employees of Haiti's Education Ministry announced March 12 that it has until March 29 to pay their salaries, which are three months overdue. The workers will go to their posts but will not work until they receive debit cards from the government.

A union spokesperson denounced the delay, saying, "They treat us like poor relatives." Another demand is respect for the principle of "equal salary for equal work," referring to the higher pay that employees in the capital Port-au-Prince receive, while their colleagues in the other departments earn less.

Former employees of Dominican Republic's National Lottery protest for benefits

The Dominican Republic's National Lottery building in Santo Domingo was the scene of a protest by former employees on March 12. The former workers, who were terminated in August, called attention to Public Function Law 41-08, which requires the payment of job benefits within 90 days of dismissal. The discharged workers had staged a protest on March 5 without getting a response.

Protesters' chants denounced the unjust and unfair way that they were left without employment or income in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. They say that when they have called the Lottery to find out about progress on their claims, they get the runaround.

Dominican Republic: Tourism drivers to strike over pandemic-related losses

The Dominican Tourist Transportation Association (Adotratur) announced March 13 that its drivers would go on strike March 20 to demand that the government alleviate the loss of income due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The announcement was made at a protest in the Punta Cana-Bávaro beach resort area, where the drivers pick up and transport tourists.

The drivers were hit hard by the pandemic, which virtually dried up the flow of tourists to the popular site but did not stop the banks' demands for loan payments. The drivers have been in desperate straits ever since.

Strike by Trinidadian jockeys called off with overdue pay issue unresolved

The Jockeys Association of Trinidad and Tobago (JA) at Santa Rosa Park, in Arima, Trinidad, announced that jockeys were returning to work March 11 after refusing to ride in the Arima Race Club's (ARC) 2021 season Race Day Five on March 6. The jockeys had struck because they had still not been paid for the 2019 season.

Bowing to pressure and criticism from ARC, JA President Sheldon Rodrigo told reporters, "We thrashed out our differences. They said they have no money. That's the honest truth. The last resort was either to shut it down or ride and try to make it [income] to pay jockeys. Punters

[bettors] have now started to come back to the pool. If we have no money, we have to keep it going."

In a December 2020 meeting, the ARC had pledged some monies to jockeys from the upcoming four-day New Year's racing event. According to a *Trinidad and Tobago Guardian* report, "Clearly, the betting amassed from local and simulcast shows some TT\$2.3 million coming into the system. The ARC made 30 percent of that total and as such, met the quota that was requested in terms of stakes and commission for the first four days of the season."

When Rodrigo, saying that the jockeys were "fed up of the empty promises," announced the strike, ARC CEO Ken Ogeer placed the blame on the jockeys, accusing them of renegeing on their contractual commitment and hurting trainers and others in the industry. After two days of meetings of the ARC, the JA and the Racehorse Trainers Association, the parties announced an "amicable" agreement. Racing is set to resume on March 27.

Four-hour strikes by Uruguayan construction workers over worker's death

The SUNTA construction workers union called two four-hour strikes—9 a.m.–1 p.m. and 7–11 p.m.—over the death of a worker on a pulp mill construction project. The worker, Carlos Marcelo Brun Ruiz Díaz, a 43-year-old father of two, was working in a 10-foot-deep trench when he was buried under a mound of dirt that slid on top of him.

The accident occurred along a road leading to the pulp mill site in Centenario, a town on the south bank of the Río Negro in the department of Durazno. Díaz was contracted by the INCOCI construction company. The future pulp mill, known as UPM 2, will be the largest of its kind in the world. It is being promoted as a job creator for the region, though it has been criticized over environmental, nationalist and economic issues.

Worker safety is also an issue. SUNTA's communiqué announcing the stoppage declared, "We convoke to debate about a National Law of Health and Safety at work."

Chilean metro workers strike over labor conditions

The La Moneda, University of Chile, Santa Lucía and Catholic University subway stations in Santiago, Chile, were shut down March 10 due to a strike by the Metro Professional and Technical Workers Syndicate. According to the union, the workers stopped work because of the administration's "null dialogue" over working conditions.

The workers want higher wages, an end to labor instability for subcontracted workers, improved treatment of workers and inclusion among workers prioritized for COVID-19 vaccinations.

United States

Teamster beverage delivery drivers strike in Detroit

Drivers who deliver 7-Up and Dr. Pepper soft drinks in the Detroit area are on strike against distributors after voting overwhelmingly last week to reject the company's contract offer. In a familiar tactic the Teamsters have labeled the walkout an "unfair labor practice" strike rather than a

contract dispute, a maneuver that leaves open the possibility of a return to work without a contract settlement.

For its part management has retaliated by maintaining operations with a scab workforce.

One worker posted on Facebook, “When the pandemic first hit they (your company) calls you essential workers until you ask for a better pay benefits and a pension... then you find out what they really think about you.”

New York cookie company threatens deportation if workers unionize

A New York cookie company is being charged with threatening its undocumented workers with deportation if they should vote to unionize. Workers say Tate’s Bake Shop in Long Island, New York, began threatening them once they found out they were considering unionization and said it will call Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

The 450 workers had begun to consider unionization before the pandemic. But the company’s failure to provide paid time off to quarantine and personal protective equipment intensified their interest in organizing.

The National Labor Relations Board will issue mail ballots to workers on March 26 with a required return date of April 21. Tate’s was purchased in 2018 for \$500 million by Mondelez International. Mondelez, a Fortune 500 company based in Chicago, operates in 160 countries and has annual revenues of some \$26 billion.

Union declines to call strike after worker illegally fired from Wisconsin pipeline project

The International Union of Operating Engineers Local 139 has been picketing a water project pipeline in Waukesha, Wisconsin, charging the company with illegally firing a worker and using out-of-state workers. Local 139, however, is declining to call a strike against S.J. Louis Construction, Inc., based out of Minnesota, and encouraging its members to continue working on the job.

Few details have been made available. The S.J. Louis management had initially entered into negotiations with several unions to reach an agreement, but in the words of a company press release said it could not obtain a “meaningful discussion.”

Workers continue strike against Marathon refinery in St. Paul, Minnesota

About 200 workers at the Marathon refinery in St. Paul, Minnesota, are continuing a job action they began in January. The company has locked out the workers following what had originally been intended by the Teamsters union as a one-day strike over unfair labor practices. The previous contract between the Teamsters and Marathon expired on January 1. Marathon is threatening to cut 50 jobs at the plant and contract out work. It has maintained operation during the strike using scab labor.

The Teamsters have worked to keep the strike isolated while they prepare a sellout. As a diversion they have issued appeals to various politicians to pressure Marathon. On March 2 a group of Democratic Party

state treasurers sent a letter to Marathon asking them to end the lockout. So far the company has not responded.

Oregon nurses union shuts down Bend St. Charles Hospital strike without a contract

In a stab in the back, the Oregon Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals Local 5017 ended the strike against St. Charles Hospital in Bend, Oregon, without a contract Monday. Management had hypocritically warned of deteriorating patient care due to the use of unqualified scabs.

The medical technicians, technologists and therapists walked out March 4 over contract issues, including wages and cost of living. The union issued no details of the agreement to return to work. In a joint press release the OFNHP and management state, “The two parties will bargain over several days to secure a contract by March 31.” It would be the first contract at the hospital since staff voted to unionize. The 156 workers had voted in the OFNHP in 2019.



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