

## Strikes in Argentina by teachers, oilseed workers and Córdoba state workers

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

### Argentine vegetable oil workers strike, block plant over firings

Workers in the Oil Workers and Employees Syndicate (SOEA) in San Lorenzo, a port city in Argentina's Santa Fe province, struck and blocked access to a soybean oil refinery on March 18. The measure was taken against the Buyatti plant, where about 70 workers had been terminated recently.

The San Lorenzo General Workers Confederation (SOEA) branch called a one-day strike at the nearby Puerto San Martín agroexport terminals for March 19. The SOEA issued a statement saying, "We want to show our total rejection of the conduct of the enterprise, generating anguish and desperation in our Buyatti coworkers. Such a situation is the cause of its arbitrary terminations, without having seen compensation that corresponds to the work carried out during so many years."

Last year, the oil processing plant workers struck for three weeks before the union signed a wage and bonus agreement with the Ciara-CEC oil industry chamber. When the blockade began, Ciara-CEC issued a communiqué asking of "the intervening authorities the maximum attention" and claiming that "social peace cannot be held hostage" by the strike, which could "paralyze the totality of the industrial and port activity, beyond the agroindustrial."

### Argentine teachers hold one-day walkout over salary demands

Teachers in the Entre Ríos province of Argentina held a 24-hour strike on March 19 to demand, according to a statement by the Entre Ríos Education Association (AGMER), that the provincial government make "a salary offer that merits being analyzed" by March 29. The union is also calling for improved working conditions. AGMER has called for an additional 48-hour stoppage on March 25 and 26 if no such offers are made.

Following failed negotiations in February, the union held a 48-hour strike on March 11 and 12 and set up a canopy in front of the Education Council in the provincial capital of Paraná. The canopy for the current strike is located in front of the Casa Gris (Gray House), the governmental headquarters of the executive and legislative branches.

### State workers in Argentina's Córdoba province hold one-day strike to demand reopening of parity talks

Members of the State Workers Association (ATE) in Córdoba province, Argentina struck March 18 to demand the reopening of parity talks. The ATE publicized a list of demands to be discussed at the negotiations, including decent salaries for state workers; permanent status for contracted workers; rehiring of workers fired during the Macri administration; periodic COVID-19 tests for all personnel; vaccinations for essential and on-site, face-to-face workers and safe and sanitary working conditions.

The strike included a march from the center of the eponymous capital city to the headquarters of the Labor Ministry, where ATE local head Federico Giuliani told demonstrators that the strike could be extended to other parts of the country if no action was taken by the government.

### Chilean kindergarten workers strike to demand suspension of return to classes

The National Kindergarten Board Workers Association (Ajunji) in Chile called a nationwide 72-hour strike beginning March 17. The action was taken to demand the suspension of the return to in-person classes, with Ajunji alleging that there were no guarantees of adequate sanitation and oversight of protocols related to COVID-19 to allow for the resumption of in-person classes.

The walkout was opposed by the National Kindergarten Board (Junji), which claimed that it had updated protocols and trained personnel on how to respond to suspected cases. However, several kindergartens have been shut down due to the lack of sanitary conditions since the protocols were introduced, according to Ajunji President Silvia Silva. Junji claims that no kindergartens have been closed since the protocols were instituted.

The conflict over the reopening of kindergartens in the midst of the pandemic has its parallel to the friction between the College of Teachers, who teach elementary and middle school, and the Education Ministry. Ajunji has appealed to the Comptroller General for a pronouncement on the legality of the reopening plan.

### Peruvian civil construction workers protest for pay

Over 50 civil construction workers in Juliaca, a city in the southern

Peruvian Puno region, marched down its main streets in a protest against the noncompliance by the municipal and regional governments with salary tables established by law. They denounced the fact that equipment operators, officials and unskilled workers alike have not received the sums owed to them, and the situation has worsened due to the pandemic and recent rises in the cost of fuel.

### **Trinidad and Tobago: National Insurance Board workers protest nonpayment of wages**

Workers of Trinidad and Tobago's National Insurance Board held a protest on March 15 outside its headquarters in Port of Spain after being informed that the government was not going to pay the nine percent salary increases negotiated in 2020 by their union, the Public Services Association (PSA).

The finance minister claims that the agreement was signed without the approval of the Human Resource Advisory Committee of Cabinet as mandated by a 2011 directive from the Finance Ministry. The PSA filed an industrial relations offence against the NIB over its failure to honor the terms of the agreement.

### **Bahamian television workers strike to protest unilateral pay cut**

Some employees of the Bahamian television broadcaster ZNS struck on March 17 to protest a unilateral wage cut. ZNS decided to deduct about US\$100 per month to cover health insurance co-pays. (Bahamian dollars are pegged to the US dollar.)

The Bahamas Communications and Public Officers Union claimed that ZNS cannot make such a decision without the workers' consent but eschewed any further industrial action, saying that it would file for an injunction against the cut while the case is being fought out in court.

### **Belizean teachers protest proposed salary cut**

Teachers in Belize held protest actions last week against a proposed cut and freeze on raises. Teachers in the coastal town of Dangriga, who had already organized a protest on March 10, held another on March 16.

Protest organizers said that they were not acting in unison with the Belize National Teachers Union (BNTU) but assumed that the union was also against the cuts. One organizer told Love FM, "BNTU is against the proposed salary cut and increment freeze. However, BNTU has a way how they act, how they go about showing their discontent. So, we are not against BNTU. I want to make that very clear; we are in solidarity. But our teachers wanted a voice ASAP, and that was the issue."

On the same day, in the far southern fishing town of Punta Gorda, their colleagues lined their cars in a mile-long vehicular parade. In Belize City, more than 90 vehicles lined the streets. Similar protests took place in other towns and cities nationwide. Another set of protests are planned for this week preceding the official budget reading on March 26.

The motorcades are part of an "action plan" devised by the BNTU, which in early March received a letter from the government proposing the cuts and freeze for three years. The first proposed cut would be for 10 percent. The missive followed "consultations" with the country's unions

on ways to shrink government expenditures. The nation of 420,000 is currently about 500 million Belize dollars, or US\$250 million, in debt.

### **Doctors picket Tacoma, Washington clinics over safety conditions**

Doctors ended two days of picketing on March 17 at two MultiCare clinics in Tacoma, Washington, charging the hospital with a "failure to take provider safety concerns seriously." The Union of American Physicians and Dentists (UAPD) accused the hospital of understaffing, patient overload and exhausting 12-hour shifts.

Doctors were also reacting to MultiCare's decision to appeal a state Department of Labor & Industries (DLI) citation carrying a \$28,400 fine that was issued on February 19. The state has cited two locations—the Indigo Clinic and Good Samaritan Hospital—both in Puyallup, Washington and implying "serious and recurring" safety violations.

The DLI accused MultiCare of not providing health care workers "with a workplace free from recognized hazards that are causing or likely to cause serious injury or death." Social distancing "was not enforced, and there was no barrier or other means of separation between employees while working at a distance of less than 6 feet."

Last November, over 100 doctors, physician assistants and nurse practitioners struck 20 MultiCare clinics to demand personal protective equipment, including the more effective N95 masks. MultiCare sought to sow confusion, claiming it was providing "adequate PPE," using the CDC loophole, which calls N95 respirators a "preferred" PPE but labels other loose-fitting face masks as an "acceptable alternative."

### **Coca-Cola deploys strikebreakers in Calgary**

Two hundred seventy warehousemen, production, maintenance and delivery workers, members of the Teamsters union, are entering the second week of a strike against Coca-Cola in Calgary, Alberta. The workers voted by 94 percent for strike action after twice rejecting a deal presented to them by the local union leadership. Already, the company has begun ferrying in scabs to perform the work of the strikers. Beverage deliveries, although delayed by picketers, have eventually made their way out of the plant.

The strikers are demanding that any new contract contain job protection language after the company began outsourcing work to third party contractors that has reduced the hours of drivers and warehouse workers. They have been without a contract since last October. Since the beginning of the pandemic over a year ago, workers at the Coca-Cola plant have been deemed "essential" and have laboured there even as the company was steadily reducing their take-home pay through their outsourcing schemes.

Local Teamsters business agent Brock Penner issued a statement after the strike began, denouncing the company's attacks on pay and job security. But in an exposure of the union's duplicity, Penner neglected to mention that the union had twice agreed to a contract with management that did not address the issue of outsourcing. Those two deals had been brought to the membership and had been roundly rejected.

The struggle in Calgary takes place in the wake of vicious anti-worker legislation passed by the hard right-wing government of United Conservative Party Premier Jason Kenney. The centerpiece of Kenney's attacks has been the so-called "Restoring Balance in Workplaces Act" that reduces limitations on corporate lobbying and advocacy campaigns

whilst restricting the freedom of expression for advocates of workers' rights.

Since the UCP government came to power in 2019, laws have been passed reducing vacation pay, workplace injury protections, statutory holidays and even break times. Minimum wage protections for young workers and regressive health and safety laws have also been introduced.



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