

Guatemalan government imposes “state of prevention;” Chicago nurses authorize one-day strike

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

Guatemalan government imposes “state of prevention” in response to protests

Guatemala’s president Alejandro Giammattei announced July 12 that the government was going to impose a “state of prevention” from July 14-28. The announcement followed protests demanding his resignation for his mishandling of the pandemic and lack of vaccinations.

On July 10, about 300 protesters had gathered in the capital Guatemala City’s Constitution Plaza to denounce corruption and demand Giammattei’s resignation. In announcing the state of prevention, the president tried to shift the blame for the pandemic onto the protesters, saying, “My complaint is against those people who are promoting the virus and who become more upset. .. and they are promoting it through a series of illegal demonstrations.”

The state of prevention includes measures aimed at slowing the spread of COVID-19, such as mask mandates, social distancing and regular washing. However, it also militarizes public services and education, sets conditions for the right to strike and limits or prohibits protests.

With a population of over 17 million, barely more than 190,000 Guatemalans have been fully vaccinated. The nation has had over 319,000 infections and nearly 10,000 deaths.

Buenos Aires doctors strike for 24 hours over salary demands

Members of the Municipal Doctors Association in the city of Buenos Aires struck for 24 hours July 13. They took the action to press their demands for a 50 percent increase in their wages. They are calling for a base salary for doctors of 100,000 pesos (US\$1,040) per month, a 22,000-peso (US\$230) bonus for all workers, and for their pay to be pegged monthly to inflation.

The doctors also complained of overwork and exhaustion and demanded that the meals that were provided by the hospitals, but stopped at the start of the pandemic, be brought back. Other demands include 20 percent additional pay for those working with COVID-19 patients and permanent status for contracted workers.

One doctor told Télam that the government of Horacio Rodríguez Larreta “doesn’t listen to us, we’ve been complaining for months and

they don’t listen, the doctors are worn out and poorly paid.”

The doctors, joined by medical students, residents and other hospital workers, marched to the central headquarters of the Buenos Aires city government.

Argentine petroleum workers strike against firings

The Private Petroleum Workers of Río Negro, Neuquén, and La Pampa Syndicate called a strike July 12 at the Halliburton special services center in Añelo, a municipality in Neuquén province. The walkout was launched to demand the reinstatement of eight operators whose contracts the company claimed had expired.

According to the union, their contracts run through September.

Temporary or “eventual” contracts, ranging from eight down to two months duration, have increased in the petroleum industry in recent years, according to union head Guillermo Pereyra. The union has not opposed the contracts outright. Pereyra told reporters, “As a general rule, the contracts are for an indeterminate time, but if they are made in installments, the union must be notified, and a specific agreement is made for this type of relationship. In this case, it was not done, so the dismissals are illegal.”

On July 14, Pereyra called off the strike and announced that after “two intense meetings and thanks to the dialogue of the parties, we were able to reach an agreement and the colleagues returned to their task.”

Strike by Chilean port workers ended with signing of agreement

Workers at the Dubai-based DP World San Antonio port terminal began a strike July 12 as their unions negotiated demands regarding to working conditions, wages, job security and pandemic-related sanitary measures. The workers are members of the MCE 2.0 and Sitrasen port workers unions. Two other unions already signed agreements.

About 200 striking workers held a protest the morning of July 12 in which they blocked a road to the DP World terminal. Local police and Carabineros arrived and attacked the workers with tear gas and water cannon. Several workers were injured, but no arrests were reported.

On July 15, a spokesman for MCE 2.0 announced that the two unions and DP World had come to an agreement and said that work would resume on July 16. He did not give details but said, “We went into a meeting with the company in which we accepted the offer with a few points of our own and we came out well, such that today we lift the

strike.”

On a related note, the Port Union of Chile called on its 5,000 members to strike 17 terminals nationwide until 1:00 p.m. July 15 to demand the withdrawal of 10 percent of the pensions to distribute to workers hard-pressed by the effects of the pandemic.

The Congress is currently debating the withdrawal, which is opposed by business interests. But union figures say that the 10 percent is not the only demand. They are calling for the end of the Pinochet-era AFP private pension funding scheme and the establishment of a “worthy” pension system.

Partial strike by Uruguayan construction workers demands “jobs for all”

Members of Uruguay’s Sunca construction workers union stopped work and held protest actions on July 15. The partial walkout lasted from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. and included a caravan to the Executive Tower and Legislative Palace in Montevideo. Mobilizations took place in other locations nationwide. Due to pandemic concerns, large gatherings did not occur. The slogan of the mobilizations was “Jobs for all.”

Sunca has called for more housing construction to address the unemployment that will result once a number of current large projects—a pulp mill in central Uruguay, port enlargement in Montevideo, the Central Railroad Project, for example—have wound down. The union also calls for “more public investment” in general.

In addition to construction workers, Sunca includes toll booth workers, who are mostly women. Recently, automatic collection devices have been installed at various locations, and about 120 workers have been compelled to take “incentivized layoffs” so far. Sunca also called for a government response to the layoffs, especially since more are bound to occur.

Belize port workers go slow as union issues notice of strike action over unresolved issues

Belize’s Christian Workers Union (CWU), which represents workers at the Port of Belize Limited (PBL) terminal, announced on July 14 that it would begin strike action on August 4 if progress is not made on unresolved issues. On July 15, workers began “go-slow” action at PBL.

CWU president Evan “Mose” Hyde pointed to three instances of lack of progress that caused the actions: the plan of the Belize Sugar Industries/American Sugar Refining Group to move its sugar exports to the port of Big Creek further south, a move that would have serious consequences for PBL workers livelihoods; the stalling of negotiations on the Collective Bargaining Agreement for stevedores, which has not been changed since 2003; and the inability of the CWU to get confirmation on new stevedores to be placed in gangs.

Hyde said on July 15 that the go-slow action would end when negotiations began. Later that day, he told reporters that the Labour Commissioner had indicated that BPL agreed to participate in a tripartite virtual meeting on July 21.

Mexican hotel workers protest for labor rights

A group of about 200 workers for the Hard Rock hotel chain held a protest at the United States Embassy in Mexico City July 15 to demand respect for their labor rights. The protesters are members of the Workers and Farmers Revolutionary Confederation (CROC).

The protest was held with security personnel reinforced by antiriot police and metal barriers around the embassy preventing the protesters getting near or entering the building.

The workers protested the chain’s refusal to pay overtime or let workers keep tips, among other complaints. The action took place in the context of a representation dispute between the CROC and the Mexican Workers Confederation at the Hard Rock Hotel in Los Cabos at the southern end of Baja California del Sur.

United States

Nurses at Chicago medical center plan one-day strike

Nurses at the Community First Medical Center on Addison Street in Chicago have voted to authorize a one-day strike for July 26 over stalled contract negotiations. Nurses say the hospital has failed to provide a safe work environment under conditions of the COVID pandemic. Nurses United is negotiating a first contract for some 320 nurses at the facility.

Staff report that at least 60 nurses at the 300-bed hospital have been infected with COVID-19 and three have died since the start of the pandemic. Nurses report chronic problems including lack of proper personal protective equipment, non-compliance with hospital rules, and inadequate staffing.

The hospital was fined \$13,500 in February for violations including not properly testing N95 respiratory fitness provided to nurses treating COVID patients. The fine was in response to complaints by nurses following the deaths of the three nurses.

Nurses also allege the hospital did not maintain properly the negative pressures chamber doors used to isolate COVID patients and has not paid employee health insurance premiums and correct overtime pay.

New report finds affordable housing out of reach for minimum wage workers

A new report by the National Low Income Housing Coalition finds that the average minimum-wage worker in the United States would have to work 97 hours a week in order to cover the cost of an “affordable” two-bedroom home. The report, entitled “Out of Reach,” defines “affordable” as “no more than 30% of a household’s gross income should be spent on rent and utilities.”

In areas where states such as California have skyrocketing rental markets, workers need to earn a minimum wage of \$39.03 an hour based on a 40-hour week in order to obtain an “affordable” two-bedroom home at the “Fair Market Rent” defined by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Teamsters call off Bellingham, Washington strike

The Teamsters union ended the 14-day strike July 15 by 110 workers at the Bellingham Cold Storage facility. The union’s climb-down came after

the two sides agreed to resume negotiations with a mediator.

No tentative agreement was reached, and the Teamsters covered their retreat by claiming "...this decision was made largely to benefit the local community, which was seeing catastrophic impacts as a result of BCS management's decision to attempt to operate with an unskilled strike replacement workforce. Many of the businesses that rely on BCS for product storage and handling are small local operations, including the local food bank, without the resources to withstand the massive service failures."

Teamsters Local 231 secretary-treasurer Rich Ewing said the leadership wanted to avoid an "impact on their customers." Management replied, "We are pleased to have worked with the Teamsters to develop an 'Orderly Return to Work Plan'... Both parties have worked diligently on the plan to ensure business operations will continue to run smoothly as we facilitate the transition."

Workers first carried out a 30-hour strike on June 18 over opposition to health care concessions and failure to produce acceptable wage and pension benefit proposals. Workers commenced the two-week strike on July 1. The union and company are slated to meet with a federal mediator July 21.

Workers in Maine, Vermont and New Hampshire authorize strike against Consolidated Communications over outside contractors

Some 1,000 workers for Consolidated Communications in Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine have voted to authorize a strike over the company's employment of outside contractors.

Members of the Communications Workers of American and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers last went on strike back in 2014 over pension and health care issues for 131 days. In 2018, the union initially threatened to strike over contractors before a last-minute agreement headed off the work stoppage.

Canada

Municipal workers locked out in Grand Falls-Windsor, Newfoundland

About 100 municipal workers, members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), were locked out last week in the central Newfoundland town of Grand Falls-Windsor. The workers have been without a contract since last December.

Although mayor Barry Manuel has stated that town finances are in good shape, his negotiating team has insisted that workers give up a medical plan that has covered 100 percent of their insurance premiums. Manuel has suggested that the town should only cover 50 percent of workers' medical insurance premiums.

Managers and contract workers are performing the jobs of the locked-out workers. Essential services like garbage collection will continue under this arrangement but other work such as parking enforcement and administration will be curtailed. Most of the city's playgrounds have been closed. Union officials have instructed strikers to mount informational pickets only and not interfere with work being performed.





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