

Strike deadline near for Toronto Bombardier workers; Truckers walkouts hit Honduras, Puerto Rico

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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Honduran public transport drivers strike to demand debt relief, subsidy

Public transport drivers in Honduras went on a partial strike the morning of July 22 over a number of demands aimed at addressing the dire situation in which many of them find themselves. In some places bus drivers blocked traffic by parking their vehicles across streets.

Bus and taxi drivers have been hard-hit by the pandemic, and it has been difficult to make loan payments. Some drivers have already lost their vehicles. They are asking for debt relief as well as a subsidy of more than the current \$US160, especially since the costs of gasoline, maintenance and repairs, as well as food, have climbed.

In addition, the drivers call for the end of the illegal operation of minibuses, which they call “unfair competition,” since the minis do not pay fees or comply with regulations.

Puerto Rican truckers strike for rate increase

Puerto Rico’s Truckers Broad Front called its members out on strike July 21 to press their demand for an increase in haulage rates. All operations, except for transport of medicines, diesel for health care centers and other health and safety activity, were halted. Truckers stopped picking up imports from the ports and deliveries of gasoline were stopped, causing runs on gas stations and quickly leading to 200 stations exhausting their supplies.

The rate hike demand was opposed by the Financial Oversight and Management Board (FOMB) created in 2016 to restructure the island territory’s finances, mostly by imposing austerity on the working class. The Transportation and Other Services Bureau, a commonwealth agency, approved the new haulage rates last December, but the FOMB claimed that the 2021 budget did not allow for a rise in the rates, which have not increased since 2005.

On July 22, following a tense meeting, acting governor Omar Rios signed an agreement with truckers’ reps after at first hinting that he would not. (Governor Pedro Pierluisi has been on vacation, whereabouts unknown.) The rate will be raised by about 35 percent.

Guyanese teachers protest over salaries and other issues

The Guyanese Teachers Union (GTU) held a protest in front of the

Ministry of Education in Georgetown, the nation’s capital, on July 22. The protesters demanded that Education Minister Priya Manickchand address a number of issues, including salaries, lack of consultation, grants, school records and the reshuffling of head teachers.

GTU president Mark Lyte told protesters and media that teachers had worked through the pandemic, often having to use their own resources, and that they deserved better treatment from the minister, whom they accused of ignoring them and their needs. He also claimed that the ministry has stopped inviting the GTU to meetings.

Manickchand accused the union of turning into a political arm of the previous APNU+AFC (A Partnership for National Unity+Alliance for Change) government and was being used to push their agenda against the People’s Progressive Party/Civic administration that replaced it.

Uruguayan chemical and state workers hold protests and strike

Uruguay’s Chemical Industry Workers Syndicate (STIQ) mobilized thousands of workers in Montevideo July 20 against plans by the government of President Luis Lacalle Pou to privatize public enterprises. Of particular concern is Alcohols of Uruguay (ALUR), which produces biodiesel, bioethanol, animal feed, electricity and sugar.

STIQ estimates that the dismantling of ALUR, located in Capurro, a Montevideo neighborhood, would imperil over 4,000 workers engaged in direct and indirect jobs generated by the state-controlled company, including small and medium businesses, transportation and other jobs related to the production and distribution of biofuels. Workers began their protest in front of the ALUR plant, then marched to the Legislative Palace. They were joined by workers in the Fuel, Alcohol and Concrete National Administration Syndicate.

On July 22, the State Entities Syndical Coordinator Board (MSCE) of Uruguay began a national strike and mobilization to the Legislative Palace to demand a hearing with government authorities. The MSCE called for discussion with the Lacalle Pou over working conditions, jobs and budget issues.

MSCE was joined by the AUTE electrical workers union, the PIT-CNT federation and other organizations. The strike began under conditions described by AUTE’s president as “harassment, persecution and dirty tricks.”

Chilean dockworkers strike over pay, conditions

Short-term contract dockworkers at Muelles de Penco, a port company located in Chile's Bío Bío Province, began a strike July 20 as the Bío Bío Port Workers Union and the firm continued negotiations, but without making progress. In particular, the company's final offer did not meet the union's demand for a base pay raise of 1,200 pesos (US\$1.57). According to the union, Penco's pay rate is the lowest in the region.

Workers also complain about poor working conditions and the unresponsive management, which they accuse of being unfair and discouraging improvements in productivity, preferring to maintain competitiveness through low pay and job insecurity.

Partial strike action by Argentine health workers highlights demand for wage improvements

The Health Workers Federation of Argentina (FATSA) called for strikes of four hours per shift at clinics and private sanitariums nationwide on July 23. The actions took place the day after "obligatory conciliation" talks passed their deadline without resolving the issue of wage improvements.

Workers held protests in front of clinics and sanitariums in Buenos Aires during the 15 days of mandatory talks, but management was adamant in rejecting FATSA's 45 percent wage raise demands, which coincided with the pattern signed by other unions.

The ADECRA clinic and sanitarium business chamber claim that the expenses and challenges of confronting the pandemic have made a raise impossible. Average monthly pay for nurses is 54,000 pesos (US\$560) and for stretcher bearers it is 50,000 pesos (US\$519).

One day strike possible at Pennsylvania nursing homes July 27

Some 1,500 health care workers at 21 nursing homes in Pennsylvania were slated to walk off the job for a day on July 27. However a last minute deal apparently averted a strike at 12 locations. Talks continue at other facilities. A strike would affect nurses, nurse's aides and other nursing home staff belonging to the Service Employees International Union (SEIU).

Shelly Lawrence, a certified nursing assistant, said in a statement, "COVID ripped the Band-Aid off what we've been going through for the past 20 years. Staffing is terrible and wages are too low to bring in the staff our residents need. Going on strike was a hard decision, but we have to send the strongest message we can for this one day that will make the real change we need."

The SEIU is lobbying the Department of Health to change staffing guidelines for nursing home facilities. Current policy requires a nursing home resident to receive only 2.7 hours of care per day. The union is calling for that minimum to be increased to 4.1 hours of care.

Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf endorsed SEIU's new minimum of 4.1 hours in the run-up to the strike. Given the drive to extract profit from nursing home operations and the insufficient state funding under Medicaid, it is not clear that the proposal will affect workers' pay and benefits. The turnover rate for workers at nursing homes due to working conditions and pay is 128 percent.

Health care workers authorize strike at three Southern California

hospitals

Health care workers at three hospitals in Southern California owned by Tenet Healthcare have voted to authorize the National Union of Healthcare Workers (NUHW) to call a strike over understaffing and subcontracting. Some 800 workers took part in the strike vote with only 11 opposing a work stoppage.

Overall, NUHW represents about 1,000 workers at the three facilities, with 612 at the Fountain Valley Regional Hospital involving therapists, housekeepers, nursing assistants, technicians along with dietary, emergency and operating room workers. Another 225 food service workers are employed by Tenet through a vendor, Compass Group, at Fountain Valley, Los Alamitos Medical Center and Lakewood Regional Medical Center.

Eunice Zamorano, who labors in housekeeping and cleaned rooms occupied by COVID-19 patients during the pandemic told the *Los Angeles Times* her family cannot afford health care based on her income at Tenet. "I took every precaution I could to keep my family safe, but there were too many times my hospital did not have PPE. Nearly all of my coworkers on the night shift have gotten [coronavirus]."

Along with the poor living standards and insufficient staffing, workers are further outraged at the company's recent announcement of \$120 million in profits, up from the previous quarter's \$97 million and \$88 million a year ago. Tenet is ranked second among health care companies in the United States.

The NUHW has called for a federal investigation into Tenet. "We have special concerns regarding Tenet Healthcare ... which received \$2.6 billion in federal grants, Medicare advance payments, and COVID related tax savings between April 2020 and March 2021," NUHW president Sal Rosselli wrote in a letter. In the past, Tenet has been forced to settle a number of multi-million dollar cases for defrauding Medicare, Medicaid, and individual patients.

Strike deadline near for 2,200 Toronto aerospace workers

Two thousand two hundred workers at the Bombardier and De Havilland aerospace facilities in Toronto, Ontario will strike on July 27 unless a last minute deal is reached with Unifor Locals 112 and 673. The union is negotiating separately with the two entities that both operate at the Downsview manufacturing complex. Negotiations restarted this past weekend after the expiration of a three-week "cooling off" period.

The workers build Bombardier's Global business aircraft and the final orders for De Havilland's discontinued Q400 Dash 8 turboprop. The model has been deployed as a major regional carrier for Porter, Jazz and WestJet airlines. Hundreds of workers assigned to the Dash 8 operation are already on layoff as production comes to an end. Although no plans have been officially announced, there are fears that the company will move any future contracts to another facility in Alberta.

Unifor is insisting that any contracts for new turboprops must be located in the Greater Toronto Area. De Havilland has refused to offer this commitment. The union has been lobbying the Ontario and federal governments to support initiatives that would keep any future production in the province. De Havilland's parent company, Longview Aviation Capital, also operates in Calgary, Alberta and Victoria, British Columbia under Unifor contracts.

In parallel negotiations with Bombardier, wages, pensions, contracting out and working conditions form the main issues under discussion. Should either contract remain unsettled, the union will strike both companies.

Inevitably, any commitment to preserve jobs will be tied to demands for further concessions by workers.



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