

Chilean mineworkers strike Lumina Copper; Alberta nurses protest health care cuts

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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Latin America

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

Chilean mineworkers strike over wage demands, benefits

Mineworkers at Minera Caserones, a mine in northern Chile, went on strike August 10 against Lumina Copper Chile following failed negotiations. Striking workers blocked the roads leading to the mine, preventing access to the entrance.

Workers at central Chile's Andina mine voted August 11 by over 80 percent to strike after spurning a pay offer by the management of state-owned Codelco. In addition to a higher wage, the workers want better benefits. They began their strike the next day.

On August 14, at the Escondida mining complex in the Atacama Desert, the union representing 2,000 mineworkers canceled the strike notice it had filed July 31 and announced that it had reached an agreement with the Anglo-Australian conglomerate BHP, and that it had been approved by the membership.

Though the parties did not reveal details of the agreement, "Local media reported that the agreement included a bonus for each union member of \$23,000 (for work during the COVID-19 pandemic), as well as nearly \$4,000 for extra days worked, in addition to other provisions," according to France 24.

Mexican health sciences researchers strike for contract

Members of the Independent Health Scientific Research Workers Syndicate (SITIC Salud) began a strike August 11 at six of Mexico's National Institutes of Health and High Specialty Hospitals (Inshae). According to the union, the striking researchers comprise 400 of the 1,400 researchers in the Health Institutes system. Only research areas were struck, and "medical attention has not been suspended nor is it going to be suspended," according to a union statement.

The walkout was set off by the Health Secretariat's (SSA) lack of response to SITIC Salud's request for negotiations for a contract guaranteeing job security. The SSA director of labor relations had promised to deliver an answer by August 9 but did not.

While Inshae claims not to have the authority to bargain over contract provisions, insisting that the union should take its case to the SSA, "they [SSA] tell us that each institute has its own personality and was

autonomous to sit down and sign a collective contract," according to SITIC Salud Secretary Alejandra Contreras Ramos.

On the day of the ratification of the strike, the Federal Board of Conciliation and Arbitration (JFCA) declared it illegal. SITIC Salud appealed to the labor courts, saying the decision was unfounded because the labor conditions cited by the JFCA to support it only applied to medical technicians, doctors and paramedics but not to researchers.

Mexican health care workers plan 48-hour strike to demand overdue benefit

The National Health Secretariat Workers Syndicate (SNTSA) in the Mixteca region of Oaxaca, Mexico announced August 11 that its members will begin two days of "permanent assembly" beginning August 18 if they do not receive immediate payment of their State Capitalizable Savings Fund (FAEC). The benefit was paid on August 5 last year, but this year the director of the Administration of Oaxaca Health Services told SNTSA that it was scheduled for August 18.

Union officials pointed out that the FONAC low-interest loan program already delivered payments on August 3, and "therefore, we demand the immediate payment of the FAEC to our union members."

Colombian taxi drivers protest Uber/taxi company alliance

Taxi drivers in the Colombian city Cali blocked a main thoroughfare August 13 to protest an alliance between two transportation services: Uber and TaxExpress. The cabbies consider the alliance, which is called Uber Taxi and offers access to its platform to regular taxi drivers, as unfair competition.

Under pressure from the taxi drivers, authorities ordered Uber to halt operations in 2019, but that ban was overturned by a court decree in 2020. With a lack of consistent regulations of ride services, app-based drivers have faced fines as well as opposition from traditional cab drivers. Uber General Manager Marcela Torres described the move as "a show of reconciliation" and a means to give riders alternatives. Apparently, some taxistas are less than fully convinced.

Protests in Ecuador against fuel price hikes, right-wing laws

Workers from various sectors mobilized against government policies in Ecuador on August 11. It was the first instance of nationwide protests against the administration of President Guillermo Lasso, who took office in May. The mobilizations were called by the Unitary Workers Front and the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador.

The main demand of the protests was the freezing of the price of fuels. Former President Lenín Moreno had issued several decrees that relaxed restrictions on the prices of combustibles and allowed for monthly adjustments, always upward, which have steadily undermined working-class living standards.

Protesters also highlighted two laws passed by the national legislature. The Law on Humanitarian Support, which had been promoted as a response to the pandemic, has been used to cut back on workers' rights and purchasing power. Protesters called for its elimination.

After years of agitation by teachers, the National Assembly passed various reforms to the Organic Law of Intercultural Education in March, but Moreno impeded their implementation, claiming that they were unconstitutional. Lasso followed suit. The demonstrations called on the Constitutional Court to rule in favor of the reforms. On August 13, the Court ruled in favor of the reforms.

Agricultural and transport sectors also took part in the mobilization. Rice producers demanded an increase in the price of rice, as did banana producers. Transportation workers in some cities blocked roads as part of their demand for a cap on gas prices.

Paraguayan drivers continue strikes, protests for freight fee law[/subhead

Truckers in Paraguay have struck and held protests for over two weeks to demand a freight law that regulates their fees. The Paraguayan Federation of Transporters has called the mobilizations, most recently a roadblock on the Costanera de Asunción, a highway and promenade in the nation's capital. Similar protests have taken place in other parts of Paraguay.

Rising fuel prices have put the squeeze on the truckers, who are at the mercy of agroexport companies that "cartelize" the purchase and transport of wholesale freight, paying low rates to independent truckers or to smaller companies that employ truckers. The Federation says that the strikes and protests will continue until the government passes legislation establishing minimum freight costs.

Strike by Argentine health care workers over wage demands, conditions

Health care workers in the city of Tandil, in southeast Buenos Aires Province, went on strike August 9 over wages and working conditions. Guards and emergency services remained in effect.

The health care workers, members of the Municipal Workers Syndicate, are demanding workdays of six hours, that is, 36 hours per week, and a 25 percent bonus from funds received for social works.

About 200 workers held a protest on August 12, in which they denounced Mayor Miguel Lunghi, who they said had promised the reduction in hours, but later switched. Lunghi says that he will not negotiate as long as the workers are on strike.

Municipal workers in Argentina strike for wage adjustment

The Santa Fe Province Municipal Workers Syndical Federation (Festram) announced August 13 that its members would strike for 24 hours on August 19 and for 48 hours on August 24 and 25 if the provincial government does not respond to its wage demand. Since April, Festram has been calling for moving forward a previously agreed 35 percent raise to stop the decay of purchasing power due to rampaging inflation.

Last week, Festram and provincial government officials held parity talks, in which the union reps proposed modifying the current agreement but were put off by government claims of a lack of a mandate and the absence from participation of representatives of the Peronist Justicialist Party.

If the government does not respond after the strike actions, Festram will call a meeting of delegates to decide on further measures.

United States

New York City Teamsters rally after 113-day strike

Striking Teamsters at the United Metro Energy oil terminal in New York City rallied August 10 as their strike to better wages and benefits reached 113 days. The terminal provides heating oil, diesel and gasoline to New York gas stations, as well as schools and hospitals.

Workers are paid 50 percent less than workers performing comparable work at other companies and receive an inferior health care package. Despite rally speeches by union officials, Democratic politicians and the NYC-DSA, the strike is being isolated from any meaningful support in the working class. Many of the speeches castigated billionaire owner John Catsimatidis but offered no strategy.

Teamsters Local 553, which represents the striking workers, has limited itself to filing charges with the National Labor Relations Board, alleging illegal firings and retaliation against workers at the Brooklyn oil terminal.

Workers at Washington state mental health facility launch safety strike after violent incident

Workers at the Cascade Behavioral Health facility in Tukwila, Washington launched a safety strike on August 11, after a patient became violent and injured 11 health care workers, four of whom were seriously injured and sent to a hospital. The incident occurred back on August 1st when a patient stole a security badge, gained access to offices and began to destroy property.

A registered nurse told the Kent Reporter that the facility has begun to accept a high volume of patients convicted of violent crimes in the last year and a half, and the facility has no security staff or cameras. She estimated that the hospital has nine patients per worker, and policies require patients be checked every 15 minutes.

Brando Villareal said of the patients, "They often become worse before they get better." Workers have sustained broken bones, noses and black eyes.

When the *Seattle Times* did an investigation in 2019, it found that only 15 "adverse events" had been reported to the Department of Health by Washington state psychiatric and behavioral health facilities during the period 2016-2018. The *Times* report, in contrast, "found 350 assaults, injuries, escapes, suicide attempts, sudden deaths and other incidents that

harmed staff or patients.”
Canada

Alberta nurses rally across province against government cuts

Thousands of Alberta nurses marched and staffed informational pickets outside medical facilities in cities and towns across the province last week to protest the United Conservative Party government’s health care policies. The grievances of health care workers, as well as large sections of the population, are numerous. Already, daily demonstrations by medical professionals and the general public against the right-wing government’s withdrawal of all COVID-19 safety protocols and regulations have forced Premier Jason Kenney to backtrack on the order to end quarantine and contact tracing of people infected with the virus.

A fourth COVID-19 wave is now washing over Alberta. Hospital staff are once again overworked and understaffed as the government continues to gut health care resources and close hospital beds.

In addition, the Alberta Health Service (AHS) has demanded that the 30,000 provincial nurses accept a 3 percent cut in wages, the elimination of scheduled lump sum payments and reduced shift and weekend premiums in contract negotiations currently underway. The cuts would amount to more than a 5 percent reduction in compensation for the members of the Alberta Nurses Union.

The move is an additional provocation against the nurses. Only last March, the AHS, an arm of the United Conservative government, had demanded a four-year wage freeze.

Should nurses move towards a provincewide strike, a number of preliminary steps are required under the Byzantine provisions of provincial labor law. First, an essential services agreement would need to be reached, a program of mediation would need to be exhausted, and then a 14-day “cooling-off” period would be invoked before a strike vote and job action could be undertaken.



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