

Nurses at Buffalo, New York Mercy Hospital overwhelmingly vote strike-authorization

## Workers Struggles: The Americas

13 September 2021

### **One-day teachers' strike in Argentina protests provincial government's indifference to complaints**

The Education Workers of Chubut Association (ATECh) called a 24-hour strike for September 8 to protest the provincial government's lack of response to teachers' demands, which it characterizes as "abandonment." A rally together with other educator and state-sector unions in the provincial capital Rawson was declared as well.

In recent weeks, ATECh has held a number of limited mobilizations to press its demands: a salary raise, substantial investment in infrastructure, continuation of courses and positions, increase of measures to combat COVID-19, connectivity guarantees as well as provision of netbooks for students and teachers, complete vaccination of the entire education sector, and guaranteed provision of and coverage for transportation, including the creation of routes that are missing.

### **Judicial workers in Argentina strike for 24 hours for payment of overdue raises**

The Justice Employees National Union (UEJN) of Argentina struck for one day, September 9, to demand the payment of the third and fourth parts of a raise agreed to in parity talks. The judicial workers have held strikes, marches and rallies for the past five weeks.

The UEJN demanded the payment of a 15 percent raise retroactive to July, as well as a 10 percent increase due for September in the face of "the advance of the inflationary process," according to UEJN president Julio Piumato.

The one-day walkout included marches and rallies in front of courthouses nationwide. The largest march went to the Palace of Justice in Buenos Aires and cut off some major streets.

### **Uruguayan industrial union federation calls four-hour strike against government policies**

Members of Uruguay's Industrial Syndicates Confederation (CSI) struck for four hours September 7 in opposition to the current

administration's policies. The CSI is a member of the national PIT-CNT federation.

The mobilization, which included a mobilization in Montevideo, was held to demand defense of jobs and wages, no reductions in pensions, preservation of public enterprises and the rescission of the Urgent Consideration Law (LUC), a collection of anti-worker measures promoted by President Luis Lacalle Pou in the guise of economic stimulus.

At a rally in front of the National Labor Directorate, PIT-CNT head Marcelo Abdala blasted the "connivance and complicity" of Lacalle Pou and business that have brought hunger, unemployment and poverty to the Uruguayan working class. Another speaker, whose organization runs "popular cooking pots" (ollas populares, outdoor community kitchens), said, "We're not the solution; people should be able to eat in their homes." He added that "this country is not poor, it is profoundly unequal and the gap between the rich and the poor is every day wider."

Another, wider strike is planned for this week.

### **Guyanese bridge operators protest for better working conditions, pay**

Operators of the Berbice River Bridge near New Amsterdam, Guyana held a protest September 7 to demand improvements in working conditions and wages, and the firing of the general manager of their employer, the Berbice Bridge Company Incorporated (BBCI).

The workers are represented by the Guyana Agricultural and General Workers' Union (GAWU), which told the workers not to strike or disrupt traffic but to get management's attention for their issues. The protest was called following the failure of the company and the GAWU to come to an agreement regarding the timely provision of protective gear.

The GAWU and management have been holding meetings for more than a year over wages, which, at 55,000 Guyanese dollars (US\$262) a month, are less than the minimum wage. Company reps put off that demand by saying that BBCI has asked the Board of Directors to look into and address the issue.

Workers complain that management has refused to replace personal protective equipment when it has been damaged, in one case telling a worker that his damaged and water-soaked boots would not be replaced because he had already been issued a pair for the year.

## **Colombian hospital workers strike to demand overdue pay**

Workers at the Hospital San José de Maicao in Colombia's northern La Guajira department began an indefinite strike September 6 to demand payment of three months' wages. The striking workers include doctors, nurses, health care workers and other staff. Emergency services were maintained.

The departmental government owes the hospital more than 38 billion pesos (US\$9.9 million). The Workers Union and the hospital administration have both appealed to the departmental and national governments without receiving any response

## **Nurses at Buffalo, New York Mercy Hospital overwhelmingly vote strike authorization**

Some 2,000 registered nurses and other hospital workers voted September 9 by a 97 percent margin to strike Mercy Hospital in Buffalo, New York unless negotiations address the crisis of staffing shortages, as well as wages and nurses demand that pensions be retained. The contract between Catholic Health, which operates Mercy Hospital, and the Communications Workers of America (CWA) Local 1133 will expire September 30 and a strike could begin October 1.

Jackie Ettipio, president of CWA Local 1133 and a 30-year registered nurse, outlined the staffing crisis at Mercy, saying, "We have some areas where there's emergency room nurses where they have 18 patients to one nurse. We have paralyzed ventilated patients that are getting one nurse to eight, eight patients to one nurse. These nurses have to take care of this person with their bodily functions, they have to be cleaned, they have to be fed, there's tons of medications coming through, they have to be special care. You just can not do it."

Mercy Hospital is just one of three hospitals operated by Catholic Health and currently involved in contract negotiations with Local 1133. But according to WGRZ-TV news, hospital workers at Kenmore Mercy and Sisters of Charity Hospital are not permitted to participate in a strike due to an agreement between Catholic Health and the CWA.

Catholic Health, meanwhile, has announced it will remain open in the event of a strike and is making plans to hire temporary replacement nurses and other staff to scab on strikers.

## **Walkout by Pennsylvania fast food workers over low wages and management indifference to staffing shortages**

The entire morning shift of a McDonald's chain restaurant in Bradford, Pennsylvania, walked off the job September 5 to protest management's refusal to respond to a petition concerning staffing shortages and the demand for higher wages. The store's franchise operator was forced to close the restaurant and bring in workers from

another McDonald's across the state line in New York.

Long-term workers at the restaurant had been asking for a wage increase over the past year with promises from management, but no follow-up. Meanwhile, other workers have left for jobs at other retail venues that pay more and potential new hires are not signing on, creating a staffing shortage.

According to reports, this is not the first walkout at the Bradford McDonald's. Executive management responded to the crisis by blaming the restaurant's working managers. Workers saw through the transparent attempt to scapegoat managers and drew up a petition signed by more than 100 McDonald's workers and customers. The failure again by management to respond triggered last week's walkout.

## **Lockout of Grand Falls-Windsor municipal workers in Newfoundland continues**

One hundred workers in Grand Falls-Windsor are now in their eighth week on the picket line in a lockout by the central Newfoundland town government. 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. In addition, management is demanding more power to weaken job classifications, increased workloads and reduce staffing.

In a scabbing operation, management has contracted workers to perform the work of the locked-out refuse collection workers employed by the municipality. Locked-out workers routinely have followed the trucks used by the scabs.

In most other municipal departments, managers are performing the jobs of the locked-out workers. Work such as parking enforcement, parks maintenance and administration has been curtailed. Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) officials have instructed the locked-out workers to mount informational pickets only and not interfere with work being performed.

The attempt to impose steep contract concessions on the Grand Falls-Windsor workers is being watched closely, not only by other towns in Newfoundland, but by city officials outside the province. The impact of the pandemic combined with continuing efforts to place budget cuts onto the backs of municipal workforces signals increasing labour disputes as contracts come up for renewal.

In Ontario, for example, municipalities overall will see a projected \$2.4 billion shortfall in 2021 according to a new report by the province's financial watchdog. Cities and towns will seek to enforce measures such as tax increases, contract concessions and/or service cuts in 2021 if no additional emergency funding is made available by the federal and provincial governments, states a report by the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario (FAO).



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