

Guyana sugar cane workers stage protests; New Brunswick hospital workers give strike mandate

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Mexican water and sewerage workers strike for overdue pay, bonuses

Workers for the Municipal Potable Water and Sewerage Board of Escuinapa (JUMAPAE) walked off the job September 28. They resolved to remain out until they receive back payments of their salaries, end-of-year bonuses and other benefits that the municipality of about 31,000 in the Mexican state of Sinaloa owes them.

Workers say that some of them have not been paid their last two fortnightly checks, while some of them have not gotten paid for the last four 15-day pay periods. None have received end-of-year bonuses for 2019 and 2021. There is also vacation pay in arrears, and the city has been behind on pensions for eight retired workers.

The city government has claimed that it does not have enough resources to pay the end-of-year bonus, but the workers say that they are only asking for what is owed to them according to federal labor law. The union has tried to come to an agreement, but the city manager has refused to make a proposal, repeating the argument that there is no money.

Guyanese sugar workers protest discriminatory benefits policy

“Fairness for all, not for some,” “GuySuCo end discrimination now,” “We demand gratuity payment,” “Equal benefits for all workers,” “Only big boys/girls getting benefits.” These were some of the slogans on signs held by workers at the Skeldon sugar cane plantation in Guyana at a picketing protest on September 27. The workers, who are engaged in cutting, harvesting and processing sugar cane, were angered over the recent awarding of gratuities to employees in managerial, supervisory and clerical levels, while they got nothing.

The Guyana Sugar Corporation, known as GuySuCo, runs the

Skeldon Estate as well as others. GuySuCo gave no explanation for the denial of the benefit to the field and factory workers in a letter to the Guyana Agricultural Workers Union (GAWU) on September 23. GAWU, citing the Prevention of Discrimination Act, notified the Labor Ministry and asked for its intervention.

The protest followed a strike and protest, including blockage of a major roadway the previous week by harvesters at the Albion Estate over complaints of poor working conditions. The striking workers also accused GuySuCo of shorting them on the weights of harvested cane. Police arrived at the blockade to clear the road, but the situation did not escalate into confrontations.

Paraguayan teachers strike, protest for pay increase

Thousands of teachers, members of 10 educators’ unions, gathered in the Plaza Uruguaya in Asunción, Paraguay on October 1 to voice their demand for a salary increase. The teachers then marched to the Finance Ministry, where union bureaucrats spoke to the crowd.

The teachers, in addition to school administrative personnel, demanded a 16 percent raise, while the Ministries of Finance and Education said on September 30 that the raise will be 8 percent, unilaterally put into effect on October 1. Another demand was for more funding for education.

Speakers at the demonstration said that if they do not get an adequate response from the ministries, they would go on indefinite strike. One said, “We will not let them step on us like cockroaches,” while another called for “no more crumbs.”

On October 2, the unions agreed to put the strike on hold while they talk with the Finance Ministry. They said that if negotiations failed, they would call the nationwide indefinite strike on October 5.

Uruguayan cement workers strike for 24 hours over privatization plans

Uruguay's National Combustible Administration Syndical Federation (Fancap) called a one-day strike September 28 in opposition to a government plan to associate the portland cement industry with private enterprises. The walkout affected cement plants in metropolitan Montevideo and inland, but Fancap said that the supply of fuels would not be interrupted.

Fancap asserted in a communique that association with private actors implies "the handing over to the associate of the factories, natural resources and management in a majority percentage, which signifies privatization." It also stated that in some areas, hundreds of families would be uprooted if such a dismantling of the state enterprise Ancap were to take place.

Janitors conduct one-day strike over low pay at Denver International Airport

Janitors at Denver International Airport returned to work October 2 after a one-day strike the previous day. Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 105, which represents the 350 airport janitors, resumed negotiations with Flagship Facility Services upon the conclusion of the strike.

The SEIU declared the strike a success despite no contract having been secured. Janitors are deeply disaffected with their \$17-an-hour wage as evidenced by a 99.6 percent vote to strike. They note that workers at McDonald's make \$20 an hour in the Denver area.

A 2021 report concluded that Colorado workers need to make \$27.50 an hour to keep rental costs at 30 percent of their net income. Other airport staff such as parking lot attendants face a contract expiration in mid-October, while security guards could take a strike vote at the end of this week.

Flagship took over Denver airport's most profitable contract last March from ISS Facility Services which was accused of shorting subcontractors. Flagship received the \$183 million deal with a 59 percent increase.

The Denver airport is plagued by understaffing, with 1,500 unfilled jobs. The results have been flight delays due to a lack of air traffic controllers, long lines affected by lack of airport staff and shortened food service hours due to the inability to hire concessions workers.

Beaumont, Texas transit workers prepare for strike

Transit workers in Beaumont, Texas have been gearing up for a strike against the contractor that runs the city's bus system following a 100 percent contract rejection vote and strike authorization. First Transit, which operates in 39 states and outside the US, has rejected the Amalgamated Transit Union's (ATU) request for increases, citing that the City of Beaumont sets the budget and no additional funds are available to meet workers'

demands.

First Transit is pushing a first-year wage freeze followed by a meager 3 percent increase in year two of a new contract and a \$1,000 bonus. ATU President Arlon Jackson stated there are other concerns in addition to pay, stating, "The Union has tried going to Beaumont City Council to get assistance during the contract dispute, but the buck continues to be passed. When we proved that this company cuts corners on safety, with 89 percent of buses unfit for service, the city remained silent."

New Brunswick hospital workers give strike mandates as health care crisis grows

Eight out of ten hospital worker local unions have voted to support a strike mandate to defend wages, staffing, services and working conditions within New Brunswick's hospital network. The latest vote by 7,300 members of Local 1252 of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) supported strike action by 94 percent. The two remaining union locals will be polling their members this week.

New Brunswick's Conservative government broke off negotiations earlier this summer with CUPE officials negotiating new contracts on behalf of 22,000 provincial public sector employees. The workers, who include health care, education, N.B. Liquor Commission workers and other provincial government employees, have all held strike votes amongst their own memberships.

Provincial Premier Blaine Higgs has deployed a vicious anti-worker ad campaign denouncing the hard-pressed workers for their demands to end derisory wage rates, understaffing and brutal working conditions. New Brunswick public sector workers are among the lowest paid in the country. Some of the workers have been working without contracts since 2016 and all of them since 2019.

Claiming the pandemic has devastated the province's finances, Higgs announced last December that his government could only afford to give the public sector workers wage increases totaling 3 percent over four years. This would constitute a massive wage cut in real terms, since inflation is currently running at well over 3 percent annually.

Among working people, there is widespread sympathy for the public sector workers, especially the health care workers who have borne the brunt of the fight against the pandemic. Demonstrations in support of the public sector workers have been held in communities across the province.



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