

Guyanese bauxite miners strike, Peru truckers protest over fuel prices, taxes

## Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

### **Guyanese bauxite miners strike for wage increase, improved conditions**

Workers at Bosai Minerals Group Guyana Incorporated (BMGG), a Chinese-owned bauxite mining and processing complex, downed their tools on October 21 over their wage demands. The workers have described the company's offer of a 5.5 percent raise for 2021 and 6.5 percent for 2022 as unfair and are calling for somewhere between 8.5 and 10 percent each year.

The cost of living in Guyana has risen precipitously in recent months, and even a 10 percent annual raise would not keep up with the inflation rate. In addition to the pay raise, BMGG workers also want night premiums, snack benefits and leave and out-of-town allowances. BMGG has kept production going during the pandemic, yet management pleads poverty when wage issues come up, a claim the workers do not accept.

Workers complain of stress and hazardous conditions, with shifts often lasting 12 to 14 hours. They have not been provided with adequate personal protective gear, equipment and tools, which workers say they must purchase themselves. Casual workers wait years without being promoted to permanent status.

The workers' union, which has said that it "will not settle for less than 8 percent," is engaged in talks with BMGG while the workers vow to remain on strike.

### **Peruvian truckers call strike over rising fuel prices, taxes, tolls**

Two Peruvian truckers unions, the National Union of Transporters of Peru and the National Congress of Land Transport, announced October 22 that they would restart a national strike on October 26. The unions called the strike due to the government's inaction in the face of demands by the truckers that they address problems plaguing the industry's workers.

The drivers cite the rising cost of diesel fuel, the value-added tax and toll increases among the expenses that are eating up their earnings. They held strikes and blockades in the spring but suspended them when the government agreed to arrange meetings. Months of talks with various ministers and other government officials have failed to reach any agreement on their claims.

### **Mexican government workers in Colima state strike for overdue pay**

Thousands of government workers in Colima, the capital of the Mexican state of the same name, stopped work October 22 to demand the full payment of their salaries for the last month. Workers marched through the city center holding signs and verbally denounced Governor Ignacio Peralta Sánchez with the slogan, "Nacho [short for Ignacio], thief, give me my money." Sporadic strike actions and work under protest took place around the city and state.

Peralta Sánchez claimed on July 29 that there were no funds to pay the state office workers, teachers, judicial workers, police and others because the state had to pay back a 1 billion euro (23.5 billion pesos, or US\$1.16 billion) loan to commercial banks before the end of his term, October 31. Some workers received half of their pay while others have suffered delays.

The Union of Workers at the Service of the State Government (STSGE) pointed out that the governor spent

money unnecessarily on remodeling the government palace, a building project and purchasing property. STSGE called on state authorities to prosecute Peralta Sánchez, while State Judiciary employees filed a complaint to the State Human Rights Commission.

### **Paraguayan Public Ministry workers set to strike against budget cuts**

The Public Ministry Officials, Employees and Workers Union of Paraguay is set to begin a general strike on October 27 to protest budget cuts. Union officials say the walkout could last a month.

About 5,000 workers are employed at the Public Ministry, which describes itself as “a body with functional and administrative autonomy, which represents society before the jurisdictional bodies to ensure respect for rights and constitutional guarantees; promote public criminal action in defense of public and social patrimony, the environment and other diffuse interests and the rights of indigenous peoples, and exercise criminal action in cases in which it is not necessary to initiate or continue it.”

According to the union’s General Secretary Odilón Turo, the legislative branch and the Finance Ministry have chipped away at the budget year after year, and this latest budget will slash 10 billion guaranies (US\$1.44 million). Turo said in a radio interview that the ministry would be left “without resources to continue providing our service to Paraguayan society in search of justice.”

Some essential basic services, such as forensic doctors and drivers on duty, will continue during the strike.

### **Medical waste workers strike two Ohio plants over increased health care costs**

Teamsters at two biomedical waste management plants owned by Stericycle in Toledo and Warren, Ohio are completing their second week on strike. Some 50 drivers and plant workers at the Warren facility, represented by Teamsters Local 377, and nearly 30 at the Toledo plant, represented by Local 20, are fighting escalating health care costs and demanding higher wages.

Previously, Stericycle workers were covered by a health care plan with an 80/20 coinsurance rate and a \$6,000 deductible for those under the family plan. Then early in

2021, before the expiration of the old contract, the company implemented a new plan with a 60/40 coinsurance rate and a \$13,000 deductible for families. Already Stericycle workers are finding themselves awash in mounting medical bills.

Toledo striker Tim Byram told the *Toledo Blade* that the pandemic had a direct impact, with workers being classified “essential” and forced to work longer hours and handle inordinate amounts of COVID-19-infected materials from hospitals and clinics. “It got more dangerous. We got over our heads in COVID waste.”

Stericycle has brought in strikebreakers. In the case of the Warren plant, the company brought in replacement workers before workers even walked out on strike.

The attack on Stericycle workers occurs as hedge funds add the company to their portfolios and anticipate “stunning growth.” A2Z Market Research enthused that the “Medical Solid Waste Treatment Market ... is predicted to grow at a healthy pace in the coming years.”

Stericycle, based in Illinois, operates in 21 countries with approximately 640 locations worldwide. CEO Cindy J. Miller pulled in a salary of over \$5.5 million in 2020 and was named winner of a Gold Stevie Award for successful female business executives.

### **Belleville, Ontario casino workers strike**

This past Friday, 93 workers at the Shoreville Casino in eastern Ontario struck after voting by 84 percent to reject a company offer. The workers were unionized by Unifor in 2020 and are demanding a settlement that significantly increases their poverty-level wages. A wage gap of \$4.10 per hour currently exists between the Belleville workers and the industry average.

The Great Canadian Gaming Corporation, the former owners of the Shoreville Casino, was acquired by New York-based multinational Apollo Global Management for \$3.3 billion in 2020. The ongoing pandemic, which has caused temporary closures of gambling establishments across North America and Europe, has spurred the concentration of gaming assets into fewer and fewer companies.



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