Truckers stage protests over rising fuel prices and deteriorating social conditions in Panama, Haiti and Brazil

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Long haul truckers in Brazil stage protest strike

Long haul truck drivers and owner-operators carried out a national protest strike on October 25. At issue are fuel prices and wages. The strikers also demanded retirement benefits after 25 years on the job.

According to the National Confederation of Transport and Logistic workers (Cnttl) the strike paralyzed trucking operations in Ijuí (Rio Grande do Sur) and in the ports of Santos (São Paulo) and Salvador (Bahía). In Santos, battles took place between police and truckers partially blocking some roads. Police also attacked trucker rallies in Goiás and Río de Janeiro.

Some truckers indicated that even though many of them supported current president Jair Bolsonaro in the 2018 elections, their demands have been ignored. Tarcísio Gomes de Freitas, chief negotiator for the government recently declared that truckers had to accept price increases and pass them on, which the strikers interpret as an attack.

National strike in Haiti paralyzes Port au Prince

Port au Prince, Haiti was paralyzed last week by a national strike of transport workers to protest violence by armed criminal gangs and the fuel crisis affecting this nation. Armed gangs supposedly control 40 percent of the capital and are blocking the delivery of fuel from the Varreux port terminal, where most of Haiti's fuel is stored.

Hospitals and clinics reported being particularly affected by the fuel shortages. Before the strike, hospitals had warned of the danger of having to cease operations. They depend largely on gasoline and diesel generators for their electricity.

The Association of Private Hospitals (AHPH), whose members provide over seventy percent of the city's emergency services, warned of the closure of many of its clinics in the middle of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

National truck drivers' strike in Panama

On October 27 and 28 truck drivers and social activists in cities across Panama carried out a protest strike condemning the worsening of economic and social conditions for the working class. In addition to collapsing living standards, workers also confront historically high unemployment levels.

Throughout the day, rallies took place, blocking the roads in Panama City and other regions, including Colon, Veraguas and West Panama.

In the Caribbean port city of Colon, workers rallied demanding jobs, potable water in addition to the freezing of fuel prices and the resolution of the homeless crisis in the city. The demonstrators also voiced their support for striking nurses who are demanding overtime pay and better working conditions.

Sharecroppers and rural workers protest in Argentina

On October 25, Argentina's Rural Workers Union (UTT) organized demonstrations over a land reform law currently being debated in Congress (Access to Land law). The demonstrators are demanding access to land that is currently in the hands of the landed elites.

At the rally in front of the National Legislature in Buenos Aires, the protesters gave out food and produce.

The protesters are demanding an end to abusive rents by the landlords and that the government provide them with a credit

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with which to acquire their own land.

UTT spokesperson Lucas Tedeco pointed out that 40 percent of the arable land belongs to 1,200 families and that 60 percent of the crops are produced by the sharecroppers and farmworkers who live in poverty.

The land law, fiercely opposed by the landowners, has been the subject of debates in the national legislature since 2016, with no results.

Strike at ArcellorMittal sheet tube plant in Shelby, Ohio

Workers at the ArcellorMittal tubular products plant in Mansfield, Ohio struck at midnight, October 31 after management presented its "final offer" and abruptly walked out of ongoing contract talks.

The 500 striking workers are members of United Steelworkers Local 3057. The tubing plant in Shelby, formerly Dofasco Copperweld, has been in operation since 1890, starting out making bicycle parts. The plant now makes welded and seamless precision tubes in a variety of steel grades for a wide variety of customers including oil, farm machinery and automotive.

A major issue in the contract talks has been workers' demands for additional time off. The plant currently operates on a 7-day schedule. According to one USW official the average workweek at the plant is 56 hours. Other issues include increased health care costs, stagnant wages and pensions.

Three-month strike at Toronto De Havilland ends

Seven hundred aerospace workers, organized by Unifor, voted to end a bitter strike over job security last week and accept the loss of their jobs for an enhanced severance package. De Havilland had recently discontinued its formerly profitable Q400 Dash 8 turboprop as market conditions changed for the commuter jet. Workers had demanded that any new products or orders would be assigned to their site at the Downsview, Toronto plant with the company signing a new lease for the Toronto location.

Hundreds of the company's Downsview workforce had already been laid off but 700 remained to finish already-existing orders. The company had announced that it would not renew its lease at the Downsview complex when it expires later this year. Although no plans have been officially announced for relocation, workers feared that the company would move any future contracts to another facility, perhaps in Alberta, making any relocation rights for the current employees virtually unrealizable.

De Havilland is a holding in the investment vehicle Longview Aviation Capita,l owned by Sherry Brydson, scion of Canada's richest family—the Thomsons—and the richest woman in the country.

Over the course of the dispute Unifor did everything in its power to prevent a broadening of the strike amongst its other members at the Downsview facility, let alone across its 300,000-strong national membership. At the same time as the De Havilland strike began, 1,500 Bombardier workers at Downsview, also members of Unifor, struck for a new contract.

But after only a five-day strike, Unifor presented Bombardier workers with a new, miserable three-year contract. The subsequent contract ratification left the De Havilland workers in the lurch. Bombardier workers took deep concessions on wages. With cost-of-living indexes in Canada running to 3.7 percent year-over-year, the new contract provides for increases of only 0.5 percent in Year 1, 0.75 percent in Year 2 and one percent in Year 3—in effect a significant real-wage cut.

Weeks later, when militant picketing by the still striking De Havilland workers stopped scabs from completing and moving out some of the last Dash turboprop orders, the union immediately bowed to a draconian court order that virtually extinguished workers' picketing rights at the plant.

The court ruling prevented strikers from "interfering with, blocking, obstructing, or delaying in any way whatsoever, the entry of vehicles or people into the East Gate to the Bombardier and De Havilland facilities at Downsview Airport. In addition…informational picketers cannot come within a radius of 20 metres of the East Gate turnstiles. As an exception, only once every five minutes, a single picketer may walk across the entrances and exits that make up the East Gate provided that the picketer does so walking continuously and completes crossing the entrances or exits within one minute."

De Havilland workers, now completely isolated, fought for two more months before accepting the final severance agreement.

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