

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

One-day strike by Uruguayan teachers

Teachers in Uruguay's National Secondary Education Professors Federation (FeNaPES) struck for one day on November 18. FeNaPES called the action to express opposition to cuts in education and support for guaranteed hours for teachers.

The protesting teachers also gathered signatures in support of 14 teachers at Lyceum 1 in Santa Fé who were fired last February by the General Education Board because they had been photographed on campus with banners in opposition to a right-wing law-and-order reform plebiscite on the ballot during the 2019 elections. The teachers were accused of "proselytizing" and were sacked.

The proposed constitutional amendment, known as "Living Without Fear," would have established repressive measures—such as the creation of a National Guard to carry out police functions, the use of the military in the streets and night raids—in response to the nation's rising crime rate. FeNaPES, other union federations and social organizations opposed the measure, which lost after winning only 46 percent of the vote.

FeNaPES condemned the firings as "political persecution of unions" and has taken the case to the International Labor Organization.

Trinidadian petroleum workers protest for long overdue pay

Workers and retirees of Lennox Petroleum held the latest in a series of protests in front of the firm's headquarters in San Fernando, Trinidad on November 17. The protesters demanded the payment of retroactive pay that is overdue by more than four years. Nearly 300 workers are covered by the pay demand.

Despite two Industrial Court rulings in favor of the workers, Lennox has refused to pay and has filed an appeal. Meanwhile,

some workers have fallen into debt, and some have lost their houses. One died waiting for his pay. The pandemic has worsened the workers' plight.

The Oil Workers Trade Union filed a noncompliance lawsuit against Lennox in June, and the court has not yet responded.

Dominican Republic: Teachers hold 24-hour strike for more personnel

The Dominican Professors Association (ADP) called a strike for November 18 in three sectors of the Santiago Oeste municipal district of Santiago, the nation's second largest. About 400 teachers joined in the one-day strike call.

The teachers' main demand is the hiring of at least 150 teachers in Santiago province schools to alleviate chronic shortages. In an assembly before the walkout, ADP President Miguel Jorge criticized the lack of response from the educational authorities to the teachers' complaints and said that teachers would have to consider staggered strikes to press their demands.

One-day strike in Dominican Republic raises demands for public works, security

A number of social organizations in the city of San Francisco de Macorís, Dominican Republic held a strike November 15 to demand that the government fulfill agreements that it had signed in June.

The Collective of Popular Organizations of San Francisco de Macorís, which ratified the strike call, accused the government of scrapping its promises to carry out works and improve services in the Duarte province.

The government ignored repeated calls to fulfill its promises, according to the organization's spokesman, José Mercado. In addition to the refusal to do necessary infrastructure work, like repair and construction of streets, sidewalks, parks, sports fields, schools, markets and fire brigades, Mercado added the rise in the price of basic necessities like food and fuel and

growing insecurity to the list of grievances. Basic services, such as water and electricity, are also among the demands.

The authorities responded to the calls by sending police officers, reinforced by special troops, to various parts of the municipality. Several dozen demonstrators were detained.

Strike by janitors at Denver International Airport cut short as SEIU accepts deal with management

Company and union negotiators reached a new agreement hours after 350 janitors launched a strike November 20 at Denver International Airport (DIA) in Colorado. The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 105 claimed Flagship Facility Services, which contracts janitorial services from the DIA, agreed to a \$4-an-hour wage increase over a new three-year agreement.

The SEIU also said janitors won “workload protections and increased time off.” Workers returned to work the same day of their strike and will vote later this week whether to ratify the new agreement.

The \$4-an-hour wage increase will be broken up into a \$2.50 increase the first year, with a \$.75 increase in each of the second and third years of the agreement. Among janitors’ complaints was Flagship’s refusal to provide sufficient personal protective equipment as the pandemic has continued to rage.

A mediator immediately called talks as the workers hit the picket line. According to the SEIU, the DIA for the first time sent observers to sit in on negotiations. No doubt the DIA was concerned about a prolonged strike as the busy Thanksgiving holiday airport traffic picks up, and they greatly fear the spread of militancy amid the nationwide strike wave.

Flagship took over the janitorial operations at the DIA in March of this year after cutting a \$183 million deal that represented a 59 percent increase over that held by the previous contractor. Janitors struck Flagship back on October 2 in a one-day strike after a 99.6 percent strike vote, but the company did not budge.

A report published earlier this year found that Colorado workers needed to make \$27.50 an hour in order for rental costs to be limited to 30 percent of their income. DIA janitors only made \$17 an hour under the previous contract, and the \$4 increase will not only not bring them up to a fair standard but without a built-in cost-of-living escalator, soaring inflation in the coming period will leave them further behind.

Newfoundland municipal workers ratify new contract after 14-week lockout

One hundred workers in Grand Falls-Windsor voted to ratify a new contract after a 14-week lockout imposed by the central Newfoundland town. Although Mayor Barry Manuel had stated throughout the dispute that the town’s finances were in good shape, his negotiating team insisted that workers give up a medical plan that has covered 100 percent of their insurance premiums. The new contract saw the workers surrender their fully covered medical plan and now must pay 10 percent of their weekly wage into the insurance program.

Throughout the lockout, management organized a scabbing operation, contracting replacement workers to perform the jobs of the locked-out refuse collection workers employed by the municipality. In most other municipal departments, managers performed the jobs of the locked out workers. Work such as parking enforcement, parks maintenance and administration were curtailed. Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) officials had instructed the locked out workers to mount informational pickets only and not interfere with work being performed.

The attempt to impose concessions on the Grand Falls-Windsor workers was 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 points to increasing numbers of 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 2022 if no additional emergency funding is made available by the federal and provincial governments.



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