

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

## Kentucky GM workers reject local contract; Teck Resources copper miners ratify contract in British Columbia

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

Latin America

### Argentine ferry workers protest for compliance with contract

Workers for Buquebus, a ferry service between Buenos Aires and two Uruguayan cities, Montevideo and Colonia, protested January 21, impeding passengers from boarding. The workers held the protest to press the demands of their union, the United Maritime Workers Syndicate (SOMU).

SOMU accuses Buquebus of noncompliance with the collective labor agreement and signed accords, unjustified suspensions and shorting of salaries.

### Uruguayan bank workers hold 24-hour strike to demand new collective bargaining agreement

Members of the Banking Employees Association (AEBU) in Uruguay held a one-day walkout January 21 at Central Bank offices. Bank employees refused to replenish ATMs in three departments as part of the job action. The AEBU, which had called some limited protest actions the week before, is demanding progress in contract negotiations with the government.

An additional sticking point is the latest salary adjustment of 5.8 percent, which, in view of the current inflation rate of over 8 percent, represents a loss of spending power. Moreover, AEBU noted that despite rising profits, over 1,000 jobs have been lost, mostly through non-replacement of retiring workers.

AEBU planned on more short strikes and a march this week.

### Brazilian public sector employees demand raises after Bolsonaro promises wage hikes for cops

Last month, Brazil's fascistic president Jair Bolsonaro attempted to bolster his base in the repressive state apparatus by announcing wage hikes for federal police officers, federal highway patrol officers and prison guards. Bolsonaro instead, in the words of *El País*, "opened the box of

thunder" among other public sector workers, who held short work stoppages, go-slows and protests to demand the same.

Buffeted by denunciations and protest actions, as well as a lack of funds, Bolsonaro announced on January 19 that he was "suspending" the raises, though he dangled the possibility of a "readjustment" in 2023. However—if he and his fascist supporters are not able to carry out a coup—his defeat and replacement would bring no relief to the working class but shift responsibility for enforcing austerity to Lula and the Workers Party, who have already shown their willingness to carry out the austerity dictates of the national bourgeoisie and international capital.

### Nurses in Barbados continue protests, strike for better conditions, pay, benefits

The strike at Queen Elizabeth Hospital by nurses belonging to the Unity Workers' Union (UWU) in Barbados entered its seventh week last week. On January 17, the nurses marched in the capital, Bridgetown, chanting, "Enough is enough, we will not be bullied," and other slogans.

The union has raised several demands that the government has ignored, claiming that they are represented by another union, the National Union of Public Workers (NUPW). UWU head Caswell Franklyn has criticized the NUPW leadership, telling *Barbados Today* that "they only agreed to the most basic things, not the more substantial matters we wanted addressed." He further claimed that the other unions "are now in bed with the government."

The UWU's demands include: a pay raise; improvements in working conditions, nurse-to-patient ratios; health insurance; enhanced salary levels for degrees; advancement and continuous training. Franklyn claimed that workers in other sectors, such as airport technicians, are in solidarity with the nurses and that industrial actions and protests would increase if their demands were not addressed.

### Belizean stevedores protest, strike over job post assignments

Stevedores at the Port of Belize Limited (P.B.L.) held a sit-down action and later struck over management's refusal of recommendations for filling of recent job vacancies. The industrial actions prevented the unloading of a vessel and brought police and military forces to the port.

Following announcements of the resignation of two general foremen and vacancies for an assistant general foreman, a gangway man and two crane operators, the Christian Worker's Union (C.W.U.) held a foreman's

meeting at its headquarters last week. On January 19, the union emailed its recommendations to the P.B.L. According to C.W.U. president Evan “Mose” Hyde, the recommendations were based on “safety and performance, because they are the ones out there.”

The union got no response, and when the six workers showed up the next day, they were denied entry to the port. Several of the stevedores held a sit-down protest, which evolved into a strike on January 21. With rumors circulating that the B.P.L. was going to bring in Belize Defence Force (B.D.F.) units to offload a ship, some strikers stayed at the port overnight. B.D.F. soldiers arrived the next morning, and port police forcibly removed one stevedore.

Since then, there has been no news on the strike, apart from a denunciation from B.P.L. management of the strike as “illegal” and “lunacy.”

United States

### **Workers at Kentucky General Motors plant solidly reject company contract proposal**

Over 1,000 autoworkers at General Motors’ Corvette plant in Bowling Green, Kentucky voted by overwhelming margins to reject the company’s latest offer. Production workers racked up a 98 percent rejection vote, while skilled trades voted down the proposal by a 97 percent margin.

The United Auto Workers (UAW), ever focused on the interests of the union bureaucracy, seeks contract language that will guarantee a continuation of production at the Chevrolet plant. The Drive, which interviewed UAW Local 2164 officials, reports that, “As for market realities... the union understands that the plant needs to sometimes employ part-time and contract workers for certain roles.” In other words, the union will sacrifice the interests of the rank-and-file to obtain this guarantee.

The old agreement expired two years ago, and the plant has since been working without an agreement. Workers have voted strike authorization, but the union is determined to block any industrial action and continue negotiations.

### **Euclid, Ohio teachers give strike notice after year of fruitless bargaining**

The union representing teachers in Euclid, Ohio issued a 10-day strike notice January 20 after the recent round of negotiations ended in a deadlock over contract language governing teacher assignments. Members of the Euclid Teachers Association (ETA) have been without a contract for over four months and negotiations are reaching the one-year mark.

The Euclid City School District has taken aim at contract language dating from the 1950’s that denies the administration the ability to impose teacher assignments and alter working conditions.

“The Board is insisting on stripping teachers of long-held contractual rights which the ETA feels would severely damage the learning opportunities for our students,” said ETA spokesperson Josh Stephens in a statement. Teachers charge the board “seeks the power to arbitrarily reassign teachers to different classrooms or different teaching assignments at any point in the school year for any reason.”

Teachers also want increased compensation in what they maintain is “the second-lowest paid school in the county.” A new round of negotiations will begin on January 26.

### **Hennepin County workers in Minnesota file intent to strike**

Two unions representing social service and clerical workers for Hennepin County, Minnesota, filed an intent to strike January 19, setting a ten-day countdown to a possible walkout by 3,500 workers. American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Locals 34 and 2822 and county negotiators failed to reach a contract agreement for workers in a bargaining unit that encompasses Minneapolis and its surrounding suburbs.

The unions are seeking 5 percent annual increases over the next three years, while the county has offered only 2.5 percent. Workers are also demanding hazard pay, a \$200 monthly stipend to provide for work-related supplies while working at home and better quality personal protective equipment when interacting with the community, such as N-95 masks as opposed to surgical masks which do not protect against COVID-19.

Workers also oppose the county’s proposal to establish a two-tiered system that would do away with the traditional sick days and vacation and put in its place an inferior PTO (personal time off) provision that would be used for both categories.

AFSCME and the county have been engaged in mediated talks and both sides are required to hold another bargaining session before workers can strike. County officials have declared they are firm in their final offer and will attempt to carry out contingency plans in the event of a strike.

Canada

### **One thousand Teck Resources copper miners ratify contract in British Columbia**

United Steelworkers (USW) officials at the Highland Valley open pit copper mine announced Saturday that a mediators’ report put to a membership vote over the past week passed by 81.2 percent, thereby avoiding a strike. Shortly thereafter, Teck Resources management announced that they too would accept the terms of the proposed settlement. Both sides had reached an impasse in negotiations last week and turned to terms put forward by two labor relations mediators.

With inflation running at nearly 5 percent and projected to remain at elevated levels for several years, the mediators’ recommendations amounted to a substantial real wage cut. The mediators’ terms accepted the company’s demand for a meager 2 percent per year wage increase in each year of a five-year contract. The company had also offered a \$3,000 signing bonus to be paid in each of the five years of the proposed settlement. The union had demanded a paltry 3 percent per year wage increase along with a signing bonus.

In a bid to secure acceptance of the deal, the mediator increased the signing bonus to \$20,000 to be paid in a single lump sum within 30 days of ratification.

Highland Valley, the largest copper mine in Canada, accounts for a massive 43 percent of Teck’s global copper production, meaning that a strike by the workers would have had a big impact on the corporation’s bottom line at a time when copper prices on the global market continue to spike. Teck Resources runs three other copper mines in South America. It is also active in coal and other resource extraction operations. Global revenues of \$3.77 billion are expected this year, up a whopping 92 percent.



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