

Workers Struggles: The Americas

14 February 2022

Latin America

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

Protests and strike call in the Dominican Republic highlight worsening economic straits for the working class

The Dominican Republic has seen protests in recent weeks, reflecting the dire situation that the nation's working class is facing. On February 8, protesters in San Francisco de Macorís, in Duarte province, held a demonstration to demand modification of the Hydrocarbons Law to ease the burden of rising fuel prices.

In addition, the demonstrators, who blocked some roads with burning tires, called on President Luis Abinader to deliver on his promises of infrastructure projects, such as a provincial hospital, a culture plaza and a bridge. They also denounced the rise in the cost of necessities, known as the family basket, in the midst of reductions to working class incomes.

The protests were organized by a number of social organizations, in particular the Broad Front of Popular Struggle, known by its acronym Falpo. A Falpo statement denounced the "abandonment, forgetfulness, demagoguery" of the Abinader administration and called for another protest and march on February 24. It also issued a call for a municipal strike on March 1 and 2.

Haitian factory workers strike over pay demand

Workers at an industrial park in Port-au-Prince, Haiti went on strike February 9 to demand a pay raise. The wage for workers at the plants producing textiles and other commodities is 500 gourdes, the equivalent of US\$5.00, per nine-hour day. Another demand is for food assistance.

With inflation soaring, the workers are demanding 1,500 gourdes. Transportation alone for most workers costs 200 gourdes per day. The remainder is not enough to provide for basic needs. In a country plagued by raging inflation, gang and official violence, political instability, natural disasters and super-exploitation, 43 percent of the population requires humanitarian aid, according to estimates by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Workers held protests, burned tires and blocked roads near the

industrial park. Police attacked them with tear gas, and in some cases live ammunition, on both days. Undeterred, workers say that they will continue to hold protests and strikes if their demands are not met.

Protest actions in Antigua and Barbuda over wages grow

Workers in both the public and private sectors in Antigua and Barbuda have held various industrial actions recently over wage demands. On February 9, nursing home workers at the Fiennes Institute picketed and chanted for the second time in a week in front of the Treasury Building in St. John's for overtime pay dating as far back as 2019.

The same day, truck drivers and loaders at the National Solid Waste Management Authority struck to demand a firm commitment of payment of overtime pay that has been outstanding since 2020. They also want proper medical care or risk-pay for handling trash and garbage from medical facilities with COVID-infected patients.

Bus drivers for the Public Transport Service Corporation (PTSC) San Fernando depot held sickouts beginning February 9 to press their demand for overtime pay. Drivers also stressed that they are concerned over health and safety conditions, such as the lack of sanitization facilities and personal protective equipment. In a press statement, the PTSC chairman called the strike "illegal" and tried to shift the blame to the Transport and Industrial Workers' Union for "affecting the traveling public and not PTSC."

In addition to public sector workers in waste management, hospitals, child health care and public utilities, private sector workers have also protested for overdue pay. Former workers at the Jolly Beach Resort and Caribbean Airlines Services protested to demand outstanding back pay. On February 7, workers at the Cocos Hotel struck when their demand for an EC\$14 (US\$5.20) pay increase was rejected by management.

Uruguayan bank workers union calls 24-hour strike over government's "lack of will" in negotiations

The Uruguayan Banking Association (AEBU) Financial Sector Council voted February 11 to call a one-day strike for February 14 at branches of the state-owned Banco República (BROU). In

addition, they convoked a protest rally at the Banco de Seguros del Estado (BSE: State Security Bank) in Montevideo at 12:00 to be followed by a march to the Executive Tower and the delivery of a letter to President Luis Lacalle Pou.

Other limited industrial actions—short strikes and protests—were called for BSE headquarters, the National Housing Agency Headquarters, and the Mortgage Bank of Uruguay. In some areas, ATM machines will not be reloaded.

In a statement, AEBU accused the Executive Power of “lack of will” and bad faith in negotiations for salaries and a new contract.

United States

Teamsters call off strike at Minnesota food distribution facility

The Teamsters ended a strike February 11 by some 50 drivers at the Sysco food distribution warehouse in St. Cloud, Minnesota without securing any agreement on workers’ demands. Members of Teamsters Local 120 went on strike three days earlier after voting down three previous and virtually identical offers. Workers at the St. Cloud facility unionized in 2021 and are demanding parity with Sysco drivers at the company’s facility in Mounds View, Minnesota, also represented by Local 120.

According to the union, the newly organized workers are paid 49 percent less than the Mounds View workers located in a suburb north of Minneapolis and St. Paul. Sysco has called the parity wage demand by workers “unreasonable.”

Jeff Schreiner, who has worked at Sysco for 20 years, told the *Star Tribune* that the union and company were “miles apart ... We don’t feel like we’re second-rate drivers, and we don’t deserve a second-rate contract.”

Sysco distributes food products to schools, restaurants, health care facilities and movie theaters. The company is the world’s largest broadline food distributor, operating in 90 countries with 330 facilities.

Illinois teachers issue intent to strike notice

The union representing teachers in the Patton Elementary School District 133 in Riverdale, Illinois, filed an intent to strike notice February 1. The 19 members of Local 943 of the Illinois Federation of Teachers, who instruct 220 students, are seeking wage increases along with a restoration of course work that has been eliminated by the district.

The union is asking for annual wage increases of 8 percent and 6 percent in a two-year contract. Teachers are also seeking to boost the \$40,000 a year entry level salary for teachers with a bachelor’s degree, which discourages new hires from coming into the district.

The union has also raised the need to restore courses such as art, music, technology and foreign languages which have “been abandoned for some time,” local president Sabrina Hawthorne told

the *Chicago Tribune*. “We want to make sure our students are well rounded when they leave our district.”

The previous contract for the district expired in August of 2021. Negotiations have been ongoing over the last seven months, while currently talks are being conducted with a mediator.

Workers strike Sherwin-Williams Bedford Heights, Ohio plant over wages and benefits

Some 55 workers went on strike at midnight, February 4, at the Sherwin-Williams plant in Bedford Heights, Ohio, after going three months without a contract. United Steelworkers Local 14919 has been bargaining with the company for the last five months over wages and pensions, but without any progress.

The Bedford Heights facility packages aerosol products including paint, lubricants, adhesives, cleaners, disinfectants and air fresheners. Negotiators went back to the bargaining table February 10.

Canada

Ontario Tech University educators strike in Oshawa

Two hundred and eighty faculty members at the Ontario Tech University walked off the job last Thursday in a strike against brutal workloads and for improved benefits and retirement provisions. Due to the Conservative provincial government’s attack on collective bargaining rights, wage increases are capped at a paltry 1 percent per year average in each of the next three years and therefore not subject to negotiation.

The education workers have been without a contract for nine months. Despite two rounds of negotiations with mediators, university management has refused to address any of the concerns raised by the instructors. The strike by the Faculty Association is the first ever at the university.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact