

Teachers in Garupá, Argentina block bridge over pay and working conditions

Workers Struggles: The Americas

14 March 2022

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

Teachers in Garupá, Argentina block bridge over pay and conditions

A group of teachers in Garupá, a village in northeastern Argentina's Misiones province, blocked the Garupá Bridge on a major highway on March 11. Another group cut off traffic in Montecarlo, another village in the region. The teachers took the action to press demands over issues that have festered for years.

Among their grievances, two stood out: the woeful state of infrastructure exposed by but predating the pandemic, and salary demands. Concerning the latter, one teacher told reporters that their pay is "out of phase" with the present reality of runaway inflation and that "the salary update is indispensable."

The bridge blockade began at 8:00 a.m. and, after a vote, ended at 6:00 p.m. By its conclusion, more than 500 teachers had participated. They resolved to return on the morning of March 14.

Panama construction workers threaten strike as talks deadlock

Talks between the Panamanian Chamber of Construction (CAPAC) and the National Union of Workers of Construction and Similar Industries (SUNTRACS) have reached a standstill, raising the possibility of a general strike. The "obligatory conciliation" negotiations on the 2022-2025 Collective Bargaining Agreement, mediated by the Ministry of Labor and Labor Development (MITRADEL), began in September and have dragged on without an end in sight.

SUNTRACS, an affiliate of the National Confederation of Independent Trade Union Unity, has proposed pay raises to keep up with the rising rate of inflation that has eroded workers' purchasing power. CAPAC is using the last two years of the pandemic, rising fuel costs and other expenses, and even the Ukraine-Russia war to claim that it can offer no more than a raise of seven cents an hour, staggered over five years (!), while SUNTRACS is calling for 70 cents an hour.

March 8 marked the end of the conciliation period, and SUNTRACS

officials have set a deadline of March 18 before calling a general strike. In the meantime, SUNTRACS head Saúl Méndez told Prensa Latina, "We will continue talking for as long as it takes because the objective of that discussion is not the strike; the goal is to sign the collective agreement. The strike will take place if the employers do not come up with proposals that help to get out of this situation."

SUNTRACS also called for a march this Thursday from a central Panama City park to the MITRADEL headquarters and the National Assembly to present its demands.

Retired Trinidadian oil workers protest over medical and pension plans

Retired workers for Trinmar, a division of Petrotrin, a state-owned petroleum company in Trinidad and Tobago, protested March 11 in front of subsidiary Heritage Petroleum in Port Fortin. The retirees denounced the loss of their medical plan when the government shut down the Pointe-a-Pierre refinery in 2018. Since then, their plans have been shuffled among several insurance companies. Premiums have risen and the coverage has gotten worse.

Retirees told reporters about their experiences, and those of other retirees: going from paying 20 percent of medical expenses to 80 percent; the inability to afford nursing home care; deaths from lack of treatment. They also said that many of them have been shorted on their pensions.

While protesters criticized the government for giving them the runaround and not resolving the issues, others blamed the Oilfield Workers' Trade Union (OWTU) for its failure to represent them. The response of the union's president was to say that it is pursuing cases in the Industrial Court.

Dominican Republic: Teachers protest over evaluation and placement process

Several dozen teachers who had taken a test to qualify for assignments last month held a protest March 10 in front of the Ministry of Education of the Dominican Republic (Minerd). The Minerd had announced the results of the competition, but only in

terms of the percentage of participants who passed, which was 41 percent, that is, 29,527 approved out of 71,826 (out of over 85,000 registrants) who attended the evaluation process.

Among the complaints expressed by the educators were the lack of information, delays in notification for those who qualified, and not enough positions for the number of teachers who passed. Some of them said that they had to rely on family to support them as they waited to find out where and if they would have a job.

The education minister said that Minerl would begin contacting teachers for 19,000 positions and that the rest would be put on an Eligible Registry.

Belizean finance corporation workers protest proposed pay cut

Employees of the Development Finance Corporation (D.F.C.) headquarters in Belize City held a protest during their lunch hour March 11. Colleagues at the Belmopan Branch performed a similar action, dressing in black and singing solidarity songs.

The workers protested a management proposal to slash their salaries by 10 percent and cut vacation leave and other benefits as well. However, the chief shop steward at D.F.C. told News 5, "We are not protesting. We held an activity to motivate ourselves to continue working hard and to remind us that nothing can happen without the labour force, and we are stronger together and need to be united."

New York state nursing home workers carry out one-day strike to demand wage hike

Some 150 nursing home workers at Our Lady of Peace in Lewiston, New York, held a one-day strike March 9 to protest contract talks that have failed to rectify substandard wages. While workers at other nursing homes in the region have seen 20 percent wage increases, Our Lady of Peace management has stubbornly refused to budge.

When WBFO News asked Daniel Martinucci, a maintenance worker, what his wages were, he declined to say. "It's really embarrassing to tell you how much I make."

"They don't hear us," said Krista Diez, a licensed practical nurse. "They don't hear us wanting more staff. They don't hear us wanting comparable wages to everybody else in the area. They're not hearing us."

Our Lady of Peace has 250 beds. But the abysmal level of pay has led to a situation where three of its units have been shut down and only 48 percent of its beds are filled. This compares to an average occupancy rate for New York state of 83 percent.

The Service Employees International Union Local 1199 has been in negotiations with management since last November, and the old contract expired December 31, 2021. At that time, members voted for a 10-day strike, but the union delayed any action before finally calling a token, one-day walkout.

ratios

Nurses walked out of Armstrong County Memorial Hospital (ACMH) in Kittanning, Pennsylvania, on the first day of a five-day strike. Talks between the 213 members of the ACMH Nurses United union and management are deadlocked over safe staffing ratios and wages.

The 15 percent pay raise offered by hospital management has not mollified nurses, who complain of unsafe staffing. "We simply cannot attract and keep nurses with the conditions at the bedside the way they are now," Mary Kilgore, a striking nurse, told TribLive.com. "We want to provide better, safer care for our families, friends and community for now and for the future. To do that, we have to improve conditions at the bedside so nurses will come here and stay."

According to the union, over 40 nurses have quit ACMH to move to other hospitals where pay is up to \$6 more an hour. The hospital is further pressed by the fact that there is a 30 percent shortage of nurses.

The union has been in contract negotiations with the hospital since last July. In January nurses voted by 94 percent to authorize a ten-day strike. However, the union is limiting the strike to five days.

London, Ontario food processors end strike, return to work

Production workers at the Dr. Oetker Frozen Pizza manufacturing plant, members of the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), have returned to work following an 8-day strike. On February 24 workers voted by 62 percent to accept the latest company proposal. Bakers received a 50 cent per hour increase in the first year of the new contract and 40 cents per hour in each of the next two years.

For other workers, the deal provided for only five cents per hour more than the previous offer. Wage increases for them amounted to a \$1 per hour increase in the first year of the contract and 40 cents per hour in the next two years. With inflation nearing six percent a year, the new contract will see workers' real wages slip further behind over the life of the deal.



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Pennsylvania nurses launch five-day strike of wages and staffing