

Peru truckers strike over fuel costs; last minute deal blocks walkout by Utah Rio Tinto copper miners

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Latin America

Peruvian heavy cargo carriers strike, blockade highways over rising costs

Truckers in Peru began an indefinite strike March 28 over rising costs for fuel and other expenses that have cut into their earnings. The truckers have blockaded highways in at least six departments: Ayacucho, Áncash, Junín, Arequipa, Apurímac and Puno. The blockades have not been total; the National Police have intervened to attempt to allow passage for emergency vehicles and food cargo vehicles. So far, repressive measures have not been reported.

A delegation of the Superintendence of Land Transportation of People, Cargo and Merchandise (Sutran) arrived in Huancayo to meet with trucker representatives. A report by *gestion.pe* lists the following demands from the truckers:

- A solution to the increase in fuel prices by supplier companies.
- Elimination of the unfair competition by foreign carriers and for the national unions to direct the cargo reserve.
- For the table of reference values to be declared a mandatory minimum rate.
- The elimination of the selective consumption tax on fuels for national carriers.
- That the highway and toll concession contracts be reviewed.
- The total restructuring of Sutran and the revision of the law of municipalities, among others.

Mexican teachers protest delays in salary payments

Several hundred members of Section 58 of the National Union of Education Workers (SNTE) in Zacatecas, capital of the Mexican state of the same name, struck and held a protest April 1 in front of the Education Ministry. Another union of mainly rural distance learning workers, the Independent Union of Telesecundaria, joined with SNTE members. The teachers took the action to protest the nonpayment of their twice-monthly

salaries.

Some of the protesters occupied the Ministry building and hung banners denouncing the state government for its “abandonment and contempt” toward teachers. Others broke into a local theater where the governor was going to attend an event celebrating the founding of the city of Jerez. Authorities canceled the event.

Governor David Monreal, without specifically mentioning the protesters, used social media to denounce “those for whom the protection of what they believe to be a certificate for doing nothing or laziness.” A government spokesperson claimed that the wages, which were due March 31, were already being disbursed, but the teachers continued with their protest through the afternoon.

Protests in Haiti against kidnappings and violence continue

Thousands of Haitians once again took to the streets of Port-au-Prince and other cities on March 30 to demand action from the government of Ariel Henry against ongoing violence. Another target of the protest was the slow pace of the investigation into the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse last July.

The protests coincided with the 35th anniversary of the signing of the constitution that followed the end of the dictatorships of François and Jean-Claude Duvalier and supposedly brought democracy to the nation. Instead, the crises that have buffeted the nation have made life unbearable for the Haitian working class.

In the capital, demonstrators marched through the streets and chanted against gang crimes, including kidnappings, extortion, robberies and shootings. They also denounced police inaction and the inability or refusal of the Henry administration to confront criminal organizations and called for him to step down.

In the southwestern seaport of Les Cayes, protesters stormed the airport and set fire to a small plane belonging to a missionary organization. One person was killed and several injured as police fired into the group. Instead of addressing the issues that precipitated the protests, Henry tweeted, “I have instructed the public powers to launch public actions against the authors of these subversive acts so that they are severely punished.”

Bahamian insurance board workers union calls strike vote over negotiations

On March 30, the Public Managers Union (PMU) of Bahamas applied to the Department of Labour for a strike vote to be held April 6 over the breakdown in negotiations with the National Insurance Board (NIB). The talks have been going on since 2019.

According to PMU President Freda Cartwright-Lewis, the NIB “has rescinded all matters that we laid on the table and have been in negotiations about, they have rescinded all of it.” She claimed that the parties had gotten “close to an agreement,” with only two items remaining, pay and raises, but that the NIB scrapped all proposals and now, “Their position is no financial remuneration at all.”

Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister with responsibility for National Insurance Myles LaRoda claimed that the NIB’s funds would not be sustainable if it granted any raises.

Antigua and Barbuda: Broadcasting workers strike over unpaid overtime

Workers at the Antigua and Barbuda Broadcasting Service (ABS) went on strike on March 30 to press their demand for delivery of overtime pay. The workers have tried for years to get the pay, but ABS has been adamant in refusing to deliver.

Attorneys representing the ABS workers filed a lawsuit in 2020. In October 2021, the Attorney-General attempted to get the case thrown out, but the Industrial Court ruled in favor of keeping the case alive. ABS filed an appeal of the decision with the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court of Appeal, delaying any Industrial Court adjudication until the former’s decision.

If the ABS workers’ union loses the appeal, the whole process would have to restart from square one, thus the workers walked out.

United States

Unions ram through sub-inflation contract settlement for 1,300 workers at Kennecott Copper Mine in Utah

Management reported that members of four unions at Rio Tinto’s Kennecott Copper Mine in Utah ratified a new contract agreement Thursday night, narrowly avoiding a strike by 1,300 miners at one of the world’s largest copper mines. The union claimed the contract passed “overwhelmingly” but did not release vote totals.

The company said the deal included pay raises ranging from five percent to twenty three percent in the first year of the contract and yearly three percent pay raises after that, far below inflation.

Workers at the facility had earlier rejected a proposal that included a first-year four percent raise followed by annual raises of three percent while maintaining substandard pay and benefits for new hire. Workers will also get a \$1,500 signing bonus.

The agreement covers members of four unions at the mine, the United Steelworkers, International Union of Operating Engineers, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, and International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers. The miners produce 20 percent of all copper mined in the US.

Brandon Dew, district representative for the International Union of Operating Engineers, claimed the deal was “the best deal that the members have got at Kennecott in well over 20 years and definitely met their needs for current cost of living and ongoing increases.”

The forcing through of this sellout agreement takes place amid US war

preparations, with the Biden administration collaborating with the unions to secure production of critical metals necessary for the military. In addition to copper Rio Tinto is also recovering previously overlooked minerals from mining sludge, including rhenium, tellurium and bismuth, which are used in products ranging from smartphones and solar panels to jet engines and military explosives.

Mississippi and Louisiana call center workers hold one-day strike against federal contractor

Workers employed by the giant federal contractor Maximus Inc. went on a one-day strike March 23 at call centers in Hattiesburg, Mississippi and Bogalusa, Louisiana. The call center workers, who answer Medicare and Affordable Care Act questions for the public, are seeking higher wages, paid sick leave and improved health insurance.

The Communications Workers of America (CWA) began a unionization drive in 2017 when workers were paid a mere \$9.64 an hour. Currently workers make \$11.00 an hour, far short of President Biden’s so-called support for a \$15 an hour minimum wage for federal workers. Still, the CWA has not been able to win union recognition.

Maximus, typical of the parasitic nature of labor contractors, maintained a \$4,500 deductible for its core health insurance plan. In February it reduced the deductible to \$2,500, still oppressive for poverty wage workers.

Workers strike Wisconsin kitchen ware maker Vollrath Company as contract deadline passes

Several hundred members of United Auto Workers Local 1472 struck Monday after talks last week failed to result in an agreement ahead of a Friday contract expiration date. According to a Facebook post by Local 1472 President Robbie Kilgore, workers rejected a company offer before walking out.

In a news release Monday morning, company spokesman said management was open to continuing talks. The company, based in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, makes stainless steel and aluminum small-wares and equipment for commercial and institutional food service customers.

Palatine-Schaumburg teachers in suburban Chicago grant strike authorization

Teachers for the Palatine-Schaumburg High School District 211 in an eastern suburb of Chicago voted to grant strike authorization March 31 and the union said it will follow through with strike action unless they can come to an agreement by June 30 when their contract expires. Neither side has disclosed details concerning negotiations as talks continue between the district and Northwest Suburban Teachers Union Local 1211.

In a press release, Local 1211 president and Palatine high school teacher Anita Lee stated, “Our union and the board have always collaborated to ensure that our district is financially responsible. As a result, our district has an enormous surplus, but that money doesn’t do our students any good sitting in a bank account.”

Survey reports one out of five workers runs out of money between pay periods

A new survey reports that 20 percent of workers run out of money before their next paycheck, up from 15 percent in last year's survey. The report, issued by Salary Finance, polled more than 3,000 adult workers in the United States in a continuing annual report.

The survey revealed about 25 percent of respondents found it more difficult to pay for necessary expenses—transportation costs, food, etc.—and one-third said they are unable to build savings. Workers with annual incomes of \$50,000 or less saw their margin between total take-home pay and necessary spending shrink.

Canada

Metro grocery workers strike in Toronto

Nine hundred food distribution warehouse workers at Metro Ontario Inc., the third largest retail grocery outlet in Canada, struck on April 2 after workers roundly rejected a tentative agreement that had been unanimously recommended to them by their Unifor union leadership.

The rejection of the proposed deal is just the latest in a growing number of contract rejections across the country by workers chafing against monetary offers well below the rate of inflation. Workers in the warehouse, who have been working steadily throughout the pandemic, voiced their anger at the derisory offer after the ratification vote.

Sold by both management and the union as a settlement that represented significant wage gains, the deal offered only a 14 percent wage increase spread over four years. With inflation now at 5.8 percent and expected to soon breach the six percent mark and continue to remain high, the so-called “significant” offer would see workers’ wages cut by almost 10 percent in real terms by the end of the contract.

The warehouse in the Toronto suburb of Etobicoke stocks groceries for the Metro and Food Basics Supermarket chains throughout southern Ontario. Workers have been without a contract since October of 2021.



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