

Protests in Argentina over inflation; layoffs to begin at Dayton, Ohio, auto parts facility

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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Latin America

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

Former airline employees in Argentina block airport, demand work

Former workers for the LATAM airline protested in front of the Jorge Newbery Airport in the Buenos Aires area on April 13. The protesters' slogan, "We want to work," was in reference to the signing of acts by the ministries of Labor and Transport promising to maintain "labor continuity in the aeronautical sector" following the dissolution of the company in 2020.

Over 2,000 workers were laid off due to LATAM's closure, and many have waited since then without regaining jobs in the aeronautical sector.

City police and airport security police showed up at the site and attempted to open at least one lane for arriving passengers. They threatened the protesters, and some shoving matches ensued.

Protests in Argentina against rising cost of living continue

Protests broke out again across Argentina last week over the sharp deterioration of purchasing power and living standards due to rampaging inflation. Demonstrations in Argentine cities demanded jobs, food aid through either subsidies or lowered prices, and social assistance programs to counteract the inflationary surge, which reached 6.7 percent in March and shows no sign of stopping.

On April 14, an organization of the unemployed called "Unidad Piquetera" (Picket Unity) marched to the Social Development Ministry in Buenos Aires, where representatives of the organization and ministry met and signed a "partial" agreement. Workers have placed little faith in the accord and have continued their protests.

In Neuquén, protesters demanded the expansion of social assistance programs, the provision of jobs and a raise in wages. A spokesperson for Barrios de Pie (Barrios Standing) said that "we are demonstrating for the 40 percent of the poor who are in the country, for the 60 percent of children and adolescents who are below the poverty line; it's a very grave situation for us as an organization."

Protesters also denounced the agreement between the Alberto Fernández administration and the International Monetary Fund, which requires

measures that will further unload the crisis onto the backs of the already battered working class and poor.

Peruvian air traffic controllers strike over understaffing, overwork

Air traffic controllers at five Peruvian airports—Arequipa, Ayacucho, Tacna, Trujillo and Cusco—went on strike April 14. The controllers, members of the Unified Syndicate of Air Traffic Controllers (SUCTA), explained their main complaints being staff shortages and extended overtime, which according to a gestion.pe report, "on occasion can reach 24 hours."

SUCTA head Victor Zavaleta blamed the Peruvian Corporation of Airports and Commercial Aviation (CORPAC) for the strike, declaring, "We had various labor rights postponed by CORPAC functionaries. We have to take strike action during these dates because we have been silent workers during the entire pandemic. We have maintained national aerial traffic while ground traffic was restricted."

SUCTA reps met with their CORPAC counterparts the same day, and the union suspended the strike after signing an eight-point agreement that included a promise of full payment of a benefit accumulated since 2016; the payment of an arbitration award dating back to 2018-19; improvements in working conditions; review of the rotation schedule; a no-strike pledge by SUCTA for at least one year; and no sanctions or reprisals for the strike.

Panamanian drivers renew strike to freeze fuel prices, review fares

Transport workers in the province of West Panama resumed their strike on April 13 demanding measures to relieve the economic crunch they are suffering under. The drivers had struck before to call for a freeze in fuel prices and a review of their fares, according to the drivers' union, after being summoned by the province's governor, Sindy Smith, to a meeting with the National Chamber of Transportation (CANATRA), which ignored them.

Accusing CANATRA and the Transit and Land Transportation Authority of "trying to negotiate behind the workers' backs," according to one union leader, the workers resumed their strike.

Antigua and Barbuda: Fisherfolk protest fuel price surge

The government of Trinidad and Tobago announced on April 8 that gas and diesel prices were slated to rise April 19. Restiveness and anger among the island's working class has pushed labor union bureaucrats and "progressive" politicians to issue threats of "massive" protests and strikes.

Watson Duke, leader of Tobago's Progressive Democratic Patriots (PDP), held an April 11 press conference in which he shouted, "Take it off, take it off!" and promised protests over the Easter holiday. He denounced the "disrespect" shown by the ruling People's National Movement and added that the fuel increase was announced "with people still working on 2013 salaries" and promised that all would improve with the election of PDP candidates. He called for protests while denouncing the formation of any third force outside the two-party system.

Ancel Roget, leader of the Oilfield Workers' Trade Union, declared April 12, "We will stand up against them, and we will stand firm and protest in many different forms against this most unjust installment coming from an uncaring government. We will take the necessary action" to get the government to hold off on the price hikes. He appealed to the prime minister and finance minister "to have a heart and reverse the move."

On April 13, the Trinidad and Tobago Taxi Drivers' Network announced that its members would strike April 19 when schools resumed to protest the fuel price increase. Network President Adrian Acosta called on "everybody, whether it is the trade unions, the government workers, teachers, police, army, firemen, anybody, to support us and stay off the road on Tuesday because this gas hike will touch everybody. Once you drive a vehicle in this country, it is going to touch you in your pocket."

Acosta affirmed, "We have the faith that the Government will hear us, and they will not reduce the fuel subsidy at this time." As the crisis deepens throughout the Caribbean, Acosta's expression of faith in the government will prove unfounded.

United States

Nursing home workers at 5 Connecticut facilities set April 22 strike deadline

The union representing 450 Connecticut nursing home workers at five facilities announced it will strike on April 22 unless a new contract is reached. Members of the Service Employees International Union voted overwhelmingly to authorize a strike unless the owners agree to a \$20 minimum wage for certified nursing assistants (CNA) and \$18.50 for other staff members.

Exact details of the conditions for current staff members were not available, but starting wages in the nursing home industry have been known to be as low as \$13 an hour. Windsor Health and Rehabilitation, one of two nursing homes targeted for strike action in Hartford, has offered workers a mere 13 percent wage hike spread out over a four-year contract.

National Health Care Associates, which owns three of the facilities located in Rocky Hill, West Hartford and Bloomfield, has offered wage increases of 15.5 percent and 20.5 percent for its minimum wage workers but delayed their implementation until 2023. For workers earning more than the minimum, the increase will only be 4.5 percent. Regardless, all of the increases will be eviscerated by soaring inflation.

At a press conference, CNA Annamaria Parsons declared, "We have worked consistently and are tremendously tired through the COVID (pandemic). We should be paid fairly for the work we have done and are still doing. The boss is making lots of money and doesn't want to share."

Workers outraged as Tenneco announces beginning of layoffs at Dayton, Ohio area auto parts plant

Tenneco automotive sent out the first layoff notices to workers at its auto parts facility in Kettering, Ohio. The cuts are to start in June, sparking renewed outrage among workers.

The company had earlier announced that it would end operations at the plant, which makes shock absorber struts mainly for General Motors by December 31, 2023. About 450 of the workers at the facility are members of IUE-CWA. Contract talks are underway, but management says its decision to close the facility is final based on "overall competitiveness issues."

Private Equity firm Apollo Global Management acquired Tenneco in February 2022 for \$1.6 billion. Tenneco is Number 15 on the list of *Automotive News* top 100 automotive supplier firms.

The company had received about \$11 million in taxpayer-funded subsidies to operate the plant, located on the site of a former Delphi auto parts plant that had been spun off by General Motors. The Dayton area has been devastated by the closure of GM plants and other manufacturing.

Attempting to divert workers' anger, the IUE and local Ohio politicians have responded to the plant closing announcement with nationalist demagoguery, citing the company's overseas operations.

Contract expiration at ice cream plant in Rochester, Minnesota

The contract covering workers at the Kemps ice cream plant in Rochester, Minnesota, expired April 16 and, according to the union, they have not reached an agreement with the company. Teamsters Local 120, which represents 166 workers at the plant, has only divulged that health care, wages and job protection are being discussed. Kemps management has not commented on contract discussions.

Workers voted April 3 in what the union termed a near-unanimous vote to authorize strike action. But a posting on Local 120's Facebook page as the contract neared expiration said, "Stay tuned ..." and offered no other information.

Kemps is a regional operation involved in the production and marketing of dairy products, such as milk, ice cream and frozen yogurt. In 2020 Kemps shuttered its Rochester milk plant discharging 125 workers along with a related cheese plant operation that terminated 75 workers.

Nurses at Los Angeles hospital protest unsafe staffing levels

Nurses at PIH Health Good Samaritan Hospital in Los Angeles, California, held a speak-out on April 13 to protest unsafe staffing levels at the city's oldest hospital. Members of the California Nurses Association are calling attention to short staffing levels that undermine the health and safety of both nurses and patients.

In a press release Alejandro Cuevas, a nurse in the critical care unit, charged, "The hospital's solution to the lack of nurse retention and recruitment has been to hire non-RNs to directly care for patients ... saving money in their pockets in the process."

Jennifer Delisle, a registered nurse in the orthopedic unit, said, "We are

put in a moral dilemma every day we come into work. As patient advocates, we should not have to choose between caring for one patient over another because the hospital is not doing enough to staff. We should be provided all the necessary resources, equipment, and training to be able to adequately care for our already vulnerable community.”

PIH Health acquired Good Samaritan Hospital in 2019. It also operates two other hospitals in Whittier and Downey, California, and constitutes one of the largest health care employers in the Los Angeles area.

City workers in Santa Monica, California, hold protest as contract talks continue

Workers for the City of Santa Monica, California, maintenance bargaining unit rallied outside of city hall last week to press demands for better wages and conditions. The 350 members of Teamsters Local 911 employed by the city include firefighters, building maintenance, parks workers, transit, custodial and other workers.

Pay for city employees had been frozen during the pandemic and subject to the ravages of inflation. More than 200 workers took part in the assembly. While a Teamster spokesman called for a “strong contract that recognizes them for the services they perform,” he did not raise any specific demands or threaten a strike if talks drag out, merely stating that actions could “escalate.”

Workers at Metro Energy mark one year on strike with rally at New York City Hall

Members of the Teamsters union will rally at City Hall in New York City on April 21 to mark the one year anniversary on strike by 13 workers at a Brooklyn oil terminal operated by United Metro Energy.

The workers are fighting for their first union contract with the company owned by billionaire John Catsimatidis. The workers earn only about 50 percent of the prevailing wages in the area. Eight of the 13 workers have been fired in retaliation by management.

Canada

Strikes and lockouts continue in Quebec

A number of labour disputes in Quebec have continued into the month of April. In Montreal, 530 workers at Roll-Royce Canada’s Côte-de-Liesse aircraft engine maintenance factory are now in the second month of a lockout. The company wants to end the defined benefit pension plan and is proposing a salary freeze for the years 2020 and 2021.

Some 420 workers at the Molson Coors brewing plant on Montreal’s South Shore are now entering their fourth week on strike after rejecting a derisory pay offer. The offer fell well below the burgeoning inflation rate in the province, which is now breaching 6 percent a year. Management is also demanding increased mandatory weekend shifts, obligatory overtime and the destruction of the seniority system when layoffs are determined.

In the Montreal suburb of Terrebonne, 190 United Food and Commercial Workers members have been on strike since February 7 at a

central Sobeys grocery distribution center. Sobeys is the second-largest grocery store chain in Canada. Workers rejected a proposed seven-year contract, which offered 6 percent in the first year and less than 3 percent annually in the ensuing six years. Management recently threatened to move the grocery hub out of the province if the workers do not soon accept their contract offer.

In Trois-Riviere, 300 cement workers organized by Unifor have now been locked out for 10 months at the Ash Grove CRH facility. The company has been producing cement since the beginning of the dispute by importing clinker, the key ingredient in cement, that had been previously made at the Quebec factory but is now shipped in from Greece and Turkey.

And across the province, hundreds of paramedics organized by the CUPE-affiliated Brotherhood of Quebec Pre-hospital Workers are nearing one year on strike for wage increases and significant improvements in the onerous shift scheduling system. The workers have been without a contract since March 2020.

UNITE HERE members mark one year on picket line at Vancouver Hotel

In Vancouver, British Columbia workers at the Hilton Vancouver Metrotown are marking one year on the picket line after they were locked out by management in April 2021 following a provocation in which management fired about 100 workers.

The walkout at the 283-room hotel is now the longest hotel strike in B.C. history.



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