Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Colombia demonstration marks one year since mass strikes, protests erupted

On Thursday, April 29 workers, students, and organizations representing indigenous and rural workers marched on the streets of Bogota demanding that the government of President Ivan Duque cease his anti-democratic and repressive policies against the population.

The protest marked one year since the beginning on April 28, 2021 of mass protests, which took place across Colombia in opposition to President Duque's neo-liberal economic policies and the government's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. The protests were severely repressed by the government.

Government repression against the strike struggles resulted in the death of 100 people and the wounding of 1,200 others. Since then, the Duque administration uses a doctrine of national security to repress workers, youth and rural people.

Government represses May Day protest in Santiago, Chile

At least three protesters were wounded by firearms, two others were arrested at a May first labor day demonstration, led by the pseudo-left Central Clasista de Trabajadores (Workers' Class Federation) in the city of Santiago. There were no incidents in another Santiago march, led by the official CUT trade union. The Clasista march was attacked by the government's Carabineros military police.

Government and private sector workers march in Ecuador in defiance of state of siege

Hundreds of government and private sector workers marched in Quito on May 1, under conditions of a state of siege declared the day before by the Ecuadorean government in many parts of the country, including Quito and Guayaquil. Thousands of troops have been mobilized, allegedly against drug mafia activity.

At the May Day protests, workers demanded government action to put an end to the mass unemployment caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. A central demand was an end to the neo-liberal policies of the hated regime of President Guillermo Lasso. The workers were joined by environmental groups.

May Day demonstrations repudiate President Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil

An attempt in Brasilia by the fascistic President Bolsonaro to bolster support for his administration flopped when thousands of workers marched and rallied in the industrial city of Sao Paulo with banners and slogans repudiating Bolsonaro and calling for his removal. At the Sao Paulo march and rally, workers expressed their anger over the economic and inflationary crisis that have cut jobs and living standards across this nation.

The six official trade unions used the May Day demonstrations to encourage support for populist ex-president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. Presidential elections are scheduled to take place in Brazil in October 2022.

Immigrant workers protest US/Mexico anti-immigrant policies

Hundreds of immigrant workers protested on May Day in the border pass between the cities of Tijuana and San Diego against the anti-immigration policies of Mexico and the United States that have made use of Title 42 restrictions related to COVID-19 to attack the rights of immigrants. Since this year began, over 115,000 immigrants have been intercepted by both nations. Title 42 uses the COVID-19 pandemic as a pretext for blocking immigrants.

Immigrant workers, mostly from Central America, burned images of US president Donald Trump and of Mexican chancellor Marcelo Ebrard, who signed onto the anti-immigrant politics and helped militarize Mexico's border with Guatemala.

Garcia Lara, who heads the 2000 Youth Movement (Movimiento Juventud 2000) addressed the rally. Lara pointed out that Title 42 is not being used against European refugees, for example.

Since last October, over 1 million immigrants have been "settled" on the Mexican side of the border many, of whom are forced to exist under conditions of total neglect and poverty.

Maryland Teamsters strike giant food distributor Sysco

Hundreds of drivers and warehouse workers went on strike April 27 at Sysco Corporation's giant food distribution center in Jessup, Maryland after contract talks broke down. Teamsters Local 355 pointed to working conditions, mandatory holiday shifts and attendance as some of the issues.

One striker, 73-year-old Ron Daniels, told WBAL, "We have problems (with) the way they treat the men… They should care because they have families and they should be able to get home, have a decent wage and be able to be with their families."

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A statement from Sysco declared that the union's demands "would place an unreasonable burden on our business." Sysco is the world's largest broadline food distributor. Its CEO, Kevin Hourican, pulled in over $23 million in compensation for 2021.

Iowa concrete truck drivers strike

Concrete truck drivers walked out May 2 after the members of Teamsters Local 238 in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, voted down the most recent wage proposal by King's Ready Mix. The current base rate for drivers is $22.45 an hour and workers have warned that any offer less than $25.70 will not recover past losses.

Teamsters' secretary-treasurer Jesse Case revealed, "Workers are tired of living paycheck to paycheck in a market that is grossly underpaying their employees. Wages in the concrete industry in the Cedar Rapids market have remained stagnant for years and quite frankly, I'm surprised the industry has gone this long without a strike."

No doubt the Teamsters bureaucracy has played a significant role in maintaining wage stagnation and frustrating strike action. According to KWWL, the Teamsters are feeling pressed to reach out to non-union concrete drivers in the region, whose employers are contributing to the suppression of wages.

Maine nurses rally amid stalled contract talks

Hundreds of nurses and supporters rallied outside the Maine Medical Center in Portland, Maine, April 27 one year after registered nurses unionized with the Maine State Nurses Association. Nurses are growing impatient with the failure of talks to reach a resolution over issues such as safe staffing ratios, and benefits and wages that are comparable to the profession.

Jonica Frank, an RN in the hospital's operating room declared that safe staffing was "one of our number one goals," but that "Maine Med has already shot that down and said they don't want to change our ratios."

Improved compensation is also seen as key to maintaining qualified staff. "The biggest reason I'm out here is to retain the amazing nurses that we have in the walls of the hospital," Nadine Kern told the Beacon. "Having a fair contract and getting that as soon as possible is going to help with retention."

But the pace of negotiations has been disappointing. Hospital management, in a statement, would only reply that it was bargaining toward a contract "as quickly as possible."

Strike vote by Rochester, Minnesota ice cream workers

Workers at the Kemps ice cream plant in Rochester, Minnesota moved closer to a strike after rejecting a management offer by a vote of 135-1. The vote took place on Sunday, May 1, international workers day. Local unions In Rochester staged a march in commemoration of the fight for the eight-hour day, a demand long since abandoned by the unions.

Teamster Local 120 said negotiations would continue, but that a strike could come soon.

Contract ratified at Pratt & Whitney plants in Connecticut

A three-year contract for about 3,000 machinists at two Pratt & Whitney plants in Connecticut has been approved. The International Association of Machinists did not release the vote totals and only scant detail of the new contract with the maker of jet engines.

A management spokesman hailed the deal saying it was "positioning the company for long-term success." Pratt &Whitney is a subsidiary of Raytheon Technologies Corp., based in Waltham, Massachusetts.

Highlights released by the IAM claimed the contract, which took effect May 2, provided improved job security language, including guaranteed new work, annual wage increases, improved pension accrual rates and more personal time off and vacations. It claimed the contract provided savings on out of pocket health care costs averaging about $2,400 per worker.

There had been recent job cuts at company locations in East Hartford and Middletown, Connecticut amounting to about 13 percent of the workforce. Raytheon recently opened a new, nonunion plant in North Carolina. It appears that the threat of outsourcing of jobs was a factor in pressuring workers to ratify the deal.

New contract at Guthrie Corning Hospital in New York state

The union at Guthrie Corning Hospital, a rural hospital in Corning, New York, announced ratification of a three-year agreement April 27. According to Local 1199 SEIU United Healthcare Workers East the deal provides a total 9 percent wage increase over the term of the deal, well below the rate of inflation.

The contract covers about 150 caregivers including nurses, technicians, clerical workers, food service workers and maintenance.

Dublin, California teachers hold protest over contract

Teachers at the Dublin, California schools staged a protest last week as contract talks continued with the district. The Alameda County district enrolls about 12,300 students. The educators say that like many other school systems, the district is having trouble recruiting and retaining enough staff due to stagnating wages and increased health hazards due to the pandemic.

Teachers association president Robbie Kreitz presented the local school board with her concerns. "At a time when California funding for education is at an all-time high, Dublin in many capacities is ranking last," she said. "We are hoping we can entice the district to continue to work with us, to put students first, because that's our goal."

The protest in Dublin coincides with a wave of strikes and protests by health care workers across the state of California, who face burnout and short staffing after two years of a deadly pandemic.

UFCW local in British Columbia locks out its own staff; demands contract concessions

Administrative staff and field representatives for the United Food and

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Commercial Workers Local 1518 in New Westminster, British Columbia were locked out by union officials on April 8 after almost two years of failed negotiations. The locked-out workers act as support staff for the UFCW and are members of the United Steelworkers (USW). It is the common practice that employees working as support staff for any particular union are members of a different union.

The UFCW local in New Westminster organizes over 20,000 retail workers across British Columbia. Nationally, 250,000 workers belong to the union.

The UFCW is demanding that its office employees agree to a two-tier wage and benefits scheme. Workers voted unanimously to reject the contract offer. Already, twice in 2021 UFCW officials unilaterally cut the health and welfare benefits of the workers. Across the country, both the UFCW and the USW continuously ram through concessions contracts when negotiating with their corporate masters. In situations where the unions themselves are required to bargain contracts with their own administrative workers organized in other unions, concession bargaining has also become the order of the day.

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