

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Teachers in Argentine province declare three-day strike over pay increase

Following a two-day strike June 8-9, the Association for Education Workers of Chubut (ATECh) called a 72-hour walkout for June 13-15. A mobilization in the provincial capital Rawson was also declared.

The actions are a response to the provincial government's offer of a 15 percent raise to be paid in three stages, beginning in August. Argentina's inflation rate was already high before the recent worldwide spike, and the government's offer will not come near to counteracting the consequent erosion of spending power. ATECh is demanding a basic monthly salary above 100,000 pesos (US\$817).

An ATECh statement said that "Governor [Mariano] Arcioni and his [Education] Minister [Florencia] Perata are responsible for the huge loss of school days due to the lack of basic infrastructure in dozens of schools throughout the province. They are responsible for thousands of teachers and their families falling below the poverty line; therefore, they are also responsible to take the forceful measures required in response to this salary and budget adjustment."

Uruguayan teachers to strike over pay, budget and other issues

The Uruguayan Federation of Teachers-Primary Education Workers (Fum-Tep) and Education Unions Coordinator of Uruguay called a strike for June 15 over a number of issues. There will also be a mobilization in the nation's capital, Montevideo.

The national strike will encompass all public education unions as well as the National Public Education Administration, the University of the Republic and the Technological University. Some sections of private education will also participate.

Among the demands being raised are increased budgets to education agencies and universities; full recovery of lost salaries; rectification of salary inequities; creation of teaching, technical, administrative and service positions; policies to promote a democratic education; participation in education policymaking; and the end of union persecution and censorship.

Fum-Tep criticized cuts of over 200 million pesos (US\$5.08 million) made by the government and declared the establishment of an emergency system of food distribution to children during the strike so as not to interrupt the meals that they receive during the school day.

Metalworkers in Uruguay strike, protest shutdown of company

Workers in Uruguay's metallurgy sector held a one-day strike and protest June 9 over the May 30 announcement of an auto parts company that it was immediately ending operations. The mobilization was called by the National Union of Metal Workers and Related Branches (UNTMRA). It included workers from related industries, such as mining, service stations, plastics, electronics and telecommunications.

The protesting workers marched to the Ministry of Economy and Finance and the National Directorate of Labor. Union officials denounced the move and called for discussions between the company and the government.

The transnational company, Cinter Aperam, had operated for 65 years in Uruguay. It said that it was going to concentrate its operations in Brazil. Its 150 workers were not given prior notice before the public announcement. The firm, which has a presence in over 40 countries, said that it was leaving Uruguay due to "lack of competitiveness."

Retirees in Antigua and Barbuda protest delays in pensions and benefits

Senior citizens, disabled workers, supporters and family members picketed the main office of the Antigua and Barbuda Social Security Board in St. John on June 6 to protest delays in payment of pensions and benefits. This action was taken six months after a similar November protest drew promises from the government that it would streamline the process.

For many elderly retirees, the pensions are the only income they have, and they complained that they have not received April's payments yet, leaving them dependent on their families for support. There were also workers who had not been paid sick leave, disability, funeral grants or maternity leave and, in some cases, their claims were not yet approved.

The executive director of the Social Security Board claimed that a "system failure" was at fault and admitted that some claims have languished for as long as six months. He claimed that the April payments would be deposited by the end of the week.

Bahamian nurses vote for strike over contract, pay and work conditions

The Bahamas Nurses Union (BNU) held a strike vote on June 9 in which the nurses overwhelmingly chose to walk out if their demands are not met. In one locale, Nassau's Princess Margaret Hospital, the BNU claimed that there was only one "no" vote among nurses.

The nurses have longstanding grievances, including the government's

foot-dragging on agreement of a new contract, short-staffing, poor working conditions, inadequate protections from the pandemic, the need for a pay raise and the lack of a system of promotions.

Union at Panasonic auto parts plant in Reynosa, Mexico agrees to pay deal, calls off strike

The newly installed union at the Japanese-owned Panasonic auto parts plant in Reynosa, Mexico said it had reached an agreement with management over pay and called off a strike set for Friday morning. The settlement called for a 9.5 percent pay increase and a one-time bonus of 3.5 percent.

The “independent” SNITIS trade union negotiated the deal. SNITIS recently won a representation election at the plant. Workers fired under the previous union will reportedly be rehired.

Earlier this year SNITIS had called on US Trade Representative Katherine Tai to investigate Panasonic for alleged violations of the 2020 United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), claiming workers were denied collective bargaining rights as required by the pact.

Workers at the General Motors Silao plant recently voted in the SNITIS union as well. The intervention of the Biden administration in support of SNITIS reflects fears that the old, corrupt unions in Mexico are losing control, such as happened during the mass wildcat strikes in Matamoros.

Indigenous organizations protest policies of Ecuador government

Starting Monday, indigenous organizations in Ecuador began a nationwide mobilization, including blockades of roads in a number of provinces. Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) leader Leonidas Iza said native peoples and farmers want a dialogue with the government of Guillermo Lasso over a number of issues. This includes the reduction of fuel prices, renegotiation of debts, fair prices for agricultural products, job creation and labor rights.

The protesters also want a halt to the expansion of areas designated for raw material extraction, claiming this is causing extreme environmental damage and destruction of fragile ecosystems.

In advance of the protest the army and police were granted broader powers. A previous national protest during the administration of Lenin Moreno was met with violent state repression with over a dozen people killed and some 1,500 injured.

Strike vote set for Atlantic City casino workers

Unite Here Local 54 said members will vote on strike authorization Wednesday over unsettled contract issues with Atlantic City, New Jersey casinos. The contract for thousands of workers at nine casinos in the resort city expired two weeks ago.

The union did not say when a strike would begin if approved by workers. There was speculation that the July 4 weekend would be a likely target due to the high visitor traffic. The union did not indicate what the issues are in negotiations, saying only that it wanted a “significant” pay raise.

The union has been negotiating with Caesars, Harrah’s, Tropicana and

MGM Resorts International, which owns the Borgata. Unite Here members struck for 34 days in 2004 and again in 2016 against the Taj Mahal casino, owned by Donald Trump, which later closed and subsequently reopened under different ownership.

California social service workers strike over wages

Some 300 social service workers at the Metropolitan Area Advisory Committee (MAAC) based in Chula Vista, California, walked off the job June 6, shutting down more than a dozen childhood development centers after eight months of negotiations failed to meet their wage demands. The bargaining unit comprises teachers, bus drivers, kitchen aides, drug and alcohol counselors, provides a variety of social services and is represented by Service Employees International Union Local 221.

MAAC stated in a press release it raised starting wages to \$18 an hour. But the offer fails to address wage compensation for higher seniority social workers, many of whom currently make less than \$18 an hour.

Workers want to restore step-increases, which were bargained away in the past. Union member Alisa Miller told the *San Diego Union Tribune*, “Every year on your anniversary, you move up a step and that allows you to grow in your career. ... That’s been frozen for at least 10 years. We want that back so we don’t have this constant turnover.”

Lily Camarena, a 19-year veteran at MAAC, said, “People are going to other agencies or they’re going into the fast-food industry because they’re offering a whole lot more. It’s sad that we, the workers, can still qualify for the services that we provide.”

Connecticut health care workers conduct protest over flagging contract negotiations

Health care workers at Windham Hospital in Windham, Connecticut, held an informational picket June 6 to call attention to desperate conditions affecting the safety of both staff and patients. Nurses, medical technicians and skilled support staff are demanding increased wages and insurance and an end to mandatory overtime, but after 16 bargaining sessions, their proposals have not been accepted.

Heather Howlett told Fox61 News, “Imagine you’re on a 12-hour shift and now you’re being told you can’t go home. You have to stay for another four hours. If you’re tired, how can you properly take care of your patients?”

Howlett is president of Windham United Employees, AFT Local 5099, which represents health care workers in the negotiations. Nurses are represented in the negotiations by the Windham Federation of Professional Nurses, AFT Local 5041.

Windham Hospital is owned by Hartford Healthcare, which manages some 36,000 employees at 400 locations. In 2020, Hartford Healthcare suspended its maternity services, citing a decline in births that affected profitability. The hospital carried out the measure without filing a “certificate of need” in a move that widely angered the public. In February, Hartford was issued a slap on the wrist \$65,000 fine.

Teamsters force through a concessions contract after 11-week strike at Montreal brewery

An 11-week strike by 425 Montreal Molson-Coors brewery workers will end today after the strikers voted on the weekend to accept a contract that offered wages well below the rate of inflation. It was the third contract offer presented to workers over the past three months.

The ratification of the new deal came only two days after workers had overwhelmingly rejected Molson-Coors “final offer” by a 92.4 percent margin. It was the second time workers had refused to ratify a contract proposal. The Teamsters union officialdom had urged the strikers to accept that deal as well as a similar offer made to them two days later.

After last week’s contract rejection, Teamsters spokesperson Catherine Cosgrove revealed the immense gap between the union leadership’s view of the concessions deal and the membership. “As good as it (the contract) may seem, the workers have to make sure they are not losing money by accepting the contract as presented,” she said. The union then called another vote to ram through a settlement.

The original proposed contract made last March fell well below a soaring inflation rate, which is now at 7 percent a year. The company had initially offered a miserly 2.25 percent per year increase in a five-year contract. Management was also demanding increased mandatory weekend shifts and compulsory overtime as well as the destruction of the seniority system when layoffs are processed.



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