

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Argentine health workers strike for pay hike, improved conditions

Argentina's Health Professionals Association (APROSLAR) held a 72-hour strike beginning July 12 following a failed meeting the week before with the Minister of Health, Juan Carlos Vergara. In the meeting, Vergara told APROSLAR reps that the government would give the medical union a raise for July to be paid in August. However, he did not include any information as to the amount or modality (fixed or percentage sum, non-remunerated or basic).

APROSLAR issued a statement saying that "since there are no concrete answers, there is discomfort and a certain disbelief in what has been announced. ... This announcement of salary recomposition for this month, of which we do not know the scope, is very short-term since it must be collected in August and if that does not happen it will cause more indignation and anger by health personnel." It added that the unit wants an increase that exceeds the inflation rate and that it will be a percentage increase and not a fixed amount.

The union claimed a high level of adherence to the walkout in public hospitals and primary health centers. Scheduled nonurgent surgeries were suspended, and only emergencies were performed at hospitals and clinics.

Demonstrators march in Buenos Aires to demand break with the IMF

Thousands of members and supporters of the Piquetero Unity, a coalition of various left organizations, protested in Buenos Aires July 14 to demand that the government break with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). They gathered at different points in the city and marched to the Plaza de Mayo.

"Piqueteros" are protesters who march and blockade streets to dramatize their demands.

Aside from the demand to boot out the IMF, the demonstrators called for a 20,000 peso (US\$155) payment to the hardest-hit sectors, a minimum wage above the current 100,000 pesos (US\$780) as well as universal insurance for the unemployed equal to the minimum wage.

Chilean tow truck operators and motorists protest fuel prices

Tow truck drivers and motorists converged on downtown Santiago, Chile's Plaza Baquedano on July 14. Two organizations, United Tow Truckers and Furious Motorists, came to hold a joint protest against the

high price of fuel.

The protesters had wanted to form a caravan through the city, but the Carabineros, Chile's national police, would not authorize it. Instead, a delegation delivered a letter at La Moneda Palace, the office of President Gabriel Boric. At one point, however, protesters erected barricades, blocking traffic in the capital.

Last week, average prices for various octanes of gasoline rose to 1,200-1244 pesos per liter (US\$4.58-4.83 per gallon). Furious motorists told reporters that "Mainly, our greatest demand is the brutal rise in fuel prices. We are asking for the total elimination or a 50 percent reduction in the Specific Tax," a levy established by Chilean tax law applied to diesel and gasoline, which is used to finance various social programs.

Ecuadorian teachers demonstrate for national equalization of salaries

Teachers affiliated with Ecuador's National Union of Educators (UNE) held a march and rally in Quito on July 13 to demand the national government increase their wages. Similar actions took place in other cities.

The mobilizations were carried out to press for the publication in the Official Registry of the salary reforms to the Organic Law of Intercultural Education, which would raise the budget for education, raise salaries, fund programs for special education and improve retirement plans. Another demand was that the government of President Guillermo Lasso cease "the criminalization of the social struggle and the anti-popular policy."

Five UNE leaders, as well as leaders of indigenous organizations, have so far been summoned by prosecutors. A group of teachers and indigenous leaders chained themselves outside the Constitutional Court to demand an end to the harassment.

UNE denounced the delay—by then 45 days—in the publication of salary equalization due to appeals by the government, all of which so far have been thrown out by the Court. It also demanded that the government address the rise in fuel prices.

Trinidadian cement workers continue protests for outstanding payments

Workers for Trinidad Cement Limited (TCL) have continued protests to press their demands for overdue payments, maintenance of their medical and retirement plans, and compliance with their contract. They picketed TCL's plant on July 13 for the third time since the week before and say they will keep protesting until they get what they deserve.

Another point of contention between the company and the workers emerged when it was revealed that parent company Cemex sent letters to workers on July 12 saying its auditing service company will not allow the company to share financial information with them unless the workers sign

a confidentiality agreement. This is the first time in 30 years that the firm has imposed such a requirement, leading to suspicions that TCL is concealing information from its workers.

The Oilfield Workers Trade Union is calling on TCL to return to negotiations. So far, there has been no discussion of strike action.

Jamaican maintenance workers protest unfair treatment

Workers for a local labor contractor in Jamaica held a protest July 12 at Spanish Town Hospital in St. Catherine over unfair treatment. The contractor, Upset Manpower and Maintenance Services Limited, has told workers that it will terminate their employment on July 31 per the terms of their contracts. However, Upset will not pay the workers until September.

The workers are insisting that they cannot wait over a month to pay for their ongoing expenses and demand they receive their pay sooner.

Bahamian contract workers demonstrate to demand pay

Contract workers from the Bahamas Public Parks and Public Beaches Authority demonstrated for the third consecutive week in front of the Office of the Prime Minister to demand outstanding pay. The workers claim that they are owed wages dating back to July 2021 and they are demanding to speak with Prime Minister Philip “Brave” Davis over the issue.

Richard Johnson, one of the organizers of the protests, told reporters, “We are going to be here until we’re satisfied about where our monies are. Whether we get a letter, whether we get a meeting, if we get a statement. Whatever causes us to be satisfied as a group.” He criticized the Authority’s executive chairman for refusing to address their concerns: “That guy does not speak to anybody. He’s very rude. He’s very condescending and so the reason why we’re here is because we’re finished with over there. We can’t get resolution.”

According to Johnson, the workers are owed thousands of dollars. He said that the workers are prepared to take legal action, and he has spoken to a lawyer about taking up their case.

Detroit area pipefitters continue job action amid media and union blackout

In the Detroit area, 120 building trades workers, members of Pipefitters Local 636, have been locked in a dispute with the Mechanical Contractors Association since June 1 after members rejected a tentative agreement. While the workers are technically on strike, a reactionary no strike agreement prohibits workers on state or federal job sites from actively participating. As a result, a number of retirees have been manning the picket line.

According to Rick Fast, Business Agent for the local; “We’re on strike for better wages and working conditions, and the MCA does not want to give us that.” Fast added that the MCA is denying workers a new contract, while seeking to cut disabilities payments, an obvious sticking point since the danger of on-the-job injuries is ever present.

While the MCA seeks to present a united front against the workers, several dozen of the smaller companies fearing economic repercussions if

their construction projects remain uncompleted have entered into interim agreements with the union.

While the strike has been completely blacked out by the news media and the pipefitters union itself, a parade of leading Michigan Democratic Party politicians, including Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel and elements from the Party’s Labor Caucus, have appeared on the picket line feigning support. They are no doubt concerned that if a settlement isn’t reached in a timely manner, given the current upsurge in the class struggle, this dispute may become more than an isolated strike.

Idaho cement truck drivers enter tenth week of strike

Ready mix drivers at two plants, Pocatello Ready Mix in Pocatello and Horrocks Ready Mix in Blackfoot, Idaho, are entering their tenth week on strike over management’s plans to end support for union pension and insurance plans. Members of Teamsters Local 983 went on strike back on May 10 charging that two 50-cent wage increases in the first and second years of the contract will be consumed by costs from the new private insurance and pension plans being proposed by the company.

The union reports the company is hiring strikebreakers and offering a \$10,000 bonus if they oppose union membership. Idaho is right-to-work state where there is no requirement for membership in a union as a condition of employment, and no dues can be deducted from paychecks without an authorization by the employee.

Dollar General workers at a South Carolina store carry out two-day strike

Non-union workers at the Midlands Dollar General store in Holly Hill, South Carolina, launched a two-day strike July 17 charging the company with unsafe working conditions and wage theft. Workers report piles of boxes blocking fire exits, lack of security cameras and the fact that the store is in an obscure location where shrubbery blocks a view of the building and contributes to frequent robberies.

Taiwanna Milligan told The State, “We’ve been asking Dollar General to do these things for months, but Dollar General didn’t listen until we threatened to go on strike. We’re following through with this strike because we have more problems that Dollar General has to fix.”

One worker reported being punched off the clock while making bank deposits. Another worker was given advanced approval to take time off to transport her son to an eye procedure. After returning, she was fired.

In a statement released by Raise Up the South, an organization connected to the “Fight for \$15,” Keshia Brown, an assistant manager, stated, “I was a victim of robbery at work. Right after we got robbed—not even 15 minutes later—management was already telling me to open the store back up.”

Dollar General, a Fortune 500 company whose revenues reached \$27 billion in 2019, operates 18,216 stores across the lower 48 states. It is one of the most profitable stores in rural areas, especially depressed small towns.

Lockout of 300 cement workers continues at Quebec plant

In Trois-Rivière, 300 cement workers organized by Unifor have now been locked out for 14 months at the Ash Grove CRH cement 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 as far away as Greece and Turkey. Clinker accounts for 90 percent of the raw material necessary to make cement. Prior to the lockout, workers at the plant produced the material in a series of kilns before processing the cement.

The company is demanding a number of deep concessions that includes extending sub-contracting and the closure of two kilns that would result in significant layoffs.

The clinker is being transformed into cement by scabs hired by the company in the greater Lanaudière region of the province. The finished product is being used in construction projects that include government and institutional buildings. The production of “scab cement” makes a mockery of Quebec’s so-called anti-scab law and has encouraged management to stonewall discussions for a new contract.



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