Uruguay unions set one-day strike over government “reforms”

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

Uruguay’s PIT-CNT labor federation announced August 4 that its members would strike for 24 hours August 11. The walkout will be carried out to protest plans by the government of President Luis Lacalle Pou to effect reforms to the social security system that would worsen conditions for active and retired workers.

A number of Uruguayan transport unions in the Transport Cooperatives and Workers Syndical Association (Ascot) announced August 5 that they would join the strike. Of particular concern for transport workers is the raising of the retirement age for drivers, which is currently age 60. The blueprint for the proposed bill would phase in the retirement age by year of birth. Those born in 1967 would qualify to retire at age 61, in 1968 at age 62 etc., until reaching age 65.

An Ascot communiqué stated: “We ask ourselves, ‘What is going to happen with the compañeros who cannot renew their driver’s licenses and are not yet at retirement age? Who is going to take care of their work and salaries?’”

The protesters will gather at the Executive Tower, the headquarters of the Executive branch, and hand over a document arguing against the bill.

Workers from various departments of Puerto Rico’s public health care system gathered and picketed in front of the island’s Medical Center in San José in the early morning of August 5. The protesting workers, members of the General Workers Union (UGT), carried signs demanding “Salary Justice, Now!”

The workers denounced the miserly wages, frequent 12-hour shifts caused by shortages of personnel and poor working conditions. UGT President Gerson Guzmán López told reporters that base pay nets about $500 every two weeks after deductions. Workers are often lured away from the island colony by wages that are up to double of those on Puerto Rico.

The UGT is calling for the designation of health and medical care as essential services, thereby requiring better wages and budgets.

Teachers at the Petion Ville High School in Cul de Sac, a town north of Port au Prince, Haiti, struck August 5 to demand the return of a physics teacher kidnapped by gang members on August 3. The teacher’s family does not have the resources to pay the ransom.

Cul de Sac, a lowland region in Haiti’s southeast, was the scene of gang clashes in which more than 200 people died last April. Gangs have tightened control over vulnerable neighborhoods and kidnappings reached over 500 in the first five months of 2022.

Several hundred public school educators marched through Caracas, Venezuela, August 2 to demand better pay and benefits, as well as respect for their labor rights. Carrying signs declaring, “Salary is a family patrimony,” “Fair salaries and fair vacation pay,” they marched to the Labor Ministry, where they handed over a list of their demands.

The teachers denounced the calculation of the vacation bonus decreed by the National Budget Office, which they say was based on the last collective contract, but should be based on the new, as yet unsigned, labor agreement. Retirees are also confronted with rising costs for medications, for which their pensions are inadequate.

On August 2, functionaries at Chile’s National Emergency Office (Onemi) went on a national strike. The striking officials voiced concerned over a new body designed to replace it, the National Disaster Prevention and Response Service (Senapred). Law 21,364 created Senapred in August 2021 but had yet to get approval of a

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Force of Law declaration that would clarify and regulate various aspects of its implementation.

The Senapred is due to take over operations later this month, but according to a statement by the Onemi Functionaries Association (Anufonemi), “Onemi does not have adequate infrastructure and staffing for the new tasks that the law creates, but on the contrary, it weakens decentralization by concentrating many of the region’s own tasks at the central level.”

The statement continued that “it is vitally important to strengthen a service that in 2010 suffered a major crisis [a powerful earthquake] due to not having the personnel or the adequate infrastructure to respond to the multiple threats the country is facing and that this Law wants to correct. However, with the financing and structure proposal we are returning to the organization that we were in 1974.” The statement blamed the “rigidity” of the Budget Directorate (Dipres) for defunding the agency in 2010 and said that we do not want to have a 27-F again,” referring to February 27, the date of the 2010 earthquake.

Anfuonemi announced on August 6 that, after discussions over the Force of Law with the Ministry of the Interior and Public Security, Onemi and the National Association of Fiscal Employees, it was calling off the strike. The announcement said that “important progress was made with respect to the first proposal we received from Dipres.” However, it added that since “the process is not over yet,” it would remain in a “state of alert.”

United States

Some 100 teachers in Niles, Ohio, voted unanimously August 4 for a strike as mediated negotiations between the Niles Education Association and the school board have failed to produce an agreement. Details of the talks are not available as the board has declared it has “no intention of negotiating this contract in public.”

But at a July 28 school meeting, teachers showed up carrying signs that made clear wages have historically lagged and are being further eroded by inflation. One sign declared that Niles teachers receive the second-lowest pay in the state of Ohio. Another pointed out that teacher pay was not increasing at the same rate as the superintendent’s. Apparently in reference to the pandemic, one stated, “We sacrificed in good faith, now bargain in good faith.”

The old contract expires August 29, the first day of school. The union has said, without an agreement, they will issue the mandatory 10-day notice of an intent to strike on September 1. The two sides will resume negotiations on August 26.

Canada

One hundred and fifty members of the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) continue job actions against Blue Bus services in pursuit of a new contract in Vancouver, British Columbia. After a 99 percent vote on July 19, workers began limited job actions on July 23, which include an overtime ban and the wearing of union shirts instead of Blue Bus uniforms. The bus company transports about 18,000 West Vancouver customers per day.

Despite the near unanimous strike vote, ATU officials have restrained their members from completely withdrawing their labour. Due to the overtime ban at least 12 percent of regularly scheduled services have been canceled. Due to job actions by mechanics, up to 40 percent of the Blue Bus fleet has been out of service due to delayed repairs. The company has moved to call in part-time workers to cover service shortfalls in violation of a previous understanding with the union.

Aside from demands for a significant wage increase to combat the erosion of living standards due to spiking inflation, workers are insisting on specific, written guarantees on break times for every run.

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