

## Argentine teachers strike and march over provincial government's wage offer; Ontario safety inspectors strike impacts Canadian National Exhibition

# 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

#### Argentine teachers strike and march over provincial government's wage offer

Teachers in Argentina's Río Negro province struck for 48 hours August 17 and 18 to press their salary demands. The educators, members of the Río Negro Education Workers Union (Unter), were joined by members of the State Workers Association and the Argentine Workers Central Union.

The unions are calling for parity talks to be reopened, since the provincial government's offer is considered insufficient in view of inflation. Unter head Sandra Schierononi told the press that "we want a decent salary, schools in conditions to be able to teach and we tell the provincial government that we are not capricious, we are here because we are asserting our rights."

Unter claimed 98 percent adherence to the strike, which began with a massive march in the capital Viedma to the Legislature and Economy and Education and Human Rights Ministries. During the march, delegations visited the offices of politicians and officials with letters listing their demands.

#### State workers in Argentina strike for 48 hours over pay demand

The Civil Personnel National Union (UPCN) in Argentina's Santa Fe province called a two-day strike for August 18 and 19. The main demand of the walkout was the advancement of the last two installments of the salary agreement reached last March. The state unions agreed to a salary increase of 46 percent, divided into 22 percent in March and eight percent each in May, August and September, with a revision clause in the last month.

A UPCN statement denounced the provincial government for refusing to open joint discussions and advance the pay. A statement by the national State Workers Association asserted that "the measure is taken due to the lack of responses from the Executive Power, to the demand of the state unions that the sections of the salary increase scheduled for August and

September be brought forward."

Teachers in the Santa Fe sectional Argentine Teachers Union joined in the strike as well, to demand the reopening of parity talks. Meanwhile, the Union of Doctors of the Argentine Republic carried out their own 48-hour strike in all medical facilities belonging to the province.

#### Chilean taxi drivers protest law for app-based transportation

Hundreds of taxi drivers protested in downtown Santiago, Chile August 17 against a law being debated in the legislature that is aimed at regularizing app-based transportation companies like Uber, Cabify and others. The cabbies assembled at the Parque O'Higgins at the southern outskirts and formed a caravan to the city center, but were prevented by the Carabineros from reaching the presidential palace, La Moneda.

Claudio Morales, a spokesman for the taxi drivers union, said in a radio interview, "We are not against the applications but we want to work in equality." He decried the fact that taxi drivers "are regulated by a law that has been in parliament for eight years, where there is no fairness and equal working conditions." He added, "Basically they are opening the doors to the platforms that today operate in Chile on a piecework basis and without any supervision."

Other issues that the drivers want addressed are security, rising fuel prices and the cost of living in general. The cabbies hope to get a meeting with the Transportation Ministry to discuss the issues.

#### Rice field workers in Guyana protest paying dues for union that does not represent them

Workers at the Guyana Rice Development Board (GRDB) Research Station in the coastal village of Burma picketed August 17 to demand that their union dues not be deducted because their union does not represent them. Protesting workers chanted and carried signs saying, "Why you taking out our money? Stop it now!" and "We want nothing to do with UAAW," the latter referring to the Union of Allied and Agriculture Workers.

Workers had been disillusioned with the UAAW for years and had asked the General Agricultural Workers Union (GAWU) to represent them back in 2020. That December, the Trade Union Recognition and Certification Board (TURCB) organized a vote, which the GAWU won by

a margin of 60 to 16.

However, after a year, a High Court judge issued an injunction making the election null and void. The UAAW was reinstated, and management began deducting dues for it. Workers have complained of abysmal working conditions, no luncheon facilities, malfunctioning bathrooms, management insensitivity toward workers' health issues and UAAW inaction.

In June of this year, some 80 workers signed a petition asking that management stop deducting and paying the dues to the UAAW, to no avail.

## **The United States**

### **New talks in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Ingredion strike**

Food products company Ingredion and the union representing 120 striking workers at the Cedar Rapids, Iowa plant announced there would be a new round of contract talks in the three-week-old strike. Members of the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers (BCTGM) Local 100G voted by a 96 percent margin to strike starting August 1, after the union bargaining committee, anticipating widespread rank-and-file opposition, rejected the company's "last, best and final offer."

According to the BCTGM, Ingredion is seeking contract language that would allow it to unilaterally change the terms of the health care benefits midway through the contract. The company also wants to cut vacation and alter seniority rights, and has plans to outsource the company's laboratory department.

Another issue workers want addressed is the two-tier wage structure, which has been denounced both by workers on the lower tier as well as the upper tier. In addition, the union indicates that Ingredion's new wage structure will result in pay cuts for some workers.

Ingredion has brought in strikebreakers to continue production. The company is a leader in developing, producing and marketing specialty ingredients for industrial and food applications. It employs 12,000 workers at 44 facilities and has markets in 120 countries.

### **Union warns of strike by Connecticut nurses, hospital staff**

Health care workers and union officials at Windham Hospital in Windham, Connecticut, held a press conference August 16 to highlight deadlocked contract negotiations, ongoing poor working conditions and intimidation by management. The Windham Federation of Professional Nurses and WCMH United Employees have filed unfair labor practices and after nine months of fruitless bargaining have said they will be filing a strike notice "in the very near future."

Hospital workers held a picket last June to call attention to low wages, unsafe staffing levels and unaffordable health insurance. In particular, chronic lack of staffing has led to crushing mandatory overtime. Added to this, has been the use by hospital officials of one-on-one meetings with employees aimed at intimidating workers.

In July workers rejected a contract proposal from hospital management.

### **Teamsters ready-mix drivers strike Illinois company over pay cuts and benefit concessions**

Concrete ready-mix drivers with Teamsters Local 50 launched an unfair labor practice strike August 17 against SRM Construction Material & Supply in Centreville, Illinois. SRM is seeking to slash health care and retirement benefits, and unilaterally cut wages by \$6.00 an hour before bargaining even began.

SRM received \$456,000 under the Paycheck Protection Program during the pandemic. But workers were never provided personal protective equipment or given a hazard pay bonus.

### **Workers at Fresno, California, Corn Nuts plant strike over company-imposed health care plan**

Some 40 workers at the Corn Nuts production plant in Fresno, California, are entering their second week on strike over health care benefits that are taking a toll on workers. The Corn Nuts plant was purchased by Hormel Foods, along with the Planters brand, in the company's largest acquisition in 2021.

Hormel took advantage of the fact that the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers (BCTGM) union did not have contract language in place at the Corn Nuts plant to protect workers in the event of a transfer of ownership. Hormel imposed a new medical plan with higher deductibles, premiums, and increased employee contributions at a time when the pandemic was raging. According to the BCTGM, workers are accumulating additional out-of-pocket costs in the thousands of dollars.

## **Canada**

### **Ontario safety inspectors strike impacts Canadian National Exhibition**

One hundred and seventy provincial safety inspectors, members of the Ontario Public Services Employees Union (OPSEU), are entering their fifth week on strike against substandard pay, vacation time and other benefits, and for increased staffing levels and more rigorous safety standards. The inspectors are employed by the Technical Standards and Safety Authority (TSSA).

Fighting for their first-ever contract, the workers provide technical safety inspection across the province for many installations, including construction projects, boilers and elements in nuclear power plants, elevators and escalators, and amusement park rides and food trucks.

Of particular public note is the TSSA's responsibility for inspections at Canada's largest summer fair and carnival at Toronto's Canadian National Exhibition.

The strikers have mounted informational pickets outside the just-opened fair and have expressed worries that the TSSA's use of management personnel and third-party contractors to perform the work of the strikers can be dangerous. Said one striker, 'We used to have 10 to 12 inspectors coming in the first week before opening, and now we're down to a couple of supervisors, maybe three or four doing our work.'



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