

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Bridgestone workers in Argentina hold limited strike over pay, conditions

After the twentieth meeting between the Single Union of Tire Workers (Sutna) and Pirelli and Bridgestone factory management at Argentina's Labor Ministry failed, the union called a strike September 8. The walkout, however, was only for one eight-hour shift per day and only lasted until September 12.

Sutna and the three tire firms have been in talks for months, and workers have engaged in short duration strikes, the last being in June.

The main demands, according to Sutna general secretary Alejandro Crespo, are "a wage increase above inflation and an additional 15 percent for hours worked on the weekend." Improved working conditions are also included in the list of demands.

Brazil autoworkers strike against planned layoffs

Workers at the Brazilian Mercedes-Benz plant in São Paulo went on strike September 8 following the announcement that the German-based luxury car firm plans to lay off around 3,600 workers. The company said that it will lay off 2,200 employees and will not renew the contracts of 1,400 temporary workers.

Mercedes-Benz plans to outsource production of front axles and medium transmissions, as well as logistics and maintenance services and concentrate on bus chassis and trucks.

The Metallurgic Syndicate do Grande ABC scheduled the walkout to end September 12.

The fact that the strike call was only for a limited duration indicates it was largely aimed at dissipating worker anger, not actually stopping the layoffs.

Uruguayan bus drivers strike over wage demands

Drivers employed by the Uruguayan Copsa public transportation provider in Montevideo began an indefinite strike on September 6 over salary demands. The drivers are members of the Copsa Workers Association (ATC).

That evening, the Ministry of Labor and Social Security (MTSS) called for a meeting the next day. The ATC attended, but the stoppage remained in force. Workers gathered in front of the Executive Tower that day, while a delegation delivered a letter to be given to President Luis Lacalle Pou.

The issue precipitating the walkout is recurring delays in delivery of wages. ATC president Adolfo Silvera told reporters at the protest that the problem dates back as far as 2014, with Copsa "always negotiating, putting up a good [face] but the company continues with the same position that there's no money." If that position does not change, added Silvera, "the strike continues."

Colombian taxi drivers protest lack of controls on digital ride platforms

Hundreds of taxi drivers in their vehicles converged in Medellín, capital of the Colombian department of Antioquia, and paralyzed traffic on Route 65, a major thoroughfare, September 8. The taxis carried out "Plan Tortuga" (Tortoise), slowly driving to the Mobility Secretariat in the city's administrative center.

The mobilization was part of a global taxi drivers' protest against app-based ride services that the cabbies accuse of destroying their livelihoods.

The Association of United Taxi Drivers of Medellín claimed that app-based private vehicles and motorcycles are able to skirt regulations and expenses, such as registration fees and insurance, with which taxis must comply, while also presenting a risk to passengers. The unions demanded tightening of restrictions on digital companies, requiring insurance and a formal procedure and official pass to operate as a public service.

Other demands of the taxistas unions concerned security issues. They demanded more "photodetection" cameras at key spots around the city and, a greater police presence and investigations of crimes committed against cabbies, who are frequent victims of robbery, kidnapping and violence.

Mexican VW workers union delays walkout over pay increase

On September 8, negotiators for the 7,000-member Independent Union of Automotive Industry Workers-Volkswagen (SITIAVW) announced that they had extended the deadline for a strike originally set for September 9. VW workers already voted twice to reject the firm's raise proposal, which currently stands at 11 percent, 9 percent

in wages and 2 percent in benefits.

On both August 9 and September 2, the majority of VW workers rejected the company's offer of a two-year contract, since they recognized that record inflation, which shows no signs of slowing, would quickly eat up the increase. After the second vote, SITIAVW and VW were called to meet in the Federal Labor Court of Collective Affairs in Mexico City.

In a press statement, SITAVW said that it had agreed to an extension until September 14.

However, VW has not budged from its raise offer, which it has described since July as "sufficient," only adding the meager 2 percent benefits hike after the first rejection vote. The Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare ordered the parties to continue with the negotiations on September 9, which had been the strike deadline.

Florida hotel workers vote for strike authorization after two months of failed talks

Hotel workers at the giant Diplomat Beach Resort in Hollywood, Florida, voted overwhelmingly to grant strike authorization September 2 after a two-month extension of the old agreement expired August 31 with no new agreement to replace it. No strike date has been set by UNITE HERE Local 355, which bargains for 450 housekeepers, bellmen and restaurant staff.

Housekeepers are paid an abysmal \$13.95 starting wage. Workers are demanding a minimum wage of \$20, but union secretary-treasurer, Wendi Walsh told WLRN Radio, "We have told the company that they don't have to get there all at once, but that we have to get there by the end of the contract and that we do need significant increases for the current workers to give some relief."

Management has indicated that they have come to an agreement with the union on wage increases for the first year of the contract but would not reveal the percentage.

The Diplomat closed for 14 months during the pandemic. Ines Santisteban, a housekeeper at the hotel for 20 years, told WLRN hotel management had cut housekeeping staff from 100 to 60 and rooms would no longer be cleaned on a daily basis. Santisteban said it now takes "three times longer to clean because you have piles of garbage, dirty sheets, piles of dirty towels. One person is doing the job of three people."

Brookfield Asset Management, which owns Diplomat Beach Resort, brought in \$12.4 billion in net income last year. Negotiation between the union and the Diplomat will resume September.

Mediated talks fail to produce an agreement in Peoria, Illinois schools contract negotiations

The second round of federally mediated talks between the Peoria Federation of Teachers (PFT) and District 150 negotiators for Peoria, Illinois, schools broke off early September 8 without a resolution. The 850 teachers, whose wages are nearly \$7,000 below the national average, went through 19 bargaining sessions before the union agreed to a federal mediator.

District 150 President Martha Ross issued a statement claiming the two sides had arrived at an agreement on compensation. The PFT responded, calling it an "untruth." Meanwhile, Peoria teachers delivered a walloping 780 to 7 vote to authorize a strike back on September 1.

Under Illinois law, the union would have to call for a third-party fact-finding process and report followed by another 30 days to allow for all sides to review the report. However, the PFT has not asked for fact-finding. Another mediated session is scheduled for September 15.

1,800 shipyard workers in Vancouver and Victoria honour tugboat crew picket lines

One thousand welders, pipefitters, electricians and other trades at Seaspan's North Vancouver shipyard and at a nearby drydock are refusing to cross picket lines mounted by striking tugboat captains and engineers. In addition, another 800 tradesmen at Seaspan's Victoria shipyard also honoured picket lines. Work has remained at a standstill since last Thursday at both locations.

Tugboat captains and engineers in British Columbia, members of the Canadian Merchant Service Guild, went on strike August 25 against Seaspan, the largest ship-docking tug and barge company on Canada's west coast. Workers have been without a contract since September 2019 with management refusing to make a serious wage offer. Workers have told reporters that a derisory 2 percent per year wage offer from the company is entirely unacceptable.

In addition to ship-docking, the guild crews provide tanker escorts and emergency towing services, with a fleet of 30 tugs. Seaspan also operates a fleet of over 100 specialty and general-purpose barges that provide transportation for many of the province's largest industries and marine construction projects. The tugboat crew strike has added to traffic congestion and delays at Vancouver and Victoria ports that had already been heightened as a result of the COVID pandemic.

The dispute has impacted work on two support ships for the Canadian Navy and a Coast Guard vessel in North Vancouver and has delayed work on standing contracts for repair and maintenance of both navy vessels and other ships at the Victoria shipyard.



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