

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 government workers in 24-hour strike

Government public employees across Argentina went on a 24-hour strike on September 27. The main demand is wages, which have been badly eroded due to inflation. The strikers are demanding an emergency catch-up raise and wages set above the level of inflation.

A spokesperson for the strikers pointed out that in the cities and provinces, public employees are being paid wages below the poverty line. Another demand is that 30,000 contingent public workers be made full-time and permanent.

The current contract provides for a step-raises between June 2022 and June 2023 that would add up to a 60 percent raise. Given the accelerating inflation, that is no longer enough to keep up with price increases.

Strikers marched and rallied in downtown Buenos Aires.

Union ends tire workers strike after Argentina government intervention

Last week, SUTNA, the union that represents tire workers at three Argentine plants, Bridgestone, Pirelli and Fate, declared a partial victory after a long strike, following government intervention. On Tuesday the Fernandez administration called for calm and demanded that the workers settle with management, forcing through a settlement after 14 hours of negotiations.

The strike had forced the suspension of work at the Ford Assembly plant in General Patcheco, due to a shortage of tires.

Health workers strike 36 public hospitals in Brazil

Health workers at 36 public hospitals operated across Brazil by the Brazilian Company of Health Services (EBSERH) went on strike September 20. At issue are wage demands and the neo-capitalist free-market health policies of the administration of President Bolsonaro.

In addition to wage demands (a 22 percent raise, payment of owed back wages, and others), the strikers are demanding an end to government cuts in health care. EBSERH is refusing to negotiate with the strikers.

Transit strike in Port-au-Prince, Haiti

Port-au-Prince public transit workers carried out a three-day strike last week to protest against rising gasoline prices. So far this year the price of gasoline, diesel and kerosene has risen by 228 percent. At the same time, Haiti is in the midst of a food crisis. As of Wednesday, there was no public transit in the Haitian capital.

Reflecting the social crisis gripping Haiti, on the first day of the strike a worker was murdered by police and so-called gang members.

The strike took place in the midst of six weeks of protest marches, rallies and highway blockades across Haiti. More protests are planned to demand the resignation of Prime Minister Ariel Henry.

Mexico: Telmex workers reject contract proposal

On September 27, telecommunications workers employed by Telmex, a company controlled by the fabulously rich Carlos Slim family, voted to reject a contract proposal from the company. The workers are members of the Telephone Workers Union (STRM). In July, the workers went on strike against Telmex over outsourcing of jobs and oppressive working conditions and underfunded pension funds.

The STRM rejected the latest offer by the company, following an inadequate offer on pension plans for retirees, based on bonuses for retiring workers. The company claims that there is no money to satisfy workers' demands.

STRM leader Francisco Hernandez has declared that the STRM is undecided whether to reinstate the strike or to suspend negotiations until next April.

Santa Cruz, California, city service workers strike blocked

Some 600 city workers in Santa Cruz, California, who were slated to walk off the job October 3 on an unfair labor practices strike, will remain on the job after a last-minute deal, according to the Service Employees International Union Local 521. The union reportedly accepted a miserly 12 percent wage increase over the course of a three-year contract, a pay increase workers had earlier rejected.

The deal encompasses workers in maintenance, sanitation, public safety, library, parks, the water department and other sectors. Santa Cruz City Manager Matt Huffaker defended the wage increases, saying he was being "fiscally responsible."

Local 521 President Ken Bare responded, "The city just gave its executives year one raises averaging over \$4.30 per hour at the same time that they are trying to force over 100 of our front-line service workers to accept less than a dollar per hour." Workers had voted by a 95 percent margin back on September 13 to reject the city's offer.

The low pay for city services has created what the union calls a "revolving door" in hiring and has made it difficult to keep experienced

workers to maintain city services.

Ohio school bus drivers, staff vote to strike

Some 70 workers for the Princeton, Ohio city schools voted by an 88 percent margin September 27 to strike the transportation monopoly First Student unless negotiators come to an acceptable agreement. Local 184 of Ohio Association of Public School Employees, which represents drivers, bus monitors and mechanics, have been in negotiations since July 31 when the old agreement expired. The two sides twice extended the old contract for periods of 30 days.

A major issue for workers is First Student's refusal to grant sick days. Derryl Hall, speaking to WXIX on behalf of the union, said, "We are living in the age of COVID, when people have been sick and contagious and had to miss work through no fault of their own. And these drivers and monitors had no paid time off the job. Many of them had to come to work with COVID because they couldn't afford to take days off work and not be paid. It's just not right."

First Student and the union resumed negotiations September 29. A strike date has been set for October 3.

OSHA issues citations against Illinois company for violating safety procedures that could lead to amputations

The Federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration issued citations against Ferrara Candy Company in Bellwood, Illinois over unsafe working conditions that could lead to amputations. The company was charged with one repeat violation and four serious safety violations, carrying a possible penalty of \$201,379.

OSHA received a complaint on April 4. Inspectors found the company had failed to use prescribed lockout/tagout procedures on equipment before workers attempt to clear machines of jams or perform service maintenance. The company ignored the reports and continued the violations.

The company was also issued citations for not providing access to an eyewash station and for permitting workers to operate powered industrial vehicles that were in disrepair.

Picket protests attempt by Ford Louisville Assembly Plant to use nonunion car haulers

Teamsters car haulers put up a picket line at the Ford assembly plant in Louisville, Kentucky on September 30 to protest the company's hiring of two nonunion car hauler trucks that came into the facility. Teamsters Local 89 called the protest under a provision called the Area Standards Picket, which allows them to enforce the use of only union car haulers.

Within an hour, Ford management agreed to order the nonunion car haulers out of the assembly facility.

Illinois truck drivers strike Tri-State Asphalt

Workers for Tri-State Asphalt in Morris, Illinois walked out on an unfair labor practice strike September 26 over wages, health care and pension issues. The eight striking workers are members of Teamsters Local 179 and provide transportation for the company that operates throughout the upper Midwestern United States.

Tri-State originally offered workers a 1 percent raise. Days before the strike they raised their offer to 21 percent over the course of a four-year contract.

The company has also been increasing the number of hours required for maintenance of health insurance. In certain cases, a deductible can rise to \$8,000. Negotiations are scheduled to resume October 3.

Provincial court allows dockworker strikes in Vancouver, while 'national security risks' cited to shut down strike at Victoria naval yards

Sympathy strike activity in support of striking tugboat crews by about 1,000 workers at Vancouver Shipyards and Vancouver Drydock re-started last week after the British Columbia Supreme Court overturned a temporary injunction barring secondary strike action at the two facilities.

The same British Columbia Supreme Court ruled last month to outlaw a similar sympathy strike of 800 workers, who honoured tugboat crew pickets at the Victoria Shipyards' Esquimalt Graving Dock, citing "national security risks."

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.

The sympathizing dockworkers have their own separate contracts, but all are ultimately employed by the Seaspan parent company. The Supreme Court ruled that, due to this shared employer and the company's ability to influence labour relations throughout its extensive holdings, the support offered by the sympathizing workers was legal so long as there was no intimidation by the tug boat crew pickets at the dockyards.

The strike at the Esquimalt dock was delaying the servicing of a Royal Canadian Navy submarine, a navy frigate and a Coast Guard vessel. The court decision to ban picketing at Victoria Shipyards came as US saber-rattling (supported by the Canadian government) was heightening tensions with China in the Taiwan Strait.

The labour unrest on the west coast docks also involves a strike by about 200 members of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) at Westshore Terminals, one of the largest export portals for Canadian coal and potash. Meanwhile, the Port of Quebec in Eastern Canada has been closed for the past two weeks due to a lockout of dockworkers in a bitter dispute over wages and working conditions.



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