

Peruvian doctors conduct 48-hour strike, University of Minnesota service workers authorize strike

Workers Struggles: The Americas

17 October 2022

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

Latin America

The Medical Federation of Peru (FMP) staged a 48-hour nationwide doctors' walkout beginning on October 12 to press their demands. The FMP had held a national assembly three weeks prior with other health sector unions and had resolved to take the action.

The FMP was joined in the mobilization by the Federation of Nurses of the Ministry of Health, the National Federation of Obstetricians, the National Federation of Health Sector Workers and the Association of Contracted Physicians.

The demands include an increase in the national health budget to 6 percent of GDP, compliance with the scheduled salary scale adjustment promised by the government but not delivered, and automatic promotions every five years.

The FMP stated that failure of the Ministries of Health and Economy to address their demands satisfactorily will result in an indefinite strike.

The Automotive Tramway Union (UTA) of Argentina called for a two-day work stoppage by public transit bus drivers on October 12 and 13 in the nation's interior provinces. The reason for the strike call was the lack of parity between the recently agreed basic monthly salary of drivers in the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires (AMBA) of 200,000 pesos (US\$1,318) and salaries for those drivers in the interior.

UTA and passenger transport business representatives had met at the Ministry of Labor on October 11 but did not reach an agreement, prompting the strike call.

There was high compliance with the strike in most of the provinces, although in some cities, such as Santa Fe and Neuquén, only city service was interrupted while interurban and long-distance drivers continued working. In Mendoza, Chaco, Río Negro and La Rioja provinces, union locals and businesses had reached agreements and continued services.

On Friday, October 14, after the drivers had returned to work, the Ministry of Labor convened a tripartite meeting to resume negotiations.

Workers in the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (ICBF) held a strike and protest in front of the agency's Antioquia headquarters on the morning of October 11. The Union of Family Defenders of the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (Sidefam) issued a statement denouncing the ICBF for not carrying out provisions of an agreement reached with Sidefam last year.

The unfulfilled commitments are an increase in personnel, an easing of the work overload and nondelivery of salary raises. The workers had held a strike and protest over the same issues in late April, but none of them

have been resolved.

Former employees of Trinidad and Tobago's Point-a-Pierre refinery protested October 9 and 10 in front of its main gate. The protest was called by the Oil Workers Trade Union (OWTU).

The refinery was shut down in November 2018, with the government claiming that it was no longer profitable. A "preservation and maintenance team" has kept some minimal operations going. The OWTU and the workers are demanding its reopening, saying that it would alleviate the surge in fuel prices, earn foreign exchange and provide employment.

The protest was sparked by recent comments from the prime minister that there was no interest in buying the refinery, and that it was not a budget item for the coming fiscal year. The protesters noted that a firm called Patriotic Energy and Technologies Co Ltd had bid on it, but the government had not issued any updates on the process since March 2022.

The OWTU is calling on the prime minister to meet with the union and has threatened to expand the protests to include workers from other affected sectors such as fishing, taxis and asphalt production.

Puerto Ricans have continued to press demands that the island's contract with private energy firm LUMA Energy be canceled. On October 14, some 200 people gathered in front of La Fortaleza, Governor Pedro Pierluisi's official residence, to protest LUMA's record of unreliable and costly electrical service.

The situation has been exacerbated by the devastation caused by Hurricane Fiona. Though service to wealthy Puerto Ricans was quickly restored, to date, there are still over 8,000 residents in poor and working class neighborhoods without electricity since the storm hit Puerto Rico.

Another target of the protest was a proposal by the unelected—and hated—Fiscal Supervision Board that a charge of \$23 be added to monthly electrical bills for the next 50 years to pay off the debt of the Electric Power Authority.

But the ire of the protesters was not confined to LUMA Energy. Demonstrators also denounced the lack of essential services, environmental degradation, privatizations, neglect of the elderly, underfunding of education and other issues.

United States

The Teamsters union announced October 10 that 93 percent of its service worker members across the University of Minnesota system have authorized strike action and a strike could begin by October 22 following a 10-day mediation period. Some 1,500 workers in cleaning, maintenance and food service are demanding a minimum starting wage of \$20 an hour, up from the current wage of \$15 which has persisted since 2017.

The University is offering a mere 3.85 percent wage increase over two years. While it touts an average \$21.67 an hour starting wage, that average still leaves a significant section of workers below \$20 an hour and would be buried by raging inflation.

The Teamsters, having conducted a survey, admit 62 percent of its workers cannot afford “basic expenses every month,” while 12 percent report having suffered homelessness. The *Star Tribune* quoted cook Mick Kelly, “When we talk about poverty wages it’s not a rhetorical device, it’s a fact we are living. We have members who are homeless, we have members who are my age living in people’s basements. That’s the reality of work at the university right now.”

The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and the vendor that employs janitors at Facebook’s offices in the San Francisco Bay Area settled a week-long strike October 10 that erupted after some 120 janitors were laid off. Facebook’s parent, Meta, which suffered a recent decline in revenues, hired SBM Management to administer its janitorial services this past summer.

The previous vendor employed 368 janitors. The recent strike is estimated to have encompassed about 260 workers. After the layoffs, some janitors reported their workloads doubled.

The SEIU, while not disclosing numbers, says some janitors have been rehired and those still laid off received severance pay. Despite the layoffs, SEIU president David Huerta declared, “We thank Meta for listening to workers’ demands...”

According to MarketWatch, several janitors disclosed that SBM maintains lower-paid non-union janitors where the company previously laid off union janitors. During the strike, the SEIU reported that its Facebook page disappeared for 36 hours. A Meta spokesman called the “blackout” a “mistake.”

Members of Teamsters Local 760 walked out on strike October 12 against the beverage distributor Swire Coca-Cola in East Wenatchee, Moses Lake and Omak in Washington state. Contract details are not known, but drivers, loaders and merchandisers twice voted down contract offers by the company.

Workers voted down the first offer before the old agreement expired on April 1. Then on October 11, one day before striking, workers again defeated a tentative agreement. Swire has hired replacement workers in an effort to continue deliveries.

Swire, based in London, is the fifth largest bottling partner of Coca-Cola and operates in 13 US states and the United Kingdom. In addition, it has an arm of the company based in Hong Kong and covers Taiwan, most of China, and recently announced it will acquire subsidiaries in Vietnam and Cambodia.

Workers at seven of the largest condominiums across the Minneapolis-St. Paul metro region conducted a two-day strike beginning October 14 to demand better wages and working conditions. The buildings are managed by FirstService Residential, North America’s largest property management company, with most workers making less than \$20 an hour.

The workers have been seeking union recognition under the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). At the end of September they voted to authorize a strike, but FirstService refused to meet with them, leading to the walkout.

The potential bargaining unit might represent some 300 caretakers and desk attendants, but the SEIU chose only a subset of these workers to strike and limited the walkout to two days.

Sales for FirstService, based in Toronto, Canada, total some \$3.6 billion annually and its FirstService Residential brand operates in 8,500 communities comprising 1.7 million residential units across the United States and Canada.

A strike by Orange County, California bus drivers, set for Monday, was averted after California Governor Gavin Newsom intervened to ask for more talks. No deal has yet been announced.

About 150 service workers, mechanics and machinists had been working without a contract since September 30 according to Teamsters Local 952. The walkout could have halted bus service in the heavily populated Southern California county. Negotiations started back in May. Despite over 20 bargaining sessions, no agreement has been reached.

The workers voted to strike last week after management reportedly submitted a “substandard” offer that did not address key “health and welfare issues,” according to the union. Some workers pay \$350 out of pocket for medical, and the company offer would have substantially increased that amount.

Canada

Workers at the now refurbishing Come-By-Chance bio-fuel refinery in Placentia Bay, Newfoundland are demanding that the company be made criminally responsible for an explosion and flash fire that seriously injured eight workers last September 2. One of the injured has now died as a result of the blast.

Shawn Peddle, a labourer at the refinery and a member of the United Steelworkers (USW) succumbed to his injuries this past weekend after a seven-week battle. Another worker remains hospitalized while six others were recently sent home to recover after long hospital stays.

Six hundred workers are employed at the plant, now owned by Braya Renewables. The refinery was long known as the province’s only oil-producing plant. It is now being converted to a renewable diesel and sustainable aviation fuel operation. Police and Occupational Health and Safety officials are still investigating the cause of the explosion.

Workers have demanded that the investigation proceed under the provisions of the federal Westray Bill, passed in 2004. The law is named after the infamous 1992 Westray mine disaster in Nova Scotia which claimed the lives of 26 miners. It makes it possible to hold corporations criminally responsible for workplace accidents that are the result of company negligence.

Since its passage, health and safety experts have stated that the law is virtually “useless.” No criminal convictions have ever resulted under it despite countless workplace deaths across the country that were clearly caused by managerial negligence, thus exposing the legislation as a veritable farce.



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