

Argentine tenant farmers stage mass protest; Akron, Ohio teachers set January 9 strike date

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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Latin America

Argentine tenant farmers stage mass protest in Buenos Aires

On December 30, tenant farmers distributed tens of thousands of kilos of free fruit and vegetables near the Plaza de Constitución square in central Buenos Aires, demanding legislation that protects their access to land from repeated land-grabs by the agriculture monopolies and a solution to the hyperinflation that is creating mass poverty among farmers and workers.

Nahuel Levaggi, national coordinator of the Agriculture Workers Union, (UTT) called for a society “of justice and solidarity.”

In anticipation of the farmers protest, thousands lined up in the summer sun from early morning. UTT members, aided by other workers from the city, distributed green salad vegetables, tomatoes, eggplants, pumpkins, oranges and other agricultural goods.

The UTT spokesperson denounced that in Argentina a handful of powerful absentee owners control vast acreage and water rights and benefit from government export policies that ensure their profits, while hundreds of thousands go hungry and are dependent on free food distribution and soup kitchens.

Currently, the City of Buenos Aires provides inadequate support to 330 volunteer-run soup kitchens. The Buenos Aires daily *Página 12* spoke to Jenny, who was collecting food items for the Semillitas soup kitchen. She denounced the rising price of food that has created a food emergency among the working poor across Argentina.

The typical UTT tenant farmer rents a parcel of land in a three-year lease. The rents go up every six months due to hyperinflation (100 percent this year, one of the highest in the world). The tenant families are forced to live in precarious shacks, which, under current drought and extreme heat conditions, often catch fire.

The food distribution took place following protest rallies on December 27 at Buenos Aires supermarkets that have profited from the increase in food prices at the expense of working class families.

Scores of workers rally in Montevideo against attacks on pensions

Workers rallied on Tuesday December 29 at the legislative palace in Montevideo to protest the social security “reforms” proposed by the Luis Lacalle Pou administration.

The protesters included members of the bank workers union (AEBU), as well as members of the PIT-CNT labor federation. The Lacalle Pou government proposal includes the extension of already privatized pensions, raising the retirement age to 65 and tying future retirement ages to average life expectancies (the current retirement is set at 65) and cutting retirement pensions by about 16 percent, including for incapacitated workers and widows.

A health worker described the logic of the social security proposal as “working more for less pay.” However, despite the mass opposition to the new law, the trade union bureaucracy is not proposing any fighting measures, outside of this relatively small Montevideo protest.

Strike at Buenos Aires food and cereal processing company

On December 29 workers at Chile’s Metropolitan University of Science and Education (maintenance staff, educators, technicians and lower ranks of administrators) marched and rallied in Santiago, demanding a 12 percent wage increase, plus a year-end bonus of one month’s pay.

The marchers began with a rally at Chile's Government House and continued on to three other locations in the capital city.

The demonstrators point out that while the higher administrators at the University earn salaries comparable to CEOs, the measly 6 percent pay increase offered to them, the first in two years, is not enough to keep up with the rising cost of living.

United States

Akron, Ohio, teachers' union gives 10-day strike notice

The union representing Akron, Ohio's teachers issued a 10-day strike notice December 29 as federally mediated talks have failed to resolve issues involving wages, health care benefits and personal time off, as well as safety. The move paves the way for a strike to begin on January 9, three days after classes for 20,000 resume following the holiday break.

A release by the Akron Public Schools phrased the contention over safety issues as "more specific provisions for the definition of student assault as outlined in the impartial fact finder's report." Akron, like many public school systems, faces underfunding, outdated infrastructure and the general plague of capitalist economic breakdown. All this has been intensified by the pandemic and the first half of the 2022-23 school year that saw an outbreak of violence in the school system, including assaults on teachers.

Teresa Ridgeway, a parent, lashed out at the school board, telling ABC's News 5, "They push school safety to the very back. ... They keep twisting this to make it like the teachers are, you know, looking for just wages or for insurance, so that it's selfish reasons, and it's not."

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Under Ohio law, students are required to work online during a strike. Another parent sounded off, "I will not send my child to school, nor will they do any sort of school-related activities or homework of any kind. I hope the teachers get everything on their wish list."

Ridgeway agreed. "They're trying to bully and scare parents into conforming to this online schooling ... but really what we parents should be doing is standing with these teachers and saying, no, we are not participating in

this."

Fort Worth newspaper strike ends with tentative agreement

The union representing workers at the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* called off their strike December 22 after 24 days on the picket line. The Newsguild said McClatchy, which owns the *Star-Telegram*, had come to a tentative agreement and the membership would now vote on the proposal.

One of the issues that separated the two sides were proposals for a minimum floor on wages. McClatchy had held firm to a \$45,000 minimum wage while the Newsguild had asked for \$57,000. According to the Newsguild, McClatchy had moved off their minimum.

McClatchy owns 30 newspapers across the United States. In 2020, it filed for bankruptcy and was purchased for \$312 million by Chatham Asset Management, a hedge fund and media conglomerate.

Canada

Union warns of short staffing at Quebec's emergency call centres

Emergency call centres in Quebec are so understaffed that it is endangering response time to 911 calls for emergencies according to the Fédération des employés du Préhospitalier du Québec (FPHQ). The call workers are currently without a contract amid what the union calls a "catastrophic" breakdown in services.

In an interview with the Canadian news media, the president of the brotherhood of emergency dispatchers for the Laurentides and Lanaudière regions said that his office should be staffed at seven people, but is regularly short by two. This can result in calls being placed on hold. "If we're already with a heart attack, we're forced to tell the person, 'lay them on the ground and start CPR, we'll call you back,' and take another call," he said.

Call centre workers get a starting wage of \$21.37 per hour, which the union says is not nearly enough for such a demanding and stressful job.



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