

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Venezuelan education and state workers protest wages and conditions

Protests demanding improvements in wages and working conditions, as well as pensions, took place in Venezuela last week.

On January 11, public workers and retirees marched through downtown Caracas to demand pay and pension parity with private industry workers. The next day, members of the Federation of University Centers, students and supporters from the Central University of Venezuela (UCV) marched through downtown Caracas chanting slogans demanding payment in dollars. In other cities, including Tinaquillo and Seboruco, unions representing education, health and public administration workers held demonstrations demanding improved salaries and conditions.

In the industrial complex in Ciudad Guayana, workers for the state-owned Sidor steel company held daily protests, blocking traffic and demanding that wages be raised to keep pace with inflation, which exceeded 300 percent in 2022. In addition to rampaging inflation and the devaluation of the bolívar, “Venezuela’s state-owned corporations were hard-hit by the economic crisis and US sanctions which led to a lack of spare parts, a diminished workforce due to migration and a reduced capacity to invest and perform maintenance,” according to a report by venezuelanalysis.com.

On January 13, a preliminary meeting between company and government officials and union representatives was held in which the union agreed to halt the street blockades in exchange for pledges of nonretaliation against protesting workers and to set up “dialogue mechanisms” to negotiate wages, bonuses and conditions.

Dominican Republic: Metro employees union cancels strike call, signs agreement

On January 14, the union representing train drivers, station operators and operating agents of the Santo Domingo Metro in the Dominican Republic called off a strike scheduled for January 17 after reaching an agreement with the Executive Directorate of the Office for the Reorganization of Transport (Opret).

The union had issued a statement on January 6 declaring that “we are obliged to exercise our constitutional right in its article 62 to carry out a partial stoppage of our functions as employees of Metro De Santo Domingo ... in a peaceful and organized manner, until our claim, which OPRET is aware of, is resolved by formal agreement.” In exchange for the lifting of the strike call, Opret made a series of promises regarding working conditions, wages, accreditation of drivers, retroactive payments, promotions, payments for night hours, and reprisals.

Opret agreed to raise monthly wages 20 percent, to RD\$37,800 (US\$670) for train conductors and station operators and RD\$43,800 (US\$776) for operation agents. The payments will be retroactive to January 1. The figures for inflation from November to December show a decrease in the overall inflation rate from 8.24 percent to 7.58 percent while the rate for food and nonalcoholic beverages rose from 9.80 to 11.19 percent. Interest rates since the beginning of 2022 nearly doubled by December, from 4.5 to 8.5 percent.

Adjunct faculty at New York City’s Fordham University authorize strike

Non-tenured and non-tenure track faculty members at Fordham University in New York City voted by a 90 percent margin to strike January 30 unless the

administration raises wages, increases health care benefits and establishes pay parity between all departments. The Fordham Faculty Union (FFU) issued a statement: “After months of negotiations, we have been shocked with Fordham administration’s indifference to the need for wage adjustments and health care benefits amid rapid inflation and the COVID-19 pandemic, which hit the faculty community in NYC particularly hard.”

Fordham faculty organized back in 2017. Back on October 14 of last year, the FFU held a rally and procession before the inauguration of the university’s new president, Tania Tetlow.

The adjunct faculty at Fordham teaches the majority of classes at the school and typically are required to meet the same educational requirements of tenured faculty. But like higher education institutions across the United States, they are exploited as a source of cheap labor.

Portland Oregon theater workers conduct sit-in, strike to protest firing of co-worker

Non-union workers at the Living Room Theaters in Portland, Oregon, launched a four-day unfair labor practices strike that ended January 10 after the owners fired a worker and workers conducted a sit-in at the corporate office. Management fired a worker back in December and management warned a worker not to discuss the issue.

“We showed unrest about a co-worker being fired, for reasons that we felt were illegal, unfair and unwarranted, and without warning,” striking worker Audra Sweetland told *The Oregonian*. “We were told to stop speaking about it at work and outside of work.”

Workers contacted management, told them their objections and set a meeting time. Management delayed and then informed them they did not recognize the group of strikers. There then followed an eight-hour sit-in.

Living Room Theaters closed their facility for two days and then reopened on January 13. The National Labor Relations Board opened a case on January 4 and documents were filed the following day.

Private sector ambulance drivers and paramedics launch work-to-rule in Newfoundland

About 120 private sector paramedics and ambulance drivers, members of the Teamsters union, began a work-to-rule last week involving crews in central and eastern Newfoundland that service Clarenville, Ferryland, Come-by-Chance and nearby rural areas. The workers are employed by private businessman Robert Fewer. They have been without a contract since March 2020.

For years, the drivers and paramedics have performed administrative and even managerial duties during any downtime between calls on a voluntary basis. The work-to-rule puts an end to those activities. Emergency ambulance service will not be impacted.

The workers had been moving toward a work stoppage last spring until the provincial government intervened to send the opposing parties through a conciliation process. Workers who were preparing a strike vote at that time were particularly angered by reports of the employer preparing a scab workforce should a work stoppage ensue.

The government-imposed conciliation process broke down in December after months of failed discussions. The workers had indicated last May that they would not withdraw emergency responses and instead restrict their job action to patient transfers and other secondary duties.

The paramedics and drivers receive pay, benefits and working conditions far inferior to those employed in the public sector. Workers get paid for less than 12 hours of their 24-hour shifts and are expected to work overtime without any extra pay should they be attending to a call as their shift is ending. The crews also do not receive any pension benefits.



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