

Los Angeles school employees vote strike authorization, walkout at Leamington, Ontario food processor

Workers Struggles: The Americas

13 February 2023

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

“indoctrination,” not teaching. Some even claimed that they were connected to the National Liberation Army guerrilla group.

Argentine bank workers set to strike over pay, outsourcing

A union representing Argentina’s bank personnel announced February 10 that it would strike before the end of the month if its demands were not addressed. In a press release, the Banking Association (BA) contended that the employers “continue without hearing the workers while time continues to pass and the purchasing power of our salary is impacted day by day.”

The bankers have stalled on enacting a December parity agreement increasing wages 94.1 percent as inflation continues to eat up purchasing power. The BA also wants the bankers to pay for part of their income tax. In addition, the union maintains that “the level of employment in banking is being reduced and they are advancing a fraudulent outsourcing scheme.”

The BA general secretariat scheduled a meeting for February 14 “for the purpose of defining the scope and setting the date of the force measures that will inexorably take place during February,” according to the statement.

Colombian teachers hold protest at national Congress over demands for dialogue, health services

A group of teachers and members of indigenous communities from Cauca, a department in southwest Colombia, attempted to enter the national Congress in Bogotá on February 7. The number of protesters reportedly ranged between 150 to 600, depending on the source. Both houses, which were in session at the time, adjourned as units of the police and the notorious Mobile Anti-Riot Squad were deployed to prevent the protesters’ entry.

The teachers are members of AsoInca, which broke away from Fecode, the nation’s largest teachers union. They contend that the latter does not represent their interests. Their main demands are dialogue with the Ministries of Health and Education, improved health care services and greater security.

The protesters set up encampments at the Plaza de Bolívar near the Capitol building and the Plaza Mosquera in front of the Congress.

Meanwhile, because some of the teachers wore t-shirts with images of Ché Guevara, far-right politicians alleged that they were involved in

Colombian home delivery workers block roads to protest pay, conditions

App-based home delivery motorcyclists, known as *domiciliarios*, in the Colombian city of Cali carried out intermittent blockages of traffic on February 11 to protest the pay and conditions imposed on them by their employer, Rappi.

According to Wikipedia, Rappi is a “multivertical company headquartered in Bogotá with main offices in São Paulo and Mexico City” with 200,000 “independent couriers.” Founded in 2015, it has diversified into prepaid cards, banking, transportation, live events, music and other services. In 2021 Rappi was valued at \$5.25 billion.

While Bloomberg gushed in 2019 that Rappi was “transforming Latin America,” critics slam it for capitalism’s “same ol’ same ol’”: dire working conditions, predatory employment practices—including plans to force employees to compete for access to COVID-19 vaccinations—its flouting of government regulations and lack of customer care. Wikipedia notes, “The company currently has 108 active lawsuits related to consumer protection lodged against it.”

In October 2018, the first of numerous protests and strikes by Rappi *domiciliarios* broke out. At the most recent action, the riders demanded a raise in their miserly “commission” on each delivery, which is currently 2,200 pesos (US\$0.45). A statement by the riders lambasted “the bad pay, the lousy support and the maltreatment of the *domiciliario*; we demand respect.”

The cyclists began their mobilization from a park in the south of the city and eventually made their way to another park via a main thoroughfare. On the way, they stopped at the Municipal Administrative Center, the downtown seat of city government, and held a brief demonstration.

Dominican Republic: Doctors suspend consultations for 48 hours to demand changes to social security system

The Dominican Medical Association (CMD) suspended consultations at hospitals and clinics that are part of the Health Risk Administration. The suspension, called for February 9 and 10, did not apply to emergency services and critical care patients. The CMD called for a march in the city of Barahona on the second day.

At a February 7 news conference over its demands for changes to the social security system, CMD president Senén Caba excoriated the National Social Security Council (CNSS) and its refusal to meet CMD's demands. He stated that the CNSS "irresponsibly preferred to throw overboard our willingness to seek, through consultation and dialogue, a social security which would provide the population with an adequate health plan and increase the quota allocated to the affiliated members to buy medicines."

Caba also averred that the CNSS did not care about those with mental disorders and the disabled, which the CMD wants included in coverage. He further demanded that the fee for consultations, the main source of income for doctors, be raised from the current 8,000 pesos (US\$142) and that the quota allocated to affiliated members for the purchase of medicines be increased.

Los Angeles schools nonteaching employees give overwhelming strike mandate

Members of Local 99 of the Service Employees International Union have given an overwhelming 99 percent mandate for strike action against Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) if a new contract isn't reached. Local 99 bargains for most nonteaching employees in the Los Angeles schools including cafeteria workers, custodians and teacher assistants, bus drivers, campus security aides and gardeners.

The union is asking for a 30 percent wage increase and a flat \$2 per hour "equity wage adjustment" for all workers going back to the 2020-2021 school year.

School workers have been without a contract since June 2020 and earn an average salary of \$25,000, only a little above the minimum wage. LAUSD teachers have been working without a contract for the past six months and sentiment is strong to support the school staff if they walk out.

Disney workers vote down management agreement but union continues talks

Workers at Disney World in Orlando, Florida are continuing on the job after voting by a 96 percent margin to reject a contract offer by management. The 45,000 Disney workers, members of a six-union coalition, are demanding an immediate \$3 per hour starting wage to meet the soaring cost of living in the area. Workers currently earn starting pay at the poverty wage of \$15 per hour.

Management has offered an immediate \$1 an hour wage increase covering only some of its employees in a proposed five-year agreement. Disney claims its proposal would bring most workers up to \$20 an hour by 2026. However, in a region that has some of the most unaffordable housing in the US, that is a pittance.

The union apparently agreed to an extension last October, which includes a no-strike clause, when the previous three-year agreement expired. The union has kept its own members in the dark about when the no-strike agreement expires. A separate strike vote would have to be taken before workers could walk out at the massive entertainment complex.

Workers were outraged to learn that former CEO Bob Chapek received a \$20 million severance package when he was fired last fall. Disney reported another fired executive received \$10 million for three months of work.

UPS lays off some weekend drivers

Package delivery service United Parcel Service has begun to lay off some weekend drivers according to two Teamsters locals. Teamsters Local 174 in Washington state said that management had raised the question of layoffs in contract talks.

The impacted workers would be the so-called 22.4 drivers, included in the last contract. The drivers work Tuesday through Saturday and top out at just \$30.64 an hour as compared to the standard wage of up to \$42 an hour. This provision was included as part of the sellout 2018 contract agreement.

Another Teamsters unit, Local 804, in New York state, reported additional layoffs in three locations: Suffolk, on Long Island; Foster, in the southern tier; and Laurelton, in Queens. Under terms of the current contract, 22.4 drivers must be laid off before regular package drivers.

Performers at Medieval Times in Buena Park, California walk out

Workers at Medieval Times in Buena Park, California walked out Saturday. About 25 of the 50 workers in the bargaining unit walked out according to a spokesman for the performers union, Medieval Times Performers United, which is seeking its first contract. The show's cast voted to unionize last November.

Workers complained of staff shortages that force them to work six days a week, and lack of progress in contract talks, which have been going on since December.

"They love to tell us that we're not Broadway and it's absolutely correct," union spokesman Erin Zapcic told KABC. "Broadway does eight shows a week. We do anywhere from 16 to 21."

Strike authorization to be held by New York Metro-North railway workers

Members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) will be holding a vote to grant strike authorization by 1,000 workers for the Metro-North rail system that provides commuter services between New York City and its northern suburbs. Arthur Davidson, general chairman of the IBEW, told THE CITY (thecity.nyc) that negotiations, begun in 2019, are "at a deadlock" with Metro-North.

Metro-North's unbending insistence on their wage proposal, with increases as low as 2 percent, has left IBEW members countering that they want pay comparable to the higher-paid Long Island Rail Road workers.

The Transport Workers Union (TWU), which represents mechanics and car inspectors is also in negotiations with Metro-North and has requested federal mediation. TWU president John Samuelsen told THE CITY, "If and when IBEW strikes, we will not cross the picket lines."

No doubt this indicates powerful sentiments of workers for a joint struggle against Metro-North. But union officials anticipate drawn-out negotiations lasting a year that will be used to grind down the militancy of workers.

Teamsters continue strike at Decatur, Illinois ADM plant

Members of Teamsters Local 916 at the Decatur, Illinois, Archer Daniels Midland (ADM) plant are continuing a walkout that began February 2 on an unfair labor practices strike. ADM has refused to meet workers' demand for a 12 percent wage increase over the course of a three-year contract, despite the fact the company brought in over \$1 billion in revenue last year.

The Teamsters represent fewer than 50 workers in the co-generation plant at ADM's giant corn and soybean processing complex that employs some 5,000 workers. The Teamsters claim ADM wages fall below industrial wages at other Decatur plants.

ADM spokesperson Jackie Anderson reacted to the strike, saying, "We have a robust plan in place to maintain production levels until we can reach a satisfactory resolution." ADM operates 270 plants and 420 crop procurement facilities worldwide.

Talks stalls as New Jersey rail workers demand parity with other regional rail transit workers

Three years of mediated contract talks between New Jersey Transit and the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLE&T) have stalled as workers are demanding parity with their counterparts at Amtrak, Metro-North, Long Island Rail Road and PATH. According to the BLE&T, NJ Transit workers are paid between 8 and 23 percent less than train operators at other regional rail companies. Workers are also required to be on call 24/7 and do not receive time off for medical care.

Jim Brown, general chairman of the BLE&T, told the *Inquirer*, "One of the reasons why it's coming to a real head is the gap keeps increasing. The guys are firm. ... They will not accept something subpar this time."

Rather than prosecute a real struggle, however, the *Inquirer* indicates that "union leaders say the dispute could require White House intervention," a ploy that was used by the rail unions to sell out 115,000 freight rail workers last fall.

Mediated talks to begin at Wausau, Wisconsin 3M plant as workers prepare to strike

Negotiators for 3M announced they are preparing for mediated talks with the United Steelworkers union in the wake of a vote back on January 28 by some 100 workers at the company's Wausau, Wisconsin plant to reject a company offer. Workers are demanding a hike in wages to keep pace with inflation, increased vacation and matching contributions by the company for the 401(k) retirement plan.

Workers, who have been working without a contract since last October, are impatient with the pace of talks and are inclined to strike. 3M raked in over \$35.4 billion in total sales in 2021. It has 95,000 employees with operations in over 70 countries.

Strike at Leamington, Ontario tomato processor

Workers have struck tomato processor Highbury Canco in Leamington, Ontario after rejecting management's final offer February 8. The 405 workers are members of United Food and Commercial Workers Local 175. The packing and food processing plant supplies grocery stores across

Canada.

The previous contract expired at the end of last year. The union said it was asking for "significant wage improvements." Workers granted strike authorization last November. In comments to CBC, chief union steward John Scott Jackson said, "Seventy percent of the workforce makes less than \$19 an hour here," far short of a living wage.

The area is Canada's premier tomato growing region. No negotiations are currently scheduled and a management spokesperson said he doesn't expect talks to resume soon.

The plant was formerly owned by Heinz, but the facility closed in 2013. In 2014 Highbury Canco, backed by a consortium of investors, reopened the facility with 250 workers. The workforce has since been expanded and the plant contracted to make many products, including those branded Kraft Heinz Canada.

Yellowknife municipal workers locked out hours before launching strike

Two hundred workers employed by the city of Yellowknife, the capital of the North-West Territories, were locked out last week in a dispute over the local government's refusal to address any of the workers' demands. The employees are members of the Union of Northern Workers, which is a sub-group under the umbrella of the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC). They have been without a contract for over a year. The lockout came last Wednesday, just three hours before a strike was set to begin.

The dispute involves most workers employed by the city. This includes workers at the public library, entertainment multiplex, athletic fieldhouse, pool, arena, visitor information centre and the solid waste facility. Snow clearing and garbage pickup will be reduced.

The union is seeking a 5 percent wage increase for the first year of a two-year contract and 3 percent in the second year. Because the employer has dragged their feet in negotiations, the first year would be backdated to 2022, with the second year encompassing the current period. Workers are also seeking several days of additional vacation and personal time off.

The wage demand by the union for 2022 falls far below the inflationary rate over the past year and sets workers even further behind in the coming year. Inflation, which was approaching double digits last summer, still remains at over 7 percent. Despite this, the municipality has offered only 2 percent for each of the two years under discussion. Talks began again Monday with a mediator.



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