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Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

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The Banking Association (AB) union of over 64,000 bank employees in Argentina called a national 24-hour strike for February 23. The walkout, to which the AB claimed high adherence, followed four failed meetings over two months at the Labor Ministry with representatives of four major banking business chambers. Soon after the strike began, the national director of Labor Relations and Regulations ordered the parties to “start a period of mandatory conciliation for a term of fifteen (15) days . . . and must retract the situation to that existing prior to the start of the conflict and for the duration of this conciliation procedure.”

The AB demands a salary raise that keeps pace with inflation, which officially reached nearly 95 percent in 2022. The chambers have agreed to the raise and for the first five months of 2023 offered 29.3 percent in three tranches—in January (retroactive), March and May, when the numbers would be reviewed. Starting base salaries from January would be 258,184 pesos (US\$1,320) according to the formula, which the AB considers insufficient.

Another unresolved issue is outsourcing. The AB is demanding that the Central Bank “regulate hiring outside the collective agreement since it also ends up having an impact on the level of salaries that are not included in the banking activity,” according to a *cronista.com* report. The union argues that “there are entire areas that are outsourced, even foreignized...”

However, a less publicized point of dispute, but one of greater impact on bank workers’ earnings, is the matter of profit sharing. Almost a third of profit-sharing payments are eaten up by taxes, and the union demands that the chambers take over a part of the income tax, a proposal that the latter have refused to consider.

Buenos Aires subcontracted security workers block traffic to demand reopening of parity talks, democratic union delegate elections

Some 150 workers employed by GPS, a security firm outsourced to Aerolíneas Argentinas, blocked traffic in the city of Buenos Aires the morning of February 23. According to a statement, the protesting workers took the action “against the attacks by the GPS company and the inaction of the union UPADEP [Private Aeronautics Entities Personnel Union].

The parity of GPS workers is among the lowest in the country with 75% and therefore the urgent demand for reopening so that wages do not continue to be destroyed by inflation.”

This is the second such protest against GPS, the first being in January for the company’s nonpayment of the government-decreed end-of-year bonus and for attacks on their working conditions.

The workers’ statement also denounced “the attempt by the leadership of the UPADEP union to impose an undemocratic method of voting in the elections for delegates. In December the Ministry of Labor has already ordered the union to call ‘democratic and participatory elections’, and it is the workers themselves who demand to be able to elect all the delegates in turn democratically.”

Colombian airline workers protest and block streets to demand job security

About 300 employees of Viva Aerobus, a Mexico-based low-fare airline with branches in Colombia, blocked traffic in the vicinity of the José María Córdova airport in Rionegro on February 24. It was the second protest at the airport, the previous one being a sit-in last November.

The José María Córdova airport is the second most important in the nation and serves the city of Medellín. With the company in financial and organizational trouble, workers have asked the national government to purchase it, but negotiations have dragged on for over seven months without any progress.

Students and employees of Colombia’s National Training Service protest for higher budget, increased workforce

Traffic in Bogotá was snarled the morning of February 24 when students and workers at the National Training Service (SENA) blocked major roads in the Colombian capital. The workers, members of the SENA Union of Public Employees, and students marched to the Ministry of Finance and Public Credit, where they held a sit-in.

The principal demand of the protesters is an increase in SENA’s budget. A related demand is formalization of the temporary workers and their promotion to full-time permanent staff. In a radio interview, the union’s national board treasurer said, “SENA’s academic calendar began on January 23. It is the date that there are still many instructors who have not been hired and that causes many inconveniences, we do not see the strategy to recover the classes with the apprentices, and what there is is a

delay in teaching.”

The mobilization followed a February 23 encounter between educators and the Minister of Labor in which they requested immediate action to address the crisis.

Resident physicians and fellows at New York City hospital unionize

Resident physicians and fellows at the Montefiore Medical Center in New York City voted by an 82 percent margin to unionize with the Committee of Interns and Residents (CIR). The CIR announced February 24 that some 63 percent of the 1,200 eligible health care staff took part in the vote.

The results of the election have been submitted to the National Labor Relations Board for certification, after which, the union and Montefiore will enter into negotiations. Resident physicians are not yet board certified and still in training, while fellows are licensed physicians but working on their sub-specialties.

The pandemic exacerbated the under-staffing of hospitals, forcing residents and fellows to clock longer hours and take over responsibilities of other health care workers who either fell ill or quit their jobs. “That means that we can’t be operating at our full capacity as doctors,” Dr. Rex Tai told the Gothamist.

Last November, physician assistants at Montefiore unionized and nurses went on strike for three days in January.

Adjunct faculty at University of Pittsburgh protest slow pace of contract talks

Some 100 adjunct faculty members at the University of Pittsburgh rallied outside a meeting of the school’s Board of Trustees February 24 to protest the slow pace of contract negotiations. Faculty members voted by a 1,511 to 612 margin back in 2021 to unionize under the United Steelworkers.

Workers are demanding equal pay for equal work and a cost-of-living escalator to keep pace with inflation. The union has proposed a \$60,000 minimum salary and yearly step increases of \$5,000 for full-time members of the union. Part time faculty would receive a proportional step increase based on their workload related to full-time faculty.

Sabrina Robinson, an adjunct professor who is also on the bargaining team, told Pittnews.com that she made only \$28,000 last year. “It’s not enough money for what I do. It’s not enough money considering that I’m required to have advanced degrees.”

Rutgers faculty begin strike authorization vote

Faculty members will begin voting on February 28 whether to authorize strike action after eight months of fruitless bargaining with Rutgers University in New Jersey. A strike would encompass both the Rutgers American Association of University Professors, an AFT affiliate, and the Rutgers Adjunct Faculty Union. Contracts for both unions, representing some 8,000 members, will expire in June.

The unions are pressing for wage hikes, increased job security, and are seeking health care benefits for part-time workers and graduate assistants.

The unions also want to freeze rents on housing for students and staff.

Rebecca Givan, an associate professor and president of the Rutgers AAUP-AFT, told the Gothamist, “Our members really want to support the most vulnerable among us and they understand that those of us with more advantages need to step up and fight for those who don’t have those resources.”

In response to the broader demands of faculty, Rutgers spokesperson Dory Devlin declared, “All mandatorily negotiable issues related to those employee contracts will be discussed at the negotiating table with the appropriate bargaining team representatives from the administration and the unions.”

Striking Windsor, Ontario salt miners block shipments

Some 250 workers at Windsor Salt’s Ojibway Mine, evaporation plant and back offices are in the second week of a strike against private holding company Stone Canyon Industries. The workers, members of Unifor, are demanding job protection provisions to defend themselves against the company’s drive to contract out jobs to lower wage third-party, non-unionized workers.

Last week, pickets blocked trucks and trains organized by the company to move product out of the strikebound facility. In the failed attempt to prepare and move inventory to market, the company had mobilized managers to perform duties of the striking workers.

Job action escalates amongst British Columbia bus drivers

Two hundred and thirteen bus drivers and support workers in the province’s Fraser Valley withdrew their labour Monday and Tuesday to protest the impasse in negotiations for a new contract.

The workers, members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) had been refusing to collect fares from passengers since February 2. They have been without a contract since March of 2020.

The drivers are employees of First Transit and service the cities of Chilliwack and Abbotsford and the surrounding region. Workers are prepared to escalate their job actions further, including an all-out strike, should the month of March begin without a new contract. They are demanding a significant wage increase and a pension plan. In addition, they are seeking to end company policies that place drivers on lengthy stand-by times in which they are paid only \$3 per hour.

The workers are fighting to bring their pay and conditions closer to the level of nearby Vancouver bus drivers who earn 32 percent more than the Fraser Valley workers and who also have a pension plan.



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