

Workers Struggles: The Americas

20 March 2023

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

Talks between Argentine bank workers union, business chambers yield no results

Weeks of government-mandated negotiations between representatives of four Argentine banking business chambers and the Banking Association (AB) union have failed to come to an agreement. Shortly after a national 24-hour strike on February 23 over wages, conditions, outsourcing, profit sharing and tax obligations, the Labor Ministry decreed “mandatory conciliation” talks, which have dragged on to no avail.

In fact, the limited one-day action was a response to two months of talks that had failed to reach an agreement. Meanwhile, an AB statement maintained that “they [the banks] do not care about the salary situation of the workers but only continue to generate more and more profits.”

Of particular concern is the likelihood that any raise or profit sharing will be eaten up by income taxes, and the AB is demanding that the chambers take over some of that expense. On March 17, one of the chambers, the Association of Public and Private Banks of the Argentine Republic (Abappra) proposed “granting an extraordinary sum for one time of a non-remunerative nature, in concept of salary compensation for Income Tax” half to be paid in May and half in September. The other three chambers have only said that they would “analyze” the Abappra offer.

Two-day strike by Mexican university workers presses demand for overdue pay

Teachers, workers and students at the National School of Anthropology and History (ENAH) in Mexico City voted March 13 in a general assembly to stop work for 48 hours over the nonpayment of wages for subject teachers.

A statement from the general assembly read: ‘After dialogue and analysis of the institutional precariousness that affects both teachers and workers and students, with unworthy working and study conditions, we decided, with a total of 219 votes from the different sectors that make up the school, to establish the seizure of the facilities and the stoppage of ENAH activities for a period of 48 hours.’

The statement also mentioned a document sent by Professor José Luis Castrejón Caballero, director of ENAH, in which he said that an extraordinary payroll would be issued March 15 to cover the salary payments. The assembly, however, decided to go ahead with the strike, since the payment did not fully address their concerns.

Dominican Republic: two-day municipal strike called to demand promised improvements

Residents of Navarrete, a municipality in the Dominican Republic’s northwestern Santiago province, struck March 14 and 15 to demand that the government deliver on promised improvements. These included the completion of sidewalks and curbs and the provision of drinking water. All commercial, labor, educational and transportation activities were paralyzed.

Residents assert that the government had promised the improvements two years ago, but have not complied. They also demanded the release of Armando García, a leader of the Revolutionary Party, who was arrested for allegedly injuring a member of the National Police. The Popular Front of Navarrete 24 of April describes García as a political prisoner.

Supposedly responding to looting and violence, authorities deployed special agents of the National Police as well as contingents of the Army to the town of 140,000 and in some instances, they entered the homes of Navarrete families. On the second day of the strike, a one-year-old girl was shot and taken to the hospital. Responsibility for the shooting has not been determined.

Jamaican immigration officers strike over pay review

Immigration officers in Jamaica’s Passport, Immigration and Citizenship Agency (PICA) walked off the job March 13 to demand changes to the compensation review process that determines pay rates and job classifications.

National Workers’ Union (NWU) General Secretary Granville Valentine told reporters that the officers would only return to their posts when longstanding issues, including reclassification and proper alignment regarding the compensation review, were addressed. He also mentioned wage gains made recently by other public sector employees.

In a press statement, PICA claimed that the NWU negotiated the current wage agreement in meetings, in which Granville took part, with the Ministry of Finance and Public Service.

Bolivian community protests to demand equitable distribution of benefits from lithium extraction

On March 15, an organization called the Civic Committee of Potosí (Comcipo) led a protest and blockade of the entrance to a lithium processing plant. The protesters demanded the passage of legislation to guarantee improved pay and benefits for the workers and communities in the lithium-rich region, as well as an increase in royalties for communities where the metal, an essential component of batteries, is extracted and

processed.

The specific target of the protest was a plant in Llipi, which processes lithium from the nearby Uyuni salt flats, one of the world's largest sources of the metal. With the growth of electric vehicle production, the price of lithium has surged, earning it the nickname of "white gold." Comecipo claims that the lion's share of the wealth has not gone into improving the lives of the workers and residents in the region.

Tentative agreement in three-week Maui, Hawaii, hospital strike

The union representing 500 workers at Maui Memorial Medical Center, Kula Hospital, and Lanai Community hospital in Maui, Hawaii, reached a tentative agreement March 14 with voting scheduled into the weekend and a final tally to be announced March 20. The current "last, best, and final offer" was preceded by three previous offers that were rejected by members of the United Public Workers (UPW) union which represents nurses' aides, respiratory therapists, housekeepers, cooks and other staff.

According to Maui Health management, the new agreement offers an 8.9 percent wage increase in the first year of a three-year contract along with a one-time cash bonus of \$1,500. There is an additional one-time longevity payment of \$1,000 for workers with 15 or more years of service and \$500 for those with seven to 14 years of service. Management also announced the establishment of a labor-management committee but did not provide details.

Workers first walked off the job on February 22.

Maine paper mill workers protest forced overtime

Paper mill workers at the Twin Rivers Paper Company plant in Madawaska, Maine, rallied downtown to protest forced overtime that has taken a toll on members of United Steelworkers Local 1247. The contract covering the 140 production workers expires April 30 and talks have stalled over staffing issues. Additionally, anger has been fanned by the recent 20 percent hike in health insurance that has cost workers an additional \$80 a month.

Back in 2009 the former mill owner cut 100 jobs. Today, it is not unusual for a worker to put in 18 hours, have six hours off, and then be required to return to the plant for another 12 hour shift. Besides layoffs, workers also endured pay cuts and during the pandemic they never received hazard pay despite being declared essential workers.

Local 1247 President Josh Bernier told the *Bangor Daily News*, "The fact that nobody has been killed yet is a miracle. We're literally talking about life or death. Maybe not right now this minute, but at some point that's what we're going to be talking about."

Two other unions represent the balance of the 660 workers at the Madawaska plant. Twin Rivers Paper Company also operates two other plants in Canada. The company is controlled by Atlas Holdings which holds stock in some 26 manufacturing and distribution companies.

Ohio workers continue strike at INEOS Pigments plant over stalled negotiations

Workers at the INEOS Pigments Plant 2 in Ashtabula, Ohio, are into

their second week of an unfair labor practices strike. The 400 members of Teamsters Local 377 and Local 1033C of the International Chemical Workers voted to unionize back in 2021, but more than a year-and-a-half later they are still without a contract.

The unionization drive was sparked by INEOS' elimination of pensions and a hike by more than \$100 in the weekly cost of health care benefits, with some workers paying as much as \$600 a month.

INEOS is a global company owned by British billionaire Sir Jim Ratcliffe and operates a network of facilities involved with chemicals, oil and gas. Currently, Ratcliffe is prosecuting a lockout against 1,350 workers at its Grangemouth plant in Scotland. INEOS wants to eliminate pensions, institute a pay freeze along with other concessions.

Strike by 1,300 Laval University professors in second week

A strike at Laval University in Quebec City has entered its second week in a dispute over wages and working conditions. The job action has affected at least 40 percent of classes. Earlier this month the professors, members of the Syndicat des professeurs et professeures de l'Université Laval, voted by 95 percent to strike after the university refused to acknowledge their demands for a significant pay increase.

Even leaving aside the continued erosion of buying power due to high inflation rates, the professors point out that they are by far the most underpaid of all faculties teaching in the top 15 Canadian research universities, despite being rated as the sixth best in that category. University management has argued that the workers' pay demand would cost about \$70 million next year. However, professors have pointed out that the university recorded \$257 million in surpluses over the course of their last four-year agreement.

In addition, the professors have made several other demands that seek to address a steadily increasing workload and job security protections for untenured staff. Over the last 20 years, the number of full-time faculty has been slashed by 11 percent even as student enrollment has spiked by 26 percent.



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