

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Protest in Argentina demands policies to “end hunger and poverty”

Members of Argentine unions and social organizations mobilized April 12 in Buenos Aires to protest the government’s economic policies, which have increased suffering for the nation’s working class. The action was called by the Argentine Autonomous Workers Central (CTAA).

Participating organizations included the Classist and Combative Current, the Movement of Excluded Workers, the Darío Santillán Popular Front, the Evita Movement, Barrios de Pie and the Union of Workers of the Popular Economy.

The demonstrators marched to the National Economy Ministry, where speakers excoriated the deal—which CTAA head Hugo “Cachorro” Godoy called a “scam”—made between the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the previous government of Mauricio Macri. The austerity measures demanded by the IMF have continued under the presidency of Kirchnerist Alberto Fernández, who assumed office in 2019, and whose disapproval ratings have swung between 60 and 80 percent.

The demands of the protest, which was replicated in various cities in Buenos Aires province, included rejection of IMF conditions, an “emergency wage increase” in both the formal and informal sectors, adjustment of pensions, and more spending on health and education.

Snack food company workers block Pan-American Highway to protest layoffs

At 6:00 a.m. on April 14, a group of workers for snack food company Mondelez in General Pacheco, a city northwest of Buenos Aires, blocked a section of the Pan-American Highway. The protesting workers called for an end to Mondelez’s system of “labor flexibility,” a euphemism for the use of temporary contracts to undercut workers’ wages, conditions and rights and facilitate firings and layoffs.

A statement by the workers pointed out that over 1,800 workers have been laid off since the adoption of the “flexibility” policy. The protesting workers called for the Labor Ministry to intervene, a request that they have repeatedly made without a response.

They also lambasted their union for betraying them. One of the protesters told news channel C5N, “We are part of the commission that had to be formed because the union does not listen, they signed an act against us. Today we are suffering from increased production rates. We can’t take it anymore. This situation comes from the pandemic.”

Traffic to and from the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area was delayed and drivers sought alternative routes to get to their destinations. Members of the National Gendarmerie were deployed to the protest, though no

instances of violent confrontation were reported. After about two hours, the workers decided to end the protest, but said that they could hold another one this week.

Bolivian teachers striking and protesting against education cuts and curriculum changes clash with police

After breaking off talks with the government April 12, the Bolivian Confederation of Urban Education Workers (CTEUB) issued a call for a strike and protest in La Paz for the next day. When the protesters arrived at Plaza Murillo Square, the location of central government buildings, police used tear gas to remove the protesters. Teachers reported at least 100 injuries by tear gas, beatings and rubber bullets.

The CTEUB has called for mobilizations in the last six weeks, but they have not achieved their main demands: a 30 percent increase in the education budget, including a salary rise, a reduction of working hours and the rescission of the new curriculum promoted by the government. CTEUB alleges that the curriculum is “indoctrinating,” especially in the area of gender issues and sexual education.

Antigua & Barbuda: Teachers strike over security, pay, conditions

Teachers in the Antigua and Barbuda Union of Teachers (A&BUT) began a strike April 11 over issues of security, working conditions and teacher pay and upgrades, which the government has failed to rectify. The A&BUT had informed the government of its plan to strike the day before.

Director of Education Claire Browne responded by extending the Easter vacation for another week, until Monday, April 17. She said that “in light of this and because children cannot be left unsupervised or under-supervised, particularly at this time of immense challenge with antisocial behavior among young people, the Ministry of Education has decided to extend the Easter Vacation by four days, resorting to the traditional two weeks.”

During the week, the A&BUT and government reps held meetings, from which the Ministry of Education claimed that it had resolved some issues like pay, upgrades and improved lighting. An A&BUT statement said that the teachers would return to their classrooms on the 17th, but if all their demands were not met, they would engage in a sit-in.

Los Angeles catering workers strike airline food service provider

Airline catering workers at Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) launched an unfair labor practices strike April 10 over lagging wages and

the fear that they are losing health care benefits. In a statement released by Local 11, Norma Reyes, who sets up equipment for Flying Food Group (FFG), declared, “I cannot live on these poverty wages and feed my family. We have filed complaints alleging FFG’s treatment of us violates the law. This company must change how they treat us.”

The 350 members of UNITE HERE Local 11 have been without a contract since June of 2022. During a six-month contract extension FFG showed no inclination to make concessions. Then on March 15, workers voted by a 99 percent margin to grant strike authorization.

FFG provides catering to over 70 customers in the airline industry, including in-flight meals to airlines such as Singapore Airlines, Air France and Lufthansa. The company earned revenues of \$46 million in 2022.

Los Angeles has a Living Wage Ordinance that requires employers to pay a minimum of \$18.04 to workers. Currently, the city’s Bureau of Contract Administration is investigating FFG for failing to pay a total economic package of \$23.81 to hundreds of its workers. Estimates of the wage shortfall is in the tens of thousands of dollars.

Oakland, California hospital workers to strike April 19

Some 1,200 members of the National Union of Healthcare Workers (NUHW) at Benioff Children’s Hospital in Oakland, California, are slated to hit the picket lines April 19. Workers are concerned about staffing levels and have demanded a nine-month advanced notice of any staff or service cuts in the East Bay area.

The NUHW bargaining unit is comprised of technical, clerical, professional and other service workers who had been without a contract since July of 2022. Nurses at the hospital represented by the California Nurses Association have declared they will hold a one-day sympathy strike on behalf of their co-workers.

While hospital management responded with the usual statement pronouncing disappointment about the strike, they added, “We’re heartened that the union agreed to participate in the federal mediation process and remain hopeful that they will prioritize their patients by calling off the strike.”

Morristown, New Jersey parking workers protest automation plans

Workers for the Morristown Parking Authority (MPA) in Morristown, New Jersey picketed April 11, charging the Authority’s director of bad-faith bargaining in the wake of an announcement to introduce automation at three public garages. The MPA was silent about the plans for automation during weeks of bargaining with Local 108 of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union before announcing the initiative.

Local 108 comprises some 30 workers who tend the city’s garages, parking lots, metered spaces and neighborhood permit parking operations. Since MPA executive director Nicole Fox assumed office in 2021 there have been a number of vacancies in the system.

Workers complain about their own salaries that hover slightly above the minimum wage while the MPA purchased a Ford Expedition SUV for Fox and raised her salary by \$23,000 to an annual total of \$150,000, augmented by a \$10,000 bonus.

Workers also bridle about harassment. The MPA pressured one worker’s doctor for additional details about his health while another employee who took a sick day had MPA managers knocking on his door at 2:56 a.m. to confirm his illness.

Quebec City dockworkers locked out for 7 months

Longshore workers at the Port of Quebec, one of Canada’s five largest ports in terms of cargo tonnage, have been locked out for more than seven months.

The Société des arrimeurs de Québec (SAQ)—an employer association representing the port’s three employers, G3 Canada Limited, QSL and Logistec—locked out the 81 longshore workers last September 15. Since then, the port has continued to operate with the help of scabs, mainly drawn from the three companies’ management personnel.

The main issues in dispute are work schedules and family-work balance.

Under the pretext of a difficult economic context and a shortage of labour, the SAQ wants to impose 12-hour shifts. Longshore work is already notoriously dangerous and difficult. At the Port of Quebec, workers are only assigned their next shift on the previous day. They can also go several weeks in a row with no weekend off. These conditions make planning family life virtually impossible, a situation that would be made much worse by longer shifts.

The most recent financial results of Logistec, the only one of the three SAQ members listed on the stock exchange and therefore required to make its results public, show that the “difficult context” and the labour shortage are only pretexts to intensify the exploitation of the longshore workers so as to increase profits.

In 2021, Logistec had the best financial results in its 70-year history, with revenues up 23 percent to C\$743.7 million, and pre-tax profits of \$120.8 million. On its website, Logistec boasts that its “marine services sector posted unprecedented results” despite “congestion and labor shortages at many of our ports.”

The Quebec City longshore workers’ bargaining representative is the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE). With more than 700,000 members, CUPE is the country’s largest union. Yet it has done nothing to mobilize that social power, beginning with dockworkers at the Port of Montreal. Instead, it has encouraged workers to focus their energies on appealing to the federal Liberal government to adopt an anti-scab law.



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