

Uruguayan bank and transport unions hold 24-hour strike over pension cuts; Defense workers at Rock Island Arsenal hold protest over contract changes

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Latin America

Uruguayan bank and transport unions call strike against pension reform

Unions representing bank employees and transport workers in Uruguay announced a 24-hour general strike for April 25. The Uruguayan Bank Employees Association (AEBU) and the National Union of Workers and Transport Workers (Unott) called for their members to hold a protest outside the Legislative Palace, where a bill to increase the retirement age will be debated.

The raising of the retirement age is being promoted by President Luis Lacalle Pou, who had vowed during his electoral campaign that he would not push such a measure.

The strike call was issued by the PIT-CNT union federation. The Unott transport strike will include urban, suburban and departmental transport, and will begin on the night shift on April 24 and end at midnight April 25.

The AEBU announcement claimed that the reform “implies that two out of three workers will have losses in their retirement or pensions” and that “the increase in the retirement age will have an impact on employment, both among young people and among older people.” It further criticized the plan to incorporate the Caja Bancaria (Retirement and Pension Bank) “into the AFAP [Pension Fund Management Companies] regime, which would cause “a cost of more than US \$2,000 million that all Uruguayans will pay.”

Protests and strike call in the Dominican Republic demand solutions to surging cost of living

A number of unions and social organizations in the northern Honduran region of Cibao held demonstrations last week to protest the rising cost of living. On April 21, the Revolutionary Student Force (FER), an organization of students and athletes, held a demonstration in the municipality of San Francisco de Macorís in support of a strike called for April 24.

The demonstrators marched down a major thoroughfare, in some cases blocking traffic and burning tires. The FER exhorted all sectors of civil

society, including workers, peasants, opposition parties, business and churches, to join the strike.

Demands of the protest included reduction of the costs of food, medicine, gasoline, gas and electricity, an increase in wages and policies to generate jobs. They also demanded the end of plans to privatize water.

A press release by the coalition of organizations condemned the “continuation of the lack of response to the last regional strike, carried out in April of last year, where this list of demands has not had a response from the government” of President Luis Abinader.

Antigua and Barbuda teachers union suspends strike over salaries, security, conditions

After two weeks outside the classroom, the Antigua and Barbuda Union of Teachers (A&BUT) announced that it had suspended the strike it had called to begin April 11 following the Easter break. The government’s director of education responded by extending the break for another week.

A&BUT President Casroy Charles referred to the return to work as a gesture of good faith and claimed that members “could have a difference of opinion, and each day as the action unfolds something will pop up where persons become fearful, or they may become more comfortable with the action.”

Whereas the week before, 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, General Secretary Sharon Kelsick told the Antigua Observer that some of their demands “weren’t met 100 percent; we would have extended some grace as we know many of these issues take time, but we saw that the ministry did make an effort to meet us halfway.”

Issues that have not been resolved include school security, teacher upgrade payments and a new collective bargaining agreement.

Trinidad and Tobago university lecturers refuse to grade exams because of slow pace of talks

Lecturers at the University of the West Indies (UWI) represented by the West Indies Group of University Teachers (WIGUT) have refused to grade exams scheduled for April 24 through May 5. The boycott was undertaken to protest delays in payment of salaries and the lack of raises since 2014.

UWI lecturers and staff have held a number of protests, the latest being held outside the office of UWI principal Rose-Marie Belle Antoine on April 20. At that action, WIGUT members beat drums, carried picket signs, chanted “No pay!” and demanded to meet with Antoine.

Six weeks before, following a similar protest, the Chief Personnel Officer (CPO) had promised to respond to their demands. The deadline for the response was April 23. Staff members, meanwhile, resolved to work to rule until they get a response from the CPO.

United States

Illinois defense workers protest unilateral contract changes by US Army

Some 400 workers at the Rock Island Arsenal near Moline, Illinois, protested April 17 against the unilateral implementation of contract changes. The demonstration comes after more than a year of negotiations.

Tim Russell, a chief steward at the plant for the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) Local 2119 issued a statement, saying, "We've gone to the table with management multiple times and left thinking that a fair agreement has been reached, only to be met with specific aspects of the contract changed without our input. They've actually tried to slip in changes that weren't even discussed. This has happened five times, and we have not agreed to any versions of the contract."

The workers manufacture howitzer cannons, mobile repair modules and portable kitchens for the US military. AFGE has filed a protest with the Federal Relations Labor Authority over the issue.

Burbank, California, teachers rally for wage hikes

Teachers in Burbank, California, rallied April 21 as the Burbank Unified School District's offer has failed to mollify teachers and contract negotiations are stalled after eight months of bargaining. Members of the Teachers Association are demanding a 9 percent raise while the district is only offering a mere 5 percent.

According to the union, the district has not made a final offer and once that happens and should it be rejected, mediation will follow.

Union president Diana Abasta described the long drought in terms of wages: "In 10 years, we have received the equivalent of 1.9 % a year. We got no raise in 2016, 2019, 2020. We had to take furloughs in 2010-2012."

The calling off of the Los Angeles teachers' strike has left the Burbank teachers isolated. Burbank district officials have declared that 5 percent is the maximum their budget can support and has called on the union to collaborate with them in finding ways to slash other parts of the education budget should teachers desire a further increase in wages.

Columbia, Missouri construction supply workers rally at end of first week on strike

About 50 workers gathered April 21 to support a strike by three workers at the construction supplier Wildcat Materials in Columbia, Missouri. The workers, represented by Laborers' International Union of North America (LiUNA) Local 955 are striking over substandard wages, the increased cost of life insurance and long hours.

"We're not trying to be millionaires, we're asking to be even with our competitors," striker Walter Langdon told the Missourian.

The workers complain that management pays them less than other area

companies. Healthcare insurance coverage used to be paid by the company. Now workers have to assume 50 percent of the costs with weekly deductions as high as \$200.

Wildcat Materials is also manipulating work schedules to force daily overtime up to as many as 14 hours a day, but paid at straight time rates. Then the following day, they are not called back to work. They are demanding time-and-a-half after eight hours.

Workers first walked off the job on April 17. They have been negotiating since December 2021. The company has advertised for permanent replacements.

Canada

UFCW members at Alberta work camp face termination after rejecting pay cut

Around 300 workers at the sprawling Wapasu Creek Lodge work camp near Fort McMurray, Alberta are facing termination after rejecting a massive pay cut demanded by their employer, Civeo, which owns and operates the lodging. Civeo demanded in November 2022 that workers take pay cuts ranging from \$3.75 to \$6.80 per hour. The workers, represented by the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW) Local 401, rejected this demand by 90 percent.

The workers' termination date has been set for June, with the company issuing a statement that terminated workers would have the chance to be rehired at a different work site "should we have work available for you."

The Wapasu Creek workers perform tasks associated with operating the camp, including housekeeping, cooking, and administration. Their pay ranges from \$20-\$30 per hour, making the company's proposed pay cut a substantial one. The camp accommodates thousands of seasonal oil workers employed by Imperial Oil. Civeo, a transnational corporation, reported annual revenues of \$697.1 million in 2022.

UFCW Local 401 responded to the company's attack by striking a militant pose and vowing to oppose the pay cut. Predictably, the union's local executives and the UFCW bureaucracy as a whole have limited their response to appeals to the Alberta Labour Relations Board (ALRB), which is historically proven to be on the side of the corporations and the capitalist state, not on the side of workers.

A wrongful termination and workplace injury suit brought against Civeo by two former workers at Wapasu Creek, who argued that poor sanitary conditions at the site led to them contracting long-term respiratory diseases and the death of at least one fellow worker between 2007 and 2017, was dismissed out of hand by the ALRB, despite a damning third-party report on dangerous conditions at the camp. UFCW Local 401, led then by the same executives as now, repeatedly downplayed and hampered the workers' grievances.



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