

Buenos Aires teachers protest sellout by union; San Diego transit workers strike

Workers Struggles: The Americas

22 May 2023

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

Latin America

Teachers in Buenos Aires province strike against sellout by their union

On May 17 and 18, teachers in Buenos Aires province carried out a 48-hour protest strike to repudiate a sell-out agreement by their own union, behind teachers' backs, carried out to fulfill the demands of the International Monetary Fund.

In addition to wage demands, the educators are demanding increased investments in classrooms and schools. Striking teachers complained of classrooms that are literally falling apart, and with a near total absence of cleaning and teaching supplies.

Panamanian teachers hold rallies to demand education funding

On Friday, May 19 Panamanian educators took part in protest rallies demanding that the government fulfill increases in funding for teachers and schools, promised last year, following a first wave of protests.

The educators are demanding promotions, cancellation of teacher debts and that public education be guaranteed 5.5 percent of the country's national income, and the hiring of more educators to reduce class size in elementary schools.

Last year Panamanian educators, driven by the high cost of living and in repudiation of government neo-liberal free market policies, participated in the biggest protests in 30 years.

Uruguay workers demand justice for those disappeared by dictatorship

Thousands of Uruguayan workers took part on Saturday May 20 in the 28th March of Silence in honor of the hundreds of those

disappeared during the 1973-1985 military dictatorship, demanding that the government provide an accounting of the fate of many of the victims and bring their torturers and murderers to justice. The protest coincided with the 50th anniversary of the dictatorship.

In addition to the march in Montevideo, there were similar protests in 60 Uruguayan cities and towns. Many demonstrators carried signs that read: "Where are they?" and "No more State Terrorism" and carried photos of the disappeared.

Since 1988, succeeding Uruguayan governments have refused to investigate the crimes of the dictatorship and have exonerated the perpetrators.

Argentine teachers protest strike for wage increases, oppose victimizations

Teachers and school employees also mobilized last week in Salta Province in northwest Argentina, near the Bolivian border, independently of their union, demanding higher wages and protesting being penalized for their strike at the beginning of May.

Salta government authorities refused to meet with the demonstrators and sent the police to repress the protest.

Workers at Altos Hornos Mexico Corporation occupy union headquarters, expel leadership

On May 16, hundreds of steelworkers employed by the bankrupt Altos Hornos Mexico Corporation (AHMSA) in Monclova, Coahuila State, took over their union headquarters and expelled their leaders, accusing them of colluding with the management and stealing millions of pesos of union funds. The steelworkers were armed with bats and stones.

The bureaucrats retaliated by attacking the occupiers with a private army of paid thugs, but the workers resisted and prevented the union officials from reentering the building.

Researchers protest new science law in Mexico

The passage of a new law on science research, which consolidates government control over priorities, has evoked widespread opposition among researchers and academics.

General Law on Humanities, Sciences, Technologies and Innovation was pushed through by the administration of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador on April 29, bypassing normal parliamentary procedures. Already 14,000 have signed a petition in protest. Researchers are planning a public protest or even a strike.

According to the law, a government council will prioritize science projects on the basis of their potential to “solve national problems.” The concern is this could diminish funding for basic science.

The new law overrides a previous law that mandated that 1 percent of gross national product go to science. While that goal was never met in practice, the new law merely stipulates that the science funding must increase year to year, vague language that opens the way to science spending being eroded by inflation.

United States

Transit workers strike San Diego region over wages and working conditions

Some 400 bus drivers who work as contractors under the San Diego Metropolitan Transit System (MTS) went on strike for four days last week to demand higher wages and an end to unpaid breaks. The strike affects over 90 percent of the drivers in the South Bay area.

“It’s pretty much for profit,” Jose Puga, vice president for Teamsters Local 683, told the *San Diego Union-Tribune*. “Instead of scheduling properly, they just stop paying them and say, ‘There’s no work for you, so just linger around here for three to four hours, and then complete the rest of your shift in the evening.’”

The forced breaks are often in situations where drivers don’t have sanitary restrooms or secure rest areas. Drivers, who began their strike on May 16, could potentially continue their strike for 20 days.

After six months of negotiations, drivers voted down the company’s recent offer and then followed with a unanimous strike authorization vote. The contractor, Transdev, is based in France and operates in 17 countries.

Office staff strike TruStage headquarters in Madison, Wisconsin

Employees at TruStage, formerly CUNA Mutual Group, walked out May 19 after negotiations for a new contract stalled.

While workers have been without a contract at the financial services company since March 2022, the union has not called the strike over contract issues, but merely unfair labor practices. Nevertheless, enthusiasm was high on the first day of the strike, with pickets stretching one-third of a mile down the street in front of the corporate entrance. Construction workers on site to do demolition work honored the picket line. Members of the Teaching Assistants’ Association, the union for University of Wisconsin-Madison graduate student workers, also took shifts picketing.

Major issues in negotiations are pensions, health care, wages and outsourcing. The company wants to end the traditional pension for

new hires and substitute a vastly inferior 401(k) type plan. The company has increasingly relied on outside staffing agencies and a remote workforce at the expense of the jobs of union members, whose numbers have collapsed since 2011.

Workers who do not live in the Madison area only have the option of a high deductible health care plan unless they travel to Madison to take advantage of the low deductible in-network option.

Last year, the company made \$5.2 billion in revenue and \$343 million in profit.

Canada

Striking British Columbia bus drivers’ union files labour complaint

After more than two months on strike against the First Transit bus company in British Columbia’s Fraser Valley, the union organizing 213 transit workers has filed an unfair labour practices complaint with the province’s Labour Relations Board. Local 561 of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) has charged that management at First Transit has negotiated in bad faith by initially making false statements that it could not afford the wage increases demanded by its employees.

The complaint comes after the union asserted that at a May 5 bargaining session, management admitted that the wage demand was never the reason for its intransigence. CUPE will ask the Labour Relations Board to compel the company to produce relevant financial documents that would prove its case. First Transit has denied the union’s contentions.

The bus drivers service the cities of Chilliwack and Abbotsford and the surrounding region. They are demanding a 32 percent wage increase over five years and a pension plan. In addition, they are seeking to end company policies that place drivers on lengthy stand-by times during which they are paid only \$3 per hour. First Transit has countered with an offer of a 16 percent wage rise over five years.

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.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact