

## Mexico miners strike in Zacatecas state; Grocery workers in Canada face contract expirations

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

### Mexico gold and silver miners' strike in Zacatecas state

Gold Miners at the Peñasquito open-pit mine Mazapil, in northern Zacatecas State, walked out on June 7. Peñasquito, owned by US based Newmont Corp. is Mexico's largest gold mine. It also produces significant amounts of silver and zinc. The 2,800 miners are demanding an increase in profit sharing from 10% to 20% of the company's profits associated with the Peñasquito mine.

Newmont refuses to negotiate, insisting instead that the Mexican government intervene and force the miners back to work.

### Metal Workers struggles last week in Argentina and Venezuela

Last week, striking gig workers at the Acindar Steel Plant in Villa Constitucion carried out a 36-hour strike. In the same industrial region strikes took place at the Siderar Plant in San Nicolas and Tecnaris Siat oil pipe production plant in metropolitan Buenos Aires. The protest strikes are over job insecurity, brutal working conditions and hunger wages.

The Siderar plant in San Nicolas is not far from Acindar and the issues are the same, wages and working conditions. Last week Siderar workers carried out a slow-down and protests, threatening a strike. Like Acindar, workers at Siderar make less than \$500 US dollars per month under conditions of accelerating inflation.

At Tecnaris Siat, where 12-hour days working days are the rule, the walkout was triggered by the company's intention to lay off 100 workers. Legislation imposed on workers in the 1990s, with the full support of the trade unions, made contingent labor, gig work, and zero-hours contracts, the rule along this vast industrial corridor. Last week, workers met outside the factory and decided to strike until the issue is resolved. In addition to the rehiring of the sacked workers, the workers are demanding production premiums and a review of their temp contracts (almost all the employees at the plant are temps).

### Protests over arrest of striking steel workers in Venezuela

On June 14 thousands of trade unionists, and their supporters, rallied in Caracas demanding the release of three labor activists arrested on June 11th for their role in the June 7th strike by Steel workers in the Sidor Steel plant in Bolivar State. The 3 miners, leaders of the strike, have been jailed and sent to Caracas.

The mass rally was part of a national wave of protests demanding the release of the three workers. The Sidor strikers are demanding that their wages be set in US dollars to counteract the wage devaluation caused by annual inflation rates of over 200 percent.

The Sidor plant, under government control, has been effectively militarized in response to the workers' resistance. The plant is now totally surrounded by National Police and National Guard troops. In addition to the 3 workers arrested on June 11, the State of Bolivar listed 21 other workers, demanding that they refrain from promoting the strike, including through the use of social media.

### Nurses at three hospitals in Kansas and Texas to strike June 27

Nurses at three Ascension hospitals in Kansas and Texas will hold a one-day strike on June 27 after negotiations failed to address safe staffing issues. Some 900 nurses at Ascension Seton Medical Center in Austin, Texas voted by a 98% margin for a strike. Nurses at two hospitals in Wichita, Kansas – 650 at Ascension Via Christi St. Francis voted to strike by 93% and 300 nurses at Ascension Via Christi St. Joseph voted by 90% – to join in joint action for the June 27 strike.

The overwhelming votes at the three Ascension hospitals indicate the prevalence of a crisis of under-staffing throughout the system. Matthew Clark, a nurse at Ascension Seton in Austin, told the Statesman, 'I quite frankly don't know of a single unit that isn't impacted by short staffing conditions.'

Ascension is the largest Catholic nonprofit healthcare system in the United States. It operates more than 2,600 care facilities, including 139 hospitals in 19 states.

In December 2022, the *New York Times* reported, "Ascension was trumpeting its success at reducing its number of employees per occupied bed, a common industry staffing metric. At one point, executives boasted about how they had slashed \$500 million from the chain's labor costs. In the years before the pandemic, they refused requests to hire more medical workers or fill open jobs, according to current and former hospital administrators and employees."

The *Times* further stated, "In addition to its billions in cash, [Ascension] runs an investment company that manages more than \$41 billion. Last year it paid its CEO, Joseph Impicicche, \$13 million."

## **Public workers in Santa Clara County, California, vote to grant strike authorization**

Workers in San Jose and throughout California's Santa Clara County voted by a 95% margin to authorize a strike June 15 as negotiations have proven unproductive, according to the union. Some 15,000 members of Service Employees International Union Local 521 who staff hospitals, social services, parks, maintenance, libraries and other agencies, are seeking increased wages and calling attention to a crisis in staffing.

According to the SEIU, "Unfilled vacancies in SEIU positions have increased by over 41% since October 2019, going from 1,587 to 2,248 today, according to the latest figures provided by the county."

Far from filling these positions, the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors is currently considering the termination of 650 vacant positions out of about 3,500 as it moves to reduce a \$120 million budget deficit. Foreshadowing deeper problems, a 2022 survey revealed that 69% of the doctors at county hospitals are planning to leave their positions during the next three years.

Three years ago county workers struck for 10 days and made understaffing a significant issue in the negotiations. Projections indicate the county's revenues will be falling in the coming years.

## **Workers strike Amazon delivery contractor in California**

Drivers and dispatchers for the Amazon contractor Battle-Tested Strategies (BTS) in Palmdale, California, went on strike after the union claimed Amazon would not honor the contract. The 84 workers recently joined Teamsters Local 396 and settled the first union contract in Amazon's delivery network back on April 28.

Workers were driven to organize under conditions where BTS required quotas of 300 deliveries per driver per day where trucks had no air conditioning. The contract with BTS brought drivers' wages up to \$30 an hour and included work rules allowing drivers the right to refuse to operate unsafe equipment and go through with unsafe deliveries. The contract also barred the company from disciplining workers solely based on surveillance technology.

Amazon responded by claiming they had canceled their agreement with BTS before workers organized with the Teamsters.

## **Machinists union and Kansas aircraft supplier reach tentative agreement**

The International Association of Machinists (IAM) District 70 announced June 16 they had arrived at a tentative agreement with Spirit AeroSystems covering 6,000 machinists at its Wichita, Kansas, plant and are recommending it to the rank-and-file for ratification on June 21.

The agreement provides for a 16% pay hike during the course of a four-year agreement. The union claims that with other contract measures that increase might go up to 34 percent. The proposal also includes a 15% increase in retirement benefits, more paid time off and a one-time bonus of \$7,500.

Postings on the union's website indicate opposition to the agreement and a desire to strike. The union's press release further indicates the bureaucracy's awareness of resistance to the contract and intimates they will not lead the workers in a struggle against it: "After much

consideration, the committee has decided to recommend the proposal. This is not an easy decision, but it is one that we believe is a good one. While the committee has given their recommendation, the decision to accept or reject this offer is up to the membership."

The old agreement between the IAM and the company is slated to expire June 24. Spirit AeroSystems is a major supplier to the Boeing company and the aircraft supply chain.

## **Contracts begin expiring for 11,000 Unifor-organized grocery workers**

More than a dozen contracts will expire over the coming months amongst grocery workers organized by Unifor and employed by Canada's "Big Three" grocery chains. 11,000 union employees at Loblaw, Metro and Sobeys in Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland are demanding significant improvements in wages, benefits and working conditions.

Kicking off the bargaining season on June 26 are 3,400 workers in 27 Metro stores across the Greater Toronto region. Last week a Unifor press release announced that the union would be pursuing contract "improvements" following on from earlier contract settlements such as at Loblaw subsidiary Dominion stores in Newfoundland and a central Metro food warehouse in Toronto. However, a look at these deals must serve as a warning to Unifor workers that the union is preparing yet another round of pro-company settlements.

In the fall of 2020, 1,400 Dominion Stores workers in Newfoundland struck for 12 weeks after rejecting a Unifor-backed tentative agreement. The union deliberately isolated the strikers, wearing them down to the point where they could see no other option but to accept a contract virtually identical to the one they had previously rejected.

When the strike began, 83% of the Dominion workforce was made up of low-wage part-time employees with no or minimal benefits. Fully three-quarters of the workers made less than \$14.00 per hour, with a majority of the part-timers labouring at or just above the then provincial poverty-level minimum wage of \$11.65. After the ratification, the union refused to release the vote count, which suggested that support for the deal was underwhelming.

After a 7-day strike in April 2022, 900 Unifor warehouse workers in Toronto were presented by the union with a contract virtually identical to one just rejected by the membership. The 15.8% pay increase over four-and-a-half years was the same as the 14% over four years initially rejected by the workers.

Loblaw is the largest of the three Canadian grocery empires. In Ontario, even with the recent increase in minimum wage to \$16.65, a full time Loblaw cashier in Toronto will earn less than \$32,000 per year, with average rent taking 75 percent of their income. These poverty wages have fueled the company's profits, which have burgeoned over the life of the last series of contract settlements. Meanwhile, corporate chief Galen Weston was paid \$11.8 million in 2022.



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