

Explosion at Mexican oil platform kills two; Alaska railway workers authorize strike action

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Argentine bus drivers block the Pan American Highway

On July 7, Argentine medium- and long-distance bus drivers blocked the Pan American Highway, demanding that the companies pay back wages and that their union, the UTA, enforce wage increases that had been agreed by the union, management and government authorities. As part of the pay deal, the Fernandez administration handed out generous subsidies to the companies. The workers are also demanding that the UTA call a national strike.

Thousands march in Uruguay against attacks on workers

Thousands of striking construction and industrial workers, public employees, service workers and many others, marched in Montevideo's government district on July 7. The one-day strike and protest took place in the context of wage negotiations and a legislative debate on the upcoming budget cuts that will further impoverish the working class. The marchers denounced a continuing drop in real wages, management attacks on militant workers, layoffs and plant closures.

Gas platform disaster off coast of Mexico leaves 2 workers dead and 8 injured

An explosion and fire July 7 on a gas platform in the Gulf of Mexico killed two workers and left another eight injured. One worker was missing. The disaster happened on the Nohoch gas transfer platform, operated by the state-owned oil company Petroleos Mexicanos (Pemex).

A company spokesman said those who died and were missing worked for a subcontractor. None of the injured workers appeared to have sustained life-threatening injuries.

Pemex said that 321 workers were evacuated from the platform by seven ships. Photos showed a still-smoking platform, with fireboats attempting to put out the blaze. Pemex said the platform was "totally destroyed," but that there did not appear to be a danger of a leak.

The platform that burned received gas from wells and pumped it to storage tanks or ships. The company indicated it might temporarily stop production at some wells.

Alaska railway workers authorize strike action

Railway workers for Alaska's White Pass & Yukon Route (WPYR) granted their union strike authorization in the first week of July. After six years of negotiations, the SMART Transportation Division Local 1626 has been unable to resolve issues of wages, healthcare, safety and the company's demand for a one-third reduction in the workforce.

Workers have been without a wage increase since the old agreement expired in 2017, and WPYR's job slashing would eliminate brakemen from all trains.

In a press release, the union stated, "Removing the brakeman and depending entirely on conductors to perform twice the work would endanger passengers and the public."

A strike would threaten to disrupt the vacation industry, as WPYR transports tens of thousands of vacationers. However, the two sides are in mediated talks under the

Railway Labor Act. A strike can be blocked by arbitration or delayed through cooling-off periods, and ultimately a settlement could be imposed on workers by the government.

Connecticut hospital food service workers seek union in response to insufficient staffing

Food service workers for Norwalk Hospital in Connecticut are seeking to unionize in response to under-staffing and increased workloads. Last month, Connecticut Health Care Associates, which already represents workers at the hospital, filed a petition with the National Labor Relations Board to obtain a union election.

The largely immigrant food service workforce is only paid \$15 an hour. A union election will transpire later this summer.

Workers protest victimization of co-worker at Massachusetts Trader Joe's store

Workers at the Trader Joe's in Hadley, Massachusetts walked off the job for 40 minutes July 1 to protest the firing of co-worker Steve Andrade. The walkout followed petitions by Trader Joe's in-store workers and community members, along with a letter-writing campaign that netted 20,000 communications sent to the company's corporate headquarters.

According to the Trader Joe's union, management fired Andrade, an 18-year veteran, in October 2022 for failing to remove a power tool after a request from the company. However, Andrade says the tool was not his, and the union alleges management concocted the story to retaliate against him for union activity.

The Hadley Trader Joe's was the first of the company's stores to be unionized. In a fall 2022 campaign, workers voted 45-31 to unionize under the name "Trader Joe's United." The unionization was the result of multiple factors, including a long-term attack on healthcare and pensions, and working conditions during the pandemic.

Maryland mental health providers oppose increased workloads

The union representing psychiatrists and nurse practitioners are charging Cornerstone Montgomery, part of Maryland's Public Behavioral Health System, with "drastically" increasing the number of appointments that the healthcare providers must take on, leaving less time to deal with patients' problems. The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) asked Cornerstone for an explanation of the increased workloads, and when the company wasn't forthcoming a complaint was filed with the National Labor Relations Board.

Workloads have been increasing in the wake of the pandemic. Cornerstone is unable to schedule the increased volume of patients suffering from mental health issues. The company has made clear it will not negotiate workloads.

Cornerstone Montgomery's patients, mostly Medicaid and Medicare recipients, are largely under-insured or without insurance. Leyla Adali, a communications rep with the SEIU told the DCist, "This is all kind of happening because they don't actually want to solve this through unionization. They want to unilaterally impose it."

Workers strike Vancouver brewery

Workers at Granville Island Brewery, a popular retail outlet and local beermaker, went on strike July 8 in a fight for a living wage and against an attempt by the employer to hire low-wage temporary workers in violation of their previous contract. The strikers perform retail services, shipping and receiving and also assist in the brewery and the canning line. The brewery is owned by Molson-Coors, the fifth-largest beer company in the world, with reported net global sales last year of over \$10 billion (US).

Workers start at only \$16.75 (CDN) in a tiered wages system that increases to \$20.97. The absolute floor for a basic living wage in Vancouver, one of the most expensive cities in Canada, has been pegged at \$24.08. Local management refused to even discuss the proposal to bring wages up to this basic mark. With overall inflation spiking across the country, last year hitting near 9 percent, food inflation in the city still hovering at almost 8 percent and rent increases at 5 percent, workers are struggling just to avoid slipping even further into poverty.



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