

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

## Teachers, professors and students in Argentina mobilize against illegal arrests

On July 14 Argentine teachers at all levels joined with university professors and students in a protest strike to condemn the government's illegal arrest of 22 students.

On July 13, Jujuy police invaded the Humahuaca campus of the National University of Jujuy Province in Argentina to arbitrarily arrest 22 student members of social organizations for participating in a June 30 march and rally repudiating an illegal and repressive constitutional reform from the administration of Governor Gerardo Morales.

The 22 students are accused of sedition and kidnapping. The University of Jujuy's Legal Studies Center declared that the Jujuy government has "transformed a peaceful public protest as a seditious act and a kidnapping attempt, in order to criminalize social protest." Also arrested was a lawyer who attempted to intercede for the students.

The Argentine Constitution prohibits the presence of police on university campuses.

## Brazil National Mining Agency staff strike over conditions

National Mining Agency white-collar regulatory workers went on a five-day strike (July 10-14) over working conditions and speedup. While not all the workers joined the strike, regulatory services, such as issuing mining titles and permits, were halted by the walkout.

The strikers report being overworked. Beginning in 2010 the Mining Agency began sacking employees, while the workload increased for those who kept their jobs. Currently 332 workers supervise 911 dams, illegal gold mines, tailings and other structures. Mining Agency workers are also grossly underpaid [on average 46 percent less than at other government agencies].

"The question is not if we'll have another tragedy involving dam breaks, but when," said **Ricardo Pecanha**, an ANM geologist who heads the labor group behind the strike.

## Strike at Mexico's largest gold mine continues into second month

Some 2,000 miners at the Peñasquito open pit gold mine in Zacatecas State—Mexico's largest gold mine—on strike since the 8th of June are being blackmailed by Newsome Inc. the transnational firm that owns the mine, to end their protest strike. The company has threatened to abandon operations and claims that some 28,000 jobs are being affected by the strike.

The company claims that the workers demand for 20 percent of the mine's profits, up from 10 percent, is in violation of the existing contract. Strike leaders insist that the workers are demanding a recalculation of the May 2023 payment that reflects the firm's actual profits. The strikers are also insisting on health and safety measures to safeguard the health and lives of the miners and the surrounding communities.

Thirty years after the fire sale of Zacatecas gold mines by the Salinas administration to transnational corporations, the result has been growing social inequality, transfer of water rights away from farms and people and increasing diseases. According to one estimate, for every 1,000 US dollars in revenue that Newsome gets from Peñasquito, it pays 47 cents for the land the mine is sitting on and 18 cents to the 25 communities in the area of influence of the mine.

## Protests in Ecuador target land transfer to mining interests in Andes

On Friday July 15, at least 2 protesters were arrested and 10 were injured by police who were repressing a demonstration by miners and their supporters in the Andean city of Las Naves, Bolivar Province southwest of Quito.

The protesters were denouncing the privatization of large tracts of land to the Curimining mining corporation, the so-called *Curipamba-El Domo* project to extract copper, gold, zinc and silver. Curimining operates in association with the Canadian firm Adventus Corp.

According to the National Anti-Mining Front, a climate and water rights group, the project will have a serious environmental impact in the high Andes.

Despite the peaceful nature of the march and rally, about 300 police officers attacked the protest by throwing rocks and firing teargas against peaceful protesters.

One protester declared: 'We defend water rights and nature with nails and claws... each drop of water is a blessing that we cannot give up for money.'

## Nurses at New Jersey hospital give strike notice, demand safe staffing ratios

The union representing 1,800 nurses at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital (RWJUH) in New Brunswick, New Jersey, issued a ten-day strike notice July 11 after negotiations failed to produce an agreement on staffing ratios to provide critical care for patients and relieve the stress of under-staffing imposed on nurses.

Hospital management complained that RWJUH nurses “already are the highest paid” in the state. But of the 1,500 nurses who took part in balloting, 96 percent voted to strike and clearly want ratios.

Management proposed a joint labor-management committee - Collaborative Staffing & Practice Council - that would serve to use the services of the union bureaucracy to stall the issues related to staffing ratios. It would be staffed by five management personnel and five members of United Steelworkers Local 4-200, the union at the hospital.

Nurses are also seeking medical retirement benefits for the first time in their contract. In addition, the union is seeking a cap on nurses’ portion of healthcare insurance costs and a wage increase.

### **Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin brewery workers strike after company fails to meet wage expectations**

Workers at Leinenkugel’s Brewery in Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin took to the picket line July 10 after rejecting the company’s final offer from the previous week. The 40 workers, members of Teamsters Local 662, voted by a 98 percent margin after the company’s offer failed to keep up with inflation.

“We are sick of the corporate greed and want a fair and equitable pay increase,” Dann Jackson, a 16-year maintenance technician, stated in a Teamsters press release. “We are underpaid given our qualifications and the number of different jobs that we do.”

David Buhrow, a 37-year veteran at the plant, told the *Lacrosse Tribune* he had been proud to work at Leinenkugel’s which paid some of the highest wages in the Chippewa Falls area. “Now we’re one of the lowest.”

Striker Eric Monarski put it a different way. “It used to take 15, 20 years to get a day job here. Now, sometimes it is less than a year.”

Leinenkugel’s is owned by Molson Coors, a Canadian-US multinational drink and brewing company and the world’s third-largest brewer. In February it announced net sales of \$10.7 billion.

### **Inspectors in New York and Connecticut authorize a strike against Metro-North**

Some 600 inspectors with the Transit Workers Union in New York and Connecticut voted last week to authorize a strike against the Metro-North Railroad. The strike could take place in September or October when the current mediated talks will come to an end.

TWU’s international president, John Samuelson, told CT Insider that conductors and other Metro-North workers will support the inspectors’ strike. “The trains cannot function without the car inspectors. We’re confident that the picket lines will hold and that the trains won’t be running.”

The inspectors have been without a contract since 2019. Among the

issues that have separated the two sides is management’s insistence on spreading wage increases across a 50-month contract as opposed to the 48-month contract for other Metro-North unions. The maneuver would save Metro-North \$300 per inspector.

### **3,700 Toronto area grocery workers set to strike**

Retail grocery workers at 27 Metro stores across the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) are set to strike for higher wages at 11:59 PM Tuesday night. The workers, members of Unifor, are determined to address poverty level wages at the giant corporation after a 2019 contract provided for a miserly 40 cents per hour increase and subsequent inflationary pressures have further reduced workers’ compensation. Last month workers voted by 100 percent for strike action should an acceptable contract not be negotiated.

Most full-time, non-supervisory workers make between \$16 and \$21 per hour. At its height last year, inflation in Ontario neared 9 percent. In Toronto food prices have surpassed 11 percent spikes while rents in Toronto are amongst the highest in the country. Even the average inflation rate between summer 2022 and last month is recorded at 7.6 percent.

Even as grocery workers continued working throughout the pandemic, Metro as well as Canada’s two other dominant grocery chains—Loblaw and Empire—clawed back a \$2 per hour “hero” bonus just three months into the pandemic in June 2020.

Metro’s operations record annual sales of \$18 billion across its national 950 store network. In January 2022, the company reported a jump in first-quarter profits of 8.6 percent. Metro CEO Eric Lafleche receives compensation of approximately \$4.9 million a year, while Executive VP Carmen Fortino receives \$2.1 million. Both also receive additional performance bonus payments.

Only last year, 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 percent pay increase over four and-a-half years was the same as the 14 percent over four years initially rejected by the workers. In actuality, real wage cut after inflation is figured into the deal.

In the fall of 2020, 1,400 Dominion Stores workers in Newfoundland struck for 12 weeks after rejecting a rotten 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 percent 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.



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