

Mass protest in Peru against Boularte administration; Argentine steelworkers fight for wage rises in face of 100 percent annual inflation

## Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

### Mass protests in Lima, Peru

Tens of thousands rallied in Lima on July 19, 20 and 22 across Peru last week, part of a series of mass protests against the Dina Boluarte administration. A mega-march and rally is to take place on July 28, Peru's Independence Day, demanding the end of the Boluarte regime and immediate general elections. Also, at the Lima rally were two cardboard coffins with the names of the 49 civilians killed in the crackdown by security forces in the last wave of protests.

Days before the demonstration, the Boluarte administration extended by decree the date of an already existing state of emergency that gives the police and army impunity and extraordinary powers to repress demonstrations and places all major highways under government control, particularly those that connect the cities along the 'mining corridor.' Peru's copper miners have voice strong support for the protestors.

Madrid's *El Pais* reported that protests took place in 59 provinces, representing 32 percent of the country's territory. The government responded with an enormous mobilization of gendarmes and police, to block the movement of protesters entering Lima. The Aymara Indian demonstrators, who marched from the border with Bolivia had to battle through four separate blockades. In addition to the Aymara peasants, the demonstrators included university students, miners, teachers and other workers. The police attacked the rally with tear gas; six demonstrators were injured.

### Peru Copper miners set to strike

One third of the miners employed by Cerro Verde, Peru's largest copper mine, will go on a 72-hour strike this Wednesday. The miners are members of the Cerro Verde Union. The issues in the strike include measures left over from the pandemic, such as excessively long hours, and inadequate health insurance.

### Guadalupe and Martinique Pilots and flight attendants strike

Air Antilles and Air Guyane employees, on strike over wages since July 14, extended their strike indefinitely on July 18 (it was originally set to last 4 days). The pilots and flight attendants are demanding a 15 percent wage increase.

Negotiations have been suspended by the companies, who are threatening closing the airlines, a threat that is being denounced by the SNPL union which represents pilots and cabin workers (Syndicat national des pilotes de ligne) as a pressure tactic to force the workers to give up their demands, and accept management's insulting proposal of a 1 percent raise.

### Strike by steelworkers in Argentina over impact of inflation

On Tuesday July 18, the Metal Workers Union (UOM) initiated escalating national strikes by steelworkers. The main issue are wage increases to make up for the ravage of 100 plus percent annual inflation. The strikes began with a national strike of 10-21 hours on Tuesday, followed by a 48-hour strike on Wednesday and Thursday last week and a 72 hour strike this week.

The steelworkers are demanding a 10 percent to catch up for the last three inflation months, in addition to a 30 percent increase July increase. In addition, the UOM is demanding a 60,000-peso bonus (223 US dollars at the current official rates) together with another 30 percent increase for Patagonian workers, who work in a difficult zone.

In its strike call, the UOM declared: for the first time in the UOM's 80-year history, workers receive wages below the cost of the basic food basket, and barely above the minimum wage, while adding 189 hours per month to industrial output."

### Rochester, New York, nurses prepare for two-day strike over under-staffing

Nurses at Rochester General Hospital in Rochester, New York, are

slated to carry out a two-day strike starting August 3. Members of the Rochester Union of Nurses and Allied Professionals (RUNAP) voted 472-50 to strike out of an overall workforce of 900 nurses.

Staffing ratios are at the center of the problems confronted by nurses. Nate Miller, organizer of the North East Nurses Association told NBC News10, "Nurses in the emergency department are frequently backed up, forced to take care of 20 patients at a time. In the inpatient units sometimes, they're up to 10 patients at a time which is just literally not safe."

Negotiations have been ongoing for the past nine months on a first contract, with the last two negotiations joined by a federal mediator. At least two more negotiations are to be held before the nurses strike.

### **Negotiations resume after more than a week on strike in contract struggle at Minnesota paper mill**

Negotiations resumed July 18 between Teamsters Local 346 and management at the UPM Blandin paper mill in Grand Rapids, Minnesota, after workers carried out a strike beginning on July 8. Workers are demanding higher wages, the end to a two-tier wage structure and increased staffing to reduce overtime demands.

Blandin Paper originally employed 800 workers back in 2000. Since then, UPM Blandin, a Finland-based company, has cut the workforce down to the current 166 workers.

### **Wisconsin dairy strike continues over healthcare plans**

Workers at the New Dairy Select Milk (NDSM) plant in De Pere, Wisconsin, continue their unfair labor practices strike that began July 10 after a dispute over healthcare plans deadlocked negotiations. Teamsters Local 662 wants a contract that allows workers to join a union health care plan, while NDSM insists workers must continue under the plan of parent company Borden Dairy that has higher premiums.

Local 662 claims the Teamsters plan would offer better coverage with lower rates for both workers and the company. Borden Dairy bought the De Pere plant after the former owners, Dean Foods, declared bankruptcy in 2020.

In the wake of the bankruptcy, workers lost their healthcare benefits and pensions were cut. Since then, NDSM's wage increases have not kept up with inflation while the healthcare costs have posed an additional burden.

### **Leinenkugel's brewery workers strike in Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin**

Workers at Leinenkugel's brewery in Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin are continuing a strike that began July 10 over wages and other contract issues. It is the first strike at the brewery in 38 years. Starting wages at the 156-year-old plant are just \$19 an hour. The family that first

started the business sold it to the Molson-Coors conglomerate in 1988.

One worker told the *Washington Post* she is now making just \$5.50 an hour more today than when she started in 1990. Another said, "If you've bought groceries lately, if you got your insurance bill lately, it's just, we've been going backwards and backwards." One worker called the company offer, "really insulting."

The 40 workers, members of Teamsters Local 662, are demanding wage increases that make up for inflation. In an email Molson-Coors said it offered a "competitive rate" that "exceeds local-market rates for similar unionized roles." The contract expired in May and 98 percent of workers voted to authorize strike.

Members of the local community have given strong support for the workers, with some local establishments refusing to sell Leinenkugel beer.

### **Manitoba liquor store workers strike**

One thousand four hundred workers at retail provincial Liquor Marts and distribution centres went on a one-day strike this past Wednesday seeking significant wage improvements. The job action continued for one additional day for workers at the central Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries Distribution Centre. All workers will refuse overtime until the dispute is settled. Further limited strike action will be announced should the employer refuse to move on its miserly wage offer.

The Liquor and Lotteries enterprise is a provincial government Crown Corporation. The workers are members of the Manitoba Government Employees Union (MGEU) that has consistently buckled as the right-wing Conservative government has imposed a brutal wage suppression regime across the entire public sector. The liquor mart workers have been without a contract since March 2022.

The Crown Corporation posted record profits in 2021-22 of \$598 million and is on pace to make even more in this current reporting year. Yet management has offered a derisory four-year contract with a two per cent wage increase in each year. Workers start at only \$14.91 per hour. The government's wage proposal amounts to yet another real wage cut when inflation is factored in.

Already, in the previous contract, all wages had been frozen for two full years and then capped at 0.75 and 1 percent increases over the final two years of the deal. So miserly is the government's current offer that it had to add provisions for special small "wage bump" for workers who would have made less than the legal minimum wage.

Workers are demanding that they receive at least the same percentage wage increase as Premier Heather Stefanson and her cabinet who will receive a 10.5 percent raise over three years. Stefanson is currently paid \$189,000 per year.



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