

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 rally of Valparaiso, Chile teachers and school employees as part of 24-hour regional strike

Thousands of education workers rallied in Valparaiso, on August 7, as part of a 24-hour regional strike in Chile. Among the issues in this protest-strike are super-exploitative working conditions, management abuse of education workers, lack of funding for schools and school buildings, and poor health benefits.

In an allusion to the storms last week that caused flooding, damaged homes and schools south of the Valparaiso region (affecting over 2,000 people), and, in many cases forced the cancellation of classes, the protesters had called on citizens to “flood” this major port city with demonstrators.

The protesters, who were joined by educators from other regions, assembled at O’Higgins Square in downtown Valparaiso, and then marched to the legislature building.

Valparaiso residents protest evictions

On August 8, hundreds of residents marched in the port city of Valparaiso against evictions from their temporary housing in the *Cerro Centinela* highlands. A Supreme Court judge has ordered the eviction of 3,500 families. The demonstrators rallied in the regional government house in Valparaiso, demanding that government authorities resolve decades of housing shortages.

Decades ago, residents made homeless took over land that was not being used and proceeded to build a neighborhood, San Antonio, on the slopes of Cerro Centinela. In June 2023, the real estate firm that claims ownership of the land obtained a court order against the residents, which was approved this year by the Supreme Court. Residents were given six months to leave, which is almost over.

On August 8, the demonstrators rallied in central Valparaiso,

carrying signs and chanting, “The people, the people, where are the people? We are on the streets, demanding dignity!”

Brazilian postal workers strike

On August 7, postal workers initiated a strike in 11 of Brazil’s 26 states. The issues in this walkout are inadequate wages adjusted for price increases, speed-ups and poor working conditions. The strikers are demanding that more workers be hired, improvements to health benefits and that temporary workers be made permanent. The strike call followed extensive negotiations with federal authorities that settled none of the workers’ demands.

Vegetable oil workers block port of Rosario in Argentina

Vegetable oil workers went on strike August 5 over wages, blocking the port of Rosario, on the Parana River, one of the main ports used for the shipment of agricultural goods in Argentina. The strikers are members of the Food Oil, Cotton and Agricultural Employees (FTCIODYARA) and the San Lorenzo Union of Food Oil Workers (SOEA).

Management has denounced the food oil workers for paralyzing the port at a daily cost of US\$20 million and claims that it has offered a 94 percent wage increase to cover expected price increases through September, which is more than expected inflation. Twenty ships are waiting to be loaded and 10,000 trucks are stopped in this and other Argentine ports.

The strikers claim that management is refusing to negotiate.

Social Security workers denounce union bureaucracy in Chihuahua, Mexico

On August 7, members of Section VIII of the National Union of Social Security Workers (SNTSS) in Chihuahua state,

protested in Ciudad Juarez, the state's most populous city, as well as other cities including the capital, Chihuahua City. Chihuahua is Mexico's largest state by area, and borders the US.

Protesters denounced the installation of corrupt union bureaucrat Jorge Herrera as leader of their section. Among other things, workers accuse Herrera of links to the criminal gangs that sell drugs and exploit emigrants entering the US.

Protesting workers also report that the SNTSS apparatus tried to force them to use tee shirts with Herrera's name. The workers issued a document, describing the union assault on their democratic rights and demanding a new election. Workers also protested in the city of Torreon, Coahuila state, at the ceremony in which Herrera was installed.

Postdoctoral researchers at Oregon Health & Science University announce August 15 strike date

Some 250 postdoctoral researchers at Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU) are prepared to go on strike August 15 over wages, benefits and working conditions. Oregon AFSCME (American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees) has been in negotiations with OHSU for nine months and has seen "zero progress" towards a settlement.

In early July, the union announced an impasse, and a 30-day cooling-off period followed. On July 24, the researchers voted by a 90 percent margin to authorize a strike.

Dr. Paige Arneson-Wissink, PhD, a postdoctoral researcher in the study of pancreatic cancer, called OHSU's proposal "wholly insufficient ... Our living wage proposal is a drop in the bucket compared to the \$600 million we brought in via research grants last year."

University management is proposing 3.5 percent "annual" cost-of-living increases. Postdoctoral salaries are funded by National Institute of Health (NIH) grants. The NIH sets the current minimum wage at \$61,008, regardless of where the program is located. And the cost of living in Portland, Oregon is significantly higher than in many other parts of the country.

The designation "annual" cost-of-living is also misleading. The NIH specifies that once the minimum wage reaches \$70,000, the cost-of-living escalator disappears. In contrast, OHSU president Danny Jacobs makes in two weeks what a postdoctoral researcher makes in a year. Jacobs was recently awarded \$700,000 in additional retirement benefits.

Seattle zoo workers hold picket after collapse of contract talks

The 200 workers at the Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle were scheduled to hold a picket at 3:00 p.m. August 13 after contract talks between the zoo and the Joint Craft Council (JCC) failed to reach a settlement last week. Workers charge that low wages and high healthcare costs are creating morale problems and a high turnover rate.

"We are hemorrhaging critical animal care experience which directly affects the standard of care we can provide for our animals," said Allison Cloud, an animal keeper. "The Zoo is forcing us to choose between our livelihoods and our animals, a heartbreaking decision no zookeeper ever wants to make."

The JCC says they are concerned about the possible loss of accreditation from the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. Should the Woodland Zoo's accreditation be withdrawn, animals would have to be transferred to other facilities.

The JCC says if there is a strike, a skeleton crew of workers would remain on the job to tend to animals and the zoo would be closed to the public.

Quebec hotel workers launch 24-hour strike for wage rise

Hotel workers in Quebec City, Montreal and Sherbrooke staged a 24-hour strike August 8 impacting 23 hotels to press their demands for a 36 percent pay increase over four years and a ban on the use of workers from outside agencies. The 2,600 workers are affiliated with the Fédération du commerce (FC-CSN).

The hotels are increasingly using agency workers to circumvent collective bargaining agreements. That the strike was only intended to let off steam was indicated by the fact that hotels were able to continue operations using management personnel.

It was the fourth walkout since talks started in April. A previous walkout took place July 28. According to the union, workers voted by more than 90 percent for a 120-hour strike mandate.



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