

Workers Struggles: The Americas

Brazilian workers stage protests to demand reduction in work time; Iowa Supreme Court hears case over management negligence in COVID deaths at Tyson

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

Brazilian workers stage protests to demand reduction in work time

On November 15, thousands of workers in 26 Brazilian cities marched and rallied against the prevailing six-day 48-hour workweek (6x1), and in support of a constitutional change being discussed in the National Legislature.

The protests were led by activists of the Vida Além do Trabalho (Life Beyond Work) political group.

Mass protests took place in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Brasília, Fortaleza, Vitória, Porto Alegre, Recife, Salvador, Aracaju, Belem, Belo Horizonte, Curitiba, Florianópolis and several other cities, in every region of Brazil.

The Telesur News Agency quoted a young worker: “To us working to live is normal; therefore, we end up accepting any conditions. We need to change that, and guarantee that future generations stop accepting this.”

Another worker, Alessandro da Silva, employed in a retail market, explained how the 6x1 system has robbed him of a family life: “I work Monday through Saturday, eight hours a day. I also have no time to study. On the one day I have off, I only want to rest.”

According to the Oxfam NGO, Brazil is one of the most unequal nations in Latin America in terms of wealth distribution; the top 10 percent of the population holds 60 percent of the nation’s wealth, while the bottom 50 percent holds a mere 10 percent.

Liquid gas workers on strike in Mexico City area

Liquid gas delivery workers went on strike last Friday, November 15, in Mexico City and surrounding suburbs following a notification of distribution companies that they lack sufficient funds to afford distributing bottled gas, on which many homes depend. The distribution company blames the crisis on price increases in natural gas due to shortages from PEMEX, Mexico’s national oil company.

The liquid gas workers are contingent workers, paid according to how much they deliver to homes and apartments.

The workers, represented by the National Gas Distributors Union, declared that theirs was a peaceful protest strike to highlight risks to

household supplies as the weather gets cooler.

Never having been connected to a system of natural gas pipes, Mexico City’s working class and poor neighborhoods are dependent on liquid natural gas deliveries for cooking and heating.

Three years ago, similar protests took place, which were partially resolved through government subsidies to the distributors.

Chilean airline workers stage five-hour protest strike

On Wednesday, November 13, airline workers went on a five-hour protest strike that stopped most morning flights in Santiago’s Arturo Benitez International Airport. Other airports in Chile were impacted as well. In all, 80 percent of national flights were canceled or delayed, affecting 15,000 passengers.

At issue was the government’s decision to leave out from its budget the payment of bonuses to the workers that was agreed to in May of this year.

The short strike was called off by the unions following an agreement between them and the General Civil Aeronautic Agency (Dirección General de Aeronáutica Civil-DGAC) to resume negotiations. Flights resumed Wednesday afternoon.

Workers demand freedom for Venezuelan class-war prisoners

On November 11, picket lines surrounded the Public Ministry in Caracas, Venezuela demanding the release of Jean Mendoza, leader of the workers employed by the Masisa corporation, a wood working and furniture making corporation based in Chile. A protest rally also took place in Puerto Ordaz, Guayana Province, where Mendoza’s trial is taking place.

Masisa management and the Venezuelan government are accusing Mendoza, a leader of the Masisa Union (SITRAEMAS) and supporter of the Marea Socialista (Socialist Wave) movement, under the “Incitement to Hatred Act” that has been used over and over in Venezuela to stifle strikes, protests and free speech. Specifically in this case, Masisa management is responding to the union’s demands and protests that the company carry out contractual agreements and that workers laid off in 2020 and 2021 be rehired.

The “Incitement to Hatred Act” was approved by the Maduro administration in Venezuela in 2017 as a tool to control protests and

strikes.

In addition to Masisa workers, present at both protests were family members of other workers jailed under the same legislation, who have established the Committee of Relatives and Friends of Imprisoned Workers and the League for Workers and Socialism (LTS).

Iowa Supreme Court hears case over management negligence in COVID-19 deaths at Tyson

Oral arguments commenced November 14 before the Iowa Supreme Court concerning the COVID-19 deaths of four meatpacking workers in 2020 at the Tyson Foods plant in Waterloo. The families of the four workers are seeking a reversal of last year's decision by a district court that dismissed the cases and said the deaths of the workers were a workers' compensation issue. The families want the lawsuit to proceed.

The families charge that Tyson executives and supervisors committed fraud and gross negligence in failing to prevent the spread of COVID-19, lying to workers about an outbreak at the Waterloo plant.

G. Bryan Ulmer III, an attorney for the families, charged that "supervisors were placing bets on how many positive COVID-19 cases would result from the outbreak. The end result was the largest workplace outbreak of COVID-19 in the entire country." Tyson later fired seven managers who had set up a betting pool on how many workers would get sick.

Tyson finally closed the Waterloo plant on April 23, 2020, after weeks of spreading infection. The four workers who died of COVID-19 were Sedika Buljic, Reberiano Garcia Leno, Jose Ayala and Isidro Fernandez.

The Iowa Supreme Court is expected to rule on the case by June 2025.

Police arrest two pickets in Oregon beverage strike

Oregon State Police arrested two striking workers at the Bigfoot Beverage headquarters in Eugene, Oregon, November 14 for slowing strikebreakers moving in and out of the plant. The 240 members of Teamsters Local 324 began their strike on September 19 over the company's attempt to take away the defined-benefit pension plan and substitute an inferior 401(k) retirement plan.

The tension on the picket line comes on the heels of a joint rally in downtown Eugene of Bigfoot Beverage workers and 180 Franz Bakery workers who went on strike on November 7 over safety hazards and insufficient staffing that has led to months of six-day weeks on 12-hour shifts. Workers have received less than \$3 an hour in wage increases over the last 10 years.

Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers Union Local 144 Business Agent David Gettman told the *Daily Emerald* that Franz Bakery management "refused to add enough staff to give them time off ... and now they are removing all of their ability to take personal time off for their child's birthdays, for weddings, any of that denied, even six months in advance notice."

Unifor holds strike vote for 3,600 CN Rail workers

With CN management stonewalling negotiations, workers organized by

two bargaining committees—Unifor Council 4000 and Local 100—will vote on November 18 on strike authorization. Contracts covering 3,600 mechanics, crane operators, machinists, electricians, mechanics, administrative staff, and customer support workers at CN Rail, Canada's largest railway operator, expire on December 31 of this year. Workers anticipate an overwhelming vote to strike.

After years of inferior contracts, the rail workers are demanding improvements to their pension plan, which has not been augmented in over 20 years. They also seek a significant wage increase, improved safety conditions and stronger job security provisions.

The contract dispute follows on from a bitter fight by 9,300 railway workers organized in the Teamsters union that resulted in a lockout last August at both CN Rail and Canadian Pacific Kansas City (CPKC) Rail.

Canada's Liberal government, working hand in glove with the Biden administration in Washington, banned strike action by 9,300 rail workers at Canadian National (CN) and Canadian Pacific Kansas City (CPKC). Then, after the two railroads locked out the workers, the government announced later in the day it would impose binding arbitration, robbing workers of their rights to bargain the terms of their contract and take strike action.

In that dispute, Labour Minister Steven MacKinnon ordered the railroads to resume service and invoked Section 107 of the Canada Labour Code, which allows the government to order the unelected Canadian Industrial Relations Board (CIRB) to dictate the terms of new collective agreements. The CIRB was also authorized to arbitrarily extend the previous agreements until new contracts are finalized.

The action against the Teamsters railway workers in August was reproduced in last week's weaponizing of the Canadian Industrial Relations Board to end bitter contract disputes on the west coast and in Montreal and Quebec that forced longshoremen into the pro-company binding arbitration process. Both Unifor's membership in the brewing contract fight at CN Rail and the currently locked out 55,000 CUPW mail carriers and sorters at Canada Post see the threat of government intervention against their constitutional right to strike as a major escalation in the assault on their living standards and working conditions.

Hydro-Québec workers vote to strike

About 2,500 workers at two CUPE bargaining committees at Hydro-Québec gave strong strike mandates for job actions up to and including a five-day work stoppage at the giant electricity generating company should a new contract not be reached. Some 2,300 administrative and technical workers organized by the Canadian Union of Public Employees 4000 voted by a 96 percent margin in favour of strike action while some 200 Hydro-Québec network employees produced a 98 percent strike mandate.



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