

Workers Struggles: The Americas

Santiago, Chile teachers strike and protest over layoffs; Baja California strawberry field workers strike

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

Santiago, Chile teachers demand benefits

The teachers at schools administered by Santiago, Chile's capital, held a protest strike and rally January 8 against layoffs and cuts to bonuses and benefits.

The teachers point to the continuation of the 30 percent incentive they receive under article 47 of Law No. 19070, which has established the statutes of education professionals since 1991. This states that "education professionals who provide their services in educational establishments in the municipal sector will have the right to keep the percentages of experience and development allowances when working in another locality."

In addition, the demonstrators demand the retention of winter and summer bonuses, and the suspension of all layoffs of temporary teachers.

In early January, the city sent letters to hundreds of contingent teachers [temps] indicating that they would not be assigned hours for 2025.

Responding to the protests, recently elected Santiago Mayor Mario Desbordes, of the right-wing Renovacion Nacional Party, went on an anti-communist rant during a radio interview.

The mayor denounced Irací Hassler, his Communist Party predecessor, for having a hidden agenda: "Teachers have been hired who do not justify themselves at all," declared Desbordes. "I also believe that a lot of activists have been hired ... education was used in the city not only to hire people from the party and things like that, but also in a political project of a certain sector."

"It is not that I do not want to pay the bonus to the teachers, but that we do not have the money," he added, referring to a drop in student enrollment that has reduced federal subsidies to the city's education department.

Uruguay dairy workers stage protest strike

Dairy workers went on strike and occupied the gigantic Coleme Dairy plant in the city of Melo [near the Brazilian border] for 24 hours on January 3 to protest the firing of 11 workers at the company and attacks on wages, speed-up and other working conditions.

The occupation at Coleme was the latest in a series of dairy strikes, occupations and protests since the end of December 2024. These rotating

"stand-up" strikes have taken place across the industry, some lasting as little as 2 hours (supposedly to protect the milk from spoiling), against the layoffs and wage cuts in plants across Uruguay.

At the Calcar plant in Carmelo (near Montevideo), the company is insisting on sending workers to unemployment insurance and reducing wages by 15 to 20 percent as part of a "reorganization of the dairy industry in Uruguay to respond to the climate crisis and a drop in world prices since the COVID pandemic."

Uruguay is a major world producer of milk and cheeses, with exports to 60 countries across the planet. Seventy-three percent of its milk and dairy products are exported. Thirty-five thousand workers and farmers are part of this industry in Uruguay, dominated by oligopolistic firms.

Baja California strawberry field workers strike

On Friday, January 3, 1,800 agricultural workers of the Independent National Democratic Union of Agricultural Day Laborers (SINDIA) went on a 3-day strike, shutting down a strawberry field in San Quintin Valley, Baja California, owned by the El Milagro de Baja Agribusiness Corporation, based in Ensenada, over the piece-work wage for picking strawberries.

The strikers demand an increase greater than the 1 peso (US\$0.05) per box offered by the firm, the end of attacks on their labor rights by the company, and improved working conditions. The pickers demanded 30 pesos (US\$1.45) per box of first-rate strawberries, and 28 pesos for second-rate boxes. The workers also demanded health personnel on the farms.

In addition, they denounced the current foremen of the company for mistreatment and demanded their replacement. Foremen have threatened pickers that fight for their rights, with reprisals.

On January 4, strikers blocked the Trans peninsular highway, Highway 1, which runs between the city of Tijuana, on the US-Mexico border, and Cabo San Lucas to the south.

Reacting to the highway occupation, the General Secretariat of Government and the State Secretariat of Labor intervened to impose an agreement between the union bureaucracy and the company. The agreement: 28 pesos per box of first-rate strawberries, and 23 pesos per box of second-rate strawberries, short of the workers' initial demand. Voting on the contract by strikers has yet to be announced.

Ensenada is a major corporate exporter of non-citrus fruits and vegetables, with fields across Baja California.

Petrobrás contingent workers protest suppressed by Brazilian Military Police

A protest by contingent construction workers (temps) owed one month's wages with delayed salaries and rights has been ongoing since December. The contract workers employed by MIPE-Construções e Montagens, which provides services to the Petrobrás oil monopoly, was ignored by Petrobrás, who had their protest repressed by the Military Police.

The workers had been raising their demands throughout the month of December. At issue are arbitrary super-exploitative contract changes made by the company.

The workers spent Christmas and New Year's without being able to provide for their families, with many reporting that they are dependent on help from friends and family even to buy food. On December 23, a strike was called which ended on December 30, after a promise made at a meeting with MIPE and representatives of Petrobrás that the payment would be made by January 8.

On January 8, having received no money, workers protested at TABG [Terminais Aquaviários da Baía de Guanabara], the port of Governador Island. Petrobrás and MIPE responded by calling the Military Police to surround the workers and force an end to the protest.

One day later, with no payments in sight, workers protested at the Petrobrás headquarters in downtown Rio de Janeiro and at the TABG terminal.

Protests are expected to continue this week.

Allegiant Air pilots picket Asheville, North Carolina airport as company refuses to agree to industry standard wages

Allegiant Air pilots picketed January 7 outside Asheville Regional Airport in Fletcher, North Carolina, to demonstrate their opposition to the company's failure to respond to their demand for wage increases comparable to other airlines. The 1,300 Allegiant pilots voted by 97 percent in October 2024 to grant strike authorization against the Las Vegas, Nevada-based ultra-low-cost carrier.

Teamsters Local 2118, which represents Allegiant Air's pilots at 23 pilot bases across the country, reports that their members make 40 percent less than the current industry standard. Allegiant's current offer is still 24 percent short of that standard.

The two sides are also negotiating over retirement benefits, disability benefits, paid maternity and paternity leave, schedules, and seniority rights concerning quality of life improvements.

Allegiant Air focuses on providing leisure air travel service to recreational destinations from 120 smaller cities, using regional airports with routes not covered by major air carriers. Low compensation to employees comprises a major part of Allegiant's profit plan.

Current negotiations between the Teamsters and Allegiant are being mediated by the National Mediation Board and the union has not yet been given permission to issue a strike notice.

Washington state healthcare workers begin informational pickets as contract talks stall over wages and staffing

Hundreds of healthcare workers at PeaceHealth St. Joseph Medical

Center in Bellingham, Washington began carrying out informational pickets on their breaks January 9 as contract talks between management and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) have made no progress. SEIU Healthcare 1199NW represents nearly 1,000 healthcare workers, including nursing assistants, lab assistants, patient access representatives and imaging technicians.

According to the SEIU, negotiations remain far apart on wages, safe staffing and healthcare benefits. The low-end of the wage scale for workers is \$16.86 an hour, which is below Bellingham's current minimum wage of \$17.66 an hour.

Management railed at the union's request for a 34 percent wage increase over three years for higher-paid workers and a 60 percent wage increase for those toward the bottom of the pay scale. PeaceHealth spokesperson Amy Drury called the demands "highly unrealistic" and said there was "no justification for these increases."

The old contract agreement expired on November 16, 2024. Twelve bargaining sessions have taken place since then.

PeaceHealth is a non-profit Catholic chain made up of 10 hospitals throughout the Pacific Northwest. The top 25 executives rake in an average of \$1.2 million in yearly compensation. In 2022, its president and CEO Elizabeth Dunne took home a base pay of \$5.6 million.

Edmonton, Alberta school support workers strike

On January 13, 3,200 school support workers in the Edmonton and Sturgeon school districts began a strike for a significant pay increase, better education funding and additional classroom support. About 200 educational support jobs remain unfilled.

The striking education assistants, librarians, cafeteria workers and administration staff, members of Canadian Union of Public Employees Locals 3550 and 4625, have not seen a wage increase for 12 years. Their average annual wage is \$34,500.

To begin the strike, CUPE officials have limited picketing in Edmonton to only two schools. In the Sturgeon public school district, which includes the towns of Redwater, Morinville and St. Albert, all schools are being picketed.

Toronto area steelworkers locked out at Welded Tube

Three hundred forty welders, members of United Steelworkers Local 8328, in the Concord industrial suburb of Vaughan, Ontario just north of Toronto, are in the third week of a lockout that began December 23. The workers, who in the last contract agreed to a wage freeze, are demanding that the company increases its unsatisfactory wage offer in a new contract. Details of the specific wage offer and demands of the union have not been made public.

Welded Tube of Canada is a diversified steel pipe and tube producer with annual production capacity of 700,000 tons. The company operates in total at five manufacturing and finishing facilities located in Canada and the United States.

Municipal workers strike in Queens Region, Nova Scotia

Last Thursday, about 40 water treatment, solid waste and snow clearance workers in the south-west community around Liverpool, Nova Scotia began a strike in pursuit of a significant wage increase and to push back a management demand to end overtime compensation for weekend work and to sideline contract protections for temporary workers.

Regional management has offered a paltry 5.5 percent wage increase spread out over a proposed three-year contract. Queens Region workers are paid significantly less than their counterparts in other regions in the province.

The bargaining unit is made up of 40 workers, members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW). Area management has stated that non-union staff will keep services running, and in response to the strike action, subsequently declared its own lockout of the IBEW workers.



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