

Workers Struggles: The Americas

Argentine workers mobilize to defend public entitlements; US Postal Service contract drivers strike across eight states

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

Argentine workers mobilize to defend public entitlements

On February 20, Argentine workers launched protest marches denouncing increasing poverty among retirees, as a result of the Javier Milei's administration cuts in government payments for pensions, medications and medical care. In addition, demonstrators noted the increasing costs of canes, wheel chairs, bedding for the aged, and other equipment required by retirees.

Since Milei took office poverty in Argentina has skyrocketed, doubling to reach its highest level in 20 years. The savage assault on pensions, education, healthcare and other social services is being held up as a model by Trump right hand man, billionaire Elon Musk, in his assault on federal workers and agencies.

The demonstrators rallied at the headquarters of the National Social Services for Retirees (PAMI). The protest was attacked by the police with tear gas, by order of Security Minister Patricia Bullrich.

Workers in Panama protest proposed attacks on public pensions

On February 20, workers and retirees marched on the National Legislature (aka National Assembly) in Panama City denouncing draft legislation that attacks social security in Panama. The proposal aims to replace the current public pensions with a system of individual investment accounts administered by private financiers, similar to the 401K system in the US.

"We will not allow the government of dictator Jose Raul Molinos to steal our insurance money and give it to banks and private pension administrators," declared one of the protesters.

Among the participants in the march were construction workers who have been protesting and striking, demanding the release of 83 construction workers arrested during a February 12 protest along with 500 other workers (since this latest protest, the 83 have been released).

Education workers in Quintana Roo, Mexico mobilize against draft retirement law

Education workers in the Mexican state of Quintana Roo, in the Yucatan peninsula, marched on February 22 against draft retirement legislation that threatens their living standards, their working conditions and their retirement benefits. The protest followed an 8-hour strike the day before.

Approximately 1,000 education workers marched in each of three protests in Cancun, Playa del Carmen and Chetumal, Quintana Roo's capital.

At the Cancun rally speakers denounced one of the top bureaucrats of their union, Alfonso Zepeda Salas, who is now a senator and one of the main supporters of the draft law. The legislation will increase public workers' taxes to pay for retirement and health benefits, supposedly to save the retirement system from bankruptcy. In the words of one of the speakers: "That is the obligation of the bosses and the government, who were the ones that let the system collapse."

"We are saddled with an individual who, as a representative of the [union's] national committee, pretends to be a victim, but as senator is supporting it [the legislation] declared spokesperson Julian Padilla, a special education teacher.

"We feel that we are abandoned by our own trade unions. We have no representation that guarantees that it will defend our rights; the biggest is the increase in health fees that we will have to pay, for our health benefits," added Padilla.

More protest strikes are being planned by the Quintana Roo educators.

Postal contract drivers strike across eight states

More than 500 drivers for the US Postal Service contractor 10 Roads Express launched a strike February 18 across eight states over the company's refusal to meet workers' demands for a "fair and serious offer." According to the Teamsters, "10 Roads Express is one of the largest contractors for the USPS, receiving hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars to transport US mail."

The Teamsters press release did not specify the sticking points in the negotiations, except to say the company "has continued to present an insulting and unrealistic contract proposal."

Workers first began to organize in 2023. At that time, Tony O'Neil, a driver in Colby, Kansas, said, "For too long, drivers have been forced to work under unfair conditions with no control over our stop times. When we are delayed, we don't get paid. We also need better health care."

Keith Damgaard, a nine-year driver in Omaha, Nebraska, said, "We're done with the unfair treatment from a company that takes millions from USPS while leaving workers behind. We will not accept anything less than what we have earned and deserve."

Maintenance workers at Missouri Army base strike against concessions

The 150 maintenance workers at the US Army's Fort Leonard Wood in Pulaski County, Missouri, walked out on an indefinite strike February 5 after workers rejected a contractor's final offer by a 90 percent margin. Tsay Professional Service, a tribal-owned company out of New Mexico, refused to resume bargaining after the contract rejection and has said it will unilaterally impose their concessions contract after a 60-day cooling off period.

Exact details of negotiations are not available, but the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 453, which represents the maintenance workers, indicated the two sides were "not close." Local 453 Business Manager Kevin McGill, referring to wages, said the company hasn't "offered anything close to what inflation has been," which, according to McGill runs at 5 percent a year.

Wages are not the only issue. "This company has tried through the negotiation process of this contract to unilaterally take things away from the men and women that are in the contract already," said McGill.

Port of Los Angeles truck drivers strike over unilateral pay and benefit cuts

Truck drivers who haul cargo from the Port of Los Angeles to warehouses in the Inland Empire went on strike February 20 after Southern Counties Express altered workers' compensation from an hourly wage to a pay-per-load formula. According to Teamsters Local 848, which represents the 70 striking truck drivers, the change reduces the incomes of workers by more than \$35,000 a year.

At the same time, weekly costs for family health coverage rocketed from \$30 to \$166, while deductibles rose from \$600 to \$4,400. Vacation and sick days were also slashed.

The Teamsters and Southern Counties Express last met at the negotiating table in August of last year, but reached no agreement.

Southern Counties Express is owned by Universal Logistics Holdings, Inc., based in Huntsville, Alabama. Matthew Moroun, board chairman for Universal Logistics, had an estimated net worth of \$287 million as of 2024. His father, Manuel J. Moroun, a billionaire capitalist, is most noted for the ownership of one of the few privately owned border crossings between Canada and the United States—the Ambassador Bridge that connects Detroit, Michigan, and Windsor, Ontario.

Rochester, New York, home care specialists to carry out one-day strike

Professional and clinical workers at the University of Rochester Medicine Home Care (URMHC) in New York state were slated to carry out a one-day strike February 24 after contract talks stalled. According to the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 1199, 79 percent of the 111 nurses, physical therapists and other caregivers voted to go on strike in an effort to win their first contract with URMHC.

Among the important demands workers are raising are affordable health insurance, reasonable caseloads, and fair wages. Workers also charge management with harassment, intimidation and retaliation.

Dave Simon, a physical therapist, told WROC, "We're asking for

caseloads and productivity to go back down to what it was before they increased to 30 percent. We're asking for retirement benefits that our colleagues at the university already have, not more. Same thing."

Toronto municipal workers move toward strike

Thirty thousand inside municipal workers employed by the City of Toronto were notified by the Ontario Ministry of Labour last week that their "no board" report signifying an impasse in negotiations has been received, thereby starting a 17-day countdown until the union can launch a strike or management can declare a lockout. A legal strike or lockout action can now begin as early as March 8.

In January, workers voted by over 90 percent for a strike, in a record turnout. The health, planning, operations, employment and social services officers, cleaners, court services, ambulance dispatch, child carers, 311 responders, recreation programmers, shelter attendants, water & food inspectors, and long-term care workers are organized under the Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 79.

Wages are a key stumbling block in the talks between the union and negotiators for the administration of Toronto Mayor Olivia Chow. Chow is a former New Democratic Party federal member of parliament and the widow of late NDP leader Jack Layton. Management has offered a pay increase of just under 15 percent to be spread out over 4 years. The offer has been roundly derided by workers, who have struggled to survive on poverty wages for many years.

Current pay rates are so abysmally low that vacancies in various departments continue to grow, most notably in long-term care, where vacancies have ballooned 700 per cent since the start of the pandemic according to CUPE. In Toronto, one of the most expensive cities in Canada, almost half the workers in key departments servicing children, the elderly and the poor, earn only the provincial minimum wage.



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