

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Haitian police repress demonstration in Port-au-Prince

On March 18, thousands of people, many of them displaced from their towns and homes by death squads, marched and rallied in Port-au-Prince, Haiti's capital city. The protesters demanded government intervention against social insecurity and called for the dissolution of the current unelected government, the so-called Presidential Transition Council (CPT), imposed by US imperialism.

The protesters condemned the indifference of the CPT administration to the violent activity of the *Vivre Ensemble* (Live together) coalition of gangs and death squads that terrorized the working class and slum neighborhoods of the city (85 percent of the city), home to one-third of Haiti's population.

The police blocked access to Port-au-Prince's Villa d'Accueil, in the upscale Bourbon neighborhood, where the CPT is headquartered. Police attacked the demonstrators with tear gas and live ammunition. Two demonstrators were killed by bullets.

In response to the police repression, demonstrators threw stones and blocked traffic in the main highway that runs through the region.

Panamanians strike against Social Security "reform"

On Friday March 21, workers carried out a national strike in Panama to protest legislation that will privatize Social Security pensions, placing banks and insurance firms in control of workers' retirement.

Hundreds of strikers marched in Panama City condemning the privatization and declaring: "Social Security belongs to the people, not to the banks!" "They want us to work more years and get less money!," and "The people will not allow the robbery of the century!"

Workers also carried signs declaring the current administration of President Mulino a "dictatorship" at the service of the rich.

The marchers were repressed by Panama City police. Social media videos showed images of strikers wounded by the police.

In the city of Colon, police arrested strikers distributing leaflets, including union leaders Alberto Diaz, of the teachers' union, and Manuel Valencia, of the Construction Workers Union. Flying over the demonstrators were US military helicopters belonging to the US Navy's Southern Command to assist with "security."

Chilean Starbucks workers strike and protest

On March 19, hundreds of striking Starbucks workers from many stores rallied in the port city of Valparaiso with signs against contingent employment and very low wages. "They pay us miserable wages; they demand more and more work, and they deny our right to form a union," declared a striking barista.

The strikers report that the hourly wage (\$3.00 USD) for a barista is less than half of what a cappuccino coffee sells for (\$6.14 USD) and are therefore demanding a 200 percent wage increase, better working conditions and that more workers be hired.

The strike began on March 10 in 50 Starbucks branches. It has now extended across Chile, gaining the support of young, temporary and contingent workers employed in retail stores and restaurants across Chile. The strikers are demanding that the national labor federation (CUT) declare a strike in support of all contingent and temp workers.

Last week, Starbucks workers in the United States, members of Starbucks Workers United, sent a solidarity Instagram video and text message to Chilean Starbucks workers, declaring "solidarity with the trade unionists that are fighting for the same demands as we are in the United States: more hiring, fair wages and secure jobs."

Community College of Philadelphia faculty and staff vote to strike

Last Monday, the 1,200 faculty and staff at the Community College of Philadelphia (CCP) voted to authorize a strike after 30 bargaining sessions over 14 months failed to produce an agreement on wages and staffing acceptable to workers. The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Local 2026 is negotiating three separate contracts for full-time faculty, adjunct professors and staff workers.

The CCP administration has proposed a 13 percent pay increase over the course of three years while workers are demanding a 30 percent increase over four years. The pay at nearby Temple University is 20 percent higher for adjunct faculty members than for those at CCP.

Local 2026 treasurer Jamie Zigarelli said, "We have custodial staff who've been here for 20 years making \$34,000 ... the dedicated folks who remain are now doing the work of two people." The union is seeking a \$20 an hour minimum for staff workers.

Meanwhile, the CCP staff has been reduced by some 25 percent since the pandemic, although enrollment has nearly recovered to pre-pandemic levels. CCP management wants to increase class sizes and at the same time is demanding that full-time professors shoulder increased credit loads.

The Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board responded to

management's request for a fact-finder. Pennsylvania law prohibits strikes during a fact-finding process. Local 2026 has said the actual launching of a strike "would be a last resort."

Wisconsin Cummins workers on strike against use of temporary workers, mandatory overtime

Some 90 members of United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 291 went on strike March 18 at a Cummins plant located in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, after management failed to present an offer in the wake of a January contract expiration. The union and company have met ten times and management said it will not resume bargaining until late April.

According to the union, the previous agreement bars the use of temporary workers and Cummins wants to alter that. Workers are also angry about a clause in the old contract that permits management to force workers to work 18 Saturdays a year. The company wants to remove this cap and increase mandatory Saturday shifts.

According to the union, the strike will continue until they reach a contract resolution.

Cummins, based in Columbus, Indiana, has nearly 70,000 employees and operates facilities in 197 countries and territories. It generated over \$34 billion in revenues in 2024. Its Oshkosh plant manufactures heavy-duty axles for construction and military vehicles.

Oregon beverage strike enters seventh month

Workers at four Bigfoot Beverages facilities in Oregon are in their seventh month on strike. The 240 drivers, warehouse workers and workers involved in vending, merchandise and sales walked off the job on September 19 over the company's attempt to take away the defined-benefit pension plan and replace it with an inferior 401(k) retirement plan.

The Teamsters claim that "each member would have to spend at least \$3,300 per year out of pocket just to match the company's current rate of funding for their retirement benefits." Teamsters Local 324 represents workers at the Roseburg and Newport sites while Teamsters Local 206 represents workers at Eugene and Coos Bay.

Management withdrew recognition of the union last December, claiming a majority of workers had signed a petition requesting the decertification of the union. The Teamsters, having done nothing to mobilize support behind the strike, are merely holding out for a decision from the National Labor Relations Board on the basis that a decertification can only take place through an NLRB election—a process that could require months and is hostage to the Trump administration's rampage through the federal government bureaucracy. Teamsters General President Sean O'Brien is a major union ally of Trump.

Brampton, Ontario transit workers vote to strike

Last week, the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) announced that 98 percent of its 1,400 bus drivers and mechanics voted in favour of a strike after talks between the union and city reached an impasse. The vote followed the membership's initial rejection of a tentative agreement placed before them for ratification by the union officials last month.

Government regulations say a strike cannot begin until 17 days after the union files its intention to strike with the labour board. No such declaration has been made as a conciliation process now begins.

Last November, about 1,200 Brampton municipal workers in the Canadian Union of Public Employees struck for eight days. During that strike, city workers picketed transit depots preventing buses from departing, as the bus operators honoured the picket lines.

Waterloo Region workers continue strike

Management for the Region of Waterloo, Ontario have tabled what they have termed as their "final offer" to about 240 outside workers who are now beginning their fourth week on strike. They are pursuing pay demands to address inflation that occurred over the course of their previous contract.

The workers are members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees and perform work in road maintenance, landfill services, airport services, clean water treatment services and emergency vehicle repairs.

Contract negotiations stalled after regional management withdrew a previously offered wage improvement and then presented a "significantly lower" wage proposal. Union officials have stated that the initial wage proposal must be restored before any agreement can be reached.



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