

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Thousands of workers participate in protests across Chile against Boric administration

On Thursday, April 3 thousands rallied in Santiago and other cities in Chile denouncing the Boric administration's "broken promises" on wages, working conditions, education and health.

The workers were participating in a one-day protest strike, called by the Central Workers Union (CUT) apparatus to let off steam, without engaging in any real struggle.

On wages, the workers demand an increase in the monthly minimum wage from 535 to 760 US dollars, for a 40-hour week; currently the full-time workweek is set at 45 hours.

In addition, the workers demand an end to the private pension system imposed in 1981 by the Pinochet dictatorship, placing workers retirement at the mercy of financial hedge funds. Workers and retirees are currently very skeptical of a recently approved 'reform,' a so-called mixed system that essentially leaves workers' contributions in the hands of vulture funds, and does little for those already retired.

Also demonstrating were teachers and health workers, protesting against budget cuts imposed by the government's austerity policies.

Brazil sees "Red April" struggles over land reform

On April 4, over 600 peasant families, members of the Brazilian Landless Movement (MST), occupied mining lands in eastern province of Minas Gerais demanding that the Lula administration expropriate land and carry out its long-promised land reform. The families intend to use the occupied land for homes and agriculture.

Two days later, some 800 families occupied the Santa Teresa sugar plantation surrounding the plant by the same name. Santa Teresa employs 9,000 workers and is facing bankruptcy in Golana in Pernambuco Province in the eastern Amazonian region. Santa Teresa was illegally appropriated by the João Santos group during the last dictatorship. The MST aims to transform it and other latifundia in the State into sustainable food-producing farms under

the country's land reform law.

With these two occupations, the MST peasants opened up the annual Abril Rojo (Red April) protests, initiating a month of occupations and protests.

Despite repeated assurances, the Lula administration has done nothing to advance its promised land reform. According to the MST, about 65,000 peasant families are landless and living precariously. Since 2023, under Lula, only 723 families have been granted land under the terms of the Land Reform Act.

The MST insists that the occupation of land in this, and other regions of Brazil is a legal act that accords with present legislation and the Brazilian constitution. The governor of Minas Gerais, Remeu Zema denounce the MST as a criminal group and threatened violent repression.

Red April commemorates the death of 15 MST members in 1996, executed during a peaceful rally, known today as the Eldorado do Carajás Massacre.

Panama teachers strike against Social Security law

On April 3 and 4 Panamanian educators went on a 48-hour strike demanding the repeal of Social Security Fund legislation (Law 462), which represents a brutal attack on workers and their families.

The government of President Jose Raul Murino proposes to privatize Social Security pensions.

A spokesperson for the Association of Teachers of Panama (ASOPROF), specified that the strike opposes the government's project, which ends the Social Security entitlement ('solidarity-based benefit accounts') and creates individual investment accounts, managed by financial vulture funds.

In addition, the new law raises the retirement age by three years. Considering the high cost of living, teachers estimate that their pensions would not provide enough for retired teachers and other workers to live decently.

Panama's education minister, Lucy Molinar, threatened striking teachers, declaring that their salaries would not be paid.

Teachers are set to strike on April 10, this time indefinitely, unless the Social Security retirement benefit remains at it was before the new legislation.

United States

Potential tentative agreement for faculty at ISU could leave separate lab workers' unit isolated

Illinois State University (ISU) reached a tentative contract April 4 heading off a strike by the union representing 650 tenured and tenure-track faculty after some 50 negotiating sessions over the last year. ISU management and the United Faculty of ISU union, which is seeking its first contract, will not release details of the agreement until after an April 18 ratification vote.

The agreement comes in the wake of a recent favorable decision by an administrative law judge with the Illinois Educational Labor Board over a petition by 150 workers seeking union representation at one of two lab schools run by ISU – the University High School in Normal. A final decision by the labor board is expected before the end of the school year.

The Lab School Education Association (LSEA), which represents the 150 workers, has been struggling for the last year to gain union recognition against significant resistance by ISU. The two bargaining units have been conducting their struggles separately.

Speaking to WGLT, social studies teacher Kate Pole and organizer for LSEA, said, “I’m nervous, as I look at what appears to be ISU pushing really hard against a much larger faculty [union]. And I wonder, considering how we’ve been delayed a year in terms of recognition, what does that mean for us and our future when we start bargaining?”

Connecticut nursing home workers rally at capital for Medicaid funding

Nursing home workers rallied at the Connecticut state capital in Hartford to press the governor and legislature to increase Medicaid rates to fund some 50 long-term care homes as a means to facilitate bargaining for higher wages. About 73 percent of nursing home residents are on Medicaid and this population is increasing and will require increased staffing in coming years.

Back in 2021, the legislature passed a four-year agreement that increased funding to nursing home companies that provided minimal wage increases of 4.5 percent in 2022 and 6.2 percent in 2023 for workers. No wage increases were provided for in the last two years of that agreement.

The Service Employees International Union Local 1199 is channeling workers behind a petition to press their demands.

13,000 Quebec daycare workers extend 3-day strike

Thousands of education workers as well as kitchen and office staff employed at over 400 early childhood care centers in the Montreal and Laval regions have extended a three-day strike that

began last week to now include an additional two days.

The walkout is the third limited strike held by the workers over the past three months. The strikers, members of the Federation de la sante et des services sociaux (FSSS), voted late last year for a strike mandate of five separate days of job action at their choosing. The main issues in the contract dispute are pay, workload, bonuses for workers in the regions and support for children with special needs.

Workers have now voted by 91 percent to renew their union’s mandate to include an indefinite strike should no progress be made at the bargaining table. To date, the Quebec government has submitted contract offers well short of the strikers’ demands.

Currently, the salary of a qualified childcare worker is \$21.60 an hour at the entry level. It rises to \$28.60 at the 10th level, then \$30.03 after one year at level 10. The Treasury Board for the provincial government has promoted an unsatisfactory 17.4 percent wage rise spread out over five years and have demanded concessions on the organization of daycare work.

British Columbia LifeLab technicians continue strike

One thousand two hundred medical technicians working in 129 testing laboratories across British Columbia are in the eighth week of a rotating strike to press their demands for wage equity with hospital-based lab technicians and for better health and safety protections and scheduling processes. Technicians at LifeLabs in the province are paid between 4 and 16 per cent less than hospital workers who perform the same job.

The technicians are organized by the BC General Employees Union. After working without a contract since last April, workers voted by 98 percent for job action this past November.

Due to provincially mandated essential services regulations, workers are required to rotate their strike activity. LifeLabs is one of the largest diagnostic results companies in Canada. In the province, the company provides services for over 7 million patients annually.



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