

Workers Struggles: The Americas

Peruvian truck drivers' strike nationwide; Canada DHL lockout continues

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

Peruvian truck drivers strike nationwide

The National Front of Heavy Cargo Drivers and other logistics unions went on strike on Wednesday June 18 demanding protections against organized crime, increases in retirement pay, and better working conditions.

The also denounced government-backed attacks on small farms and demanded prosecution of police and military personnel guilty of human rights violations. No end date for the work stoppage has been set.

The truckers National Front represents 80,000 drivers across Peru.

On the day of the strike, truck drivers rallied in protest in downtown Lima surrounded by 10,500 police agents sent by the government to intimidate the truckers and their supporters.

Worker is killed during protests against Panama government moves for the privatization of Social Security

On Wednesday, June 19 a worker was killed by government gendarmes during a protest demonstration in the city of Rambala, Bocas del Toro state, during a day of protests against the privatization of Social Security pensions in Panamá. The victim, whose name was not released, was shot in the back and died on the way to the hospital. Those at the scene described the killing as a crime perpetrated by the José Raúl Mulino administration.

The forces of repression, in addition to bullets and beatings, made use of large amounts to tear gas, attempting to disperse the protesters and re-open blocked roads, as part of "Operation Omega." The government sent 353 police to attack the Rambala protest, and 34 demonstrators were arrested.

The protests, organized by the United People for Panama's Survival coalition, have mobilized construction unions as well as

teachers, students and indigenous people, for over a month. They are opposed to legislation privatizing Social Security (Law 4562), putting retirements in the hands of private groups of vulture capitalists. Teachers have been on a national strike for nearly two months.

President Mulino, who has ruled out any negotiations with the demonstrators and any changes to the legislation, has ordered increasing levels of repression against the demonstrations.

Workers in three states in contract struggle with French-owned company Airgas

Teamsters Local 507 in Cleveland, Ohio, announced June 20 that they are preparing to strike Airgas in the wake of an overwhelming strike authorization vote by its members as contract talks have stalled. The action comes after members of Teamsters Local 701 in New Jersey have already gone on strike and another 30 workers with Teamsters Local 283 at an Airgas facility in Ferndale, Michigan voted unanimously to grant strike authorization.

The Teamsters have not provided details of the talks other than to say that workers have found Airgas' contract proposals "substandard" and "unacceptable." Airgas, a subsidiary of the French multinational Air Liquide, is the largest US distributor of industrial, medical, and specialty gases, employing 11,000 workers. The parent company made a net profit of more than \$3 billion last year.

In a news release, the union said, "The Teamsters represent hundreds of Airgas workers across the country. If the company fails to present a fair contract and refuses to rectify its unfair labor practices, a multi-local strike could see picket lines extend nationwide."

In previous contract struggles, while the Teamsters have always encountered sharp opposition from the company in negotiations, the union has limited strike action to regional facilities. In 2019, four Airgas plants in California went on strike to protest the firing of four workers.

Healthcare workers at Stillwater, Minnesota clinic vote 99 percent to strike

Some 100 healthcare workers at HealthPartners Stillwater Medical Group in Stillwater, Minnesota, authorized strike action June 17 by a 99 percent margin as contract negotiations have failed to deliver on wages and benefits. The clinic is affiliated with the giant hospital system HealthPartners, but the Certified Medical Assistants, Licensed Practical Nurses and Registered Medical Assistants receive substandard compensation when compared to their counterparts at other HealthPartners clinics.

Lori Leiner, a thirty-year veteran LPN, told The Lowdown that the lag in compensation was what led her to vote for union representation with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) last August of 2024. "I pay (over) four times the amount other workers pay at other HealthPartners clinics. I pay \$360 a month for my husband and I. Over at other clinics, it's 80 bucks."

Ellie Hilton, an advanced practice provider, called the wage offer "insulting... Even for our highest-paid members, they're talking about increases that are less than 70 cents per year in their most recent pass. We refuse to accept that this is the best HealthPartners have to offer us."

The contract struggle at the Stillwater Medical Group comes as thousands of registered nurses at HealthPartners Minnesota hospitals are also bargaining for a new agreement.

Essentia Health workers in northern Minnesota and northwest Wisconsin to hold strike vote

Some 400 Advanced Practice Providers (APP) at Duluth, Minnesota-based Essentia Health are holding a strike vote on June 24 as they seek their first contract after launching an organizing drive back in 2023. The workers are part of Essentia East Market healthcare facilities, which cover a region in north-central and northeast Minnesota and northwest Wisconsin.

The APPs are seeking increased input into healthcare delivery and an end to chronic short-staffing. Lynn Gevik, a nurse practitioner, told InForum, "This year, Essentia Health opened a new state-of-the-art hospital that cost nearly \$1 billion to construct. Yet, in its shadow there are APPs who have not had raises for years."

Gevik mocked Essentia's wage increases, declaring, "Essentia Health may say that 90 percent of their APPs received a raise this year, but is the 1 cent-per-hour raise given to a highly experienced orthopedic nurse practitioner really a raise?"

The East Market APPs have joined the Minnesota Nurses Association (MNA). As the APPs enter into struggle, 12,000 registered nurses with the MNA are currently bargaining with Essentia and other hospital systems in the Duluth region and the Minneapolis-St. Paul metro region.

DHL Express delivery workers in third week of lockout

About 2,100 truck drivers, couriers, warehouse and clerical workers were locked out on June 4 by DHL Express Canada management. The workers, members of Unifor, operate across the country. About one-third of the unionized workforce are the delivery truck drivers who are employed as owner-operators of their own vehicles.

Only after the DHL lockout began and a scab workforce was activated did Unifor officials, clearly placed on their back foot, issue their own belated strike call. However, with a scab workforce already deployed, DHL management was able to maintain basic operations. The company had hoped that its widespread deployment of replacement workers would intimidate the union membership and quickly force acceptance of a miserable contract.

A new federal anti-scab law that had been several years in the making was slated to take effect on June 20. That law restricted the use of replacement workers during strikes or lockouts in federally regulated industries that include transportation, banking and telecommunications. When the provision came into effect last week, all handling of parcels and crates in the DHL national system came to a halt.

DHL management quickly approached federal Liberal government Minister of Jobs and Families Patty Hajdu to win yet another in a long string of unconstitutional back-to-work orders that have been the main weapon wielded by the government against workers contractual struggles in key industries over the past four years. DHL management had the gall to appeal to the federal government to force an end to the "strike," cynically omitting that the work stoppage had been initiated by the company in the first place. In a brief, pro-forma statement Hajdu encouraged continued negotiations.

DHL is a German-owned trans-national parcel delivery company that seeks growth "opportunities" in North America as the federal Post Office workers in both the United States and Canada fight schemes to cut, dismantle and ultimately privatize delivery operations. The courier company has about 50,000 customers in Canada, including Lululemon, Shein, Siemens and many other companies.

Workers have been resisting DHL attempts to impose massive concessions in any new contract. These include changes to the driver pay system that would produce a significant pay cut. Drivers would also be required to drive as far as 100 kilometers just to get to their delivery routes, with no compensation. DHL also seeks contract language to make it easier to lay off workers.



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