

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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Latin America

Brazilian workers and students protest US tariffs

Thousands of Brazilian workers and students rallied at the US consulate in the industrial city of São Paulo on Friday, August 1, to protest the punitive 50 percent trade tariffs being imposed by US President Donald Trump as a political sanction against the Lula regime.

The measure will mainly impact agriculture and technology industries. The demonstrators denounced the tariffs as retaliation for the prosecution of ex-President Javier Bolsonaro and for Brazil's participation in seeking to establish an alternative BRICS currency to replace the US dollar.

Bolsonaro, the dictator's son and the entire Bolsonaro family lobbied Trump to impose the punitive tariffs.

The protests are expected to extend to other cities, including Rio de Janeiro, Brasilia, Salvador, Fortaleza, Porto Alegre, Belo Horizonte, Manaus, Recife, São Luis, and Curitiba.

Retirees' protest in Buenos Aires attacked by police

On Wednesday July 30, the weekly protest demonstration by retirees was assaulted by police; seven demonstrators were arrested. Nicolas Munafo, a TV reporter, was singled out by the authorities after reporting that the police had shot at a demonstrator. Another reporter, Lula Gonzalez, was violently

attacked with a tear gas projectile to her face.

The retirees and their supporters are demanding increases in their pensions, the restoration of fully covered medical insurance, and an end to government layoffs of Argentina's Social Security Agency (PAMI).

A recent Social Security increase approved by Congress was vetoed this week by ultra-right President Javier Milei.

United States

Sysco Minnesota workers authorize strike as contract expires

Teamsters drivers and warehouse workers for Sysco Minnesota voted unanimously to grant strike authorization in advance of the August 1 expiration of their contract with the giant distributor of food products to restaurants, healthcare and education facilities.

There are no details concerning the state of bargaining. The Teamsters Local 120 President Tom Erickson said, "If Sysco doesn't put a serious proposal on the table, our members will be on the picket line."

Sysco driver Ben Alverado stated, "Sysco rakes in billions off our labor. If they keep offering crumbs, we're ready to shut them down."

Sysco is categorized as the world's largest broadline food distributor, with 76,000 employees in 10 countries. The Teamsters represent some 10,000 Sysco workers in the United States. However, they segregate them into small locals and bargain separately.

Puerto Rican artists protest energy shortages and high prices

On July 29, artists and their supporters rallied in San Juan, Puerto Rico's capital city, to protest against LUMA Energy, a private company in charge of the distribution of electricity in Puerto Rico. LUMA provides 60 percent of the Island's electricity. The protests included theatre performers, poets, singers, musicians, graphic and plastic artists.

In the words of one of the protest organizers, singer and poet Raquel González, spokesperson for the Association of Puerto Rican Artists (Junete de Artistas Boricuas), "Since LUMA Energy took over, electricity prices keep going up and electricity blackouts have increased. People have died and the company does not respond. Food goes bad and the company does not respond. They [LUMA] are protected by a contract that allows charges 10 times what people used to pay."

Protesters chanted to the rhythm of musical instruments: "Luma pa fuera" (throw Luma out!), and "Luma no suma, nos quita" (LUMA adds nothing, it takes away from us!).

Hurricane Maria, in 2017, virtually wiped out Puerto Rico's electricity network, and things have yet to improve. Electric outages are a daily occurrence, while electricity bills increase frequently.

LUMA, a Canadian and US-owned company, was contracted together with other energy companies by Puerto Rican authorities as part of the privatization of the state-owned electric provider on the island (PREPA), in the context of the island's 2014 bankruptcy and energy crisis.

Waikiki hotel workers rally to demand hotel management agree to pattern settlement

Workers at the Ilikai Hotel on Waikiki on the Hawaiian island of Oahu held a rally July 31 to demand management of the iconic hotel implement contract terms comparable to those won after a 40-day strike by workers at the Hilton Hawaiian Village. Workers at the Hilton property obtained a \$10 an hour raise over four years.

But the 40-member bargaining unit, the smallest represented by Unite Here Local 5 in Waikiki, has been waiting a year in vain for negotiations to produce any

results. In 2017, workers settled a contract only to have to wait until 2024 to settle a new agreement. At that time, Ilikai workers made \$8 an hour less than other hotels. That settlement was to have been updated when Hilton settled last year and other hotel properties accepted similar terms.

Canada

Chatham, Ontario aluminum workers strike

About 200 metal workers, members of Unifor, began a strike on July 31 against Dajcor Aluminum. The southwest Ontario plant produces extruded, fabricated and anodized aluminum components for the automotive, medical equipment and office space sectors in both Canada and the United States. The company has a second manufacturing facility in Kentucky. The Chatham plant has received more than \$3.5 million in government money in recent years.

On July 29, workers had voted down a tentative agreement presented to them by Unifor. Union officials, however, instead of organizing strike action, proposed to extend a strike deadline so that contract talks as well as production could continue. But when management began preparations to remove equipment from the plant and bring in scabs, workers set up picket lines.

Workers, noting increased tensions around US tariff policies, fear that the company may seek to use the current dispute to begin moving production to its Kentucky facility. Another ongoing strike by 120 Unifor workers just north of Toronto at Toromont, a heavy equipment component refurbishing facility, has also seen pickets mobilizing to prevent management from removing equipment.



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