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

Mexico

Workers denounce Bolivian labor law "reforms"

On Tuesday March 31 thousands of workers marched and surrounded Bolivia's government house in La Paz demanding from the newly installed right-wing government of Rodrigo Pereira higher wages, labor rights and lower fuel prices. The Bolivian Labor Federation (COB) is demanding a 20 percent wage increase for all workers.

A major issue is the administration's plan to eliminate existing labor legislation, making it possible for the owners of industry to increase working hours and worsen working conditions. In addition, protesters insist that the government stop their plans to privatize government-owned companies in mining and energy production.

Joining the marchers were contingents of peasant farmers, protesting a government plan to sell off their lands to the Bolivian oligarchy.

Mexican telephone and university workers support striking tire workers

Last week library workers employed by Mexico's national university (UNAM) and telephone company workers declared their support for 1,050 workers on strike against the JK Tyre and Tornel tire company, who have been occupying three plants in Mexico since February 23.

The telephone workers, on March 31, and Library workers (April 2), called for all Mexican workers to support the strike.

Education workers, members of the CNTE national educators' union, are also calling for support for the Tornel strikers. This strike, "reflects the reality faced by thousands of workers in this country: exploitation, contingency, and deaf ears," declared a CNTE statement —alluding to the Sheinbaum administration.

On March 22, workers at one of the plants were attacked by armed thugs, who shot at the workers at the plant gates while the police stood by. Four were wounded, two of whom are still hospitalized pending operations. Two of the shooters were arrested by the workers themselves.

The workers are demanding a 7 percent wage increase, a 40-hour week, an end to speed-ups, and safe working conditions.

Venezuela food industry workers rally

Over 300 food workers employed by the Mondelez Company rallied in Barquisimeto, in northwest Venezuela. Demonstrators, mostly assembly line workers, point out that the company is using delaying tactics to postpone negotiations to update the contract, while it is making significant profits.

In a press release issued by the workers, they pointed out that the US takeover of their country has resulted in a significant devaluation of the national currency, resulting in a 25 percent cut in real wages. The press release points out that in 2019 the company produced 1,000 tons yearly with 1,200 workers. Currently it produces 12,000 tons, with only 626 workers.

Among the demonstrators were older workers who insist that the firm is violating their rights by imposing speed-up conditions in order to get them to retire.

The protest took place across from the Justice Department, which the workers accused of siding with management.

Supporting the demonstrators were workers from other factories in Barquisimeto (Venezuela's fourth largest city).

Chicago-based Mondelez produces processed food products in 160 countries.

University workers protest in Rio de Janeiro as struggles continue at other campuses

On April 1, striking university technicians and administrative workers from Rio de Janeiro campuses of the federal

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university—UFRJ, UFF, Rural and Unirio— protested along Rio de Janeiro's Linha Vermelha highway, blocking it for the day, and calling on students and other university employees to support their strike, which began in the first week of March.

This action takes place in the same week that technical-administrative staff in other states have demonstrated a fighting spirit—exemplified by the blocking of gates at the Federal Universities of Rio Grande do Sul (UFCSPA, UFRGS, and IF-RS).

The protest is part of a month-long strike movement by education workers at federal campuses throughout Brazil demanding a new contract and denouncing the Lula administration for having ignored wage agreements arrived at in 2024. The Lula administration has refused to reopen negotiations.

United States

Harvard graduate students overwhelmingly vote to strike

Graduate students at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, announced April 1 that they had voted by a 95.8 percent margin to strike, in what would be their third work stoppage since 2019, after two years of frustrating negotiations. In March, Harvard management rejected the Harvard Graduate Student Union's (HGSU-UAW) request to bring the wages of teaching fellows (TF) closer to those of research assistants (RA). To accomplish this, the union has advanced the demand for a 74 percent wage increase for teaching fellows.

Denish Jaswal, who serves on the bargaining committee, told the *Harvard Crimson*, "They were saying, 'no other union contracts are giving a 74 percent raise; how could you possibly ask for a 74 percent raise?' But it's 74 percent because they're paying me $26,000."

"The actual numbers are that I am paid enough to qualify for food stamps in the state. And all of our workers are making substantially below a living wage and below what workers right across the street at MIT are making."

HGSU-UAW is also asking for a 12 percent increase to base salaries and annual raises of five percent. Harvard did not respond to the union's request for contract language concerning protections for non-citizen workers, despite having earlier indicated it would respond to the issue.

The strike vote covered a four-week period that saw some 300 graduate students make the decision to join the union.

Florida warehouse workers vote to strike Whole Foods supplier UNFI

Over 200 warehouse workers at the United Natural Foods Inc. (UNFI) warehouse in Pompano Beach, Florida voted unanimously April 1 to grant strike authorization, accusing the company of "slow walking" negotiations. The workers, members of Teamsters Local 769, are demanding a contract equal to or better than the other 50 UNFI warehouses across the country.

UNFI is one of the primary distributors for the Amazon chain of Whole Foods grocery stores. The company responded to the strike vote by declaring, "[W]e have contingency plans in place to ensure we can operate the facility and continue to service our customers."

The Teamsters say that there has been a surge since 2022 among UNFI warehouse workers seeking to organize to oppose substandard wages, benefits and working conditions. The trend is further fueled by the company's 2025 granting of total compensation packages of $9.7 million to CEO J. Alexander Miller Douglas and $3.9 million to president and CFO Matteo Tarditi.

Canada

Strike by produce distribution workers begins to empty Quebec produce shelves

Five hundred and fifty food warehouse, transport and office workers employed by Metro grocery chains in Quebec are entering the second week of a strike in pursuit of a significant wage increase and protections against company contracting-out schemes.

The workers, many of whom are employed at Metro's giant fruit and vegetable distribution center in Laval just north of Montreal, have seen their living standards steadily fall due to the ravages of inflationary spikes during and after the COVID pandemic. Hundreds of grocery stores representing Metro as well as its Super C and Marché Richelieu outlets are already experiencing produce shortages.

The workers, members of the Federation of Commerce and affiliated with the Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN), the province's second largest union federation, voted by 97 percent for indefinite strike action. They are fighting for a 20 per cent raise in the first year of a new contract, followed by five per cent raises in each of two subsequent years.

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