Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Puerto Rican teachers protest assault on public education

Thousands of teachers and education workers marched in San Juan, Puerto Rico on November 6. At issue are demands for a decent retirement, and more than $94 million in back pay. As they marched toward a protest rally at the island's government house, the demonstrators chanted "where is J-Go" in reference to Governor Jennifer Gonzalez and her election promises to increase teachers' pensions and pay back wages.

Joining the protest, "the march of indignation," were school bus drivers, firefighters, University of Puerto Rico professors and non-teaching employees, and water and sewer workers.

Puerto Rican schools have yet to fully recover from the effects of the 2016 financial bankruptcy, Hurricane Maria (2017), and the Covid pandemic (2019), which is downgrading education, particularly in the island's poorest districts.

Buenos Aires' area bus drivers protest for living wages

Bus drivers and employees of 18 private bus lines in the working-class suburb of Avellaneda, in the southern outskirts of Buenos Aires, protested on November 6, demanding a living wage.

The protest began at 6 a.m. in several neighborhoods, including blocking the Pueyrredon Bridge, which connects Avellaneda with the rest of Buenos Aires. The workers are demanding a starting monthly wage of 3.5 million pesos (US$2,264), nearly double what they are getting today, while management is offering only a 20 percent increase, less than six month's inflation.

At the headquarters of one of the lines, a worker, speaking on behalf of those on the picket line, also raised objections to the CGT labor bureaucracy, which keeps postponing negotiations. "If the CGT really wanted to fight for 3.5 million pesos, they would be proposing it for all workers, not just for bus drivers," he declared.

At the picket line, other workers described the crisis facing blue-collar passengers who are unable to pay the bus fare to get to work.

Bus fares in the Buenos Aires metropolitan area, currently 50 to 60 US cents, are raised monthly using an inflation-linked formula. The minimum wage for October 2026 was US$244.

University of Oregon graduate students vote to strike November 16

Graduate students for the University of Oregon (UO) announced November 6 that 98 percent of their members had voted to strike by November 16 unless the administration agrees to an acceptable compromise over wages, healthcare and job security. Some1,200 members of the Graduate Teaching Fellows Federation (GTFF) who do research, grading, class and lab instruction, have been negotiating a new contract over the past eight months and mediated talks have failed to bring about an agreement.

Negotiators for the administration and GTFF have agreed to a wage freeze in the first year of a new contract, but grad students are demanding 3.5 and 4 percent increases in year two and three, while UO is only offering 2.5 percent in each of the last two years.

Healthcare costs have previously been split, with UO covering 95 percent while students pay 5 percent. A clause stipulates if healthcare costs increase by more than 10 percent, those increases would be split 50-50. The GTFF is requesting that should the 10 percent increase materialize in the first year of a new contract, that cost should follow the 95-5 percent split and only in year two and three should the 50-50 split kick in. However, any agreement on the grad students healthcare offer is contingent on UO accepting their wage demands.

Mediated talks resumed on November 9.

Grocery distribution workers strike warehouse serving New Hampshire and Vermont over removal of pension

Workers at the Associated Grocers Northeast (AGNE) distribution center in Pembroke, New Hampshire, walked out on strike November 2 over their demands for increased wages and benefits and safer working conditions. The contract covering 255 drivers, warehouse workers and maintenance personnel represented by Teamsters Local 633 voted by a 98 percent margin back on September 26 and their previous five-year agreement expired on October 17.

The strike has been declared indefinite in length, due to AGNE's

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effort to ax workers' union pension fund and substitute the inferior 401(k) with no matching contribution by the company.

Dan Johnston, a 32-year veteran maintenance worker, told the *Concord Monitor*, "We're fighting for our families right now. If I was to leave right now and not stay the full term, I'd lose like 400 bucks a month, and that to me is pretty significant."

AGNE is the largest retailer-owned wholesale grocery distributor, serving more than 600 grocery and convenience stores between Pennsylvania and Maine. The strike comes as the Thanksgiving holiday is in sight.

Mike Violette, AGNE's president and chief executive officer said, "AGNE has a contingency in place to ensure that we move into the holiday season with certainty of service to meet the expectations and needs of our customers, our vendors, and our stores." The company is also hiring permanent replacement workers.

Coca-Cola refuses to compromise with striking Pennsylvania workers

Management for ABARTA Coca-Cola plants in Ebensburg and DuBois, Pennsylvania, announced November 5 that their last contract proposal to 86 striking workers is the "best we can offer." Members of Teamsters Local 110, comprising bulk drivers, transport workers, driver merchandisers, warehouse workers and technicians, voted down two contract offers, with the final proposal going down under a 95 percent no vote before workers walked off the job October 20.

Coca-Cola is trying to ram through a 32 percent increase in healthcare costs over the course of a four-year agreement. Workers charge that their wages have lagged behind those of other workers involved in the same industry for more than five years.

Local 110 President Darrell Watt told WTAJ that workers had pre-ratified three separate proposals in an effort to reach an agreement, but management rejected them. Watt said management told him, "They're not going to reward strike behavior ... they'll hire replacements, they'll come back in January to the table, and whatever money they had to spend, they're going to take out of the new contract."

A mediator has been brought in with the hope of restarting negotiations.

"Hot edicts" declared in two British Columbia strikes

Now entering the third week on strike against the global mining giant Teck Resources, a call for broader support by some 1,300 workers at Canada's largest open-pit copper mine has resulted in a "hot edict" order from the 500,000 strong British Columbia Federation of Labour (BCFED).

The November 6 hot edict asks affiliated unions and their members to refrain from handling, loading, unloading, storing, transporting, shipping or processing products from the strike-bound mine, subject to their collective agreements and federation policy.

The edict declared in the copper miners' strike comes just four days after a similar call was issued regarding a dock workers' strike in Prince Rupert. On November 2, the BCFED issued a "hot edict" declaration in the strike between some 120 International Longshore Warehouse Union workers and the Trigon Pacific Terminals.

The edict, also known as a "hot cargo" action, asks workers to refrain from handling, storing or transporting any materials of the strikebound company. Such declarations are heavily restricted or entirely outlawed across most North American jurisdictions. However, during massive worker unrest in the province during the early 1980s, a court ruling established that workers have the right to apply secondary economic pressure during a strike or lockout.

Most union collective agreements in BC contain clauses specifically protecting workers from disciplinary action if they refuse to handle hot cargo. However, the BCFED has defined the edict as an "exceptional step" and has, over the years, been extremely reluctant to deploy the weapon in defense of the workers under its jurisdiction. If it has re-emerged now—at the copper mine and also at a Prince Rupert dock strike—it is in response to soon-to-be passed anti-strike federal legislation.

The copper miners at Teck Highland Valley Copper operations southwest of Kamloops began a strike on October 24 against the company's concession demands and in pursuit of wage and benefit increases. The workers are members of the United Steelworkers (USW) union. Last month, in a high turnout strike vote, the miners unanimously called for strike action. The previous contract expired last June. Management has announced that the mine continues to operate, albeit at a reduced capacity.

An already highly profitable operation, a multi-billion dollar development project will extend the life of the mine until at least 2046. The strike comes as Teck ownership seeks to close a merger deal with Anglo American PCL, a multi-national mining giant headquartered in London, England.

The dock workers are now in the second month of their strike. Trigon operates the Ridley Island bulk export terminal and handles coal and petroleum coke for shipment throughout the Asia-Pacific region. Canadian National (CN) rail is dropping the bulk products off at the terminal's rail yard, where scab labour has been handling the deliveries for weeks. Last week, the province's Industrial Relations Board ordered the company to desist from the use of scab contractors. Managers have also been deployed to move the coal shipments.

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