Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Bolivian educators stage protest strike

On Monday November 9, striking teachers and education workers protested the Rodrigo Paz's administration's plans to break up public education into regional enterprises.

Thousands of educators invaded the streets of La Paz, Bolivia's capital city, from the city of El Alto marching 28 kilometers; a second column protested in the Yungas region, joining protests that paralyzed teaching activities across the nation in a 48-hour strike.

The strikers rejected as unconstitutional the Rodrigo Paz administration plan to gradually decentralize education, placing the management and financial responsibility over public education on towns and municipalities that lack sufficient resources.

Paz's plan apes a previous decentralization of the public health system, which has resulted in the collapse of public health services in many regions.

Teachers in Costa Rica mount 24-hour protest strike

On Wednesday November 11, Costa Rican teachers carried out a 24-hour protest strike, including a march and rally at the Legislature in San Jose de Costa Rica, protesting the government proposal to starve school budgets, by holding school funding to a measly 4.9 percent of Gross Domestic Product. The strikers are demanding 8 percent of GDP as mandated by the Constitution, a goal that has never been implemented.

Protesters played music and displayed banners as they marched toward the legislature, demanding that sufficient resources be made available for public schools. The demonstrators are also demanding higher wages to compensate for the rising cost of living coupled with increases in retirement pensions.

Public school teachers demand pensions frozen following collapse of Paraguay's Ueno Bank

On November 9 public school teachers went on a 24-hour protest-strike across Paraguay, with rallies across the country, demanding that pension savings be restored for all workers (an amount estimated at US$355 million).

Paraguayan pension funds have been frozen since the collapse of Ueno Bank, a crisis that ended the Santiago Peña presidency. The Paraguayan government has since taken over the bank. For public school teachers, the frozen funds add up to US$ 60 million and the money is unaccounted for.

Peña was involved in covering up while millions of dollars were secretly shifted by the bank into risky loans to well-connected individuals. In addition to educators' pension funds, over 3 million Paraguayans have had their bank accounts frozen. Provincial accounts were also impacted.

Peña is imprisoned in a military base while the investigation into the fraud continues.

Chilean student's rally against planned cuts to education budget, declare education a social right

On Wednesday November 14, students rallied in Chile's capital, Santiago, and presented a letter to the education minister Maria Paz, demanding increases for next year's education budget. During the protest students had to confront tear-gas attacks by police.

The demonstrators carried signs demanding no cuts in education, and no changes in university education programs (The Kast administration proposed both, in its 2027 budget).

In their letter, the students declare that public education is a social right and indispensable for Chile's development and cannot be held hostage to fiscal budget cuts.

New Jersey X-ray and MRI tech workers strike for first contract

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Workers at 23 facilities throughout New Jersey operated by ImageCare went on strike November 9, demanding higher wages and improved healthcare benefits. The 45 technologists and technologist aides organized two years ago under Teamsters Local 125 and still do not have a contract.

ImageCare negotiators have offered meager wage increases of 1 percent per year for aides and 2 percent per year for technologists in each year of a three year contract.

Alyssa Perry, an ImageCare worker, stated in a release by the Teamsters, “[W]e are finally standing up for ourselves after years of being underpaid and undervalued. We are health care workers, but we can’t even afford the health care plan offered through our employer. This is unacceptable.”

ImageCare workers perform X-rays and MRIs for patients.

New Jersey bakery workers vote by 98 percent to strike over company effort to undermine healthcare coverage

Over 200 drivers and warehouse workers at Bimbo Bakeries in East Brunswick, New Jersey, voted by 98 percent to grant strike authorization in the face of company demands to take away current healthcare coverage. Teamsters Local 701, which represents the workers, has been in negotiations for several weeks and filed an unfair labor practices charge after management began to interrogate workers over negotiations.

The union claims that their proposal merely asks that Bimbo Bakeries offer a contract comparable to area standards and wage adjustments to match workers at other companies.

The company wants to end healthcare coverage under a plan that has existed for 25 years.

Striking Manitoba steelworkers face binding arbitration threat

Eighty members of the United Steelworkers union are in the ninth week of a strike at the Gerdau AmeriSteel Manitoba Metals recycling plant in the town of Selkirk. According to Manitoba labour law, after 60 days of a strike or lockout in the province either the employer or the union can apply for binding arbitration to end the strike. As the strike has just overtaken the 60-day benchmark, an application to the labour board for arbitration can now happen at any time.

Gerdau is a major global steel producer with headquarters in Brazil. Prior to the strike, the workers overwhelmingly rejected four separate inferior contract offers from the company. The last offer was rejected last week by 85 percent. The core dispute centers on annual wage increases; recycling plant workers state they earn roughly $9 to $10 less per hour than their union colleagues at the nearby Gerdau electric arc furnace (EAF) steel mill.

The striking recycling plant workers supply the Gerdau mill with materials for processing. Management at the mill is employing non-union supervisors and have sourced increased shipments of materials to process from Winnipeg and North Dakota to maintain production.

Corner Brook Civic Center lockout continues in Newfoundland

Twenty-four workers at the Corner Brook Civic Center on the west coast of Newfoundland have been locked out by municipal officials since October 20. The town with a population of some 20,000 people saw a large demonstration outside City Hall this past weekend to protest the growing disruption to leisure and community services at the center which houses, among other things, the town’s main indoor community hockey facilities.

The city’s latest offer includes a 10 per cent general wage increase over four years – 3 percent in 2026 and in 2027, and 2 per cent in each of the following two years. The Canadian Union of Public Employees has put forth a similar general wage increase proposal but is demanding a 3 percent higher base rate for all grades of workers at the facility. The union points out the higher cost of living in the area and says that the difference in overall wages between the two sides amounts to $540 per month for all employees over a four-year contract.

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