

Workers Struggles: The Americas

Brazilian university workers, students to strike over cuts; series of strikes hit Argentina

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

Brazilian university workers, students to strike against government budget cuts

Public university professors, workers and students in Brazil called for a general strike May 15 against attacks on public education by the government of Jair Bolsonaro. The strike call was in reaction to the right-wing president's recent announcement that he was going to cut public university funding by up to 30 percent.

Bolsonaro's particular targets are social sciences, philosophy and other subjects that involve critical thinking. In line with this agenda, he recently announced his appointment as Education Minister Abraham Weintraub, who shares his goal of "decentralizing" investment, "to focus on areas that generate immediate returns to taxpayers, like veterinary, engineering, and medicine."

Three federal universities have already announced that they may not be able to survive the budget cuts, which will make education even less affordable. Bolsonaro is also pushing for pension "reforms" that would further deteriorate the living standards of retired education sector workers and the working class in general.

Argentina: Petroleum workers union calls work stoppage following death of two operators

On May 5, two operators at the Tecpetrol petroleum plant in Fortín de Piedra, in Argentina's Neuquén province, died when they fell into a decanting pool. The plant's union, the Private Gas and Petroleum Syndicate of Río Negro, Neuquén and La Pampa, announced a work stoppage for May 13 at all the fields managed by the Pecom energy services contractor in the Neuquén region.

The "control measure" was slated to include inspections of all the plants with the object of "assuring that there is no more negligence," according to a union communiqué. The announcement added that the action was "not a measure of force, but a review of safety of activity."

Argentine judicial workers set to strike over salary demand

The Buenos Aires Judicial Association (AJB) announced May 8 that its members will go on strike for two days, May 15 and 16. The walkout was called as a result of the failure of talks in La Plata between the AJB and the provincial government of María Eugenia Vidal.

Bargainers from the Economy and Labor Ministries offered a 7.5 percent raise retroactive from December 2018 to March of this year. It was the same offer that they had proposed in negotiations last

December, and which AJB reps rejected as insufficient to counteract the erosion of their earning power due to inflation.

The walkout will include a mobilization at the federal capital and has the support of the State

Workers Association as well as the health syndicate association CICOP, both of whom joined AJB on May 7 on a one-day strike to demand the reopening of parity talks. Working conditions and the continuing attacks on living standards will also be subjects of the strike.

Educators union federation calls 48-hour strike against Argentine government's salary proposal

Argentina's Conadu Histórica educators' union federation, following a plenary session of general secretaries on May 9, called for a two-day strike May 16 and 17 in opposition to the government's latest salary offer. The national government's most recent proposal was for installments that would add up to 15 percent by the end of the year and a "trigger clause" that would take until November to kick in.

The federation is asking for a 35 percent raise and considers the application of the "trigger clause" too late in the year.

The slogan of the strike and mobilizations will be "No to the adjustments of Macri and the IMF—Defend the Public University, Science and Technology." The mobilization following the strike will include teachers' unions, student organizations and the scientific-technological sector. Protesters will march from Buenos Aires' Congress to the Plazas de Mayo.

Civil service workers in Peru strike over salary demand

Workers for Peru's National Registry of Identification and Civil State (Reniec) walked off the job May 8 to press their demand for payment of higher salaries. Processing of official documents was brought to a halt.

The National Union of Workers of Reniec has for years demanded that the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF) recognize labor rights acquired through judicial decisions and arbitration awards. The minister's reply is that there is conflict between arbitration rulings and civil law.

Recently Reniec announced that it did not recognize awards granted by the ministry in most of the years between 2012 and 2018. The Reniec general secretary claimed that it did not have the permission of the MEF to pay the awards. The refusal affected over 4,000 Reniec employees, and in some cases, Reniec workers are earning barely the minimum wage.

On May 9, in a meeting at the Ministry of Labor and Promotion of

Employment, union and Reniec representatives signed an agreement and workers were told to resume their work on May 10.

Colombian truckers call for national strike

Cargo truck drivers in Colombia are poised to go on strike nationwide on May 20 due to the lack of response by the national government to their demands. Over 300,000 drivers from thirty different syndical groups are expected to stop work.

The truckers cite the government's disinterest in their concerns and refusal to remedy their complaints. In addition, the legislative branch has proposed a Financing Law that would impose a value added tax on cargo transport, adding to expenses for truck drivers.

Among the truckers' demands are the speeding of the process of notification of wrongly certified vehicles, regulation of working conditions and categorization of their work as high risk.

UAW in talks with Michigan auto parts Nexteer maker over upcoming layoffs

United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 699 met with corporate representatives for auto parts manufacturer Nexteer May 6 to discuss layoffs at its manufacturing facilities in Saginaw County. At the conclusion of talks, neither side would reveal the extent of layoffs that are to hit the manufacturer's 5,000-member workforce, 3,000 of whom are represented by the UAW.

Local 699 president Tom Hurst's comments after the meeting indicated the UAW will put up no fight against the layoffs, saying, "If you remember not too long ago we were told to get ready for permanent layoffs across the site, start saving your money for the hard times."

A company spokesman in a separate statement said, "As customer plans fluctuate, Nexteer uses temporary layoffs to adjust employment levels. UAW and Nexteer leadership continue to collaborate to identify solutions with minimal impact to our workforce that also align to business needs and market demands."

Nexteer operates 25 plants across four continents and employs some 13,000 full-time employees. In 2010, it was sold by General Motors to Pacific Century Motors, a company based in China.

Study finds teachers struggle under burden of housing costs

A new study finds that nearly 20 percent of teachers are burdened by housing costs. The study, put out by Apartment List, points out that teachers who are primary earners with a college degree are shouldering housing costs that are 21 percent higher than non-teaching workers with a college degree.

Incomes for teachers who hold a Bachelor's degree earn salaries that are 27.4 percent of incomes of non-teachers who hold the same degree. Teachers with graduate degrees are earning 33.3 percent less than non-teachers with graduate degrees.

The housing-cost burdens for teachers are also exacerbated by location. Miami, Florida has the highest burden for teachers at a whopping 35 percent. Other metro areas falling in behind Miami include San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Diego and Washington D.C.

Alberta housing workers locked out

Workers employed by Wood Buffalo Housing in Fort McMurray, Alberta were locked out last Friday after talks broke down over company plans to lay off over half of its unionized employees and replace them with minimum wage contractors.

The 49 workers affected are organized under the Canadian Union of

Public Employees (CUPE) who says that this fight is not about wages and that the use of replacement workers for groundskeepers, housekeepers and maintenance staff will hurt the quality of life for tenants. This dispute comes in the wake of a round of layoffs for non-unionized workers at Wood Buffalo as part of a drive for financial "efficiencies".

The company has said that it needs to cut costs to regain profitability and that it has contingency plans in place to minimize service interruptions.

PEI plumbers on strike

After working without a contract for the last two months, over 130 plumber, pipefitters and welders employed by four employers across Prince Edward Island walked off the job last week in a dispute over wages and benefits in a new contract.

Claiming that their members are paid less than every other local in Canada, negotiators for the United Association union say that their demand for a \$5.35 wage increase over three years is the most important issue in the dispute. In addition they have reached an impasse over health benefits as well as maternity and stress leave. The employers had offered a \$3 an hour wage increase across the board but that was unanimously rejected in a membership vote.

The employers have walked away from the bargaining table without responding to the union's latest demands and workers have hit the picket lines in at least three locations.

Strike by Ontario sheet metal workers continues

A strike by unionized sheet metal workers in the province of Ontario is continuing into its second week.

The executive director of Ontario Sheet Metal Contractors Association said that the union had approached management indicating a willingness to talk. The union had previously refused to discuss the issue of union hiring halls and length of workweek.

Meanwhile, member of the Labourers International union in all locations were set to vote on a new contract May 13. On May 10 Carpenter's union Local 27 announced that members had ratified a settlement.

Under terms of provincial legislation, all contracts are mandated to run three years, with current contracts expiring April 30.

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