

Police attack protests in Honduras, Mexico and Chile while labor unrest spreads in Brazil and Argentina

Workers Struggles: the Americas

29 September 2020

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

Latin America

Cordoba, Argentina cleaning workers stage protest

Last Wednesday, temporary and part-time contract workers employed to clean offices, commercial buildings, and hospitals in the industrial metropolis of Córdoba, marched and rallied demanding wage increases and that they be paid on time. The workers are demanding a 40 percent wage increase to make up for the inflation that is ravaging the country. At the rally, workers denounced the union that supposedly represents them.

In the context of the pandemic, workers at the rally pointed out that much more is being demanded of them, placing them at an increasing risk of contracting the coronavirus. The workers denounced their union SOELSAC for conspiring with management to keep workers underpaid and super exploited.

Córdoba call center workers picket their union

Call center workers in the City of Córdoba, Argentina marched and picketed on Friday at the headquarters of their union (ATACC), demanding a wage reopener and a 12,000-peso wage increase to 45,000 pesos per month, barely up to the poverty level. Under conditions in which these workers now work from home, they must also pay internet bills out of their own pockets. At the protest, workers denounced their union, which collects dues from 19,000 workers and has done nothing on their behalf. Some workers carried homemade signs that accused ATACC of betraying call center workers.

Workers also reported that many of them received via email a potential blacklist of workers, with their employment and personal information, a threat to their jobs and safety, to prevent them from protesting.

The call center workers plan to continue their protest this week, with a rally at the Labor Ministry and a strike, if their demands are not met.

Recife Transit Workers March and Rally against layoffs and speedup

Public transit workers marched and rallied in the city of Recife last Tuesday to protest against layoffs and speedup policies that put their lives in danger in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has already caused dozens of deaths. The speedup measure, running buses in tandem (dupla função) disrupts traffic and also results in more layoffs. The Recife Transit Workers Union reports that between 2,000 and 3,000 bus operators have been laid off.

Militarized police attack Chilean health workers protest

On Friday, September 25, militarized police known as Carabineros savagely repressed a demonstration by health workers demanding that the right-wing government of Chilean President Sebastián Piñera recognize their status. Dozens of health technicians had rallied in Santiago's

Baquedano Square demanding that they be elevated to "nurse" status.

The police used water cannons and tear gas to force the demonstrators out of the square. Four demonstrators were arrested.

Several videos on social media show how the Carabineros brutally attacked the peaceful rally.

Demonstrators demand Haitian president's resignation

Workers in Port Au Prince, Haiti's capital, continue to demonstrate against new elections two days after President Jovenel Moïses convened a nine-member Provisional Electoral Council. Moïses is accused of corruption and of ignoring the needs of the population. The protests intersect with teacher, college and high school student protests against the assassination of Montferrier Dorval, and for higher wages for school teachers.

Dorval, a constitutional scholar and president of the Haitian Bar, was assassinated on August 28, a few hours after he called for "another kind of country, another state" during a radio interview in which he discussed the breakdown of Haitian institutions. Dorval was hit by multiple bullets by gunmen who escaped while police looked on.

All three demonstrations demand Moïses' resignation and his replacement with a transitional provisional government to organize new elections. The demonstrators also reject US involvement in Haiti's political crisis. US authorities are actively backing President Moïses and demanding an end to the protest demonstrations. In a recent tweet, the US embassy in Port Au Prince warned that there "would be consequences" for those that oppose President Moïses' convening of the Electoral Council.

Mass demonstrations against Honduran government corruption

Last Tuesday, as Honduras marked its Independence Day, thousands marched to protest against government corruption and the criminal mismanagement of funds assigned to fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

Demonstrators were attacked by police at a rally at which they intended to read a manifesto against the policies of President Juan Orlando, including the explanation for the disappearance of five Honduran youth on July 18, who have yet to be found. Several demonstrators had to be hospitalized.

Mexican teachers block rail lines in solidarity with students

Last Monday, teachers, members of the National Education Workers Coordination Group (CNTE) of the National Teachers Union (SNTE), blocked rail lines in the Mexican State of Michoacán to support the demands by teaching students for bonuses, scholarships, and job guarantees. The occupation is taking place in the context of a 95 percent cut in the budget for teaching schools.

On September 11 teaching students protesting at the Tripetío Normal School in Michoacán, demanding the release of nine of their peers,

currently under arrest, fought Mexican police trying to break up their demonstration. The police ran over several students with a police bus. Nine students were injured by the bus, three of them are hospitalized with serious injuries.

Thousands in Mexico commemorate the sixth anniversary of the disappearance of the Ayotzinapa 43

On Saturday September 26, thousands of students and workers marched across Mexico commemorating the disappearance of 43 students of the Ayotzinapa rural teaching college during a massacre in the city of Iguala on September 26 and 27, 2014.

In Mexico City the peaceful demonstration was violently broken up by municipal police.

Panamanian health workers demand to get paid

Panamanian health workers set up picket lines Wednesday and Thursday last week, demanding adequate pay and the payment of wages owed to them. They also demanded limits on overtime hours in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Health workers across Panama are owed several months of back wages and are not provided with protective equipment against the coronavirus, such as gloves, uniforms, and masks.

The Panamanian Nurses Association reported the deaths of four nurses infected by the coronavirus who had been forced to work with minimal protection. The union also said that the government consistently ignores nurses' demands.

United States

Pennsylvania steelworkers continue strike against health care concessions

Some 450 steelworkers are into their sixth week on strike over health care insurance issues at the NLMK steel plant in Farrell, Pennsylvania. Members of United Steelworkers Local 1016-03 are opposed to two separate health care plans—one a high deductible plan and the other a preferred-provider organization (PPO) plan.

The high deductible plan covers only 10 percent of the workforce, and striking workers are opposed to the decreasing contributions that the company's proposal has put forward. On the PPO plan, the monthly premium will go from \$185 to \$385 during the course of a four-year agreement.

NLMK has refused to revise its contract offer since workers went on strike back on August 22. NLMK, or Novolipetsk Steel, is based in Russia and ranks among that country's four largest steel producers.

OSHA fines Iowa meatpacker \$957 after more than 300 workers test positive for coronavirus

The Iowa Occupational Safety and Health Administration issued its first citation against a meatpacking company, a \$957 fine against Iowa Premium Beef Plant in Tama, Iowa. The scandalously low fine came in the wake of 338 of the plant's 850 workers testing positive for COVID-19 back in April.

The fine was reduced from an earlier one, still unbelievably tiny, of \$1,914. The fine cited two violations: failing to keep a required log of workplace injuries and illnesses; and failing to provide the document within four hours after OSHA inspectors conducted their investigation. OSHA categorized the violations as "other-than-serious."

The plant was shut down for two weeks while OSHA conducted tests, finding 338 workers had COVID-19. But when the health department's deputy director held a press conference on May 5, she claimed that only 258 workers tested positive. The state said the mistaken total was due to a record-keeping error.

Canada

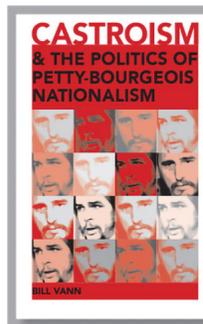
St. John's, Newfoundland city bus drivers move toward strike action

Over 100 Metrobus drivers and mechanics in the Newfoundland provincial capital have voted by 82 percent to reject a contract offer. The workers are members of the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU). Without a contract for over a year, the drivers are demanding improvements in sick leave provisions, shift work premiums, and for severance and retirement payments to equal industry standards. The city's Transportation Commission has cited budget constraints to deny the demands of the workers. Should no agreement be reached, drivers are set to strike beginning October 5.

In 2010-11, Metrobus drivers struck for 13 weeks against the city's attempt to force concessions to their health benefits plan. The strike threat comes as labor unrest continues to grow in Newfoundland. Fourteen hundred Dominion grocery store workers in the province are in their sixth week of a strike against poverty wages and for full-time employment. Ferry captains along the province's busiest coastal routes struck for three weeks before resuming services in mid-September. Their tentative agreement will be voted on in the coming days.

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Growing social inequality, deepening economic crisis, the decline in the cultural level of society and especially the political paralysis in the workers movement have led to the rise of ultra-right nationalism internationally. Only through examining and assimilating the great strategic lessons of the 20th century and the pernicious role of nationalism and the pseudo-left, can the working class arm itself against the rise of fascistic forces.

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