

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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Latin America

Laid-off workers from the Institute of Family Agriculture (INAPCI)—recently shut down by the Milei administration—small farmers and human rights organizations staged a “food fair” and rally across from the annual “Rural Society Expo” last week, as part a two-week-old anti-hunger campaign. The event brings together representatives of Agricultural Exporters and the monied rural oligarchy, in Buenos Aires. The purpose of the protest rally was to publicize the ongoing food crisis that is affecting tens of thousands of Argentine families, due to the high cost of food, and the elimination of government food subsidies to soup kitchens around the country.

The campaign, with the slogan “the worst form of violence is hunger,” was initiated earlier this month by Nobel Peace Prize winner Adolfo Perez Esquivel.

Several of the 900 sacked INAPCI workers addressed the rally and denounced the end of government technical and financial assistance to 250,000 peasant families. Leonor Cruz, one of the fired workers, declared, “The fields do not belong to these powerful people that raise soybeans to feed European pigs. The 30-year history of our institute was to defend peasant farmers from being expelled from their lands, made poor and crowded in shanty towns.”

On July 23, thousands of striking school meal preparation workers marched in Santiago and other cities in Chile, following the sacking of over 4,000 preparation workers several months ago, who’ve yet to be fully compensated.

In Santiago four separate mass marches from different locations converged on the La Moneda government house. Other protests took place in the cities of Antofagasta, Tocopilla, Taltal, Iquique, Arica, Copiapó and Baquedano,

The workers, who set up meals in kindergarten and elementary schools across the country, in addition denounced the speed-ups going on, following the mass

layoffs. In some cases, workers are charged with preparing and serving 500 meals, up from 70 meals before the layoffs. For some children their school meal is the main daily source of food.

In addition to the severance pay for the laid-off workers, protesters denounced the poor quality of the food they receive—in many cases it is past the expiration date—and delays in deliveries of food. The workers have demanded for months that the Boric Administration increase resources for students’ meals.

On July 27, thousands marched in Lima, Peru’s capital city, demanding justice for the dead and wounded victims of police and army repression during the protests of 2022 and 2023, following the palace coup against President Pedro Castillo. In addition to family members of the victims, the demonstrators included social and human rights organizations.

The demonstrators assembled, from various parts of the city at the Congressional and Department of Justice headquarters demanding a democratic solution to the political crisis that is shaking the country and Boluarte’s resignation.

The demonstration took place a day before Boluarte gave a speech commemorating Peru’s independence day.

Hundreds of rural inhabitants of the Ayabaca y Huancabamba regions in the province of Piura marched into the city of Piura to protest the Rio Blanco copper mining project that threatens their woodlands and water supply.

Ayabaca and Huancabamba are the mountain sources of all the water that flows into their fields and to the entire Piura region. In 2007 the peasants and small farmers rejected by a vote of 95 percent a referendum on the mining project. The mine company and the government ignored the vote.

United States

Hotel workers demonstrated across Hawaii July 23 as months of negotiations over wages, benefits and staff/workload issues. The union says the two sides are “too

far apart.” Contracts for 4,800 members of Unite Here Local 5 expired June 30 and contract expirations for another 1,000 hotel workers soon follow.

The contract struggle involves major hotel corporations like Hilton, Hyatt, Kyo-ya and Marriott. During the period 2019 to 2022, the US hotel industry profits increased by 26.63 percent. In Hawaii, revenue per available room has gone up by 23 percent. But management has kept in place many of its pandemic-era service cuts which have forced the understaffed workforce to bear the brunt of this profiteering.

“People are definitely burnt out,” bartender Jason Maxwell told KHON news. “They’re not giving us enough workers to handle the workload that we have. They work us to death. There is high turnover amongst some of the new hires. But it’s honestly because the workloads are—are kind of out of whack right now.”

A survey of Local 5 members found that 76 percent could not afford an unexpected bill of \$500. Another 78 percent hold the opinion that management took advantage of the pandemic to cut payroll and implement changes that have negatively impacted workers.

Unite Here will conduct a strike authorization vote on August 8.

Workers at the Philadelphia International Airport rallied for higher wages and benefits July 23 as their contract is set to expire July 30. Baggage handlers, security guards and other airport workers represented by the Service Employees International Union 32BJ accuse airport contractors of refusing to pay wage increases that were due to kick in on January 1 of this year.

The increase was mandated by the City of Philadelphia’s prevailing wage law. Pay was to have been increased from \$15.71 to \$17.20 per hour. The law also called for an additional \$4.98 hourly healthcare supplement.

Besides retroactive back pay, in the current round of negotiations workers are also seeking improved healthcare, safety protocols and additional vacation time.

In addition to those retroactive payments, workers are asking for better health and safety protocols, increased minimum hours for staffers and additional vacation time. Negotiations resumed July 25.

Canada

About 730 workers, members of the International Longshore Workers Union, will re-start the vote authorizing the union to take industry-wide strike action against the BC Maritime Employers Association (BCMEA) at Canada’s

West Coast ports. Union leaders announced that the vote will take at least until August 9 to be completed. They further stated that no 72-hour strike notice would be issued before the final tabulation of the votes from the last terminals balloted.

On July 8, dock foremen at the Port of Vancouver were set to begin strike action, but with only hours to spare the imminent walkout was ruled illegal at an emergency hearing of the Canada Industrial Relations Board (CIRB) after the BCMEA challenged an earlier strike vote held by the union. ILWU leaders then abruptly bowed to the CIRB and called off the strike. The employers association then followed up with a bad faith bargaining complaint. Hearings on that dispute will take place between August 6 and 9.

The move by the BCMEA to disrupt strike action on the docks follows on from government interventions last year to shut down a militant strike by longshore workers along Canada’s Pacific coast. In the present dispute with the ship and dock foremen the ILWU initially issued its 72-hour strike notification on July 5 against DP World, one of the cargo handling companies in Vancouver. Workers at that company voted by 99 percent for strike action.

In retaliation, the BCMEA threatened a full lockout to begin on July 9 if workers went ahead with any job action. However, after an intervention by the Federal Labour Minister on July 6, the CIRB announced the following day that they had determined the strike vote held by the ILWU was an “unfair labour practice” and therefore illegal because, they claimed, only the workers at DP Cargo had been balloted and not the entire local membership. That ruling, however, suggested that the union could only carry out legal strike action if it was an industry-wide affair. The federal government, then, would make the case that such an all-encompassing strike, if it occurred, would endanger the Canadian economy and be subject to anti-strike intervention.

These maneuvers against workers fighting to defend their living standards and working conditions are only the latest salvos fired against the working class. Both business leaders as well as government officials have been clamouring for a declaration outlawing all strikes at ports and railways in the wake of militant job actions by logistics workers over the past several years.



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