

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Latin America

On Thursday, August 1, 6,000 workers, members of the Petroleum, Gas and Biofuel Federation (FASiPeGyBio), went on a strike of indefinite duration against recently imposed income taxes by the Milei administration, imposed on June 28.

The strike involves refinery, airport fuel workers and workers at the Vaca Muerta oil fields in Neuquen province in Puerto Rosales port in Buenos Aires province. The strike threatens to create fuel shortages across the country.

On August 3, the “Caravan for life, peace, and right to remain on one’s land” arrived in Bogota. The caravan traveled through several regions in the country (Antioquia, Bolivar, Aruaca, Chocò and Cauca). Its purpose was to expose the living conditions of workers and peasants in those territories and to fight against the expulsion of farmers from their land by mining companies and paramilitary gangs.

This trek was the first of five that the Caravan, a coalition of humanitarian groups, has planned.

On August 3, workers employed by ICL, an Israel-based multinational corporation, which specializes in processing fertilizers and minerals used in the EV industry, carried out a protest strike in the City of Jacarei (São Paulo state), against working conditions in ICL plants and the victimization of workers that protest.

The protesting strikers also expressed solidarity with Palestinian workers in the face of the genocide perpetrated by Israel on the people of Gaza.

The workers also approved in an assembly a

condemnation of General Motors for the firing of metal workers at its São Paulo plant.

United States

Members of Teamsters Local 822 at Costco’s operations in Norfolk, Virginia, voted to authorize a strike as negotiations on a national contract are set to kick off on August 21. According to the Teamsters, the near unanimous vote by the 250 warehouse workers who organized back in December of 2023 reflects sentiments across the country.

Some 150 workers at Costco’s Sumner, Washington, distribution center became the first drivers to organize with Teamsters Local 174 in April of this year. Teamsters Warehouse Division Director Tom Erickson claimed that “all across the country workers are organizing.”

More than 18,000 Costco workers have now joined the Teamsters. Wages, seniority and lack of a grievance procedure are some of the issues affecting Costco workers.

Paul Lowrie, a three-year driver at the Sumner facility, told *Supermarket News*, “Costco isn’t the company it once was. The culture has shifted dramatically the past few years. Management told us they heard our concerns, but they weren’t listening. We were tired of being ignored.”

The union representing 1,200 workers at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, has hinted it may call a strike on student move-in day unless management meets workers’ demands. The United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 2300 represents food service workers, janitors, groundskeepers, mechanics, gardeners and greenhouse workers.

Workers are calling for wage increases of 25 to 30

percent across a four-year contract in contrast to Cornell's offer of 80 cents an hour the first year and a mere 60 cents in the remaining three years. Workers also want longevity bonuses, free parking and improved working conditions and to eliminate a two-tier wage system.

Alita Bentley, a food service worker told WSKG News, "Everything is doubled, except our salary, except our wages ... How am I supposed to survive?"

"We put our lives on the line for Cornell when we were working during the pandemic," she said. "We pulled through and I think we deserve a living wage. ... Cornell is a billion-dollar corporation."

Student move-in day begins around the middle of August. Classes commence August 26.

Canada

After reaching a bargaining impasse, 1,200 municipal workers in Brampton, Ontario voted by 97 percent last week for strike action should an acceptable contract not be secured. The workers, organized in the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 831, are seeking a significant wage increase after their last five-year deal resulted in a real wage cut in the face of surging inflation.

The workers are employed in city departments such as public works, community services, building planning and the key fire department and public transit service. Unionized municipal workers receive lower wages and benefits than non-union employees in the same departments where they labour. Despite the strong vote for strike action, however, a walkout is not imminent. The union leadership has scheduled meetings with a conciliator in mid-September.



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