

## 84-hour workweeks force Kansas Frito-Lay workers to strike



By Mark Gruenberg

To ordinary human ears, this sounds like a throwback to worker exploitation of the Gilded Age: Some 850 workers at the Topeka, Kansas, Frito-Lay plant were forced to strike early this month over—ready?—84-hour workweeks.

After more than two weeks on the picket line, and outrage which has spread overseas, the company now offers them, members of Bakery, Confectionery and Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers (BCTGM) Local 218, a shorter workweek: 60 hours.

And Frito-Lay says workers can volunteer for the 84-hour weeks, too.

All this for a 2% hourly raise for each of the next two years. No wonder the workers had to walk.

The latest bargaining sessions occurred July 19-20, and no information has been posted about the results. Meanwhile, Frito-Lay claims that in Kansas, a right-to-work-for-less state, 300 workers have crossed the union picket line. The firm's claim could not be verified.

It also claimed local leaders agreed to the economic sections of the deal, including the raises and the shorter workweek. But its letter admitted Local 218 members voted that down.

In a potential indication of progress, the union, on July 12, asked the National Labor Relations Board to withdraw two labor law-breaking—formally called

unfair labor practice—charges filed on June 30 against Frito-Lay, a PepsiCo subsidiary.

One charge covered unilateral company changes to the union contract. The other cited surface bargaining and Frito-Lay's effort to directly bargain with the workers, over the union's head. The firm sent a letter to all the workers, whom it calls "associates"—just like notoriously union-hating Walmart does for its workers—also dated July 12.

"This strike is about more than wages and benefits.

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It is about the quality of life for these workers and their families," BCTGM President Chris Shelton said. The workers, he added, "were left with no choice.

"Despite our repeated warnings to the management of Frito-Lay over the last decade, current employees are being forced to work seven

**No, this is not a headline from the Gilded Age. It is happening now in Topeka.**

days a week, up to 12 hours per shift. Many of the more than 800 workers are only getting an eight-hour break between shifts,” Shelton continued.

The company, in its letter, admittedly called those schedules “squeeze shifts.” The workers call them “suicide shifts.” Their picket line mascot is a skeleton.

“They are forcing the current workforce to work double and triple shifts. Workers do not have enough time to see their family, do chores around the house, run errands, or even get a healthy night’s sleep. This strike is about working people having a voice in their futures and taking a stand for their families,” Shelton added.

The workers, via tweets to the local, sounded the same themes: Long shifts and little to no pay raises.

“I am striking for a pay raise. I have only received \$.83 raise in the last 10 years,” 18-year worker Therese Lundgren tweeted.

“OT is just as bad today as when I started here 23 years ago,” said Linde Carson.

“This is not a good job,” 37-year worker Mark McCarter wrote to Relevant magazine. “At 7 a.m. our warehouse is 100 degrees. We don’t have air. We have cooks in the kitchen on the fryers that are 140 degrees making chips and sweating like pigs. Meanwhile, the managers have A/C.”

The forced strike has drawn widespread notice. Shelton passed along supportive statements to the local from the Agro-Industrial Union of the Ukraine and from a union coalition in Belgium, and from Sen. Bernie Sanders, Ind-Vt.

There have also been demands, from outside supporters, for a boycott of PepsiCo products, which range far beyond its namesake colas and the chips the Topekans turn out.

“Frito-Lay made more than \$4.2 billion in sales last year. But they can’t be bothered to provide fair wages and safe working conditions? I don’t think so. I stand with the workers on strike in Topeka. It takes enormous courage to stand up and fight back, and I applaud you,” Sanders tweeted.

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## **Israel launches air strikes on Lebanon and Syria as part of US-backed war**

By Steve Sweeney

**I**srael launched a missile attack on southern Lebanon early today, just hours after air strikes had targeted Iranian forces near the Syrian city of Aleppo.

The Israeli army claimed that it was responding to four rockets launched from Lebanon that triggered warning sirens in the Western Galilee region.

No details were given of the targets of the Israeli missiles, but there have been weeks of speculation that Israel was considering a military intervention in Lebanon to diminish the influence of Hezbollah.

Syrian air defences intercepted an Israeli missile attack on Monday night that Tel Aviv said was targeting Iranian forces in Aleppo as part of what has been described as a US-backed shadow war.

The attacks were believed to have targeted troops from Iran’s elite Quds Force, which has a presence in Syria, playing a leading role in the fight against Isis and other jihadist groups.

It has been targeted by Israeli air strikes, along with fighters from Lebanon’s Hezbollah, thousands of whom have been killed during the battle to regain control of Syria from “terrorist organisa-

tions” they say are backed by the United States.

The Israeli Defence Force refused to comment on the air strikes, the first since a new Israeli government, led by Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, took office last month.

The far-right nationalist has vowed to continue the policy of his predecessor Benjamin Netanyahu, who launched frequent missile attacks on Syria aimed at stifling Iranian influence in the region.

Israeli air strikes killed at least 11 Syrian soldiers last month, and US President Joe Biden ordered drone attacks that targeted Iranian-backed militia in both Syria and Iraq.

The groups vowed revenge for the US attacks, in which a child and four soldiers were killed, and have launched a number of strikes targeting the occupying force’s military bases inside Syria.

On Saturday, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad vowed to drive out US and Turkish occupying forces from the country.

Ankara has troops holed up in the northern Idlib province, where they are helping various jihadist groups maintain their last stronghold.

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# COVID-19 throws Tokyo and Olympics into a panic



By Al Neal

**T**he fevered pandemic welcome wagon ahead of the Summer Olympic Games in Tokyo is kicking into overdrive.

As of Tuesday morning, there have been 71 confirmed cases of Covid-19 according to Tokyo Olympics organizers, including 31 individuals among the tens of thousands of international attendees still expected in Japan to compete, train, or work at the Games, slated to begin Friday, July 23.

But let us not allow hard stats to stand in the way of the Olympic Games' glory and splendor. The show must go on.

"The world is faced with great difficulties," Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga told International Olympic Committee members in a closed-door meeting in Tokyo. "We can bring success to the delivery of the Games."

Suga Continued: "Such fact has to be communicated from Japan to the rest of the world," Suga said through an interpreter. "We will protect the health and security of the Japanese public."

Yet, Covid-19 infection rates in Japan continue to rise, right alongside the anti-Olympic Games sentiment spreading throughout the public.

IOC president Thomas Bach, who has met with anti-Olympic chants and demonstrations since his arrival in-country, said canceling the games was never a viable option, because "the IOC never abandons the athletes."

Since this is a "sports column," I will take some ed-

itorial liberty here and correct the above statement. It should read, "The IOC never abandons profit." There, now it is a bit more honest.

The IOC and National Broadcasting Company (NBC) hold the Olympic Games' largest commercial rights contract totaling a \$4.38 billion deal for all games until 2020 plus a signed \$7.75 billion extension running through 2032.

Of course, it is not just the IOC who will profit. The United States Olympic and Paralympic Organizing Committee also holds a unique deal with NBC, since 1996, receiving 12.75% of U.S. broadcast rights money. Bottom line, they expect to see \$558.6 million in profit from the current deal.

But instead of taking value in human life, especially the lives of those living in Japan, and postponing the games indefinitely—until it is safe to return to work there—Bach insists the world "will admire the Japanese people for what they have achieved." What do the people of Japan have to say?

"We strongly insist that the Olympics be canceled," said one protestor during a large demonstration last month. "The government has its priorities all wrong. Instead of helping people make money from the Olympics, they should be protecting the health and safety of the people living in Japan."

"Citius, Altius, Fortius" The Olympic Games formal Latin motto meaning "Faster, Higher, Stronger," was updated to include the word "communis" (together) but it would seem people are now further apart on this issue—not "stronger together."

**As of Tuesday morning, there are 71 confirmed cases including 31 from among the tens of thousands of international attendees.**

## LOCAL NEWS

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### Devastating flooding in China leaves 25 dead as nearly a year of rain falls in 3 days

By Climate Nexus

**M**ore than two dozen people have been killed by catastrophic flash flooding in central China in recent days.

At least a dozen people drowned in the subway in Zhengzhou, Henan province, and about 100,000 people have been evacuated. Social media videos showed extreme flooding that turned cars into bathtub toys — as well as the rescue of 150 children and teachers from a flooded kindergarten.

The city was deluged by 24.3" (617.1mm) of rain — 96% of its annual average — in just three days from Saturday to Tuesday. The extreme rainfall, and the severe heatwaves that strained the province's electrical grid just days prior, are both clear signals of the climate crisis, caused by the extraction and combustion of fossil fuels.

"Such extreme weather events will likely be more frequent in the future," Johnny Chan, a professor of atmospheric science at City University of Hong Kong, told Reuters. As reported by The Washington Post:

Experts and environmental organizations have connected the increase in severe weather events to climate change and China's rapid urbanization. The environmental advocacy organization Greenpeace warned last week that China's cities would face hotter summers and wetter rainy seasons because of climate change.

The floods in Henan follow a string of unusually severe heat waves, floods and fires across the world in recent weeks. Flooding in Germany last week killed at least 165 people, and Canada and the Pacific Northwest have seen record-breaking heat and forest fires.

## Cuba en el guión fabricado de las redes sociales

BY Prensa Latina

**L**aboratorios mediáticos, noticias fabricadas y publicaciones que incitan al caos desde el exterior inundan hoy el entorno sobre Cuba en redes sociales para la promoción de una 'intervención humanitaria' con el manual de golpes blandos.

En una comparecencia especial, el presidente Miguel Díaz-Canel llamó a enfrentar las provocaciones, al tiempo que calificó la presión en esos espacios como oportunista en el contexto de crisis económica y el repunte de casos de Covid-19.

Al respecto emplazó a Washington a desmentir los vínculos de una compañía establecida en la Florida con la campaña SOS Cuba, que promueve el llamado a una acción con el uso de fuerza extranjera.

Dicha entidad, denunció el ministro, recibió hace pocos días un certificado del gobierno de la Florida para actuar con fondos estatales.

Entre otros hechos fabricados, las redes sirvieron para asegurar que la Base Naval de Guantánamo, territorio usurpado a Cuba, recibió flotillas de embarcaciones de combate a la espera de una orden de intervención.

Los mismos espacios divulgaron sin pudor en las últimas jornadas escenarios falsos de protestas en Cuba, desmentidos por medios locales y las propias autoridades.

El portal Cuba debate desestimó el uso de imágenes que intentaban mostrar una masiva respuesta contra la Revolución cuando en realidad se trataban de instantáneas de una celebración en Buenos Aires por el reciente triunfo en la Copa América y de las protestas en Egipto años atrás.

Al mismo tiempo, desde Twitter y Facebook se lanzaron llamados a un paro nacional sin respuesta en un país que inició su semana en normalidad.

Anuncios falsos de salidas ilegales con lanchas procedentes de Estados Unidos para buscar a cubanos interesados en abandonar el país e invasiones que esperan en los límites de las aguas territoriales también se sumaron al guion virtual para generar caos.

Sin embargo, las publicaciones esquivan el saqueo de instalaciones de comercio o los actos vandálicos contra carros patrullas de la policía, la víspera, como resultado de la convocatoria para incitar una revuelta, denunciada por el propio mandatario Díaz-Canel.

Asimismo evitan señalar al bloqueo de Estados Unidos como principal obstáculo para el desarrollo económico en la isla y el enfrentamiento a la pandemia, o el incumplimiento de los tratados migratorios vigentes con Cuba por parte de la nación nortea, como denunció el jefe de Estado.

En tanto, el mandatario mexicano ofreció apoyo a La Habana y coincidió en que la mayor ayuda es levantar el bloqueo económico de Estados Unidos.

'Quiero expresar mi solidaridad con el pueblo cubano, debe buscarse una salida mediante el diálogo sin el uso de la fuerza, sin la confrontación, sin la violencia y tienen que ser los cubanos los que decidan', aseguró.

Cuba es un país libre independiente y soberano, no debe haber intervencionismo, ni utilizarse la situación de salud del pueblo con fines políticos, subrayó.

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