

General strike by Argentine public employees, Colombian pilots defy strikebreaking order, walkouts in Kentucky and Ohio

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

One-day general strike by Argentine state workers

Workers in Argentina's State Workers Association (ATE) held a one-day general strike October 4 to protest the proposed austerity measures in the 2018 budget President Mauricio Macri has sent to the Congress, and the Fiscal Responsibility Act, a five-point plan to further unload the nation's economic crisis on the working class.

Thousands of teachers, health care professionals and other public employees gathered at city plazas and marched to their provincial and local legislatures, where they condemned the budget, which would raise fees for utilities, transportation and other services, cut pensions, increase indebtedness, undermine labor rights, lower wages and consign more workers to precarious employment.

Mexican university professors vote to strike over unpaid wages

A meeting of delegates from the 3,000-member Autonomous University of Zacatecas Academic Personnel Syndicate (SPAUAZ) voted October 5 to strike at the end of October over nonpayment of wages and other violations of labor rights. The university administration owes about 150 million pesos (US\$8.09 million) in seniority bonuses for the last three months.

Public hospital doctors in the Dominican Republic stage 24-hour walkout

Doctors in public hospitals, members of the Dominican Medical Association (CMD), held a one-day strike October 4 to demand the government fulfill its promise to raise salaries, and to oppose delays in unpaid wages and high levels of unemployment hitting medical professionals.

In addition to the government's failure to comply with the salary agreement reached in November 2016, pay for first-year medical residents has been delayed up to three months. CMD resolved to carry out a 48-hour stoppage starting October 11 if there is no positive response from the authorities.

Colombian pilots defy strikebreaking edict

On October 6, the Superior Tribunal of Bogota (STB) ruled that the strike by the pilots at Avianca, Colombia's largest airline, is illegal. The court claimed that airline travel is an "essential public service" that affects the entire nation, so pilots have no right to strike. So far, about 3,000 flights have been canceled since the 700 pilots—more than half of the 1,300 who work for Avianca—walked off the job September 20.

The pilots, members of the Colombian Civil Aviators Association (Acdac), voted in mid-September to take industrial action to press their demands for pay parity with Avianca pilots in other Latin American countries, and to win hours that conform to international norms and security improvements.

Acdac lawyers immediately appealed the STB ruling, a

legal maneuver that, according to Colombian labor law, allows the pilots to remain on strike while the case makes its way to the Supreme Court, a process that could take months. The STB also ruled that Avianca could hire pilots from outside Colombia to replace the striking aviators, which the airline has reportedly begun to do.

Kentucky packing workers rally at the end of first week on strike

Workers at the Oracle Packaging plant in Louisville, Kentucky held a rally October 6 to mark their first week on strike. United Steelworkers Local 1693-18 called the strike after the old five-year labor agreement for 70 workers expired August 31 and the union announced an impasse in talks with Oracle.

Oracle, which was acquired in 2012 by the New York-based private investment firm Centre Lane Partners in a strategy to merge Oracle with another of its acquisitions, LLFlex, wants to slash hours, quadruple employee health care costs and eliminate the company's matching contribution to the 401(k) pension plan. Oracle workers currently make between \$18-\$20 an hour.

Nurses end 48-hour strike in Michigan's upper peninsula

Nurses at the Marquette General Hospital in Marquette, Michigan ended their 48-hour strike October 7 over safe staffing ratios. When nurses, members of the Michigan Nurses Association, attempted to report to work, they were turned away by hospital management until Tuesday, when the five-day contract with replacement nurses ends. The hospital's owner, Duke Lifepoint, has refused to ensure safe nursing levels for patients. Duke Lifepoint, a Fortune 500 corporation, purchased Marquette General in 2012.

Steelworkers strike HarbisonWalker International plant in Ohio

Some 90 workers, members of United Steelworkers Local 8565-03, have struck HarbisonWalker International in Windham, Ohio after rejecting management's final offer. The company manufactures refractory products such as ceramics used in steel and other industries that can withstand high temperatures.

The company operates 19 manufacturing plants globally and is the largest supplier of refractory services in the US. The contract with the United Steelworkers expired September 15. The factory lies halfway between Cleveland and Youngstown, in an area devastated by steel mill closures and deindustrialization, which has been aided and abetted by the USW.

Medical lab workers strike in Windsor

Ninety medical lab assistants and technologists walked out on strike at eight Medical Laboratories of Windsor locations on October 2. The workers, who are members of Unifor Local 2458, are fighting for improved wages and benefits at the company, one of the many for-profit contractors used by the government-run health system, which used to do its own testing.

According to Unifor the skilled workers make half of the wages of those doing the same work in a hospital. For the first five years Medical Lab Technologists earn CAN \$22.00 (US \$17.55) an hour while Medical Lab Assistants only get CAN \$13.50 (US \$10.77).

Windsor, which has been devastated by auto factory closings and mass layoffs, is the most economically polarized urban area in Canada, with a third of the residents in the city's core neighborhoods living far below the poverty line. While there is growing opposition among workers to government attacks, Unifor is politically aligned with the Liberal government of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, which is accelerating the privatization of public services and imposing austerity to fund a 70 percent increase in military spending by 2026.



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