

Buenos Aires health care workers stage protest

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

Buenos Aires health care workers mobilize to press pay, contract demands

Workers in the health care sector in Buenos Aires, Argentina marched to the city's government center October 15 to demand permanent professional status for workers in nursing, an emergency raise for all health workers and the renewal of 1,500 contracts that were produced to confront the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the gathering, the State Workers Association Health Sector Coordinator noted that 211 health workers had already lost their lives since the pandemic struck. He lambasted the city's mayor, Horacio Rodríguez Larreta, for not approving the certification of over 3,500 nurses, and keeping them categorized as technical workers.

Chilean contract hospital workers continue strike over pay, bonus issues

A strike begun by "external" (i.e., outsourced) workers at the Base Hospital of Valdivia in central Chile's Bío Bío region is still in effect following an October 14 vote over their employer's latest proposal. The vote by 86 of the 113 workers employed by the contractor Layner was 77 against and nine in favor.

Negotiations between the Layner External Workers Union and Layner have been ongoing since last year. The workers walked out on October 5 after talks failed to reach agreement on wages, bonuses for travel expenses, food, and an "end of conflict" payment.

The last proposal by Layner did not even include a response to the food and travel bonus demands, and management's offer of 187,000 pesos (US\$235) for ending the strike fell short of the 250,000 pesos (US\$315) called for by the union.

The union, however, has accepted Layner's latest wage offer and expressed willingness to lower the end of conflict bonus demand to 200,000 pesos (US\$252).

Argentine vegetable oil workers strike over unfulfilled wage agreement

Workers in the Oil, Cotton Gin and Related Industries Federation of Argentina (FTCIOD) began an indefinite strike at 2 p.m. on October 13 at cottonseed processing plants under its jurisdiction. The walkout's immediate effect, however, was blunted in the region north of Rosario, where the bulk of the cottonseed processing industry is located and where a different union covers processing plant workers.

According to a statement by FTCIOD, the strike was called after "a provocation" by the CIARA-CEC oil industry chamber; its refusal to revise "the salary scale provided for the month of last August" agreed to in April.

The statement continued, "Nonetheless, the response was first delay, and then the refusal to go ahead with the revision." It affirmed the workers' "constitutional and legal right to a minimum essential and movable salary."

Vegetable oil export is a key foreign exchange component in the Argentine economy, and CIARA-CEC immediately clamored for "the industry and syndicate to work together to increase production." It is likely to call for government intervention, which would involve a cooling-off period and "obligatory conciliation."

Argentine judicial workers strike for 36 hours over pay demand

The National Justice Employees Union (UEJN) struck for 36 hours beginning October 15 to demand a salary increase. According to UEJN secretary general Julio Piumato, the judicial workers hadn't had a raise since the beginning of the year and "inflation is gnawing away at the salaries." He added that working under pandemic conditions has added to job stress.

UEJN also called for demonstrations in front of the Palace of Justice in Buenos Aires and at courthouses nationwide. Protesters were urged to maintain social distance and wear face masks.

Uruguayan refinery workers protest against privatization of state-owned petroleum company

Workers for Uruguay's National Fuel, Alcohol and Portland [Cement] Administration (Ancap) struck on October 15 to protest plans to privatize and dismantle the state enterprise as part of its proposed national budget. The Ancap Federation (Fancap) called the one-day walkout and organized a caravan from the Ancap refinery in La Teja, a neighborhood of Montevideo, to the Industry Ministry.

Colombian unions, social organizations issue national strike call

Last week, Colombia's National Strike Committee, composed of union federations, pensioner, student and other social organizations, called for another nationwide strike for October 21. The mobilization's slogan is "For life, democracy and negotiation of the emergency list."

The list of demands that the committee proposes is long, indicative of the acute state of the crisis in the nation: the end of assassinations, massacres and abuses by police and paramilitary squads; the right to protest and free speech; judiciary independence; indigenous and minority rights; the end of femicide and gender- and orientation-based discrimination; aid to small and medium-sized businesses; adequate health care; labor rights and a living wage, food security and others.

In July, the Committee submitted the Emergency List to right-wing US ally President Iván Duque, a list to which he has given scant attention. A Committee communiqué concludes that, "if the government doesn't sit down with the board of the National Strike Committee to seek and conclude ways out of the demands of the emergency list, the people will see themselves pushed in all regions to mobilizations each time greater and more forceful."

United States

Contract settlement follows two-day strike by Connecticut nurses

The office of Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont announced a contract settlement October 17 between the Backus Hospital in Norwich, Connecticut and the Backus Federation of Nurses following a two-day strike.

Wages and health care benefits, along with a dangerous nurse-to-patient ratio of eight to one, have proved contentious in the months-long bargaining, but concern by nurses over working conditions and patient safety in relation to the pandemic proved to be a major concern and the state government has begun an investigation into an outbreak of COVID-19 at the hospital.

Eight nurses quarantined and did not take part in the two-day strike on October 13-14 and Backus hospital management has refused to confirm if there is a current outbreak. The hospital has had several outbreaks that have resulted in nurses contracting the virus.

Backus nurse Shanon Pereira, who tested positive for COVID-19 told the media that around a dozen co-workers also tested positive. "We had an outbreak in my unit. There were multiple staff members that tested positive. And I was one of the last ones diagnosed. I never took care of a patient who was positive on the floor, so reasonably working in quarters with reused PPE that is not protecting us sufficiently." Of the strike, Pereira said, "Nurses do not take the decision to strike lightly. We choose to strike only when it becomes a matter of life and death for our patients."

Norwich is located in the center of a hot zone of coronavirus infection. The governor's office announced that a cluster of eastern Connecticut cities are experiencing an average of 15 or more new cases per day per 100,000 people in the course of a two-week period.

Ohio school district withdraws request that labor board charge bus drivers with illegal strike

The Fairborn City school district in Fairborn, Ohio, withdrew a request

to the State Employment Relations Board to determine if bus drivers conducted an illegal strike October 12. The district had charged that members of the Dayton Public Service Union (DPSU) Local 101 carried out a sick-out.

Lawyers for the district charged that drivers held an informal meeting in a parking lot to "discuss their unfounded concerns with the District's COVID-19 response plan. Upon information and belief, it was at this meeting the Union members determined they would organize a 'sick-out' on October 12, 2020 and potentially beyond."

AFSCME Council 8, the umbrella organization of which the DPSU is a member, denied any role in a strike. The DPSU issued a statement, saying, "The DPSU Labor Union will continue to commit to not unlawfully encouraging, inciting or otherwise sanctioning any work stoppage, slow down or interruption in District operations."

On October 14, large numbers of bus drivers again called in sick. The district has declined to answer media inquiries as to why they withdrew their request for a ruling by the state labor board.

Canada

Newfoundland IBEW officials expelled for corruption

After years of protest from members of Local 2330 of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers in Holyrood, Newfoundland over serious financial irregularities in the union, four former officials have been expelled from the IBEW and ordered to repay over \$2.2 million. The former union president was ordered to repay over \$1,576,284 with three other officials responsible for repayments ranging from \$42,000 to \$500,000. In addition, two other officials were found guilty of malfeasance but maintained their membership in the union.

Workers had been demanding to see quarterly financial reports since 2018 as required by their constitution, but had been stymied in their demands by the union executives. Due to their continuing protests, which has included picketing of union offices, officials from the international office of the IBEW eventually became involved. In June 2019 the local executive was suspended and the union placed under trusteeship. It then took another 15 months for the investigation to produce its findings.

The final report issued by the IBEW revealed that the local IBEW training center was bankrupt and that union officials had grossly misused expense accounts and issued, in one case, a large unauthorized "severance payment" to the union president's sister. The IBEW press release and press accounts of the union scandal did not provide the names of the culprits. Rank and file members, many of whom are unemployed or working low-wage jobs, have dubbed the IBEW, "I'm Broke Every Week."



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