

Mexican teachers and students reject in person classes; nurses at Quebec hospitals oppose staff shortages, forced overtime

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

Mexican teachers and students reject in-person classes

On Thursday August 24, teachers and students rallied and protested in Mexico City against the return to in-person instruction. The protests were organized by the national teachers union (CNTE) and the National Federation of Revolutionary Students Rafael Ramirez (FNERRR).

The day after the protests, teachers, demanding a meeting to present their demands, blocked Mexican president Lopez-Obrador from carrying out his customary daily press conference, which was scheduled to take place in Chiapas State. The teachers' demands include the restoration of benefits, the rehiring of 50 educators sacked by the Chiapas University of Science and Arts and the firing of one if its deans. The teachers are also demanding freedom for political prisoners and justice for female murder victims.

The President brushed them off. Lopez Obrador declared that he would not yield to the teachers' demands; "I will not allow this," he declared, "the Mexican president cannot be held hostage by anybody."

A recently released survey reports that 87 percent of 67,000 parents are opposed to in-person instruction, and think that with the increase of COVID-19 infections by the Delta variant of the virus, the risk of infections and deaths has greatly increased.

Leaders of the CNTE (with 600,000 members) insist that under no conditions will teachers return to in-person instruction. The students, who formed human chains last

Thursday, declared that demonstrations will continue.

Protest strike by Buenos Aires public hospital employees

Health workers at Buenos Aires public hospitals carried out a 24-hour protest strike and rally on Wednesday August 25. At issue are wages and working conditions. Strike leaders declared that health workers are "not disposable."

Since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, public health hospital health workers have had to perform exhausting and extraordinary tasks to make up for the collapsing public health infrastructure. Many of the strikers are contingent employees that have been denied full-time jobs, another issue in this protest.

Relatives of political prisoners and disappeared rally in Santiago

On Monday, August 30, relatives of political prisoners and persons disappeared by the Pinochet dictatorship and those imprisoned during the 2018 social explosion against the current regime in Chile, carried out protest rallies in commemoration of the International Day of Missing Prisoners.

In Santiago's Dignity Square, demonstrators carried signs denouncing impunity laws and demanding justice for the thousands of disappeared.

There has never been a full accounting of the fate of many of the victims of the military-fascist Pinochet

dictatorship, over 30 years ago. At the same time, the current regime of Chilean President Sebastián Piñera has denied the existence of political prisoners from the mass demonstrations of 2018-2019.

United States

Twin Cities window washer strike settled

Workers who clean the windows of skyscrapers across the Minneapolis-St. Paul metro region ended their 10-day strike after clawing back promises made before the onset of the pandemic from Columbia Building Services and Final Touch Commercial Cleaning. The 40 members of Service Employees International Union Local 26 received a wage increase that raised their \$25.20 hourly pay to over \$30 an hour and also got agreement for an apprenticeship program.

A picket line at Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport drew support from janitors who refused to cross their picket line. During the pandemic, many workers were reassigned work inside buildings and almost half the workforce came down with COVID-19.

Workers consider the state-certified apprenticeship program a safety issue. The program will provide training for the dangerous work on high-rise buildings where they can be confronted with failing infrastructure.

Canada

Wave of sit-ins by nurses at Quebec hospitals oppose staff shortages, forced overtime

Dozens of nurses have taken part in sit-ins in recent days in multiple cities in Quebec. These actions were launched by rank-and-file nurses to protest against the increasingly dangerous conditions they and their patients face due to chronic staff shortages and compulsory overtime.

The sit-ins erupted just days after the Quebec nurses' union, the Fédération interprofessionnelle de la santé (FIQ), had pushed through a new contract, over widespread opposition. FIQ has pompously claimed the new contract provides "levers" to oppose the "shortage of healthcare professionals" in Quebec's public health care

system.

In reality, the new agreement meets none of the longstanding demands of nurses after years of government budget cuts—decent wages, lower nurse-patient ratios, the elimination of forced overtime and the abolition of the ministerial decrees the CAQ provincial government has used to override worker rights during the COVID-19 pandemic.

On Sunday, August 22, 25 nurses at the Centre hospitalier de l'Université Laval (CHUL) in Quebec City refused to start their morning shift a little before 8 a.m. They occupied a corridor of their neonatal unit to denounce the physical and psychological pressure they are under due to personnel shortages. The day before, another group of nurses from the CHUL Emergency Department had organized a sit-in at the beginning of their shift when their work-team lacked four of its 15 members.

On August 23, night nurses in the maternity unit of the Hôtel-Dieu hospital in Lévis staged a sit-in to denounce forced overtime. This practice, which has become the norm, forces nurses to work up to 16 hours at a time. The protesting nurses told reporters they worry about the health of their patients. "I don't feel like losing a child because I wasn't able to be in a delivery room on time," said one nurse.

Two sit-ins have also taken place in recent days at the Granby Hospital in the Eastern Townships region of Quebec. As elsewhere, the job actions at the Granby Hospital lasted only a few hours. However, the local health authority, the CIUSSS, appealed to the provincial government's Administrative Labor Tribunal (TAT) to criminalize the actions of its employees.

Unsurprisingly, the TAT, a government body that enforces the province's anti-worker labour laws, ruled the sit-ins "illegal." It further ruled that another sit-in would be considered tantamount to contempt of court and that nurses who participated would be liable to "a fine of up to \$10,000 or imprisonment for up to one year."



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