

Canadian nurses launch nationwide “Day of Action”; One day nationwide strike in Uruguay hits anti worker government policies

## Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

pro-business measures that have eroded workers’ earning power and rights.

### Workers at provincial hospital in Argentina protest “adjustment and abandonment”

Workers at the Neuropsychiatric Hospital in Córdoba, capital of the Argentine province of the same name, held a protest against the “policy of adjustment and abandonment” being carried out by the government against the hospital and the health care system in general.

Protesters, including workers’ family members, supporters and patients, blocked the entrance of the hospital and lined the street to show their dissatisfaction with the current situation. According to a statement by the Health Workers Union (UTS), “In particular, the Neuropsychiatric hospital is going through a collapse situation: lack of professionals, resignation of several of them fed up with the appalling conditions, and increased demand due to the multiplication of psychic ailments that have been generated as a result of the pandemic.”

The government was not alone in coming under criticism. The statement also declared that “the general policy of emptying by the government is joined by a hospital management that does not respond to the needs of staff and patients.”

In response to the strike, management only added insult to injury by hiring two contract workers: “In other words, they propose to deepen precariousness as a response to our legitimate claims, something that we reject outright: we need to incorporate workers with full rights and stability.”

### One-day national strike in Uruguay demands employment, wages, end of anti-worker law

Workers across Uruguay struck as part of a mobilization called by the PIT-CNT labor federation September 15. Thousands of protesters gathered for several blocks around the Legislative Palace in Montevideo to voice their demands and listen to speakers denounce the policies of the government of Luis Lacalle Pou. Over 220 buses had brought participants from around the nation, and hundreds arrived on horseback.

The main demands were: more employment; improvements in wages; defense of the ports from privatization; defense of the National Colonization Institute, which aids families moving to and developing rural areas; and the ending of the Law of Urgent Consideration, a package of

### National protest in Ecuador against rise in fuel prices, privatization, poverty

Nationwide mobilizations took place in Ecuador September 15 to protest the increase in the price of fuel. In the capital Quito, over 3,000 protesters marched against the policies of the administration of Guillermo Lasso. The participation was smaller than the 5,000 to 6,000 people that organizers, including labor unions coalesced in the Workers Unitary Front, indigenous groups and social organizations, had predicted, but was still considerable.

Smaller protests took place in other cities as well. Protesters marched and blocked streets, with signs reading “No to the rise in fuel prices,” “No to the privatization of public enterprises,” “Down with right-wing government,” “For equality and justice” and “For dignity we go on strike.” In Los Ríos and Guayas provinces, farmers blocked roads and demanded that the government fix an official price on rice.

The price of gasoline has risen from \$1.49 per gallon last year to \$2.39. Diesel, used mostly for public transportation and heavy transport, has climbed from \$1.05 to \$1.65.

Lasso, who has been president for four months, denounced the protests, saying, “Change is achieved through peaceful dialogue, not with strikes led by personal interests. The well-being of Ecuadorians comes first.” The former businessman took office in May with a high approval rating (71 percent), and it has grown slightly because of his relatively aggressive vaccination program. Now, however, his plans to carry out economic policies that will involve budget cuts, IMF austerity and price rises are spawning resistance.

### Guyanese sugar cane harvesters strike, protest over poor working conditions, shorting of pay

Cane harvesters at the Albion Sugar Estate in East Berbice, Guyana, stopped work September 17 to protest conditions in the fields. They also alleged that they are being cheated by low recorded weight of their cane harvests.

The workers protested the fact that they have been assigned to the worst fields, where thick overgrowth makes cane cutting difficult. Formerly, harvesters would be paid extra to work in obstacle-strewn fields, but that

has been ended. Now, when their harvest is weighed, the cane cutters claim that the recorded weight is lower than the amount they had cut, resulting in paltry pay.

### **Bahamian teachers protest shabby treatment by administration**

A group of teachers protested in front of the Bahamas Technical and Vocational Institute (BTVI) in Nassau September 13 over a number of complaints. The educators are members of the Union of Tertiary Educators of The Bahamas (UTEB).

The list of grievances includes lack of raises, nonpayment of overdue bonuses and no policy for promotions. After a meeting with UTEB President Daniel Thompson, the BTVI executive board promised to pay the bonuses the next day. This year the teachers voted in the UTEB, which received recognition on June 28 but has yet to meet with management.

The UTEB and the administration have scheduled a meeting to address the issues of pay and promotion policy, as well as to negotiate for an industrial agreement.

### **Protests in El Salvador against adoption of cryptocurrency continue**

Thousands of Salvadorans returned to the streets September 16 to protest against the Nayib Bukele administration's adoption of the cryptocurrency Tether—for which Salvadorans use the generic term “bitcoin”—as a national currency alongside the US dollar. The law, which established the bitcoin as legal tender on September 7, requires businesses to accept it as payment.

Bukele has justified the measure as a way to facilitate the delivery of remittances from Salvadorans in other countries, but opponents fear that it will bring instability and inflation to the nation plagued by deep poverty.

Demonstrators wore t-shirts, carried signs and chanted anti-bitcoin slogans while they marched. In one case, protesters burned a bitcoin machine.

### **Redbank Valley, Pennsylvania teachers walk out over concession demands by school district**

Teachers for the Redbank Valley School District in New Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, launched a strike on September 13 after the district negotiators failed to reply to the union's last proposal. The old contract for the 77 members of the Redbank Valley Education Association (RVEA) expired in June 2019, two-and-a-half years ago.

The district has proposed a two-year pay freeze and cuts in benefits. The RVEA says in its last proposal it offered the district a total of \$1.2 million in concessions, but the district responded by saying it needed another \$140,000 in health care concessions.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education stepped in on September 15, issuing a memo that the strike could not last beyond November 3 without coming into conflict with a department code which requires 180 days of instruction by June 15 of next year. The code provides a straitjacket that will allow the state to impose an injunction and impose a mandated final best-offer arbitration.

Redbank Valley teachers last struck in 2004 over wages after going 16

months without a contract.

### **California health care workers announce preparations to strike in October over understaffing**

Some 500 health care workers at two hospitals in Antioch and Concord, California, voted September 14 to strike at some point in October over a crisis in staffing. The bargaining unit, represented by Service Employees International Union, comprises a wide variety of workers including mental health counselors, emergency room technicians, phlebotomists, psychiatric technicians, respiratory therapists, transporters, psychiatric technicians, licensed vocational nurses and unit secretaries at Sutter Delta Medical Center in Antioch and John Muir Health Behavioral Health Center.

Jennifer Stone, an emergency room technician, said, “We’re drowning. There’s just not enough staff. We’re wearing too many hats—we’re talking down angry COVID patients, then we’re rushing to a code, then we’re talking to family members who just lost a loved one. We can’t give adequate care.”

According to workers, the understaffing was a problem prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, but the last several months of the pandemic has exacerbated staffing conditions. The SEIU has called on workers to stop taking additional shifts in order to prevent the hospital from attempting to cover up the crisis.

### **Nurses across Canada launch National Day of Action against attacks by provincial governments**

As the fourth wave of the coronavirus pandemic begins to spike in Canada, nurses from across the country mounted demonstrations and protests last week against the continued governmental mishandling of the pandemic, stalled contract negotiations, deteriorating working conditions, understaffing, cuts to patient services and stagnant wages.

Even as exhausted nurses in many jurisdictions are working double shifts, six and, in some cases, seven days a week, rallies took place outside hospitals and provincial government buildings in scores of cities and towns from coast to coast. In many locations, nurses denounced rallies in recent weeks organized by anti-vaccination activists that have taken place outside hospitals.

In Alberta, health care workers denounced the criminal “business as usual” reopening of the province this past summer, which has led to a spike in COVID-19 infections so large that the province’s intensive care units cannot take any more patients. Calls have been made for the military to come in to alleviate the staffing crisis.

In addition, the United Conservative Party government continues with plans to eliminate as many as 16,700 full- and part-time medical employees through job cuts and privatization. This comes after nurses have seen no wage increase in five years, a period during which both the UCP and the nominally “left” New Democratic Party (NDP) were in power. Hundreds of nurses have left the province to seek work elsewhere.

In Saskatchewan, nurses called for the resignation of the conservative health minister for dropping all public health precautions that has led to widespread infections in that province that have pushed the health care system to the brink.

In Manitoba, community health care support workers voted by margins of well over 90 percent over the past two weeks for strike action. They are

protesting over low pay, poor working conditions and job security. Nurses in Quebec have engaged in a bitter struggle against the FIQ union's effort to enforce a concessions-filled contract demanded by the right-wing Coalition Avenir Quebec government. In Ontario, nurses are protesting over horrendous working conditions exacerbated by the pandemic.

New Brunswick's Conservative government has broken off negotiations with the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) that is negotiating new contracts on behalf of 22,000 provincial public sector workers, including nurses and other health care workers. In Newfoundland, nurses protested chronic understaffing enforced by both the Liberal and now a Conservative government. They were joined by paramedics protesting about continuous, untenable "red alerts" reflecting the possible unavailability of ambulance services and demanding mental health services for grievously overworked attendants. Nurses in Nova Scotia and British Columbia protested similar conditions of overwork, understaffing and deteriorating services.



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