

Protests over price rises rock Haiti; Uruguay educators hold national protest strike

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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Latin America

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Haiti rocked by protests over high cost of food, fuel

On August 29 a protest march against the high cost of food, necessary goods and the scarcity of fuel in the city of Petit Goave in Western Haiti was savagely attacked by police and masked gang members loyal to newly installed president Ariel Henry. One demonstrator was killed and 11 others were wounded, two of them with bullet wounds. The dead protester suffered from asthma and was choked by tear gas.

Protests also took place in Port Au Prince, Haiti's capital.

Given the intense social and economic implosion now affecting Haiti, educators are demanding that the beginning of the school year (planned for September 5) be postponed. Educators denounced poor sanitation, the tripling of fuel prices and the extreme poverty affecting most households that make it impossible to purchase school supplies and transport children to school.

According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), more than 250,000 children have no schools to go a year after the earthquake that devastated southern Haiti last year.

National protest strike by Uruguay teachers

On August 23 teachers carried out a national protest strike in Uruguay against budget cuts in education and a government project to reform education.

"Government officials condemn us for abandoning students for these protest strikes, but forget that they are responsible for the brutal budget cuts to education, affecting poor children and students," declared Cecilia Klein of the teachers-in-training union.

In conjunction with the teachers and students, private sector health workers joined in the protest strike with demands for higher wages and better health care for all Uruguayans. The Uruguayan

Health Federation, which represents workers employed in the private health sector, led that national strike demanding better pay and working conditions and improved health care for the citizens of that nation.

In Montevideo, Uruguay's capital, strikers marched on the Labor Ministry and held a protest rally. Marches and rallies took place in several other cities in Uruguay. The striking teachers marched on and rallied at the campus of the University of the Republic, supporting the demands of university students occupying the university and denouncing the budget cuts.

Parents of 43 disappeared students hold protest in Mexico City

Last Friday parents of the 43 disappeared Ayotzinapa teaching college students marched in Mexico City demanding that their fate be determined. A spokesperson for the demonstrators declared, "We need to clear up our children's fate and where they were taken to."

The protesting parents made it clear that they are demanding objective and scientific evidence of what happened to the students on the night of September 26, 2014, an accounting that they have yet to receive,

Police kill and injure protesting artisan miners in Peru

Protesting artisan mine operators confronted police in Peru's Amazon region on August 25. The demonstrators were demanding an end to attacks and the takeover of their tools and equipment by government agents, including boats and gold mining instruments. Two people died in this latest confrontation, 17 were wounded.

United States

Teachers in Niles, Ohio, to strike this week if final bargaining session fails

The teachers union and school board for public schools in Niles, Ohio, will have one more bargaining session August 31. The union said that failure to conclude a contract would result in a strike September 1. The Niles Education Association (NEA), which bargains for 151 teachers, is demanding pay on par with other districts in Ohio's Trumbull County.

NEA spokesperson Traci Kempe confirmed wages were the issue. "It is definitely pay. Again, we are asking simply to be paid equitably. We want to be paid fairly [on a par] with school districts around us."

Currently, base pay for Niles teachers is the second lowest in Trumbull County and lags as much as \$9,000 annually behind some districts.

Teachers narrowly voted down an agreement back in March. Then in July, an amended contract was voted down by an even greater margin. The NEA claims the defeat of the second contract was due to a leak by the board members to some teachers in one-on-one meetings that they had more money to put on the table, but the NEA never requested it.

The NEA filed charges with the State Employee Relations Board that complained that the leak had disrupted the union's plans to impose an inferior contract. "What bargaining unit member would vote for a (tentative agreement) when members on the other side of the bargaining table claimed there was more money to give?" If teachers strike on September 1, the board has said it will close schools and implement a plan for remote learning.

Over 6,000 health care workers at Buffalo-area hospitals slated to vote on strike authorization

The two unions representing over 6,000 health care workers at seven Kaleida Health hospitals in the Buffalo, New York, region notified their members August 23 that a strike authorization vote will be held September 13 through 15. From March 16, when negotiations began, Kaleida Health and CWA Local 1168 and 1199 SEIU maintained that progress on a new agreement was ongoing and the unions agreed to two monthly contract extensions after the old agreement expired May 31.

But when the contract extension expired July 31, the unions declined another extension. "We really heard from our members that they didn't want to sign another extension," said CWA 1168 President Cory Gambini.

Kaleida Health released a statement last week claiming that over "wages, benefits and staffing levels ... Our current proposed economic package already accomplishes each of these objectives ..."

But the unions were compelled to depart from their previous rosy assessment. James Scordato, 1199 SEIU vice president, admitted, "We are still far apart on the economics and safe staffing levels." Before the pandemic, the bargaining unit for the two unions covered 8,000 employees. Currently it sits at 6,300.

Both management and the unions have been haunted by last fall's six-week strike at Kaleida's health care competitor, Catholic

Health. That contract secured staffing ratios in the medical-surgical area of 1:4 during the day and 1:5 at night. Whatever the limitations of the agreement, it has galvanized Kaleida workers, who have no contract language governing staffing ratios.

Catholic Health lost \$89 million during the strike, amounting to 55 percent of its \$160 million operating loss during 2021. It has lost \$230 million in the past two years and Moody's Investors Service downgraded their credit rating from Ba2 to B1. In 2020, Kaleida reported just under \$61 million losses on revenue of \$1.3 billion, despite being the recipient of \$87 million in federal relief.

Canada

Tugboat crews strike at ports of Vancouver and Victoria

Captains and engineers in British Columbia, members of the Canadian Merchant Service Guild, went on strike August 25 against Seaspan, the largest ship-docking tug and barge company on Canada's west coast. Workers have been without a contract since September 2019, with little progress in resolving multiple (but still unspecified) contract issues.

In addition to ship-docking, the guild crews provide tanker escorts and emergency towing services with a fleet of 30 tugs. Seaspan also operates a fleet of over 100 specialty and general-purpose barges that provide transportation for many of the province's largest industries and marine construction projects. Unaffected by the strike are crews working on the company's ferry system and at shipyard and dry dock facilities.

Ship docking services at the country's largest port in Vancouver are vital to international trade. The last contract dispute in 2014 was called off and sent to binding arbitration just minutes before a strike was set to begin. In the current dispute, traffic at the Port of Vancouver already has been slowed due to congestion at sea and on adjoining rail lines due to logistical difficulties initially spawned by the COVID-19 crisis.

The current labour unrest in the ports follows another dispute at Seaspan's commercial ferry services arm last January that resulted in a brief strike that was resolved only minutes after a walkout began.



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