Walkouts and protests by California nurses, New York private hospital nurses take strike vote as “tridemic” rages

Workers Struggles: The Americas

19 December 2022

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

Latin America

Brazilian pilots and flight attendants vote for partial strikes over pay demands

Pilots and flight attendants in Brazil’s National Union of Aeronautical Workers voted December 15 to hold partial strikes beginning December 19. The stoppages were set to last from 6:00 to 8:00 a.m. every day at Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Campinas, Porto Alegre, Brasilia, Belo Horizonte and Fortaleza airports. The union made exceptions for flights carrying organs, vaccines and sick people.

The main demand is for a five percent wage increase with 5.9 percent added in response to inflation. Management has only agreed to keep pace with inflation but without any amount beyond that. In recent months, airlines’ profits have surged, but workers have seen no benefit from the rebound.

The workers are also demanding improved working conditions. These include scheduling, management of leave and compliance with ground time between flights. According to a union statement, despite the airlines’ improved profits, they “remain intransigent, refusing to grant more decent pay to crew members and proposing that pilots and flight attendants work longer hours.”

Uruguayan quarry workers continue strike over unjust dismissal

Workers for Canteras Montevideo SA, an open-air granite quarry in Uruguay, have continued their strike, which began after the December 8 dismissal of an employee without just cause. The workers’ union, the Single National Construction Union and Annexes (Sunca), met with quarry management, but the company refused reinstatement without explaining why.

A Sunca representative told reporters, “When we received the communication, the conflict prevention protocol that is provided for in the collective agreement was installed and a negotiation table was opened there, and the arguments that the company put on the table ... are not true. And this leads to the position of the workers being told to stop the tasks until there is a different response or a reinstatement of the worker,” which the company has refused to do.

Sunca has since enumerated other “successive breaches of the collective agreement by the company” over the years, including nonpayment of the half-hour rest period provided for in the collective agreement and the push toward “multifunction, multitasking, which goes against what the [Ministry of Labor] evaluation says of tasks in the sector.”

Sunca called a four-hour stoppage nationwide from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. for Friday, December 16 in solidarity with the Canteras Montevideo workers. The strike, however, was only held by the union’s extractive branch workers and not those in construction and other annexes.

Judicial workers in Argentina protest, strike for payment of wage rise

Judicial employees across Argentina held a strike for 60 hours, beginning December 14 and extending it on the 16th, due to the lack of response by the Executive Power to their demand for the fourth tranche of a raise agreed previously with the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation, as well as the integration of the Union of Judicial Employees of the Nation (UEJN) into social work.

The mobilization began with a march to the Palace of Courts in Buenos Aires, blocking traffic on two major streets. UEJN head Julio Piumato denounced “the contempt for the independence of the judiciary and an unspeakable insensitivity towards those of us who work in it” and declared that “salaries cannot lose value or purchasing power in the face of the galloping inflationary process that the country is experiencing.”

The judicial workers have held a number of limited strikes and protest actions in November and December, including vigils and batucadas, drum ensembles often seen and heard at protests. Another 60-hour strike was set for December 20, to begin at 10:00 a.m., continuing on the 21st and 22nd with another 48 hours of strike.

Tire plant workers in Argentina set for one-day strike over unilateral changes in working conditions

Workers for Argentina’s three largest tire companies, Fate, Pirelli and Bridgestone, will strike on December 21 to demand an end to “unilateral changes” imposed by the firms on working conditions. The action will include a march to the Ministry of Labor.

Alejandro Crespo, head of the Single Union of Argentine Tire Workers (Sutna), told reporters that “there is a failure of the companies to act in good faith after the joint agreement. Pressure situations have been generated, arbitrary suspensions, medical departments that do not approve days for workers, changes in work methods. It was launched separately in

© World Socialist Web Site

the different plants and now it has been unified in a general strike in the face of a very similar situations."

Crespo and Sutna had shut down a week-long strike last year, resulting in a September 30 agreement that failed to keep up with inflation and secured promises to improve conditions that the companies, as Crespo's statement makes clear, broke with impunity.

Even the token one-day "Hollywood strike" is not a certainty. As infobae.com reported, "It is expected that in the next few days the Ministry of Labor will issue a mandatory conciliation against the stoppage of activities ordered by the union. However, the company Bridgestone Argentina reported that they are holding talks to reach a solution as soon as possible."

United States

California Cedars-Sinai hospital workers conduct five-day strike

Some 400 health care workers at the Cedars-Sinai Hospital in Marina del Rey, California launched a five-day strike December 12 to demand better pay and improved staffing levels. The strikers, members of the Service Employees International Union, have a bargaining unit comprised of a number of different categories, including surgical technicians, dietitians, lab assistants, nursing assistants and pharmacists.

Emergency room technician Eric Melo said, "We're struggling to keep up, and people are leaving because they just can't afford to work here… Every day, I'm running around doing three people's jobs." The SEIU reports some workers are compelled to work a second job if they want to live within reasonable commuting distance due to the high cost of living in the Marina del Rey area.

Cedars-Sinai has sought to extract other cost-saving measures, such as taking away free meals for workers who work on holidays, and imposing a tiered structure to gouge workers for parking costs that could rise to as high as $100 a month. Workers also insist that management not impose concessions on education and health care benefits.

Last May, health care workers at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Beverly Hills conducted a five-day strike and ratified a three-year agreement, separate from the workers at Marina del Rey. The contract at Marina del Rey expired September 30.

Strike vote held in New York City private hospitals in midst of "tridemic"

Nurses at New York City's private hospitals are holding strike votes as a "tridemic" of COVID, flu and RSV is sickening more people each day.

Contracts covering 17,000 medical staff at 12 hospitals expire December 31 according to the New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA), and ballot boxes have been located at workplaces across the city.

According to NYSNA president Nancy Hagans, well over two-thirds voting thus far have supported a strike. While the strike vote covers nurses at all 12 hospitals, each hospital has a separate contract, leaving open the possibility of a walkout that would only hit some hospitals while other remained on the job.

Once voting is completed, the union would still have to give a 10-day strike notice before a walkout could begin.

Central issues involve lack of staffing and inadequate health care benefits. Management has said preparations are being made in the event of a strike, without providing details.

Burbank, California, nurses picket to protest under-staffing and safety conditions

Nurses at Providence St. Joseph Medical Center in Burbank, California, held a one-day informational picket December 15 to call attention to under-staffing, workplace violence and other issues that have challenged the ability of the facility to retain health care workers. The Service Employees International Union 121 RN, which represents 900 nurses at the hospital, has called conditions in the facility "unsustainable."

Connor Palacio, an intensive care nurse, told *Whittier Daily News*, "Almost all of my peers have left. Some were burned out and moved on because they felt they are better appreciated at another facility. On bad days, nurses will sometimes work 10 hours before getting a lunch break. ... There are supposed to be two patients for every ICU nurse, but some days we'll have three patients, and that can be bad if a patient has an emergency and you still have to take care of your other patients."

Besides under-staffing, problems with violent patients has been a concern. Back in October, security failed to detect a gun carried by a patient admitted through the emergency room department. The patient barricaded himself in a bathroom. Hospital personnel carried on negotiations for more than an hour before police finally arrived and subdued the patient. A week later, a similar incident transpired.

The SEIU has been in negotiations with hospital management since last July. The current contract agreement expires December 31.

Colorado meatpackers vote unanimously for strike action

Some 200 workers at a JBS meat processing plant in Denver, Colorado, voted unanimously to authorize strike action December 10 over unfair labor practices. According to Kim Cordova, president of United Food and Commercial Workers Local 7, JBS has been "unilaterally changing workplace policies that have not been bargained on."

"These tactics", the union statement continued, "create a precarious and often dangerous workplace for these Essential Workers who risked their health and lives during the pandemic so that we could have meat on our tables."

No firm date has been set for a strike. The UFCW and JBS are currently bargaining over a new contract agreement.

Maine paper mill workers set to strike over demand for cost-of-living protection

The 123 workers at the Woodland Pulp mill in Baileyville, Maine, were slated to walk out December 19 over wages and benefits. According to the United Steelworkers Local 27, workers are content with the general wage increases but are demanding a cost-of-living escalator as a hedge against inflation.

Members voted by a 92 percent margin to strike earlier in December and sent a certified letter terminating the old agreement which was being continued under a contract extension. The letter announced a 10-day strike notice that could lead to a strike as early as December 19.

© World Socialist Web Site

Walkouts held over weekend in Starbucks unionization drive

A strike involving some 1,000 barristas at Starbucks is set to begin Friday, the longest walkout yet called by Starbucks Workers United in its drive to unionize the Starbucks chain.

More than 1,000 baristas at 100 stores staged walkouts over the past weekend, according to Starbucks Workers United, the labor group organizing the effort. The strike will be the longest in the year-old unionization campaign.

The union said it expected the strike would shutter some stores entirely; at others, managers or other workers would keep the stores open.

Starbucks said the strike had a limited impact on its stores and most remained open.

"We remain focused on working together and engaging meaningfully and directly with the union to make Starbucks a company that works for everyone, and we urge Workers United to uphold their promises to partners by moving the bargaining process forward," the company said in a statement.

On November 17, workers at 110 Starbucks stores held a one-day walkout corresponding to the company's annual Red Cup Day, when the company gives free reusable cups to customers who bought holiday-themed drinks.

Employees at some 264 Starbucks' stores have voted to unionize since last year, still only a small fraction of the company's 9,000 US stores. Workers United said the company closed the first store that voted to unionize in Seattle.

Starbucks reported a record $8.41 billion in revenue in the third quarter of 2022.

Canada

Three-year electrical technician strike against LTS Solutions nears end in British Columbia

Electrical technicians, members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) hope to soon have a first collective agreement after a three-year strike against its employer, LTS Solutions, a division of the giant North American construction firm, the Ledcor Group. LTS is active in installing phone, internet and television connectivity to telecommunication entities, including TELUS, which has a large footprint in British Columbia.

Last month, the Canadian Industrial Relations Board ruled that LTS had denied the workers the right to union membership over a five-year period by virtually refusing to bargain a contract. After years of wage reductions and layoffs, workers voted to unionize in 2017, and then for strike action in 2019. So egregious has been the company's actions that, in an unprecedented move, the pro-employer labour board has signaled it will itself now determine a labour contract between the company and the union.

Throughout the strike, LTS had deployed scab labour across its operations. Since telecommunications companies are federally regulated, provincial legislation in B.C. that restricts the deployment of replacement workers does not apply. The union estimates that at the time of certification in 2017, there were about 260 members of the bargaining unit. Most of the strikers found other jobs after it became clear that the IBEW was unwilling to end their isolation and broaden the struggle to other workplaces across the province. Today, only about 60 members remain in the bargaining unit.

The use of scab labour is steadily increasing in Canadian industrial disputes. Two weeks ago, steelworkers rallied in Quebec against the deployment of replacement workers for locked-out longshore workers in Quebec City and striking seamen at maritime services company Ocean Remorquage. At the same time, the Conservative government in New Brunswick is preparing to push new labour regulations through the legislature that would allow for the province to deploy scabs against striking public sector workers.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site