

Students, workers, mark Uruguay's Day of Student Martyrs; Multiple strikes continue across Ontario

## 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

### Students commemorate Uruguay's Day of Student Martyrs

On August 14, 2023, exactly 55 years after the assassination of Liber Arce by the Uruguayan police, students and workers marched in the memory of all the student victims of the country's military apparatus.

Hundreds of educators, university and high school students marched from the campus of the University of the Republic (UDELAR) to the Legislature building with banners reading, "Out of the blood of our martyrs will the wings of revolution spread." This is an allusion to the way in which Arce was killed, having been shot at the beginning of a protest for labor rights by police who delayed calling in an ambulance while the youth bled to death.

Arce was the first of thousands of workers and youth disappeared and murdered between 1968 and 1985 in Uruguay and in Chile, Argentina and Brazil as part of Operation Condor, orchestrated by US imperialism.

As part of the protests, high school students also demanded that government invest in Uruguay's deteriorating public schools. Next year will mark the 50th anniversary of the wave of general strikes that ended the 1968-85 tyrannical dictatorship.

### Argentina: Port of Quequén dockworkers strike in defense of their jobs

One hundred-twenty dockworkers in the Atlantic Ocean Port of Quequén, in Buenos Aires Province, went on strike on August 16 demanding to meet with the management of Terminal Quequén Inc. over the future of their jobs at the port, which handles agricultural and mineral exports. The company's license to operate will expire in three months. Striking workers say that the time is too short to decide who is going to operate the port, and have declared that the strike will continue until they get an answer.

### Argentine scientists marched to protest right-wing candidate's plan to cut research spending

Argentine scientists marched and rallied on Friday in central Buenos Aires, denouncing presidential candidate Milei's declared intention to abolish the Science and Technology ministry, and privatize the National Council of Scientific and Technical Investigations should he win the presidency. The ultra-right candidate recently suggested that the government scientists had contributed nothing and that research should be privatized.

### Municipal workers protest in Mexico City

On Friday, August 18, thousands of state municipal workers protested in downtown Mexico City in defense of wages, labor rights, an end to contingent employment and the rehiring of sacked employees.

The protesters began their march at the Anti-monument to the 43 (Antimonumento de los 43, a marker honoring the 43 students who were kidnapped and likely killed in 2014 as they were traveling to commemorate the anniversary of the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre) and ended in the centrally located Zocalo square. The protest march brought in workers from throughout the state and included workers from education, health, construction and other sectors.

### University of Puerto Rico workers set to strike

The Union of University of Puerto Rico workers announced it plans to carry out its strike plans despite a wage increase approved by the Fiscal Oversight Board that supervises Puerto Rico's government budget. More than 1,400 went on strike six months ago and were promised a US\$2.00 raise on their hourly pay, from \$7.50 to \$9.50 per hour. However, that raise has not been formalized.

The workers are demanding that this raise be approved by September 1. In addition, they are still owed \$8.50 per hour retroactively since 2022, along with improvements in their health benefits.

United States

### Illinois nurses battle hospital over staffing ratios and compensation

Five hundred nurses at the Ascension St. Joseph Hospital in Joliet, Illinois are set to go out on a two-day strike beginning August 22 over

unsafe staffing levels and wages. The hospital responded by declaring a four-day lockout supposedly due to contract requirements with a staffing company supplying replacement nurses.

Nurses have rejected a proposed 18 percent wage increase in their first six years along with a declining scale to 12 percent for nurses with 17 to 21 years. Nurses say the lower wages paid to veteran nurses will lead to a further outflow of experienced nurses to other hospitals and undermine the quality of patient care.

Nurses are also challenging the hospital's method of crediting experience that excludes the background skills of immigrant nurses who previously worked in the Philippines, Eastern Europe and Africa.

Ascension is digging in its heels against the nurses by canceling bargaining this week and refusing to meet with the Illinois Nurses Association bargaining committee until September 8.

Like workers throughout the healthcare industry, understaffing has roiled the ranks of the Joliet nurses for some time. Back in October of 2022 a group of nurses refused to clock in unless management provided adequate staffing. The hospital retaliated by firing nurses.

### **Alaska Airlines flight attendants protest low wage offer, contract delays**

Some 1,000 flight attendants at Alaska Airlines' hubs at cities across the United States turned out to demand a conclusion to long, drawn-out negotiations that have frustrated any significant gains. Flight attendants have not seen their contract updated since 2014 and the average annual base wage for first-year flight attendants is less than \$24,000, qualifying many for food stamps.

According to the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA, workers are bargaining for an increase of 40 percent in wages and benefits while the airline is only offering 9 percent. The company has responded that the AFA's proposal "included cost increases throughout the agreement that just weren't economically feasible" and would undermine the "sustainability of the company's business model."

The union, headed by Democratic Socialists of America leader Sara Nelson, has dutifully abided by the anti-strike Railway Labor Act, which was used by the Biden administration and Democratic Party-controlled Congress to block a strike by 110,000 railway workers and impose a pro-company contract on them. Nelson said the AFA-CWA would begin the legal process under the RLA—which also covers airline workers—by entering mediation in September and could launch random strikes during the 2023 holiday season.

### **Phoenix, Arizona, hotel workers protest low wages, slow contract negotiations**

Hospitality workers at the Hilton Resort at the Peaks in Phoenix, Arizona held a picket August 18 to protest the slow pace of negotiations. Members of UNITE HERE Local 11 are seeking higher wages as they continue to feel the pain of stagnating living standards that have not receded since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Jose Cruz, who has worked at the hotel facility for 27 years, told 12 News, "After the pandemic, a lot of people could not survive on the money they give to us. All the bills, all the rent, all the food, they hike the price. So that's why we stay here to fight the company."

Hotel workers in southern California, also members of UNITE HERE,

have been engaged in a months-long wave of limited strikes, while the union bureaucracy seeks a deal acceptable to the hotel owners and the Democratic Party establishment.

### **Custodial workers protest firings and harassment as they seek to organize**

Custodial workers walked off their jobs August 16 at the Constitution Center offices in Washington D.C. to protest harassment and firings in the wake of attempts to unionize with the Service Employees International Union. Federal labor charges were filed at the beginning of the month against the contractor Quality Building Maintenance Inc. A separate complaint was made with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration in conjunction with allegations that the company seeks to pressure workers not to take bathroom or water breaks.

Alicia Cortez told the *Dcist*, "They treat us like slaves, and there are other people who were fired just because we're demanding our rights." Cortez explained that during her pregnancy, management fumed when she asked for time off for doctor appointments and confirmed the company harassed workers trying to take bathroom breaks.

Canada

### **Multiple strikes continue in Ontario**

Thousands of workers in southern Ontario remain on strike across several industries, many of them after rejecting rotten tentative contracts presented to them by union officials. In Windsor, 250 salt mine workers are entering their sixth month on strike after refusing to accept management's demands to contract out much of their work. Late last month, Unifor presented the strikers with another rotten contract proposal, which was soundly rejected by the miners. The company, the private holding firm Stone Canyon Industries, has been using scab labour throughout much of the dispute.

In the Greater Toronto Area, 3,700 Metro grocery store workers are entering their fourth week on strike against poverty-level wages. Late last month, workers voted down a miserable agreement; Unifor officials had extolled the tentative deal as "one of the best in decades." The deal would have instituted yet another real wage cut over the life of the contract, continuing years of substandard compensation. Eighty-two percent of the workforce are part-timers earning barely above the provincial minimum wage with full-time workers topping out at only a few dollars per hour more.

In Ottawa, 400 Hydro workers, members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers have been on strike now for 55 days after overwhelmingly rejecting a four-year contract that represented a real wage cut after years of high inflation that continues to diminish their actual buying power. Management has put contingency plans in place to continue services but response times to rectify local outages have lengthened. The dispute, with the agreement of management and union officials, is now headed toward nonbinding arbitration.

In the town of Bradford, just north of Toronto, municipal librarians organized by the Canadian Union of Public Employees have been on strike for one month after town management refused to meet even the union's demand for a paltry \$1.35 per hour wage increase in the last two years of a three-year agreement.



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