

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

Puerto Ricans protests over the cost of electricity

Hundreds of Puerto Ricans protested last Wednesday in the streets of San Juan against proposed increases in electric rates. The marchers rallied at the governor's mansion with banners denouncing increases in electricity rates, in the context of a crisis in living costs.

The rate increases—from the current 25 cents per kilowatt/hour to 50 cents—are part of a plan imposed by the Financial Control Board to 'solve' Puerto Rico's debt crisis. Demonstrators indicated that the increases in rates will make it more difficult for families to afford to live.

In addition to very high electricity costs relative to what working class families pay in the mainland, electric service in the island has been notoriously unreliable ever since Hurricane Maria in 2017.

Civil rights organizations protest against police violence in Brazil

Protests took place on August 23 in the cities of Bahia, Sao Paulo, and Rio de Janeiro following a series of massacres that killed over 60 people in Brazil, predominately poor black youth, with the consent of local authorities under the pretext of the war against drugs.

The protesters issued a declaration with eleven demands against police violence, including that police be equipped with cameras to monitor their acts and that the government compensate the families of the victims of police violence. "In recent years neo-fascism has become rampant in Brazilian society; major evidence of that is the fascist transformation of the police", said the declaration.

Peru: court workers strike

Fifteen thousand court workers, employed in 35 courts across Peru, launched a 48-hour protest strike on August 22. The strikers demand an end to a COVID-19 wage freeze, an end to wage differences between courts, salary increases, increased benefits and better working conditions.

Strikers report that many of them are forced to work 12-hour days, six days a week for 1,600 to 1,900 Soles per month (approximately 650 US dollars), frozen since 2013.

Leaders of the Court workers' federation have threatened a strike of indefinite duration if the government ignores their demands.

Partial general strike in Uruguay

On Tuesday August 22, Uruguay's trade union federation PIT-CNT carried out a so-called partial 4-hour general strike, and a protest march on the Economics Ministry and held a rally in Montevideo's municipal Antel Arena. Some of the member unions, such as Bank Employees and public school teachers decided to strike for the entire day.

One-day national strike by Chilean health workers

On August 22, municipal and family primary health workers in Chile carried out a one-day national strike.

The one-day strike, presented as a warning by the health trade unions (CONFUSAM, and CESFAM) is over delays in retirement incentives (some workers have died while waiting for their retirement pensions to take effect). Workers also denounced acts of violence against them in municipal and family clinics.

Health workers are threatening a strike of indefinite duration if their demands are not met.

Chilean longshore union 'protests' deaths of dockworkers

The Chilean longshore union statement condemned the conditions that led to the recent on-the-job death of dock worker Marcelo Tapia, in the Port of Arica on August 21. The statement denounced dangerous work conditions at poorly-maintained Chilean ports, and the negligence of shipping companies.

So far this year four longshore workers have died on the job, in Arica, Coronel and Valparaiso.

The longshore unions have limited their protest to complaints to the Boric Administration.

United States

Cleveland hospital workers set to strike starting Labor Day

Representatives for 170 workers at Cleveland Clinic Lutheran Hospital were escorted out of the executive offices by police after delivering a notice that workers would carry out a strike beginning September 4 – Labor Day. Members of the Service Employees International Union District 1199 voted back in July to strike and have been without a contract since April.

Workers rejected the hospital's offer of a 1.5 percent wage increase and

complained about discrimination and retaliation by hospital management. The SEIU has filed more than two dozen unfair labor practice charges.

Workers are demanding many benefits that non-union workers obtain, such as parental leave, short-term disability insurance and a match on retirement benefits. The bargaining unit is comprised of maintenance workers, electricians, mechanics and nursing assistants.

Faculty at Buffalo, New York, university protest stalled negotiations

Faculty and librarians at D'Youville University in Buffalo, New York, joined by workers from a variety of unions, gathered to picket at 7:30 AM ahead of the new semester's opening assembly to protest the administration's stalling on settling a contract over compensation, health benefits, short-term disability and other issues. The administration, apparently surprised by the picket, moved the opening assembly to Zoom in an effort to isolate the picket from campus workers and students.

Eli Finnegan, an English teacher for 11 years at D'Youville, told the *Buffalo News* that the administration is "trying to wear us down. We think they are counting on our apathy and exhaustion and that we will end up taking what we can get."

Christine Walawander, a 17-year psychology professor, said, "This is affecting my family. I haven't had a raise in two years and the cost of living has gone way up. I go to class and count my students and think about how much they are paying for each credit hour, and it doesn't make sense."

The 150 bargaining unit members have been without a contract since September 2021 and negotiations have floundered for the past three years. Further, the school's president, Lorrie Clemo has become a lightning rod for faculty anger.

In 2018, Clemo slashed the entire undergraduate education department. "Every single person was pushed out the door in a pretty ruthless way," said Brandon Absher, president of the school's chapter of the American Association of University Professors and serves on campus as a philosophy professor.

Registered nurses protest unsafe staffing at hospitals in El Paso, Texas

Registered nurses from three separate campuses of The Hospitals of Providence in El Paso, Texas, held a joint picket August 22 to protest the failure of contract negotiations to address unsafe staffing levels. National Nurses United (NNU), which represents 750 nurses at the hospitals of Sierra, Memorial, and East Campuses are currently negotiating over the hospital administration's refusal to address recruitment and retention of nurses Tuesday.

NNU says that Memorial campus has lost nearly one-third of its nurses and Sierra Campus has lost a fifth of their nurse staff.

Idali Cooper, a nurse at Memorial said in an NNU press release, "Our hospital had more than 400 nurses before the pandemic and we are now around 300."

Tenet Healthcare Corporation, which owns Providence hospitals, operates 65 hospitals and more than 450 healthcare facilities. The investor-owned company has swallowed a number of hospital systems and ranks 167th on the Fortune 500 list. Its CEO, Saum Sutaria, made \$21.2 million during his first year in 2021. The company has been involved in a number of corruption allegations involving kickbacks and Medicare billing

practices.

Sub-contractor dismisses truck drivers after protest

Fifth Floor Freights, which serves as a middleman between truck drivers and companies needing shipping services, dismissed workers August 23 who took part in a demonstration to protest oppressive working conditions two days earlier. The protest, organized by the Truckers Movement for Justice and held near Odessa, Texas, called attention to the long hours and poor pay received by workers.

"Really bad conditions," complained Eldys Orrellis to KOSA. "Fourteen hours of work, fifteen hours of work, sixteen hours of work. Everyday. Without being able to go home."

"We used to have some days off, but now we cannot rest because they are putting some fees that we have to pay," Jose Chaves told NewsWest 9. The fees, combined with lost wages are forcing drivers to put in long hours on the road.

In addition, workers fume over often being forced to wait without compensation for as many as six hours at a terminal before receiving their cargo.

Canada

Canadian actors rally in Toronto

Hundreds of film and television workers, members of the Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists (ACTRA) rallied this past Friday in front of Amazon and Apple headquarters in downtown Toronto in support of strikes involving tens of thousands of writers and actors in the United States.

The two venues in Toronto were chosen to highlight the demands on both sides of the border for media workers to receive compensation for their work on streaming channels and to win protections in the way developing Artificial Intelligence (AI) impacts their artistic contributions and compensation.

The Canadian workers also pressed their demands for a renewed contract with the Institute of Canadian Agencies (ICI) which represents most of the large advertising agencies in the country. Since the ICI walked away from the bargaining table 16 months ago, a veritable lock-out has been deployed that has prevented actors from gaining employment in advertising commercials work by the large corporations affiliated to the ICI.

Workers expressed mistrust of their own union spokespersons at the rally, citing actions by their ACTRA sister union in British Columbia (a major site for Hollywood productions) – that undercut the SAG-ACTRA and Writers Guild strikes in the United States by extending their previous contract for one more year rather than fight for a new contract this summer. A contract fight this year would have considerably strengthened the bargaining power of screen workers on both sides of the border. The extended deal pushed through by the ACTRA British Columbia bureaucracy provided for only a 5 percent wage increase, which failed to recover eroded compensation from previous years of inflationary spikes.



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