

Argentine educators hold day of struggle; Austin, Minnesota, meatpackers demonstrate as old contract expires

## 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

### Argentine education workers hold protest strikes and rallies

On Wednesday September 6, Education workers from more than a dozen unions across Argentina carried out a National Day of Educators' Struggle. Strikes and rallies took place nationwide. One issue is wages: In the words of one education worker "wages take the stair, while prices take the elevator. Every month the loss of buying power is more and more noticeable." Price inflation in Argentina is going up by 113 percent per year.

Many of the protesting teachers and school workers carried signs denouncing the disrepair and lack of maintenance of public schools, due to the layoffs of school maintenance workers and of emergency personnel, to take care of school-buildings and students, who are increasingly denied basic school lunches, glasses of milk, etc. Currently six out of every ten public school students go to school hungry and depend on free lunches at school cafeterias.

### Construction workers protest in Peru

Thousands of construction workers mobilized in several cities in Peru last Tuesday demanding from the Peruvian Construction Chamber (CAPECO) wage increases that keep up with the national rate of inflation.

The demonstrators demanded improvements in safety measures and health benefits, travel bonuses, a night-work differential and higher pay for specialized tasks. In addition, the workers demand the reopening of 1,800 paralyzed projects across the country, to provide employment to laid-off workers.

Chile

### Protests in Santiago, Chile against legislation to dispossess the homeless

Residents of the Lo Hermida neighborhood in Santiago protested last Thursday against legislation that would prohibit the occupation of

abandoned lands or homes, criminalizing poverty. The protesters demanded that Chilean president Gabriel Boric veto such legislation.

Lo Hermida is a poverty zone, originally established in the 1960s by poor families that took over abandoned estates. Maria Fernanda, one of the leaders of the protests denounced the government for 'providing no solutions, while creating repressive laws.'

Protests took place against the legislation in other Chilean cities.

### Mexico City public health workers demand permanent jobs

On Friday September 8, Mexico City Health workers protested at the Health Ministry demanding the end of contingent employment and the creation of permanent jobs for public health workers in the National Mexican Social Security and Wellbeing Institute (IMSS).

This was the third protest this week, following protests on September 4 and September 7.

Protesters reported that three years ago former Mexico City Mayor Claudia Sheinbaum had promised to meet their demands, but nothing was ever done. Sheinbaum is the current presidential candidate for the Morena Party.

The demonstrators said the convoluted process of becoming full time purposely lacks transparency, allowing authorities to do what they want. Many of the protesters also reported that when their temp contracts expire this December, they fear that the health authorities will sack them.

Chanting "not one step back!" the protesters carried signs demanding that all contingent health workers be given full time permanent status, higher wages and better working conditions.

United States

### Austin, Minnesota, meatpackers demonstrate as old contract expires

Some 1,000 workers at the Hormel meatpacking plant in Austin, Minnesota, marched and demonstrated on Labor Day demanding better wages and working conditions. The old agreement with United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 663 is slated to expire September 10.

Workers are demanding a \$6.50 wage hike as opposed to the \$2.15 being offered by Hormel. Health insurance and pensions are also being disputed. Workers became sick and at least one worker died during the pandemic.

Local 663 President Rena Wong declared the UFCW wants to reach an

agreement that “keeps Hormel’s operations running smoothly.” Hormel touted their relations with the UFCW and stated, “we will reach agreements with the UFCW in the near future.”

The Austin Hormel plant was the scene of the bitter 1985-86 strike that witnessed a militant rebellion by Local P-9 Austin meatpackers that spread to Hormel plants in Iowa and Nebraska. The company engaged in a vindictive strikebreaking campaign that resulted in the firing of hundreds of workers. The company assault was greatly aided by the courts and the deployment of the National Guard by Democratic governor Rudy Perpich, who were used to help crush the strike.

Most critical was the role of the UFCW international and the AFL-CIO labor bureaucracy which intervened to sabotage any solidarity from workers across the United States. The UFCW placed P-9 in trusteeship, cut off strike pay, confiscated union funds, evicted workers from their union hall and negotiated a sweetheart deal with the company covering replacement workers.

### **California state scientists authorize strike action after three years of stalled negotiations**

The 5,300 members of the California Association of Professional Scientists (CAPS) voted by a 93.5 percent margin to grant strike authorization after nearly three years of negotiations failed to meet scientists’ demands for parity with non-union engineering workers.

The CAPS bargaining team is seeking 30 to 40 percent wage increases to overcome wage disparities between the scientists and their engineering counterparts. The bargaining unit comprises scientists who monitor food safety, air and water pollution, manage natural resources and other tasks.

Jacqueline Tkac, chair of the CAPS bargaining committee, said “state scientists are tired of the state’s foot-dragging and lowball offers.”

A bill to commission the University of California Labor Center to conduct a salary study is being held on the Senate Appropriations suspense file. The *Sacramento Bee* commented, “Frequently, lawmakers use the suspense file as a tool to kill or quietly amend bills before sending them to the floor.”

### **Phoenix airport concession workers vote to strike over poverty wages**

The union representing food service workers at Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport in Phoenix, Arizona, voted September 1 by a 98 percent margin to authorize strike action. The contract covering 400 members of UNITE HERE Local 11, who are employed by contractor SSP America, have been without a contract since the end of May and have had no response to a union proposal going back to April of this year.

The bargaining unit is made up of cashiers, cooks, baristas, bartenders and other concession workers who staff restaurants such as Matt’s Big Breakfast, Dunkin’ Donuts, Pei Wei, and Four Peaks Brewing Company.

In a press release, UNITE HERE said the workers “are paid poverty wages, have their rights violated, and many struggle to feed themselves and stay housed.” The union filed federal labor violation charges that included “unlawful disciplinary actions, unilateral changes, and unlawful surveillance.”

HMSHost is another of the food companies that received a contract from the Phoenix City Council for concessions at the Sky Harbor airport. In 2021 workers went on strike against HMSHost over wages and health insurance.

### **Locked out Chicago hotel workers return to work in wake of tentative agreement**

Workers at Kinzie Hotel in Chicago, Illinois, returned to work September 8 after management locked them out for holding an informational picket. The 12 workers did banner picketing after their old contract expired on August 31.

Hotel management and UNITE HERE Local 1 held a bargaining session on September 7 where they came to a tentative agreement that included a return to work for the victimized workers. Voting was to have taken place over the weekend on the tentative agreement, which according to the union is patterned after contracts at 31 other Chicago hotels.

Canada

### **Municipal workers set to strike in New Brunswick and Saskatchewan**

About 140 administrative, support, recreation, IT and technical employees are set to strike this week in Saint John, New Brunswick unless city management improves its wage offer. The workers, members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) perform emergency dispatch, court services, bylaw enforcement and administration. Workers have been without a contract since 2021.

Revenues for the city have grown by 5 percent in the past two years but management refuses to admit any significant surplus. Wages are so low amongst the city workers that 20 percent hold down second jobs.

Meanwhile, in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan about 160 full and part-time workers, also members of CUPE, have been without a contract since 2021 and are also set to strike. Earning barely above the provincial minimum wage which will move from \$13 to \$14 per hour on October 1, union officials had their proposal for a meager 12 percent raise spread over 4 years rejected without discussion by city management.

The last contract from 2017 to 2021 included a one-year wage freeze and then annual raises below 2 percent. During the recent inflationary spikes, no adjustments have been made to compensation. This past weekend, the union proposed concessions on vacation entitlements and duty pay that would reduce overall compensation even further. City management, determined to defend their poverty wage policy, rejected the union climbdown as insufficient.



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