

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Wave of strikes and protests triggered by Millei presidency in Argentina

In the context of ‘structural adjustments’ announced last week by recently appointed President Millei, which include mass lay-offs, monetary devaluation, wage cuts, etc. that accelerate hunger conditions for the majority of workers, many are beginning to fight back.

- In the Patagonian province of Neuquen road maintenance workers are striking in solidarity with 19 sacked workers in the Zapala. In that city workers are blocking the gates to the workshops. The workers rejected a proposal by management to rehire eight of the sacked workers and appealed to all road maintenance workers across the province.

- Also, in Neuquen, Water and Sanitation workers have declared themselves ‘in alert’ after bosses announced the firing of another 60 employees, most of whom work as contingent workers. More rallies are expected this week by Water and Sanitation employees.

- Buenos Aires: Municipal workers mobilized last week demanding the payment of two months back wages, plus the traditional Christmas bonus. Newly appointed right-wing mayor Diego Reyes indicated that there is no money, that the city cannot rely on Provincial funds, even to pay 50 percent of November wages, and has refused to talk to the strikers.

- La Plata: In La Plata, capital of Buenos Aires province, therapeutic assistants protested last week over wages and working conditions, as the government’s brutal and punitive austerity policies are taking hold. Last Thursday the assistants mobilized and rallied in downtown La Plata demanding the payment of back wages, an increase in real wages, and that from now on wages not be delayed for more than 30 days after their work is done.

A nation-wide workers mobilization against the new austerity policies is expected this Wednesday.

Ecuador unions announce protests against economic law

The Organization of Free Trade Unions carried out protests on Monday against an economic law proposal by the Noboa administration, currently being debated by the Ecuadorean Congress, which would accelerate the expansion of contingent labor and subsidize corporate debts. In addition, workers demanded the payment of unpaid wages for public employees.

Workers rallied at the congressional building demanding that Congress reject Noboa’s proposal.

Hospital workers protest strike in Haiti

Hospital workers in southern Haiti carried out a protest strike (except for maternity wards) in the Saint-Antoine de Jérémie Hospital last Wednesday, demanding the payment of back wages. The strikers are owed two months’ pay and a year-end bonus.

The strikers warned that their protest will continue until their demands are met.

One-day strike by Uruguay social development workers

Uruguayan government employees, employed by the Ministry of Social Development (MIDES), being forced to work extra hours for no higher pay, carried out a national one-day strike last Wednesday. In Montevideo, strikers temporarily occupied the offices of the department.

MIDES relies on contingent and temporary employment for many of its employees; they represent 44 percent of the workers. The strikers pointed out that by increasing working hours from 30 and 35 hours to 40 hours per week, without extra pay, is the equivalent of a 30 percent hourly wage cut.

Nurses at SSM Health in St. Louis, Missouri, to carry out 48-hour strike

Nurses at SSM Health St. Louis University Hospital (SLU) will stage a 48-hour strike beginning December 27 amid a staffing crisis, in an effort to press their demands for safe staffing ratios and steady full-time jobs. Nurses voted the previous week to grant strike authorization, and National Nurses United (NNU), which represents SLU nurses, has now given a ten-day strike notice, paving the way for the late-December walkout.

The contract for SLU nurses expired last June and the union and management have been negotiating since May. In September, SLU nurses carried out a 24-hour strike. The most recent bargaining took place on December 12.

The two sides have exchanged wage proposals. But staffing is at the core of nurses complaints. According to NNU, management has refused to hire full-time nurses to relieve the crisis, and instead relied on short-contract and travel nurses. And travel nurses are compensated at a rate three times that of the current unionized nurses.

“We have a staffing crisis, but a revolving door of outsourced nurses is not the solution,” said Earline Shepard, an SLU nurse, in a union press release. “We are taking time away from our patients to assist temporary agency nurses. Staff nurses can give our patients the continuity of care they need in their medical treatment.”

The union has called attention to the fact that there are 117,831 licensed nurses in Missouri, but only 78,900 are actively working as nurses.

“Nationwide, there are more than a million registered nurses with active licenses who are choosing not to work as nurses,” says the NNU.

SSM Health is a Catholic not-for-profit United States health care system that operates 23 hospitals in the states of Missouri, Illinois, Oklahoma and Wisconsin.

Anheuser-Busch brewery workers vote by 99 percent to strike

Brewery workers across the country have voted by 99 percent to authorize the Teamsters union to call a strike by 5,000 Anheuser-Busch workers when their contract expires on February 29, 2024. The Teamsters union claims that the company has agreed to end tiered health care and restore retiree medical benefits but has “delayed negotiating on important job security benefits since mid-November.” There are currently no new dates for negotiations.

Anheuser-Busch, which was bought by Belgian multinational InBev in 2008, made \$31.4 billion in gross profits in 2022 and has recently announced \$1 billion in stock buybacks for its shareholders.

Teamsters General President Sean M. O’Brien said, “If Anheuser-Busch’s executives can’t get their act together to negotiate an agreement that respects workers, we will see them out on the streets.” O’Brien used the same rhetoric before blocking a strike by 340,000 UPS workers in August and pushing through a contract, which maintained poverty wages for part-time workers and included a \$7.50 general wage increase for drivers, spread out over five years, that will likely not keep pace with inflation.

Illinois truck mechanics continue strike over benefits and two-tier wage structure

About 60 mechanics at M&K Truck Centers facility in Alsip, Illinois, are well into their second month on strike over the company’s drive to take away health benefits and its refusal to banish a two-tiered wage system. Members of the International Association of Machinists (IAM) Local 701 began their strike on November 1 after workers unanimously rejected the company’s offer.

M&K wants to do away with union-sponsored health benefits and 401(k) plan. The IAM charges that both the company’s health care and retirement plans are inferior to the current union-sponsored plans.

The IAM charges that imposition of the company’s 401(k) plan would require workers to “contribute more than 10 percent of gross income each week to make up the difference in the lack of contributions.” The current concession demands of management follow past negotiations that saw reductions in retirement benefits.

Two weeks ago, M&K rejected further negotiations with the union. The old agreement expired on August 31. Negotiations began back in July.

Northern Minnesota grocery workers vote to carry out four-day strike

Some 650 grocery workers in the Brainerd Lakes region of northern Minnesota will launch a four-day strike starting December 22 to protest company harassment, as Local 663 of the United Food and Commercial

Workers is in negotiations with five grocery stores. The grocery chains affected will be Cub Foods, Super One Foods and SuperValu.

The union has not published details of bargaining. Instead, it has called an Unfair Labor Practices strike as “UFCW Local 663 members have experienced interrogation, surveillance, and intimidation from their employers...” Time and again the UFCW and other unions have called ULP strikes as a means of defusing anger while a sellout deal is prepared.

The UFCW called attention to a similar threat of an Unfair Labor Practices strike by Minneapolis and St. Paul grocery workers that was called off after a tentative agreement was reached.

Strike at Rogers Sugar refinery in Vancouver nears 3-month mark

Negotiations broke down last week once again in the bitter strike of 138 Rogers sugar refinery workers in Vancouver, British Columbia. The current impasse in bargaining stems from the company’s insistence on an onerous 24/7 shift operation at the plant. Workers would be required to labour for 12-hour shifts, with mandatory weekend work and no overtime payments.

The Rogers refinery is one of the main sugar producers in Canada. The walkout has led to sporadic sugar shortages throughout western Canada despite attempts by untrained management, often sleeping in the strikebound plant, to continue a semblance of production.

The workers, members of Local 8 of the Public and Private Workers of Canada, have been without a new contract since February. They are demanding a 6 percent wage increase in each year of a three-year contract. Management has offered a paltry 3 percent a year raise in a five-year contract. Workers, who have already suffered real wage losses after several years of wage erosion due to inflation, earn a base rate of only \$23 per hour.

Rogers Sugar is owned by Lantic Inc., which recorded Canadian sales of \$1 billion last year. The company is the largest supplier of refined sugar in Western Canada. The Vancouver refinery also supplies the Western United States. In addition to the Vancouver facility, the company operates another cane sugar refinery in Montreal and a sugar beet processing plant in southern Alberta.

In addition to the company’s derisory wage offer and attempts to impose a brutal work schedule, it also has sought to cut some health and dental benefits, weaken seniority rights and contract out some jobs to even lower wage, third-party employers.



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