

Argentine upheaval continues; Hawaii nurses strike over safe staffing

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 and the Caribbean

Last week the PIT-CNT trade union federation declared its support for the national general strike by the Argentine CGT trade union federation set for January 24. It called on its members to protest and rally across the Argentine embassy in Montevideo.

“Uruguayan workers cannot ignore this attack [by Argentine President Milei] against our Argentine brothers. Following our long history of internationalist solidarity where we demonstrate in struggle, we call on all trade unions and workers to protest on January 24 across from the Argentine embassy in Montevideo.”

In particular, the Uruguayan federation denounced Milei’s plans to privatize government-owned firms, stop investing in education, abolish public services, and criminalize protests.

On Wednesday January 17 Peronist organizations led street protests in cities across Argentina, repudiating the ultra-right austerity measures of the Milei administration. The demonstrators also condemned anti-democratic measures that limit the right to protest.

The demonstrators banged empty pots and carried signs in defense of the rights of the poor, demanding cost of living raises, and the defense of social benefits.

The Union of Workers of the Popular Economy (UTEP) and the Evita [Peron] movement called on all workers to participate in the January 24 national protest strike.

Since the protests began on December 20, Milei’s security forces have killed at least 32 demonstrators.

Relatives of Cuban political prisoners demand the release of all those held by government

Relatives of 1,063 political prisoners have petitioned the

Cuban National Popular Power Assembly (ANPPC) demanding amnesty for all political prisoners. They have collected, and continue to collect, signatures through social media, facing government repression.

About 500 of these prisoners of conscience were arrested during the mass protests of July 2021, during which tens of thousands of Cubans protested the lack of bread, constant power-blackouts, and the shortage of medicine and medical care, while the government leaders lived like kings. The arrested individuals were charged with sedition and with being agents of the United States.

Since 2021, economic conditions have gotten worse in Cuba, causing student and popular protests despite conditions of increasing repression.

Last December the government announced its “Program for Macroeconomic Stability,” popularly known as “El Paquetazo” (the Bundle), a collection of austerity measures, including the doubling of fuel prices, increases in food prices amid continuing shortages of medicines.

While the Miguel Díaz-Canel administration does not publish statistics about inequality, a “new oligarchy” linked to the tourist, financial, and health industries, lives in luxury while 70 percent of the population lives in poverty.

Residents of Lerdo Tejada, in the state of Veracruz rose up in protest last Friday following the killing of Brandon Arellano Cruz, a 27-year-old father of two, at a traffic stop. Arellano had been followed by a police car; he stopped at his grandmother’s home and before he could get out of his car was shot and killed by police.

A large crowd assembled and stopped the police from leaving the scene of the murder, while the youth’s father, a local teacher, attempted to revive his son. Injured police were rescued by the National Guard.

The protesters then moved on to the city hall, forced out the city employees and set it on fire, while denouncing Mayor María Esther Arroniz López (Morena Party). Protesters chanted: “The people are tired of that woman (Arroniz López); she does nothing for the people.”

United States

The 600 nurses at the Kapi'olani Medical Center for Women and Children in Honolulu, Hawaii, launched a week-long strike January 21 after management rejected demands for safe staffing ratios. Nurses voted by 96 percent on January 5 to reject the hospital's final offer and the Hawaii Nurses' Association (HNA) followed up with a 10-day strike notice.

HNA president Daniel Ross issued a statement, saying, "The nurses could not in good conscience continue to work in an environment that compromises the quality of patient care and compromises our professional ethics. Appropriate nurse-to-patient ratios are and always will be our priority."

Hawaii Pacific Health (HPH) which owns Kapi'olani along with three other facilities, attempted to skirt the issue of staffing ratios by advancing staffing "guidelines." Gidget Ruscetta, Kapi'olani's chief operating officer told the Star-Advertiser, "We have offered staffing guidelines, which are different from the hard ratios that the union has proposed, and the difference is flexibility."

Negotiations are slated to resume January 31. The two sides have been negotiating since September 2023 with the old contract agreement expiring back on November 30.

Workers at the Acme Distribution Center in East Cocalico Township, Pennsylvania, northeast of Lancaster, voted 317 to 106 on January 17 to reject a four-year contract proposal. Despite the company's touting of a contract that provides free health insurance, workers oppose a company proposal to increase production standards on top of already grueling working conditions.

Workers are also opposed to a new contract provision that lowers the number of doctors' notes from three to one that can be used to provide continuing medical coverage while on unpaid leave. The contract proposal also stipulates that an injured or sick employee must exhaust all vacation or paid time off before accessing Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) benefits.

The Pennsylvania Acme Distribution Center serves as the sole supplier for Acme, Safeway, King's and Balducci grocery stores throughout a five-state region. Acme is owned by Idaho-based Albertsons. In October 2022, Kroger came to an agreement to purchase Albertsons. The deal is currently being reviewed by the Federal Trade Commission.

Nurses at the ProMedica Charles and Virginia Hickman Hospital in Adrian, Michigan, voted January 11 by a 98 percent margin to strike over a number of critical issues.

Nurses are seeking higher wages and demand the hospital continue to contribute to their 401(k) retirement plan. The hospital's concessionary demands on retirement contract language would have the effect of creating a two-tiered system.

The 140 nurses, members of the Michigan Nurses Association (MNA), fear the cumulative effect of the contract will leave them well below wages and benefits of other nurses in the region and will further worsen staffing ratios as a result of quits and the inability to attract new hires.

The MNA has charged the hospital with a failure to provide financial information after four months of negotiations. ProMedica owns 11 hospitals in northwest Ohio and southeast Michigan. The hospital system claims it has lost hundreds of millions of dollars over the last two years.

Canada

Seventy-one workers organized by Unifor are in the first week of a strike against poverty-level wages. The workers are almost all recently arrived immigrants who have been hired by Swipe Jobs, a third-party labour contractor for Del Monte and other low-wage employers. Swipe Jobs advertises as a totally virtual staffing agency. It operates in Canada and the United States.

The striking workers slice fruit and vegetables for packaged platters. They work long hours in sub-standard conditions at the provincial minimum wage of \$16.55 an hour.

Workers voted by 75 percent to reject a new contract that offered them a derisory 5 cents per hour increase. Unifor officials have already reduced their wage demand from \$20 per hour to \$18. In addition, the union has dropped their "request" for a basic benefits package including for three paid sick days and three days of bereavement leave.



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