

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

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## Mexico City residents protest over water shortages

On January 31, residents of the Acambay suburb of Mexico City forced open the gates of the local office of Mexico's National Water Commission, breaking windows and damaging the roof. The protest was the latest in weeks of demonstrations over the lack of water in Mexico City's impoverished neighborhoods and suburbs.

Citizens have been forced to fill buckets from water-trucks and report not having running water since mid-2023.

Officials from Mexico City's water utility SACMEX have said the Cutzamala System, a network of pumping plants, dams and other infrastructure that is the source of water for about 6 million people, is the most stressed it has ever been. They have cynically asked residents to change habits in order to conserve as much water as possible.

The Cutzamala System was at 39.7 percent capacity on January 29, down from about 41 percent in December and 54 percent this time last year, government data show. This is the third year of drought. June 26 of this year has been declared "Day Zero," when it will be no longer possible for the city to supply water to residents.

## Argentine police attack protests against President Milei's "omnibus law"

Last Thursday, Buenos Aires police attacked demonstrations against President Javier Milei's so-called omnibus law.

On two occasions, police, riding motorcycles on sidewalks, brutally attacked the demonstrators, spraying extra-strong pepper gas, and shooting rubber bullets, to prevent protesters from rallying in the center of the city.

Despite the protests the House of Deputies approved the legislation, with some changes. Many demonstrators were arrested. Authorities did not disclose the number of demonstrators injured in the police attack.

## Protests in Paraguay mark the 35th anniversary of the fall of the Stroessner dictatorship

On Friday, February 2, workers across Paraguay held protests demanding that the administration of Santiago Peña of the right-wing Colorado Party investigate and reveal the names of the victims of the anti-communist Alfredo Stroessner dictatorship, which ruled Paraguay from 1954 until 1989.

None of the administrations that succeeded Stroessner have shown any interest in accounting for the terror of the Stroessner dictatorship, part of the US-sponsored Condor Plan, that victimized left wing workers and students in Brazil, Argentina, Chile and Uruguay.

According to estimates from the Paraguayan Human Rights Committee (CODEHUPY), more than 20,000 were tortured, at least 500 were disappeared in Paraguay, and tens of thousands were driven into exile. A CODEHUPY spokesperson indicated that it would digitize and preserve thousands of documents discovered in 1992, known as the "terror archive," linked to Operation Condor.

## Long Island, New York nurses vote near-unanimous strike authorization

Over 700 nurses at two hospitals owned by Northwell Health System on New York's Long Island voted by a 99.5 percent margin to authorize a strike. The members of the New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA) are demanding increased benefits, competitive wages and safe staffing ratios.

Nurses at Peconic Bay, whose bargaining unit comprises 440 nurses, are the lowest paid on all of Long Island. Their starting salary lags \$12,000 behind nurses at a Northwell facility in Bay Shore. The top salary trails Bay Shore by a staggering \$32,000.

The organization New York Campaign for Patient Safety charges that staffing ratios at the two Northwell facilities can rise to nine or ten patients per nurse. In a survey by the union, nurses declared staffing ratios and wages to be the two most important items among their demands.

The NYSNA stated only that it intends to return to the negotiating table and has not issued a strike notice nor given a deadline to Northwell.

### **Oregon home healthcare nurses slated to strike February 10 over wages**

Some 90 nurses at PeaceHealth Sacred Heart Home Care Service facility outside Eugene, Oregon, are preparing a walk out February 10. PeaceHealth management is refusing to grant the members of the Oregon Nurses Association (ONA), who provide hospice and home care services, wages comparable to other home health agencies, including nurses at PeaceHealth's hospitals in Eugene and Springfield.

Nurses have been without a contract for nearly a year and have held 40 negotiating sessions since contract talks began in February 2023. When mediated negotiations were to take place January 23, PeaceHealth refused to show up for talks.

Nurses wanted to walk out February 1, but management had been unable to prepare a staff of replacement nurses in time and the union delayed the strike for ten days.

PeaceHealth is a non-profit Catholic chain made up of 10 hospitals throughout the Pacific Northwest. The top 25 executives rake in an average of \$1.2 million in yearly compensation. In 2022, its president and CEO Elizabeth Dunne took home a base pay of \$5.6 million.

### **Saskatchewan teachers launch third wave of one-day strikes**

Three thousand members of the Saskatchewan Teachers Federation conducted a one-day strike last week to press their contract demands. On January 16 and again on January 22, the full 13,000 membership mobilized for one-day walkouts. The action last week was billed as the first of a

series of rotating strikes that will bring part of the membership out in designated regions over the coming weeks. In October, teachers voted for strike action by 95 percent.

Teachers have centered their contract demands around government funding for the provincial education system to address class size and increased resources for student support specialists. The hard-right provincial government of Saskatchewan Party Premier Scott Moe has underfunded the education system for years.

Moe has promoted the development of "alternatives" in the education system, including options for homeschooling and independent private schools. Even in public schools, the government has advised parents of students with special needs to hire their own specialists at their own expense.

The Moe government has refused to bargain issues of funding with the union, claiming that the matter rests with local school divisions despite a December ruling by a third-party conciliator that such issues are indeed items for the bargaining table.

On the issue of wages, the union has called for an increase of 2 percent annually over the next four years plus cost-of-living increases equal to the average rise in the annual consumer price index over the life of the deal. Saskatchewan teachers are some of the lowest paid in Canada. Currently, their average annual pay is only \$39,863, which breaks down to a miserable \$19.17 per hour.

### **Unifor calls strike at Windsor vitamin plant**

Three hundred and seventeen workers at the Jamieson Laboratories facility in Windsor, Ontario began a strike on February 1 in pursuit of a significant wage increase and improved working conditions. The workers manufacture and package vitamins for the Canadian and global market.

Despite the erosion of workers' take home pay due to high inflation rates, the company has resisted their wage demands even as it issues productivity targets that dramatically increase the intensity of their already onerous work processes.



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