

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

## Protests continue as Milei administration in Argentina marks first 100 days in office

Last week, the Milei administration reached its 100-day mark. During that short period there has been an unprecedented impoverishment of the working class, celebrated by the stock market and the International Monetary Fund.

The real value—post-inflation—of individual pensions dropped 33 percent, that of family subsidies dropped 16 percent. Spending on job creation fell 69 percent, on scholarships 32 percent, on university subsidies, 30 percent. Thousands of government jobs have been eliminated; thousands of food distribution centers and soup kitchens have had their budgets slashed.

On March 24, thousands of people marched in central Buenos Aires in separate demonstrations organized by trade unions, and Peronist and pseudo-left organizations, marking the anniversary of the beginning of the Videla dictatorship in 1976, that tortured and “disappeared” over 30,000 workers and youth. The yearly protests honor the memory of all its victims and demand that the whole truth be known while rejecting all attempts to pardon those that have been condemned for ordering and carrying out the repression.

On March 18, tens of thousands marched and rallied in 500 protests across the country. The largest of these took place in Buenos Aires, Argentina’s capital city. Among the marchers were recently unemployed workers and retirees.

The marchers were confronted by police attacks on several overpasses leading to downtown, from the working class suburbs.

On March 20, steelworkers in Campana, Buenos Aires Province, carried out a three-day strike over wages.

The strike affected plants owned by Techint, Acerbrag, Gerdau and Acindar, some of which were already shut down due to lack of demand for their products. Following the lead of Milei’s Labor Ministry, management at Techint threatened to sack the strikers and move production to other countries.

The steel workers in Campana were centers of resistance during the Videla dictatorship and in the mass protests of 2001-2002.

## Brazilians demand no amnesty for Bolsonaro and other coup plotters

Behind the banners “Democracy forever!” and “No Amnesty!” protest marches organized by human rights organizations took place across Brazil in defense of democracy and social justice, demanding no amnesty for those complicit in the attempted coup of January 8, 2023 against current

President Lula, which was aimed at reinstalling former President Bolsonaro.

Triggering the protests, which took place in 20 Brazilian cities, as well as Lisbon, Portugal, were recent revelations over the coup’s organization that demonstrate Bolsonaro’s active complicity. The demonstrators demanded that the fascist Bolsonaro be condemned to prison for his role.

The protests took place 60 years after the military coup that overthrew left-leaning President Joao Goulart on March 31, 1964. Many demonstrators also carried signs calling for an immediate cease-fire in Gaza and an end to all the war crimes being committed against Palestinians in the occupied West Bank.

## Protests in Chile over Gaza genocide

Holding banners and chanting “it is not war, it is genocide!” demonstrators organized by the Palestine Coordinating Committee, a collective of various civil rights organizations, protests took place in the cities of Santiago, Iquique, La Serena, Coquimbo, Valparaíso, San Antonio, Chillán, Buin, Valdivia, Puerto Montt y Punta Arenas, and others.

The demonstrators called on the Chilean government, headed by President Gabriel Boric, to break all relations with Israel and oppose the massacre of Palestinians. At the port city of Valparaiso demonstrators called on the working classes of the world to unite in defense of the Palestinians in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza.

At the Santiago rally, a group of protesters performing a theatrical skit in favor of the Palestinians was attacked by the police.

## Construction workers in Panama conduct protest strike

In response to the burning of its union building, the freezing of its bank account and spurious court actions against the union of construction workers, SUNTRACS, Panamanian construction workers carried out a 24-hour protest strike on Tuesday, March 19.

Strikers carried out protest marches in Panama City and rallied at the Labor ministry. A SUNTRACS spokesperson declared that the union plans to continue the fight through every mean at its disposal to win this struggle and called for the support of all Panamanian workers.

## California warehouse workers strike pharmaceutical distributor

Warehouse workers walked off the job March 12 at the AmerisourceBergen distribution center in Sacramento, California, to

demand increased wages, lower healthcare costs and contract language that will secure better seniority rights. Teamsters Local 150, which represents the 124 striking workers, had been in negotiations for 10 months with management, called the negotiations “contentious” and concession demands from the company “draconian.”

Company intimidation has included a warning that it will close what it calls the Northwest facility and sent letters to workers threatening replacement. A chain-link fence was constructed around the warehouse and temporary workers have been sent in.

The Teamsters also represent workers at AmerisourceBergen distribution centers in Seattle, Washington, Columbus, Ohio, Amityville, New York and Puerto Rico. But Teamsters Warehouse Division director John Williams said, “The last thing we want is widespread work stoppages” and complained, “The company seems to be more interested in bullying its workers than protecting the interests of its customers.”

The Teamsters are involved in a number of healthcare plans. Fred Gegare, Teamsters vice president and chairman of the Central States Health and Welfare Fund, said he would convene a nationwide meeting of Teamster health and welfare plan trustees to discuss the situation at AmerisourceBergen.

AmerisourceBergen is the world’s third-largest pharmaceutical wholesale and distribution company, ranking 11th on the Fortune 500 list of the wealthiest companies in the United States. In 2022, the Justice Department filed a lawsuit against the company charging it with knowingly distributing opioids that were later resold illegally.

### **Wisconsin Dollar General workers stage walkout**

Workers at the Dollar General store in Mineral Point, Wisconsin, walked off the job for three hours on March 9. One of the workers’ signs read, “The store is closed. The whole team has walked away due to a lack of appreciation, being overworked and underpaid.” A second said, “We quit! Thank you to our amazing customers. We love you and will miss you!”

Trina Tribolet, a former store manager, charged Dollar General with understaffing and overly long work shifts. “They need to do better by their customers, and they need to do better for the communities they build their stores in,” she told WKOW.

The workers cited a store policy of throwing away food items that were close to the expiration date or brand lines that were being discontinued. Instead, workers believed they should be donated to the community.

A Facebook posting declared, “Policies, Processes, and Procedures need to change! Don’t make claims about supporting and helping communities when the reality is that it’s all about the bottom line and not about support or help.”

### **Iowa Hormel workers protest stagnant contract talks**

Meatpackers at the Hormel plant in Knoxville, Iowa, held a protest March 14 as contract talks failed to reach an acceptable agreement. The 200 workers voted down an initial proposal 107–0 on March 1, while the company and United Food and Commercial Workers Local 431 extended the old agreement until April 5.

Workers at other Hormel plants settled for a \$4.75 an hour wage increase over the course of four-year agreements. Despite the meager offer, the company has proposed an even worse \$2.05 wage increase to

Knoxville workers in their four-year proposal.

### **Teaching assistants at Montreal’s McGill University begin strike action**

On Monday, 1,600 teaching assistants at McGill University, Canada’s third-wealthiest post-secondary institution, located in Montreal, Quebec, began strike action. The main issue is over salaries, which according to one anthropology teaching assistant are set at about \$33 per hour, much lower than the \$46.36 per hour offered at similar universities.

Other strike demands include protections against inflation, improvements to healthcare benefits as well as protections against the reduction in contracted hours which erodes the assistants’ overall pay and the quality of education.

Last week, after months of fruitless negotiations which began in September, the Association of Graduate Students Employed by McGill (AGSEM) passed a motion to authorise a strike pending the outcome of a vote, which came back 87.5 percent in favour of an eight-week strike mandate. Striking workers are entitled to meagre strike pay of \$350 per week.

McGill teaching assistants join the 3,700 teaching assistants, graduate assistants, and contract faculty at York University in Toronto, Ontario, whose month-long strike is threatened to be sabotaged by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), which is isolating workers on the picket line and offering no way forward for them to expand their struggle. In 2022, CUPE collaborated with Canada’s other main unions to sell out the Ontario education support workers’ strike.

Meetings between McGill management and the union negotiating committee took place again on Tuesday. No further details are available at the time of this writing.

### **Union shuts down protest by hundreds of Newfoundland fish harvesters as province skirts around demands**

On Saturday, the protest by hundreds of fish harvesters at the provincial legislature ended with a dubious announcement by the Fish, Food & Allied Workers union (FFAW) that a deal had been reached between the union and the Liberal government of Newfoundland.

For weeks, hundreds of fish harvesters had been protesting at the Confederation Building located in the province’s capital of St. John’s over restrictions on the fishing industry. Their main demands include the ability to sell any catch of any species outside of the province in order to raise the price per pound—which they say they cannot live on—as well as an increase in processing caps.

Another key issue is the recent increase in the number of hours required for employment insurance coverage, which has made it difficult for many workers to qualify due to the seasonal nature of their employment.

According to John Efford Jr.—the de-facto leader of the protest and member of the FFAW—the province has agreed to some of the harvesters’ key demands, like the right to sell their catch to buyers from outside the province, regardless of species, as well as raising caps on processing.

The province’s vaguely worded promises have yet to be formalised, along with the price-setting formula for this year’s crab season. None of the province’s manoeuvring last week indicates that it has any intention of meeting the harvesters’ demands, despite claims by Efford Jr. that, “We got it done!”

## **Black River-Matheson city council in northern Ontario seeks to intimidate and criminalise striking municipal workers**

Leading members of council in the township of Black River-Matheson in northern Ontario continue their attempts to criminalise and pollute public opinion against the months-long strike by 14 of its municipal workers.

On Friday, a letter addressed to local residents claims that the picketing workers had engaged in “intimidation and harassment” toward the Township’s staff. The letter was signed by city councillors Chris Wray (CAO), Cassandra Child (Clerk-Treasurer), and James Mousseau (Director of Infrastructure). CUPE Local 1490, the union representing the workers, dismissed the allegations as “sweeping and baseless.”

The council’s letter appears to be in retaliation to the union’s application request filed on March 12 with the Superior Court of Justice to rule on whether the Township’s trespass notice issued in mid-February—which would exclude the 14 striking workers from three municipal locations—violates the Charter-protected rights of CUPE members and employees.

The municipal workers have been on the picket line for more than 150 days, following a lockout in mid-October. The previous contract expired on March 31, 2023. On January 22, workers rejected the city’s offer they were forced to vote on, which contained less in wages for new hires than previous offers that had been rejected.

## **Union shuts down strike by Manitoba health-care workers, applauds paltry wage gains in non-binding agreement**

The two-week strike by health-care workers at an independent living facility in Winnipeg has been shut down by the Canadian Union of Public Employee (CUPE) Manitoba, which has agreed to a tentative agreement. The healthcare strike was the largest the province has seen in over a decade.

In a statement, the union announced that 97 percent of participating workers voted in favour of the new “agreement in principle” with the Ten Ten Sinclair housing provider and the Regional Winnipeg Health Authority. An “agreement in principle” is a general framework for a contract still under negotiation which is not legally binding.

According to the CUPE, the agreement contains “huge gains” including general wage increases, wage adjustments, an additional pay step, a long-service premium, double overtime rates, increased shift premiums, retro-pay and a signing bonus. Previously, CUPE said the top rate for a trained healthcare aide was \$18.06 per hour, which would increase to \$22.54 per hour.

Workers have been without a new contract for four years. The “huge gains” in wages when spread out over a new 6-year contract term, which would expire in 2025, amounts to a paltry 75 cent raise per year—and that’s at the top of the pay scale under conditions of untenable inflation and cost-of-living increases over recent years.

## **Ottawa children’s aid workers vote in favour of strike**

Three hundred thirty workers at the Children’s Aid Society of Ottawa (CAS) have voted overwhelmingly in favour of a strike with 85 percent in support. At issue are poverty-level wages and chronic underfunding, resulting in worker exhaustion, stress, and burnt out—a situation which has led to “the worst morale” the union has ever seen, according to Michele Thorn, president of the OPSEU/SEFPO Local 454.

According to a union statement, since bargaining began in November, CAS has been “stuck on their demands for concessions and clawbacks. “Instead of putting forth a fair deal, CAS Ottawa is pushing the entire system to the brink of collapse,” said Thorn.



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