

Boston University threatens to use artificial intelligence to replace grad strikers; Art Gallery of Ontario strike in second week

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

Dockworkers strike international terminal serving Chile and Bolivia

A strike by dockworkers at the Iquique International Port, which serves Chile and Bolivia, disrupted trucking on the Bolivian side of the terminal. During the strike 1,000 dockworkers blocked access to the terminal.

At issue is the lack of safety at the ports, 12 workers were killed in 2023 because of accidents at the ports. In addition, workers complain that there are illnesses among port workers caused by poor sanitation at Chile's ports.

Workers returned to work on March 28; about 200 trucks are still stuck at the International terminal, including trucks loaded with export goods from Bolivia and imports to Bolivia.

Argentine dockworkers mobilize

The Shipping Pilots Union (SICONARA) has declared a state of mobilization against measures proposed by the Milei administration that impose a big tax on workers earnings. A union spokesperson declared that the new law confiscated workers' earnings, particularly the earnings of maritime workers, who often have to work long-hour without proper compensation.

On March 26 and 27 workers at ports, airports and customs carried out a strike against the layoffs, by the Milei administration, of 30 percent of the workforce, which will eliminate health and safety provisions at ports and airports.

Protests in Santiago, Cuba over food shortages and electricity blackouts

On March 27 hundreds protested in Santiago, Cuba's second largest city, over food shortages and electricity blackouts. The monthly ration of chicken was being distributed at a government subsidized price, when it became clear that there would not be enough to go around. At the same time electricity went out.

This was the second protest in Santiago. Some of the protesters, interviewed by Reuters, described how their lives are being affected by blackouts and food shortages: "the mosquitos, the heat, sometimes there is no water. People are losing their minds," declared Yoni Mena, owner of a vegetable stand in the city.

At both protests, hundreds of demonstrators chanted "Power and Food," and "freedom."

Santiago and Cuba are facing hard times as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the virtual collapse of the tourism industry.

United States

Boston University threatens to use AI to replace striking graduate workers

With a strike by Boston University graduate workers now in its second week the administration has sent an email to faculty recommending the use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools to replace some of the functions impacted by the strike. Among the measures proposed by the administration to deal with the impact of the strike was to "Engage generative AI tools to give feedback or facilitate 'discussion' on readings or assignments."

A faculty member who spoke anonymously to the campus paper *Daily Beast* said, "It's honestly pretty shocking."

A press release from the Boston University Graduate Workers Union, an affiliate of the Service Employees International Union, said that grad workers currently make between \$27,000 to \$40,000 per year, while the living wage for Boston is in the area of \$62,000 a year.

Grad workers voted overwhelmingly to authorize strike in March after nine months of negotiations. The walkout began March 25. The main issues are better health care coverage, childcare subsidies and higher pay. The current health plan does not cover dental or eyecare or emergency room visits. The administration, meanwhile, has suspended the stipends of strikers

Philadelphia nurses and tech workers vote to strike

Nurses and tech workers at Temple Health's Fox Chase Cancer Center granted strike authorization March 21 after six months of fruitless bargaining. The 135 tech workers and 400 nurses are frustrated that management has refused to negotiate staffing ratios and offer acceptable healthcare benefits.

The nurses only unionized in 2023 and both nurses and tech workers have demanded joint negotiations and that they take place on Temple's Cottman Avenue campus in order to facilitate workers who want to observe the bargaining process. However, Temple has refused the request.

Nancy McIntyre, an X-ray tech, told the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, "They have been calling the shots, and we've been giving in."

Meanwhile, the contract covering some 370 nurses at Jeanes Hospital—which abuts the Fox Chase facility—expired back in November and workers voted to strike on February 29.

Spokane healthcare workers preparing to launch one-week strike beginning April 7

The union representing 1,400 nurses, technical and service workers at MultiCare Deaconess and Valley Hospitals in Spokane, Washington, issued a ten-day strike notice March 27 after 19 fruitless bargaining sessions that failed to resolve workers' demands for wages and improved staffing levels. Members of Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 1199NW voted by a 93 percent margin on March 16 to grant strike authorization and a seven-day walkout is slated to commence on April 7.

The SEIU has called for a six percent cost-of-living raise for all categories of workers and additional increases for each category to make them competitive with other healthcare facilities. But according to the union, MultiCare has only granted minimal additional increases in addition to the paltry six percent wage increase. MultiCare is also seeking to increase workers' portion of out-of-pocket costs for healthcare benefits, slash personal time off (PTO) and sick leave and has rejected contract language to provide protections governing overtime, rest between shifts and recall.

MultiCare has been on an expansion binge, acquiring the Yakima Memorial Hospital and dozens of new clinics and making a \$15.7 million land purchase north of Spokane. Meanwhile, the company is showering its top seven executives with \$11.3 million in salaries. MultiCare, based out of Tacoma, Washington, operates some ten hospitals.

Canada

Union pleads for "fair deal" as strike by Art Gallery of Ontario workers enters second week

The strike by more than four-hundred cultural workers at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) has entered its second week, forcing the art museum to close its doors indefinitely "due to a labour disruption."

Members of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU/SEFPO) Local 535 began their strike on Tuesday, March 26, following the breakdown of ten months of talks. The previous day, workers had rejected the gallery's latest contract offer which ignored workers' key demands, including meaningful cost-of-living wage increases and protections against contracting out for part-time workers.

Those on strike include assistant curators, archivists, food and hospitality staff, researchers, instructors, carpenters, electricians and visitor service staff. Part-time workers, who already make up 60 percent of the museum's staff, earn an average of \$34,380 per year—well below the annual livable wage threshold in the Toronto area of \$45,591. Conversely, the top executives at the museum make more than \$200,000 per year, the union reported.

The strike is taking place amid the AGO's massive \$100 million building expansion project expected to begin this spring, an additional expenditure that the museum's management surely expects its workers to pay for.

In a press release days before the strike, while acknowledging the AGO's "disparaging refusal or lack of response on any equity-related issues" during the ten months of bargaining, the union continues to pathetically beg management for a new offer, isolating the strike and making hollow appeals to community members to email AGO Foundation CEO Stephan Jost—who makes \$406,000 in addition to hundreds of thousands in consulting fees—to demand a "fair deal" for workers.

Griffin Wheel workers in Manitoba strike over pension plans and forced overtime

One hundred and eighty-one workers at Griffin Wheel, located in Winnipeg, Manitoba, are on strike following the rejection of the company's latest concessions contract.

On Wednesday, March 27, Unifor Local 144 staged a timid one-day walk-out in protest of the company's latest offer—which would erode pensions, remove seniority rights and enforce overtime—allowing management the following morning to promptly impose a lockout, forcing workers into indefinite job action.

Griffin Wheel produces 850 train wheels a day on average for Chicago-based Amsted Industries, a multi-billion-dollar company which manufactures industrial transportation components globally.

Management at Griffin Wheel appears to have severed communication with the union since the strike/lockout began, yet Unifor continues to plead with them to cut a deal.

Unifor sellout in the offing as Green Shield workers' strike enters second month

As the strike by 600 workers at a health insurance provider in Ontario enters its second month, recent statements underscore the union's willingness to accept the employer's concessionary offer.

Workers at Green Shield, which include adjudicators, call centre representatives, and administrative roles among others, first went on strike on March 1—the first strike in the company's 65-year history. Regarding the negotiations which the union says have resumed, Jodi Nesbitt, the president of Unifor Local 240, stated, "Well, I would say that progress is being made. We're actually talking." She then admitted to the fact that the conversation at the bargaining table "might not be exactly what both sides want" before adding the vague assurance that "we are at least talking about some important issues."

Any real concessions given to workers would be an unlikely about-face by Green Shield management, which has throughout the months-long contract dispute repeatedly refused to meet the workers' demands for wage increases, job security and job protections against the contracting out of work. Three days into the strike, Green Shield announced its "disappointment" in the strike, assuring its clients that "strong contingency plans" were in place and that services would "not be impacted" by the strike.

Locked-out workers at GFL Environmental in Kelowna, British Columbia on strike

Unionized workers at GFL Environmental, a waste-processing company in Kelowna, British Columbia initiated strike action on March 27, one week after they were locked out by their employer.

Teamsters spokesperson Rob Cook admitted to the local media that negotiations with the company had been ongoing “for quite some time.” Earlier in March, members of Teamsters Canada Local 213 rejected the company’s latest contract offer, which did not meet their wage demands and on March 21, management sent a letter to the union notifying them of the lockout effective the following week.

Headquartered in Ontario, GFL Environmental is the fourth largest “diversified environmental services company in North America,” according to its website. It is listed on the Toronto and New York Stock Exchanges with a revenue of over \$7 billion in 2022.



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