

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

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## Nationwide protest strikes at Argentina's public universities

On Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, August 12, 13 and 14, university workers and educators carried out a 72-hour national strike over wages. On Monday and Tuesday striking workers rallied in cities across Argentina. Wages for educators and university workers have not kept up with inflation; since January real wages have fallen 40 percent, more than for any other sector of the working class.

The 48-hour strike shut down every public university in Argentina.

According to the Latin-American Geopolitical Strategy Center (CELAG-DATA) the distribution of incomes in Argentina has become so distorted that 68 percent of the population is under the median wage, with 55 percent of households under the line of poverty and 18 percent, barely over the borderline. With a total of 73.2 percent earning 200,000 pesos or less; "one cannot speak of a 'middle class' nation," said the report.

## Workers march against Peña administration in Paraguay

Thursday August 15, the one-year anniversary of the administration of Paraguay President Santiago Peña, was marked by protests against his policies. Thousands of demonstrators in the city of Asunción demanded increases in state funding to repair schools and colleges and denounced the fact that 63 percent of workers labor under gig conditions.

The demonstrators marched behind a banner that read: "We are worse off, the crisis is them [Peña and the ruling party]."

The marchers also denounced the collapsing public health system and scarcity of basic medicines. Contrary to the administration's promise of "zero hunger" in public schools, children are not only going hungry, but often offered food that

is out of date and in poor condition. Peña has ignored the Paraguayan constitution that mandates agrarian reform measures to redistribute lands away from the landed oligarchy. Many demonstrators carried signs demanding clean water for the population. Despite abundant water in Paraguay, water rights are assigned to mining interests, with no regard to the population.

Demonstrators indicated that the Peña administration and his political party (the Colorado Party) represent the oligarchy. Peña is accused of being an agent of former president Horacio Carter, a major tobacco producer, now charged with being involved in money laundering and other corrupt practices.

A recent survey reports that 80 percent of the population believes that conditions in Paraguay are worsening.

## Flight attendants at PSA to vote on strike authorization

About 1,300 flight attendants at PSA, an American Airlines (AAL) subsidiary, will begin voting August 21 on whether to grant the Association of Flight Attendants (AFA) the authorization to call a strike. PSA attendants are seeking double-digit pay increases and improved benefits that will bring them parity with the major carriers.

The PSA flight attendants, like others at low-cost carriers, provide a cheap labor force for the major airlines. While AAL CEO Robert Isom earned \$31.4 million in 2023, flight attendants at low cost carriers struggle to pay bills and some fall below the poverty line.

Before a strike can happen, the National Mediation Board must declare negotiations at an impasse, which is not a given. This is followed by a 30-day cooling off period before the AFA can call an actual strike. Voting will end on September 17.

## San Diego healthcare workers protest company foot-dragging on contract

Thousands of Sharp Healthcare workers in San Diego have been conducting protests at their worksites to demand hospital

management end slow-walking negotiations and respond to their demands for safe staffing and improved wages and benefits. Some 5,000 workers began unionizing with Service Employees International Union (SEIU) starting in June of 2023.

The workers are employed at Sharp Grossmont Hospital, Sharp HospiceCare, Sharp Chula Vista Medical Center and the Sharp Metropolitan Medical Campus. An SEIU spokesperson told ABC 10News, “The workers all have the same concerns over patient care issues and working conditions and want to bargain together.” But Sharp management is insisting on separate bargaining at each facility.

“I can’t afford to live in the city I work in,” respiratory therapist Tony Napoli told NBC. Napoli drives more than 100 miles to work each day.

The SEIU reports that Sharp Healthcare made over one billion dollars in net income in 2020-2021 fiscal year. CEO Chris Howard pulled down a \$2.5 million salary in 2022.

### **York University faculty prepare for strike or lockout**

One thousand seven hundred faculty, librarians and archivists at York University in Toronto could face a possible lockout or strike as early as September 4 when fall classes are set to begin. The education workers are fighting against the university administration’s unilateral demand to re-structure class sizes at its Glendon and Keele campuses that will degrade student learning and research opportunities. Some classes will see a tenfold increase in student numbers.

Ellie Perkins, the president of the York University Faculty Association, has tried to downplay any imminent job action stating that union officials do not want to move to the picket lines “unless absolutely necessary.” The union, she told reporters, has no definite strike deadline or set of conditions other than a “good collective agreement.”

York University management has a long record of attempts to attack the wages and working conditions of employees. Earlier this year, many classes were suspended during an eight-week strike by over 3,000 teaching assistants organized in the Canadian Union of Public Employees. Contract negotiations for these academic workers resulted in lengthy strikes in 2018 and 2015. The five-month-long 2018 strike was ended by the Ontario Conservative government with draconian back-to-work legislation.

Both the union and the university have been in legal strike/lockout positions since August 2. No new bargaining sessions have been scheduled beyond August 18. University management has declared that more cost-cutting measures around class sizes are needed to safeguard York’s financial viability. However, a recent Ontario Auditor General Report found that the university is financially sustainable, with net

assets of \$1.9 billion at the end of 2022-2023.

### **Nova Scotia aerospace workers strike for livable wages**

One hundred and fifty workers at the IMP Aerostructures plant in Amherst, Nova Scotia are in the second week of a strike to recover real wages lost from years of sub-standard contracts. The workers, members of the United Steelworkers (USW), manufacture parts and components for commercial airlines as well as for military equipment ordered by the federal government. The company, headquartered in Halifax, is owned by billionaire Kenneth C. Rowe.

The strike began after workers voted by 93 percent to reject the latest contract offer. They had already voted down two previous contract proposals. Central to the dispute is the company’s refusal to address the continuing erosion of real wages. Three years ago, workers were pressed to accept a wage freeze to safeguard IMP’s profitability in the face of the pandemic.

Over that three-year period, inflation spiked into double digits, severely reducing workers’ living standards. It has been calculated that due to that concessionary contract and the one previous to it, workers have only received a miserable 0.25 percent wage increase per year over the last five years. Despite this, company management offered only a 1.5 percent wage increase spread out over three years in negotiations for the new contract. After this proposal was overwhelmingly rejected, the company increased its offer to a miserable 2 percent, again spread out in increments over three years. Inflation in the province still hovers just below 3 percent per year.



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