

Workers Struggles: The Americas

Protest strikes over austerity continue in Argentina; Police arrest scores of striking hotel workers in San Francisco

4 November 2024

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

Protest strikes continue in Argentina against austerity

Over 500 protest strikes took place across Argentina October 30 to demand decent wages, jobs, food, education, and the resignation of President Javier Milei. “It’s him or us,” declared one of the protesters.

In Buenos Aires, the largest city in Argentina, striking workers rallied around the Obelisk monument in the center of town. Transit, rail, port, airport, logistic, teachers, and other workers stopped work, and thousands banged pots and pans across the city.

Striking Peruvian doctors stage protest

On October 30, striking Peruvian doctors, members of the Peruvian Medical Federation (FMP) protested over the poor condition of the nation’s health system. The protest took place on the second day of a 48-hour national strike.

In Lima, scores of demonstrators denounced the scarcity of medications and essential equipment in clinics and hospitals. They also demanded that the right-wing government of President Dina Baluarte increase the public health budget to 8 percent of GDP.

The demonstrators placed emphasis on the way the present health crisis is affecting poorer neighborhoods in cities across the country.

Peru is facing an acute health crisis, which includes a scarcity of health professionals. Currently on average, there is only one doctor per 1,000 people, and a huge disparity between the services offered by private hospitals and Clinics and public facilities, which are starved of funds, equipment, medications, and personnel, particularly in rural areas.

Municipal workers block the roads in the city of Ecatepec in northeast Mexico in protest over back wages

On Tuesday and Wednesday October 29 and 30, 4,500 municipal workers in the city of Ecatepec, northeast of Mexico City, blocked streets demanding back wages that have been owed to them since 2019. Workers are also owed bonus payments from 2022, 2023 and 2024. The municipal workers have gone without a wage increase for several years and have not been provided with uniforms.

The protests involving municipal water service and other city workers, included the takeover for several hours last Wednesday of the Municipal Palace.

In addition to streets and roads into the municipality, demonstrators also blocked rail lines and, in some areas, cut water supplies, including welding access to water tanks.

The road closures impacted public transit and truck traffic in and out of this city.

The workers also demand school supplies for their children, life insurance and holiday pay.

Temp doctors in Embu-Guaçu, Brazil on strike over wages

Seventeen medical doctors under temporary contract by Medi-Health company in the city of Embu-Guaçu (State of São Paulo) went on strike on October 28 over unpaid wages.

Medi-Health management blames the municipal government of Embu-Guaçu for not making payments to Medi-Health and other providers of contingent workers.

The strike is impacting emergency medical services in clinics in working-class neighborhoods.

The attack on public health care in Brazil, including the use of temporary medical personnel, is not an isolated case limited to São Paulo. A week before this strike, striking medical workers in Rio de Janeiro’s Bonsucesso Federal Hospital were attacked by Federal Police while protesting plans to privatize the hospital.

Scores of San Francisco hotel workers arrested in protest over stalled contract talks

Striking hotel workers in San Francisco faced mass arrests over the last several days. The arrested workers were taking part in an expanding series of strikes against major hotels, including Hyatt, Hilton and Marriott, that were launched in September following the expiration of the previous contract.

Over 2,000 workers in total are involved in the walkouts over pay and benefits. The union said no talks have taken place since August when the contracts expired.

Unite Here officials said the hotel operators had balked despite the union offer of major concessions. Unite Here Local 2 said in a statement, “Back in August, we even offered to sacrifice guaranteed wage increases and make pay contingent on hotel profits, and we challenged the hotels to match our investment and reverse COVID-era cuts.”

In Hawaii, Unite Here officials in Honolulu said they had reached a tentative deal in the 40-day walkout by 1,800 staff at the Hilton Hawaiian Village Beach Resort in Waikiki over pay and staffing. Another 3,200 Honolulu-area Unite Here members at other hotels continue to work under expired contracts.

Unanimous strike vote by 5,300 Philadelphia transit workers

Some 5,300 Philadelphia transit workers voted unanimously to grant strike authorization and their union has given the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) a ten-day notice that workers will strike on November 7 unless management comes to an agreement. According to Transport Workers Union (TWU) Local 234 says SEPTA has offered workers a one-year contract without a wage increase.

SEPTA said a \$240 million budget shortfall makes it impossible to meet workers’ demands. Management spokesperson Andrew Busch has stated, “there is no solution in sight.”

One year ago, SEPTA and the TWU pushed through a one-year contract that deliberately was set to expire two days after the national elections, thus preventing any interference with the vote in this heavily Democratic city.

The current negotiations cover SEPTA bus, trolley, subway, mechanics and maintenance workers. Local 234 also represents 183 maintenance workers and 206 drivers, who provide service in Philadelphia’s suburbs. Those workers are segregated under a separate contract not due to expire until late November.

Berkeley, California, city workers authorize strike in fight for cost-of-living increases

City workers in Berkeley, California, voted by a 93 percent

margin to authorize strike action after more than eight months of bargaining and working for four months without a contract. Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 1021 reports that since 2012, pay for its 550 members has fallen behind the Consumer Price Index.

“We’ve seen very little movement from the city in terms of our cost-of-living adjustment specifically, which is a huge part of our ask,” Jamie Cooney, a city worker and bargaining committee member, told *Bay City News*. Besides wages, workers also want retirement and dental benefit increases to have cost-of-living escalators to combat inflation.

The negotiations involve a wide variety of city workers—staff at recreation and senior centers, librarians, IT employees and building inspectors.

Berkeley city managers are also in contract talks with the American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees Local 1, which represents 200 additional city workers.

Best Theratronics medical equipment plant workers complete six months on strike

About 60 workers at an Ottawa-area Best Theratronics plant producing external beam therapy units for cancer treatment, self-contained blood irradiators, cyclotrons and other hospital equipment marked six months on strike last week. The striking production workers are members of Unifor while the striking white-collar workers are members of the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC). Their last contract expired 19 months ago.

The workers have seen an average annual wage increase of 1.1 per cent over the past 16 years. Management’s last (rejected) contract offer demanded a wage freeze throughout the life of a two-year deal, with a derisory \$25 payment for new safety glasses. The company owner, Krishnan Suthanthiran, has refused to negotiate with union representatives. Suthanthiran, dubbed in some reports as “Canada’s Worst Boss,” is notorious for denouncing Canadian workers as lazy and calling on employers and governments to cut back on worker holidays.

Last June Unifor filed an unfair bargaining complaint with the Canadian Industrial Relations Board. That complaint will not be heard until November 19. In September Unifor officials, who have supported the big business Liberal Party for decades, met with Liberal Labour Minister Steven MacKinnon to seek his assistance in enforcing basic labour law. MacKinnon promised help. Workers have yet to hear another word from the minister.



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact