

Workers Struggles: The Americas

Protests erupt over Ecuador blackouts; Ciudad Juarez, Mexico auto parts workers protest victimizations

25 November 2024

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

Protests across Ecuador against President Daniel Noboa

On Thursday November 21 workers protested against Ecuador's President Daniel Noboa and his lack of response to repeated electric blackouts and the collapsing economy, including increases in the price of fuel, gang violence, and increased taxes on workers.

The protesters demanded jobs, no more sudden layoffs, an end to attacks on the trade unions and an end to gang assaults on working class neighborhoods.

Workers planning to rally in the historic Arbolito Park in Central Quito near the Offices of the Government Insurance Corporation, were surrounded by 1,400 police armed officers on motorcycles who had previously barricaded the park. As the workers approached the repression intensified.

Eight workers were arrested plus two human rights observers: Miguel Ángel Pérez and Jafet Guzmán.

President Noboa took power a year ago. He was elected to complete the term of President Guillermo Lasso, who resigned and dissolve parliament. Noboa's term ends in May 2025. Working class opposition has intensified since Noboa took power, with protests and strikes against the blackouts and the destruction of jobs.

Beginning on September 23, Noboa implemented daily blackouts across Ecuador, some, for as long as 14 hours, related to a shortage of water for hydroelectric plants. In the last few weeks, the energy crisis has been ameliorated by imports from Colombia and by a recent increase in rains.

Argentine peasant protests against mining in Jujuy Province

Inhabitants of Indigenous towns in the Department of Susques, in the northern Argentine province of Jujuy, rallied on November 21, demanding that the provincial government respond to their demands on the mining operations in the area. The government responded with repression.

Marching behind a giant banner that read: "destroying nature is not development" the demonstrators demanded the resignation of Sonia Ochoa, the director of land use for the National Institute of Indian Affairs (INA). Ochoa was appointed to the INA in September because of her history of open support of mining corporations, disregard for tribal rights and support for the repression of peasant and tribal struggles.

Jujuy's Governor Carlos Sadir is openly preparing the expulsion of the residents of Río Grande de Coranzulí, near the scenic Coranzulí volcano, a source of borax and lithium, as part of a campaign to bring in transnational mining corporations into the region.

"We need to fight for our children, for our farms, these minerals harm them, we are fighting for our environmental rights," declared one of the Indian farmers.

Folk singer Aurora Choque, who was born in this region and participated in the protest, denounced the Marcilese mining corporation, owner of the Yacimiento Minero de Loma Blanca borax mine, for poisoning the environment, despite empty promises: "We are being fooled and poisoned," she said.

Pickets demand release of food for 40,000 Argentine soup kitchens

The National Pickets Front (Frente de Lucha Piquetera—FLPA) part of the pseudo-left Polo Obrero organization, led a massive march in Buenos Aires on November 20, demanding that the Milei administration provide 40,000 soup kitchens, administered by non-government agencies, across the country.

The food, provided by the previous government, has been kept in storage by Milei's Ministry of Human Resources since December 2023 despite court orders mandating the government release it.

Thousands marched in downtown Buenos Aires and rallied at the Human Capital offices, demanding to be heard, to no avail.

Milei's shock policies of austerity cuts in social programs have produced record poverty in Argentina, and hundreds of thousands across the country rely on soup kitchens to feed themselves every day, under conditions where government assistance is uncertain.

Auto parts workers on strike in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico against victimizations

Workers employed by the Akwel auto parts plant in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, on the border with Texas, went on a strike of indefinite duration on November 15 over the unjustified firing of 11 workers. Ciudad Juarez is just across the border from El Paso, Texas.

Striking workers picketing the plant suspect their own union leaders of attempting to sell out the 11 workers by negotiating a solution that will allow the plant to reopen without reinstating the men. The workers were fired for having signed a petition to join a trade union.

Management claims that it has its own internal code which conforms to Mexican law, that allows it to fire workers at will, and that the workers' firing had nothing to do with their signing a pro-union petition.

Akwel, headquartered in France, produces auto parts for emissions control and fluids in automobiles, part of a supply chain for auto plants in Mexico and internationally. Akwel executive Molina Alcay indicated this week that if the strike is not resolved, it will affect the assembly of vehicles in other places, and eventually cause the full stoppage of the assembly of many vehicles.

In an attempt to extort the workers, Akwel management threatened to move its Juarez plant to another location within Mexico, or to one of its plants in Asia. It is calling on Mexican courts to declare the strike illegal and order the workers back to work.

Fearing solidarity strikes by autoworkers in the US, the US Labor Department has petitioned the Sheinbaum administration to intervene and resolve the issue, claiming disingenuously, that it stands with the workers.

This is the first autoworker's strike in a plant along the Mexico-US border since 2019. In that year thousands of striking auto workers from the Mexican border city of Matamoros, in Tamaulipas state, marched to the US-Mexico border calling on US autoworkers to join their fight against the corporations and pro-company trade unions. Also in 2019, workers at the GM assembly plant in Silao, Guanajuato state, in central Mexico refused to work overtime in solidarity the strike of 48,000 US GM workers.

Contract service workers launch 24-hour strike at Charlotte Douglas International Airport

Hundreds of workers employed by ABM and Prospect Airport Services began a 24-hour strike Monday at Charlotte Douglas International Airport, a hub for American Airlines. The two companies contract with American, one of the world's biggest carriers, to provide services such as cleaning airplane interiors, removing trash and escorting passengers in wheelchairs.

The Service Employees International Union announced the strike in a statement early Monday, saying the workers would demand "an end to poverty wages and respect on the job during the holiday travel season."

Workers have complained that they can't afford basic necessities, including food, housing or car repairs. They described living paycheck to paycheck while performing jobs that keep planes running on schedule. Most of them earn between \$12.50 and \$19 an hour, union officials said.

The highest annual wage for service workers of \$39,500 falls short of the \$70,640 a year that the National Low Income Housing Coalition has determined is required in the Charlotte area for a comfortable living.

Oregon grocery workers vote to strike one day before Thanksgiving holiday

The 1,100 grocery workers at eleven New Seasons Market stores in Portland and Beaverton, Oregon voted by an 87 percent margin to carry out a one-day strike November 27, the day before the Thanksgiving holiday. The New Seasons Labor Union (NSLU) has been negotiating for more than a year without success over issues such as wages, paid time off, benefits eligibility and holiday pay.

New Seasons is only offering a 25 cent wage increase, a cut in holiday pay and the slashing of pay for higher-paid workers. In addition,

management wants to get rid of the health insurance plan for all workers.

The union has set November 25 as a deadline to reach an agreement in exchange for canceling the strike. The union is also calling for a consumer boycott.

San Francisco hotel strike expands as 500 Marriott Marquis workers join walkout

About 500 workers at the Marriott Marquis Hotel went on strike Sunday morning, joining workers at the Grand Hyatt San Francisco, Hilton San Francisco Union Square, Marriott Union Square, Palace Hotel and Westin St. Francis. The workers are all members of UNITE HERE Local 2.

According to Local 2 the strike now includes 2,500 housekeepers, bellhops, cooks, dishwashers, servers, bartenders, and more. Workers are demanding the restoration of wages, jobs and benefits that were cut during the pandemic. Marriott has said it will seek to maintain operations during the strike. The walkout began September 22.

There is growing anger and militancy among hospitality workers across the US, who are one of the poorest paid sections of the working class, reflected in overwhelming strike votes by hotel workers in Chicago, Boston and San Francisco. Instead of waging a unified struggle, UNITE HERE has sought to dissipate worker militancy by waging a series of isolated and limited walkouts.

Michigan auto parts supplier cited in Legionnaires death

The Michigan Occupational Health and Safety Administration, MIOSHA issued a \$10,300 fine against Huron Inc., an auto parts supplier in Sanilac County, following an investigation into the death of a worker from Legionnaires' disease in 2023. The outbreak sickened two other workers.

The deadly bacteria that causes a severe type of pneumonia is spread through contaminated mist or water. It can be prevented by regular cleaning and monitoring of water supplies.

Last summer a 61-year-old worker at the plant died after contracting Legionnaires from a contaminated water source in the plant. The company said it could not pinpoint the source of the infection and did not report the death of the worker to the state.

Later, two more workers at the plant contracted Legionnaires. Further testing revealed Legionella bacteria at four locations in the facility.

The company was cited for failure "to develop an effective water maintenance program to monitor and prevent the growth."

The citation is unusual given that protection against the spread of infectious disease is virtually non-existent in workplaces across the US since the ending of most COVID-19 restrictions, with COVID-infected workers being encouraged to work.

Municipal workers in Greater Toronto Area strike

About 200 Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) workers went on strike last week in Richmond Hill, a city of about 210,000 people just north of Toronto. The roads, water/sewage system, parks, arenas and community center workers have been without a new contract since March

31.

After four years of wage erosion due to inflationary spikes, city management has only offered a 9.5 percent increase spread over three years. Workers are demanding that due to the large percentage of low paid employees in the bargaining unit a significant flat, across the board wage increase is needed, since a percentage increase means that lower paid workers receive less. That arrangement could average out over two years to up to an effective 12 percent wage raise for lower paid workers.

In addition, city management employs a large group of so-called seasonal workers with substandard contracts. Yet these workers can work as much as 49 weeks a year. Workers are demanding that these members of the bargaining unit be made permanent employees.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact