

Workers Struggles: The Americas

Argentine health workers demand medications for cancer patients; strike by Alberta school support staff expands

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Argentine health workers demand the release of cancer medication

Hundreds of health workers from various trade unions protested on January 14 demanding medications for cancer patients. The protest was triggered by the announcement that over 60 patients have died in cancer clinics for lack of medications previously provided by government funds. The Milei administration has cut medications and other health subsidies as part of its austerity policies.

The protest took place at the Government Health Ministry in Buenos Aires. At the rally the health workers demanded that the government immediately provide medications to all patients in need, including those suffering from cancers.

The demonstrators also demanded an end to the “brutal austerity cuts” being imposed on public health. In 2024, over 1,000 patients were denied critical cancer medicines and more than sixty patients died from lack of government-provided cancer medications.

The health workers also denounced the elimination of health agencies involved in treating patients with HIV, tuberculosis, leprosy and hepatitis.

Two-day general protest strike rocks Bahamas

On Monday and Tuesday January 13 and 14, Bahama workers carried out a 48-hour strike, including the closure of schools and hospitals in this Caribbean nation. On January 15, the Supreme Court declared the strike illegal.

The Trade Union Congress (TUC) called the strike over the failure of the government to act on promises made in a memorandum of understanding three years ago, promising higher pay and settlement of industrial agreements. The TUC is a collection of 14 trade unions, including those that represent health and education workers.

“As my mother used to say, a promise is a comfort to a fool. Well, we are not fools, and we say enough is enough!” declared TUC leader Obie Ferguson.

Bahamas’ other labor federation, the NCTUB (National Congress of Trade Unions-Bahamas) did not participate in the strike.

Bahamas is an archipelago of several hundred islands south and east of the US state of Florida. It has the highest socioeconomic inequality in the Caribbean, and high rates of poverty (60 percent with 15 percent living under the poverty line of US\$2.15 a day) and high unemployment.

Protests in São Paulo over increased transit fares

On the evenings of January 9, 15 and 16 hundreds of students protested in downtown São Paulo, Brazil against the rise in fares for municipal trains, subways and buses. The demonstrators marched through the city’s downtown and rallied at the Municipal Theatre in downtown São Paulo.

The right-wing municipal authorities responded with a massive police mobilization, hoping to intimidate and corral the demonstrators.

While Metro and rail tickets went up from R\$ 5.00 to R\$5.20 (4 percent), bus fares increased by 13.6 percent (from R\$ 4.40 to R\$ 5.00), the largest fare increase in 10 years.

The Student Union of São Paulo indicated the increase in fares was the largest in history while the transit service is deteriorating more and more.

Teamsters union warns of warehouse and drivers' strike at Sysco Texas distribution facility

The Teamsters union warned January 13 that the giant food service distributor Sysco is pushing workers at its distribution center in Houston, Texas, towards a strike. “Without the possibility of a fair collective bargaining agreement, Sysco Teamsters will have no choice but to walk off the job,” stated a press release by Local 988.

The 430 drivers, warehouse workers and mechanics want the same wages, benefits and work rules as Sysco workers at other locations across the country. In all, the Teamsters represent some 10,000 Sysco workers. In 2022 there were strikes in Boston and Syracuse and in 2023 a set of strikes broke out in Indianapolis and Louisville.

In these past contract negotiations, the Teamsters have been able to contain the rank-and-file workers while still feeling compelled to dispatch roving pickets to other facilities, feigning support for an all-out strike. In the current Houston contract struggle Sysco has reacted to verbal threats by the Teamsters bureaucracy to expand pickets to other distribution centers by declaring, “Their actions harm our colleagues, their families, and our community partners, including hospitals, nursing homes, and schools.”

Local 988 and Sysco have been in negotiations for months. The old agreement covering the Houston Teamsters expired January 17.

Alberta school support worker strikes spreading

Strikes for decent wages amongst school support workers could spread to another 7,000 education assistants, librarians, cafeteria workers, school nurses and administration staff over the next 10 weeks as the right-wing government of Alberta Premier Danielle Smith continues to starve the provincial education system of funding. School support workers across the province are members of various locals of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE). About 40 union locals could find themselves in a strike position by early spring.

Already, on January 7, about 1,000 public and Catholic school workers in Fort McMurray walked out on a full-time strike after intermittent, rotating job actions begun last November failed to move forward negotiations for decent

wages and working conditions. The Fort McMurray workers first took job action on November 13 after rejecting the recommendations of a disputes inquiry board appointed by the province.

Then on January 13, 3,000 public school support workers in Edmonton and 200 more in the outlying Sturgeon school district began job action to pursue demands for a significant wage increase, better education funding and additional classroom support. Already, about 200 educational support assistant jobs remain unfilled, placing additional stress on the remaining staff and special needs children.

To begin the Edmonton strike CUPE officials have limited picketing to only three schools. In the Sturgeon public school district, which covers the surrounding towns from Redwater to Morinville to St. Albert, the union has limited job action to rotating strikes and a work-to-rule.

Schools remain open although services, particularly for special needs students, have been curtailed. School boards have begun hiring strike-breaking substitute teachers at wages higher than the striking workforce earned.

Union officials have said the average support worker in Alberta earns \$34,500 per year. However, the education assistants—who make up the lion’s share of the support workforce earn on average only \$26,400. The union is being offered a paltry 3 percent wage increase that is to be spread out over four years.

Education assistants are expected to support special needs children through their training and knowledge of a variety of diverse skills including speech and language training and movement and physical therapy knowledge. Their duties also include close personal care that can involve health and sanitary interventions that the strike-breaking substitute teachers refuse to perform.

Parents of children who wear diapers or who have other close-care issues have been advised to keep their children at home.



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