

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Violent police attack on pensioners protest march in Argentina

On March 12, federal police corralled and attacked thousands of protesting pensioners and workers in Buenos Aires' Congress Plaza Square. The assault ordered by Trump's fascist ally Javier Milei was one of the most brutal acts of state repression since 2001 when massive marches and protests by workers brought down the government.

Wednesday's protest was one of recurring weekly protests by retirees against Milei's austerity measures. They are demanding an end to cuts on public social security pensions, the restoration of medical benefits for retirees and protection against inflation. Each week the protests have gotten bigger, and this week, the pensioners were joined by Buenos Aires transit workers.

The rally was attacked by more than 1,000 police, who fired several thousand rounds of rubber bullets, and scores of tear gas grenades. The police also brought in pepper spray guns and truck-mounted water-cannons. More than 670 protesters were wounded and 114 arrested.

Among the seriously wounded was pensioner Beatriz Blanco, 87, beaten by police with his baton, and a 14-year-old girl, burned by tear gas. Press photographer Pablo Grillo required cranial surgery after being hit in the head by a tear gas grenade. Across the Plata River, in Montevideo, Uruguay, hundreds of journalists protested the assault on Grillo and expressed their their solidarity with the retirees and demands to overthrow Milei.

Bolivian workers protest fuel scarcity

On March 10 and 11, several protests took place in Bolivia due to a lack of fuel and other local demands in the department of Santa Cruz. In addition to marches and rallies, the demonstrators have blocked major highways. Santa Cruz is a state in Eastern Bolivia, which produces soy beans and other agricultural goods. It is also a location center of metal mining. Agricultural producers are demanding that the national government guarantee the supply of diesel for the summer season.

Citizens of San Juan de Palometillas, Santa Cruz are maintaining a blockade on the main highway across the region. Among the protesters are truck drivers and owner-operators of trucks. They plan to continue their blockade until the Minister of Hydrocarbons, Alejandro Gallardo, arrives and presents a diesel supply plan. Other protests are taking place over cuts in medical care and the lack of medication.

National health workers strike in Chile

Primary health workers in Chile conducted a 72-hour national strike starting on March 10. The medical center workers who serve 86 percent of Chile's population are demanding wage increases and better working conditions, including safety measures from assault on clinics in poor neighborhoods which have been attacked by bandits.

Many of these inner-city health centers exist in dilapidated buildings, with outdated equipment. The strikers are demanding the repair and updating of medical equipment.

On March 12, thousands of strikers marched through downtown Santiago, and other major cities, chanting and singing protest songs, demanding that the government of President Gabriel Boric answer their demands.

Workers in Panama protest Social Security privatization

On March 14, the Panamanian workers, members of the education workers union (SUTRACS), marched on the streets against legislation designed to privatize the national retirement system and raise the age of retirement (Law 163). A draft of the legislation had been partially approved by the National Legislature the day before. Joining the educators were health employees and other workers.

The legislation would replace the current system of government-managed pensions with individual accounts managed by private financiers. This week protests are to be extended across the country, including a 24-hour national strike.

Strike by 1,500 California transit workers

The Silicon Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) in Santa Clara County, California announced March 14 that two days of mediated talks failed to produce an agreement as some 1,500 transit workers continue their weeklong strike, which has shut down bus and light rail service.

Workers walked out on March 10 after rejecting VTA's last wage offer of 9 percent over three years. Amalgamated Transit Union Local 265 officials say they are demanding a 19.1 percent raise along with improved benefits.

VTA spokesperson Greg Richardson said acceptance of the workers' wage demand "would mean service cuts throughout our system and the likely elimination of positions across VTA."

On March 11, the VTA filed a request to courts for a strike-breaking injunction, claiming the walkout was doing "irreparable harm to the community." The letter claimed the strike violated a no-strike clause in the old agreement. VTA officials also sent a letter to Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom requesting the appointment of a board to investigate the dispute with an eye to shutting down the strike.

Chicago Field Museum workers rally to decry low wages

Some 100 museum workers and supporters held an informational picket outside Chicago's Field Museum of Natural History on March 12 to demand higher wages. Nearly 300 workers are members of Field Museum Workers United/AFSCME, which says workers' wages have lagged behind inflation by 17 percent over the past five years.

Emma Turner-Trujillo, an assistant registrar in anthropology at Field, told the rally, "I can't survive on my salary." She called the three percent pay raise by museum management "insulting and belittling."

Union officials say they are demanding a 19 percent pay increase in the first year and a bonus. While management says these demands are "not sustainable" Field Museum CEO Julian Siggers raked in more than \$826,000 in 2023. Workers have been without a contract for more than one-and-a-half years of negotiations.

Michigan milling workers strike over wages and safety concerns

Some 20 workers went on strike March 6 at the Knappen Milling Company in Augusta, Michigan, over low wages and safety issues. Rick Madison, chief shop steward for the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers (BCTGM) International Union Local 3G told WOOD TV8, "Our wage increases have consistently lagged behind industry standards." The last raise was 2.4 percent which translated into either a 36 cent or 40 cent increase depending on the pay level.

"Safety is huge," said Madison. "We want to go home the same

way we came into work. We don't want anybody missing toes or fingers. Just the stress of working that many hours can wear a person down over time."

One complaint is the lack of safe staffing on the third shift where only two workers are split between two buildings. Workers are demanding management increase staffing so that there are a minimum of two workers in each building. There has been no new company offer as no negotiations have taken place since workers walked out.

Two thousand Queen's University teaching assistants strike

Part-time graduate teaching assistants (TA) at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario are now in the second week of an all-out strike in pursuit of a significant wage increase, childcare support and improved working conditions. The 2,000 education workers are members of the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) union and have been without a contract since April 2024.

The university has been draining the operating funds budget for years, transferring monies into separate endowment, research, trust and future building funds. As a result, wages for those employed by the institution have spiraled downwards for decades. The current teaching assistant salary formula equates to about half the annual provincial minimum wage.

Just hours before the teaching assistants were to begin their strike, United Steelworkers (USW) officials rammed through a miserable contract proposal covering 1,200 general support staff at the university.

Two thousand Concordia University TAs strike

More than 2,000 teaching and research assistants at Concordia University in Montreal, Quebec are in the first week of a strike for a substantial pay increase. The employees are members of the Concordia Research and Educational Workers (CREW) union. They voted by 95 percent to strike this past February. As is the case in universities all across the country, graduate teaching assistants are sorely underpaid whilst consistently working under precarious employment contracts.



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