

Workers Struggles: The Americas

British Columbia government workers prepare for strike vote; Baltimore Ascension Saint Agnes nurses carry out one-day strike to protest unsafe staffing

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

Argentine pensioners and incapacitated people march against Milei

On Wednesday July 23, pensioners and incapacitated people carried out their weekly protest march and rally in Buenos Aires. Last week the national legislature approved a minimal increase in pension payments of less than US\$ 1.60 per day, a measure opposed by President Javier Milei who promised to veto it.

The marchers denounced the paltry increase, insufficient to confront the rising cost of living in Argentina, and the veto assurance.

Thousands marched from the Legislature building and assembled in central Plaza de Mayo square, across from Argentina's government house. Accompanying and supporting the pensioners were health workers and university educators. Each week more workers join these protests, braving police repression, fighting hunger wages and layoffs.

Protest in Argentina's Neuquén Province over fracking plans

On July 24, over 10,000 people protested in the Patagonian city of Neuquén, capital of Neuquén Province and rallied at its provincial government house, denouncing the Milei administration's expulsion of 2,000 members of the Mapuche tribe from the villages of Junín, San Martín de los Andes, and Picun Leufu, communities occupy the area singled out for fracking operations, to exploit underground shale deposits.

The Mapuche object to the environmental effects of fracking, poisoning the water and affecting cattle ranches in vicinity of the Vaca Muerta oil fields as well as in the city of Neuquén itself. They are calling for a halt to fracking near water sources. Officials of the YPF national, the Milei administration, and provincial officials insist that fracking is safe, provided the Mapuche take "precautions."

Pro-Government Congressman Eduardo Amadeo declared fracking vital to Argentina's economy: "Argentina needs oil and gas. You cannot stop production for 45 million people because one or two thousand people feel that their rights are affected."

The protests included a massive presence of striking education workers, who in defiance of their own union (ATE) apparatus, shut down their schools and marched with their school flags. ATE bureaucrats denounced

the teachers action as "exaggerated." Also marching were health workers, and other workers, trade unionists, and ceramic workers whose factory is being shut down, in addition to members of the communities being evacuated.

Protest marches and rallies also took place in other cities in Neuquén Province.

Workers demand the resignation of Peruvian President Dina Boluarte

Triggered by the recently announced wage increase for President Dina Boluarte to almost US\$10 million and by the government's business-friendly policies toward the agricultural monopolies, workers and left-wing groups protested across Peru, demanding the president's resignation.

Labor lawyer Rosa Varillas described the crisis facing the working class to the teleSUR website: "even though those employed by the agricultural monopolies are allowed to bargain collectively, temporary contracts are the norm; they are fired if they act to form a union."

Workers are also denouncing the government's impunity when it comes to violently repressing workers' protests.

Landless workers and peasants in Brazil demand the redistribution of land

Brazil's landless rural movement (MST) observed last week the Rural Workers and Peasants Week, demanding that the Lula administration make good on long-standing promises of land redistribution, away from the latifundista and into the hands of landless and homeless workers and peasants. In an open letter the MST asked, "What became of Land Reform, Lula?"

In protests across Brazil throughout the week, MST members and supporters demanded social justice, social equality, and access to land. In addition, to the enforcement of laws against the possession of large tracks of land by agricultural monopolies, the MST protests call for better education, housing and food stamp programs for the rural poor.

Mexico City police attack health workers' protest

On Wednesday July 23 a protest by health workers and nurses was assaulted by Mexico City police. Over 200 health workers were carrying a sit-down protest in a main avenue when they were attacked by Mexican municipal “police group for citizen protection,” formerly known as “grenadiers,” a violent police body. Nurses and health workers were violently pushed and dragged from the street by a force of 100 grenadiers.

With their sit-down protest, health workers and nurses were showing opposition to the lack of medications and equipment in public hospitals and clinics [administered by the Mexican Institute of Social Welfare (IMSS-Bienestar)], attacks on wages, and worsening working conditions. Last week’s sit-down protest was triggered by the cancellation of a programmed meeting by IMSS officials with the nurses and health workers.

Baltimore Ascension Saint Agnes nurses carry out one-day strike to protest unsafe staffing

Nurses at Ascension Saint Agnes Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland, carried out a one-day strike July 24 to call attention to the failure of management to address unsafe staffing and high staff turnover rates that threaten patient care. According to the National Nurses Organizing Committee, the nearly 600 nurses at Saint Agnes are the first nurses at Baltimore hospitals to unionize.

Nurses achieved union status in November of 2023 and began negotiations with Saint Agnes in January of 2024, but there has been little progress. On May 16 of this year nurses delivered a near-unanimous strike vote.

Among the issues hospital management has refused to address is the policy of unsafe floating assignments where nurses are assigned outside of their normal units to areas where they may not have familiarity.

“We are seeing experienced nurses leave our hospital and the nursing profession altogether due to the working conditions at Saint Agnes,” said Robin Buckner, a registered nurse on the vascular access team. “We need to stop the exodus of nurses by improving nurse staffing. When we have too many patients to care for, patient outcomes suffer. It means patients are waiting for pain medications, waiting for a nurse to answer their call light, or for assistance to get out of bed.”

According to the union, almost 10 percent of Saint Agnes nurses quit their jobs between April and July of 2024.

Teamsters extend picket lines across 11 states on behalf of strikes by workers in Ohio and New Jersey

The Teamsters union announced July 24 that they are extending the strike against the French-owned subsidiary Airgas to a total of 15 facilities in eleven states. The strikes began with a walkout by Teamsters Local 701 at the company’s facilities in New Jersey and a subsequent June 20 strike by Teamsters Local 507 in Cleveland, Ohio.

According to Airgas management, the additional “strikes” are sympathy strikes by workers in California, Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, New Hampshire, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island. Workers at Airgas’ facility in Ferndale, Michigan granted strike authorization but it is not clear if they have officially joined the strike to press for contract improvements.

The Teamsters charge the wages at Airgas facilities they represent are uneven and the two strikes are pressing to equalize wages among their

plants.

As of 2024, the Teamsters represent some 600 of Airgas’ 11,000-member workforce. Airgas claims it has 1,400 facilities in the United States and brags it has “robust contingency plans in place to provide continuity of service.”

Airgas is a subsidiary of the French multinational Air Liquide and is the largest US distributor of industrial, medical, and specialty gases. In 2024 the parent company made a net profit of more than \$3 billion.

Hawaii concrete workers strike over grueling work schedules

Concrete workers for Island Ready-Mix in Honolulu, Hawaii, walked off the job July 23 to protest horrendous working schedules, where workers work 10-12 hour shifts 7-days a week. The 25 drivers and mechanics with Teamsters Local 996 say they are underpaid, but working conditions have driven them to strike.

Kalae Ho’opai, a driver with 14 years’ experience, told HawaiiNewsNow, “I’m working rolling days of 7-days a week. Sundays we get paid straight time. We don’t have quality. We are forced to come in. It’s okay to come in, but we don’t get the premium pay, incentive to want to come in on Sunday.”

Currently, Hawaii is experiencing a construction boom. Local 996 President Kevin Holu bemoaned the walkout, saying, “This is not the time to be on strike, the construction industry is at its most high.”

The two sides have been negotiating since June 2024. The next bargaining session will be in August. Island Ready-Mix has proposed a mere 14 percent wage increase over the course of a three-year contract.

British Columbia government workers prepare for strike vote

More than 34,000 provincial civil service workers will vote in mid-August to provide their BC Government Employees Union with a strike mandate. Should workers vote to strike, job action could begin in early September. Another 400,000 public sector workers in other bargaining units are also seeking new contracts this year. The BCGEU is the first of the many public sector unions to walk away from the bargaining table and seek a strike mandate.

BCGEU members work at the province’s extensive liquor and cannabis store networks and perform the government’s overall administrative services. Other unions representing tens of thousands of nurses, hospital and social workers, teachers and professors remain in ongoing negotiations. The province’s New Democratic Party government has received continued backing by the unions, despite a legacy of inferior contract offers. In this year’s negotiations, the NDP is asserting that, due to high budget deficits, wage demands must be suppressed.

In the BCGEU negotiations the government has offered a two-year, 3.5 per cent wage deal with some small additional top ups for the lowest paid workers. The offer falls far short of worker demands for an 8.25 percent increase with an additional cost-of-living protection in the second year. Current wages are so low that as many as a quarter of union members are forced to work a second and even third job to cover their basic living expenses.

BCGEU members last went on strike in 2022. After a two-week “targeted job action” that saw a government worker overtime ban and limited strike activity by a small number of employees at designated BC Liquor Distribution centres, union officials called off even these minimal

actions as a “sign of good faith” with the NDP government. Several weeks later the union recommended a new contract that provided for a 14 percent wage increase spread over 3 years with some inferior cost-of-living protections. Over the life of that agreement, workers suffered an actual 1.5 percent real wage cut due to spiking inflation.



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