

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

## Argentine workers occupy factories in Buenos Aires and Cordoba provinces; Metalworkers in São Paulo stage protest strike

18 August 2025

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

### Argentine workers occupy factories in Buenos Aires and Cordoba provinces in separate actions

This week workers in the provinces of Buenos Aires and Cordoba took over plants in milk processing and petrochemical industries in separate actions.

On Monday, August 11, workers took over the Rio Tercero Petrochemical factory to protest the lay-off of 124 of their comrades, under terrible working conditions. The occupiers stayed in the plant throughout the week.

Previous to the takeover, the company had ignored court ordered negotiations with the oil workers union. Instead, it imposed the layoffs, and attacks on wages owed to them (they were offered 50 percent compensation).

Workers occupying the plant indicated that they would occupy the plant through Thursday, August 14, as long as the company agreed to accept government-imposed mediation.

On Tuesday, August 12, Buenos Aires workers owed some \$US 2 million in back wages took over the La Suipachense milk plant in Suipacha (population 12,000) Buenos Aires province. The takeover took place after the 75-year-old company, mired in debts, announced that it would shut down production in two weeks.

According to a spokesperson from Argentine Milk Workers Union (Asociación de Trabajadores de la Industria Lechera Argentina—Atilra), well-known for betraying its members, the company is “very much behind in the payment of wages and has serious problems.” Workers have not been paid for weeks, and milk production has fallen from 250,000 liters per day in June of this year to 40,000 liters now.

The 140 workers took over the plant to prevent its closure and guarantee a basic income for themselves and for the municipality. La Suipachense labeled the occupation a “forced take-over,” and threatened to take repressive measures.

La Suipachense’s bankruptcy is part of a general crisis in the milk industry in Argentina. Demand for milk and milk products is collapsing, costs are rising, and investors are fleeing despite decades of government financing.

### Metalworkers in São Paulo stage protest strike

Workers employed by the Gerdau Steel Company in Pindamonhangaba, São Paulo, went on strike on August 14 to protest the increase in accidents and threats of mass layoffs. The strike is a direct response to the multinational company’s announcement in early August that it had laid off 1,500 workers across Brazil. Last year one of its São Paulo plants was shut down by management and when it reopened, 100 workers were laid off.

While the Gerdau plants have a history of accidents—August 15 was the 8th anniversary of an explosion that killed two workers and injured 10 others—the layoffs and consequent speed-ups have resulted in four injuries at the plant, including a worker who had a finger amputated.

The union that supposedly represents the workers has downplayed the extent of the layoffs. Gerdau is the largest steel company in Latin America, and the third largest in the world. It operates metal producing and manufacturing plants in over a dozen countries, including the US, Canada, Mexico and the UK.

### Naperville, Illinois teachers vote overwhelming for strike

The 1,500 educators for the Naperville District 203 in Illinois voted overwhelmingly August 12 to grant strike authorization as teachers’ demands for wage compensation and school-day scheduling have been stalemated. The Naperville Unit Education Association (NUEA) has been in negotiations with the district since February of this year and the old contract agreement expired June 30.

School board president Charles Cush declared, “We simply cannot afford the union’s proposal...” The union counters that the district has 300 days of cash at its disposal, an amount that is nearly twice the amount recommended by the Illinois Board of Education.

One day following the strike vote the union filed notice with the Illinois educational Labor Relations Board of an intent to strike. But Ross Berkley, NUEA President said, “We are following a statute, and that’s it,” and “there is no intention” to strike.

The union will hold a rally on August 18, and mediated negotiations are to resume on August 19.

## **Houston hotel workers grant strike authorization**

Hotel workers at the Hilton Americas in downtown Houston, Texas, voted by a 99.3 percent margin August 13 to authorize strike action as they demand a \$23 an hour base wage, improved working conditions and a better leave of absence policy. The contract covering the 400 members of Unite Here Local 23 expired on June 30 and workers, who mainly earn around \$16 an hour, are demanding a change.

“When I started at the Hilton, I was given full-time hours but then pretty soon they started getting cut back,” cook Brian Garcia told Houston Public Media. “Right now, I’m making \$16.65 an hour, but it really isn’t enough. I know my worth, and Hilton isn’t paying me what I deserve.”

Franchesca Caraballo, president of Local 23, explained, “Houston, the cost of living here has risen by a lot, and workers are still scraping to get by. Many workers are having to work second jobs, even third jobs, to keep up with the cost of living, provide for their families, and a company like the Hilton, they’re coming off a record profit year.”

Houston broke all records for visitors last year and hotel revenues have been increasing 15.5 percent each year to \$3 billion in 2024. The Hilton Americas is Houston’s largest hotel with 1,200 rooms.

Local 23 represents some 3,000 hospitality workers. Despite the fact that other hotel workers are also seeking a \$23 base wage, whose contracts expire this year, there is no indication of a joint struggle. Mediated talks resume August 19.

## **Construction strike brings road projects to a halt in Spokane**

An August 12 strike by the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 302 has caused construction delays across the Spokane, Washington metropolitan region. Neither officials of the Operating Engineers nor the Associated General Contractors (AGC) representing a coalition of construction companies have been willing to discuss the issues involved in the strike.

The strike has brought work on projects like the widening of Interstate 90 and US Highways 195 and 395 to a halt. Because Spokane relies on asphalt from companies involved in the labor dispute, projects across the city are affected.

The union continues to negotiate with the AGC over a new contract agreement.

## **Ontario community college support workers vote to strike**

Full-time support staff at community colleges throughout Ontario voted by 77.3 percent in favour of strike action should the College Employer Council not reach a contract settlement with their Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) bargaining team. The bargaining unit comprises about 10,000 technicians, technologists, clerks, assistants, analysts, tutors and facilities operators. Their contract expires on August 31.

Major issues in negotiations revolve around wage increases and job security. Due to decades of chronic underfunding by Ontario

governments of all political stripes combined with a 2024 federal government limit on international student visas, community college facilities have been ravaged alongside worker wages and benefits.

As many as 10,000 jobs are threatened amongst faculty and support worker units in the 40-institution network of schools. Over 600 college programs are suspended or cancelled with many jobs already slashed.

Last October, faculty at these same colleges, also members of OPSEU, voted in favour of their own strike for a new contract. However, despite delivering a strong mandate to the union, OPSEU officials withheld any job action and then in January opted to agree to binding arbitration with the employer, resulting in yet another inferior contract settlement.

## **Auto parts maker Titan Tool locks out Windsor workers**

With 40 of 65 workers, members of Unifor, already on layoff, management at auto parts company Titan Tool and Die locked out the remaining 25 workers after the expiration of the collective agreement on July 31. The company is demanding massive concessions from the workers in any new contract. Union officials, for their part, have simply asked the company for a negotiated plant closure agreement.

Titan Tool management has already moved some of its molds and product orders across the border to the United States. Last April, after the union blocked a truck from carrying materials out of the premises, the company quickly received a court injunction allowing them to move material from the plant.

Citing the disruption to auto parts and metals markets arising from tariffs implemented by the Trump administration, a number of disputes have arisen over the past month between auto parts/metals companies and workers over the removal of plant equipment. Contract strikes by 120 Unifor workers just north of Toronto at Toromont, a heavy equipment component refurbishing facility, and by 200 Unifor metal workers employed by Dajcor Aluminum in Chatham, Ontario have also seen pickets alerted to suspected equipment removals.



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