

Workers Struggles: The Americas

British Columbia government workers set to strike; Walkout continues at Toledo, Ohio Libbey Glass factory

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

Protest-strike by natural gas workers in Brazil's Amazon region

On August 25, thousands of workers at the Eneva Corporation Azulão 950 Thermoelectric Plant in the Amazonian city of Silves went on a protest-strike of unlimited duration. At issue are the working conditions at the plant and the prison-like living conditions at the dormitory that many of them are forced to live in.

Among the issues raised by the strikers, in addition to unsanitary and unhealthy living quarters and bathrooms, is the company's control over internet communications with the outside world and bad food.

Workers that travel to work from nearby communities joined in the protest-strike, citing the impossibly exhausting working conditions in the plant.

Workers who denounce these conditions are victimized by the firm that extracts natural gas and produces electricity in the Amazonian region. The firm is infamous for ignoring the rights of the workers that it employs and the ecological damage to communities that surround its plants.

Police assault anti-genocide protest in Buenos Aires

On Saturday, August 30, hundreds of workers and students marched and rallied in downtown Buenos Aires, protesting Israel's genocide against the Palestinian people in Gaza. The demonstrators demanded that Argentina break diplomatic relations with Israel and that, in the event of a visit by Benjamin Netanyahu, he be arrested for his war crimes as charged by the International Criminal Court. Netanyahu was invited to visit Argentina by President Javier Milei, who also supports the Gaza genocide.

The peaceful protest was set upon by the Buenos Aires Police, attacking demonstrators with so-called non-lethal weapons (Billy-clubs, and rubber bullets).

Police forces repeatedly provoked protesters. A protesting pensioner was badly beaten by the police and many other injured during the police assault.

Police arrested activist Fernando Iglesias. He was arrested in the same area as his mother, who was disappeared and murdered by the brutal military dictatorship that ruled between 1976-1983.

Argentine President Milei expelled by angry workers

On Wednesday, August 27, a caravan headed by fascist president Javier Milei, campaigning for his Libertad Avanza party (Liberty Moves Forward) candidates, was forced to leave a working class area in Buenos Aires after being surrounded by scores of demonstrators, some armed with stones and bottles. Provincial elections are set to take place on September 7.

The incident took place in the impoverished working class Lomas de Zamora municipality, in the center of the city of Buenos Aires.

Milei, who in addition to brutal austerity policies that target retired people, workers, education and health services, has lately also been mired in at least three corruption scandals, blamed the Kirchner wing of the Peronist Party for the demonstration, claiming that it had organized the protest.

Paraguayan police attacks students asking for bus to get to school

On August 28, protesting university students in Villa Ygatimi, Paraguay, in the Canindeyu State were attacked by police. The demonstrators were demanding a bus to transport them to their University in the City of Curuquaty, fifty kilometers away. The students had blocked the road into the city.

Witnesses to the repression reported that police shoved the demonstrators and hit them with rubber bullets, wounding some of the protesters.

The students' demand for transportation had been approved by the local government, only to be disapproved with no explanation. Some students rely on motorcycles, an inherently unsafe mode of transportation, which is even more dangerous given the poor road conditions.

The National Police denied having repressed the students, declaring that its agents only used "a little force" against the demonstrators, some of whom ended up being transported to clinics in the area. The students have indicated that they will continue their protests.

Toledo, Ohio Libbey Glass workers enter second week of strike

The 84 workers at Libbey Glass's Toledo, Ohio, plant are entering their second week on strike against stagnant wages, rising insurance costs and mandatory overtime. Members of the International Association of

Machinists (IAM) Local 1297 voted overwhelmingly August 9 against the company's final offer and walked off the job August 22.

Libbey Glass went through bankruptcy and the IAM bureaucracy collaborated with management to make workers pay for the company's restructuring. Facing the growing anger of workers, the IAM has sought to paint the actions of corporate executives as merely showing a lack of "fairness, respect and dignity."

"IAM Local 1297 members have made tremendous sacrifices for this company after it came out of bankruptcy and liquidation in 2020,..." stated IAM District 54 President T. Dean Wright, Jr. "Libbey Glass management is failing to remember the significant sacrifices our members accepted to bring the company out of bankruptcy."

The IAM has tried to claim that letters of protest to management by Ohio state representative Michelle Grim and state senator Paula Hicks-Hudson represent substantive support for workers. US Democratic representative Marcy Kaptur appeared on the picket line to deflect blame to the Trump administration for its cut back in May of federal grants under the Inflation Reduction Act that were supposed to dole out \$43 million to Libbey Glass management to modernize its furnaces.

No negotiations have taken place since workers walked out last week.

One-day strike at West Nyack, New York healthcare facility

Contract negotiations have resumed at Rockland Pulmonary in West Nyack, New York, in the wake of an August 12 one-day strike by 50 respiratory therapists, medical secretaries, clerks, assistants, patient service representatives, and coordinators. Members of the Service Employees International Union—1199SEIU—have been negotiating with management for the past eight months for their first-ever contract for better pay and benefits and an end to alleged intimidation by management.

Respiratory therapist Diana McLean complained to *Rockland County Times* about working conditions, saying, "We're scheduled back-to-back with barely enough time to give our patients what they need—let alone take a break during an eight-hour shift. We're constantly asked to do more with less. We came together to join 1199 to fight for decent working conditions, fair raises, better health insurance, and a pension."

Rockland Pulmonary operates within the WMCH Health network, a non-profit based out of Valhalla, New York which oversees nine hospitals and other facilities that employ 12,000 workers. Workers complain that they face intimidation and have been told to "quit if they don't like it."

According to 1199SEIU, WMCH Health gave non-union workers a 3 percent raise in December 2024 and purposely denied the increase to Rockland Pulmonary workers who had unionized.

Suburban Chicago teachers grant strike authorization

Teachers and staff for Illinois' suburban Valley View District 365U outside Chicago voted August 28 by a 95.97 percent margin to grant strike authorization as the union and district have failed to close an agreement over wages, longevity pay and objections to a district plan to implement an earlier start time. The Valley View Council, an Illinois Federation of Teachers affiliate, has not indicated any intention to call a strike in a district that ranks as the tenth largest in the state.

Valley View Council president Jared Ploger said of the start time proposal, "The Board is trying to force an incomplete plan that no one asked for, with no stakeholder input, and no consideration of how this will

affect bus schedules, district costs, logistics, or staff workload. On top of that, studies show that earlier start times can hinder, rather than help, student learning. It just doesn't make sense."

British Columbia government workers set to strike

About 34,000 provincial government workers, members of the BC General Employee's Union (BCGEU), issued a 72-hour strike notice over the weekend in pursuit of a wage increase that would address the significant erosion of their compensation after years of inflationary pressures. The workers can legally begin their strike as early as Tuesday morning.

A membership vote taken last week produced a 92.7 percent majority for strike action. Over 86 percent of the membership cast a ballot. The workers will have a window of 90 days to begin any job action. Union officials have remained silent on the tactics, if any, they plan to adopt.

House Leader Mike Farnworth for the governing New Democratic Party stated he believed contract negotiations will continue this week. In any case, he noted the provincial Labour Board must still determine essential service levels in certain sectors organized by the union that protect public safety.

BCGEU members last went on strike in 2022. In that dispute, union officials did their utmost to prevent an all-out strike over workers' wage demands. After a two-week "targeted job action" including an overtime ban and limited strike activity by a small number of employees 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.

In the current dispute, the government has offered a two-year, 3.5 percent 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 22 percent of union members are forced to work a second and even third job to cover their basic living expenses.

In addition to the strike notice sent forward by the BCGEU, more than 1,800 members of the Professional Employees Association, also served strike notice this past weekend in pursuit of increased wages, professional fee coverage and compensation for emergency work. These government workers include foresters, geoscientists, engineers, psychologists and other specialized professionals. They have been in contract talks with the province since late May.



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