

Workers Struggles: The Americas

Harrisburg, Pennsylvania area community college professors prepare to strike if talks fail; British Columbia government workers end walkout

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

Argentine university workers hold 48-hour strike

Members of the National Federation of University Educators (CONADUH) carried out a 48-hour strike on October 21 and 22 demanding the implementation of two budget laws —The Law of University Financing, and the Law of Pediatric Emergencies—approved by the national legislature, and then vetoed by President Javier Milei.

The vetoes were overturned by the House and Senate and ratified following mass demonstrations in Buenos Aires.

The fascist president continues to defy the legislature and refuses to implement either law.

University workers and educators demand the immediate implementation of the legislation. The University Financing includes student scholarships, wages protected from inflation and funds to ensure the functioning of public universities.

The Health Workers at the Garrahan Pediatric Hospital in Buenos Aires demonstrated on October 21 against the attacks on pediatric care and in solidarity with the educators by banging pots and pans. The health workers rallied at Plaza de Mayo square, across from Argentina's Government House.

The health workers union announced it is also suing the Milei administration for violating the Argentine constitution.

Dignity march in Cotacachi, Ecuador

Thousands protested in Ecuador's northern artisanal city of Cotacachi, on October 23, following the calling off—as a result of severe government repression by the Noboa administration—of a general strike, initially triggered by the cancellation of price subsidies for diesel fuel.

The march and rally, organized by the Peasant and Indigenous Organizations of Cotacachi (UNORCAC), attracted thousands of Ecuadorean workers and peasants, who continue to resist the fascist policies of the Noboa administration, beyond the ending of the national strike.

The strike began on October 3, following three weeks of protests and local strikes, in opposition to the Diesel price increase and to the destruction by mining conglomerates of rural lands. It ended on October 22, following a threat by President Daniel Noboa, that he would escalate to the maximum the use of military force against the strikers. According to the Alliance of Human Rights Organizations, 296 protesters were injured, three died, and 15 are missing. In addition, there were 55 attacks on journalists and 205 arrests.

Many of the Cotacachi demonstrators denounced the decision by the organizers of the strike (CONAIE, Federation of Indigenous Nationalities) to end the strike and vowed to continue the struggle against Noboa.

Harrisburg, Pennsylvania area community college professors prepare to strike if talks fail

Faculty across five campuses at the Harrisburg Area Community College (HACC) in Pennsylvania granted strike authorization by a 93 percent margin and will launch a strike if negotiations set for October 28 fail to produce results. The 750 members of the Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA) are in conflict with the administration over wages and status quo contract language governing items like tuition reimbursement and sick leave accrual. HACC has campuses in Adams, Dauphin, Lancaster, Lebanon and York counties.

"We are now 42 months since approving our union, and we're still without a contract. We are nearly 40 months without a raise. That's a long time," said English professor and chief union negotiator Amy Withrow at a town hall meeting last week.

The union will hold a rally at the Lancaster campus on October 28, right before the two sides enter into their last negotiating

session. PSEA representative Adam Weber announced, “If that negotiation session is unsuccessful, we will strike, and I want to reiterate that that is what we will do.” The PSEA, however, has not set a strike date. Unlike public schools, the HACC professors do not have to give strike notice.

The HACC’s Board of Trustees approved 3 percent pay raises in each of the last three academic years, but “We have not seen a dime of those increases,” Weber told *The Keystone*. “And that’s a problem.”

Tensions between the two sides became apparent back in August when the administration called in police to arrest two PSEA representatives who set up a table on the Lancaster campus to provide information to professors. The administration declared it a “deplorable and disgraceful” publicity stunt. The same PSEA reps had previously set up a table on the York campuses without incident.

Santa Cruz, California city workers authorize strike as union and management enter mediated talks

Municipal workers for the City of Santa Cruz, California voted October 14 by a 96 percent margin to grant strike authorization. Neither the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 521, nor city negotiators, are revealing the details of negotiations that involve some 800 temporary and permanent workers. Neither has the SEIU declared a date for a walkout.

The union did say that the status of talks are hung up on “stalled negotiations, low wages, and mishandled physical and sexual harassment incidents.”

City workers struck for three days in October 2022 for the first time ever. The old agreement that expired on October 12 contained a 12 percent wage increase over the life of the three-year agreement. The two sides will begin mediated talks on October 30.

British Columbia government workers end strike after deal struck

An eight-week strike by the 34,000 strong British Columbia General Employees Union (BCGEU) came to an end this past Sunday with a tentative agreement reached between the union and the provincial government of New Democratic Party Premier David Eby. The 25,000 striking workers returned to work Monday to rejoin the several thousand non-striking essential workers who were required to stay on the job. The tentative offer was endorsed by the BCGEU bargaining committee. Workers will vote on the deal in the coming days.

Prior to the beginning of the strike, the union was seeking an 8.25 percent wage increase over the life of a two-year contract. The government had countered with an offer of 3.5 percent spread out over two years. In the end, the tentative agreement was for a

four-year term involving a 3 percent wage increase in each year. There were also small targeted additional wage increases for the lowest paid workers in government employment.

Members of the Professional Employees Association (PEA) continue their own strike after walking out 10 days ago. Over 1,600 licensed professionals across the province, including engineers, geoscientists, psychologists and other experts in the BC public service are demanding a wage increase beyond the government’s offer of 3.5 percent spread out over two years.

Part-time faculty at two Halifax universities strike

About 150 part-time faculty at Halifax’s Saint Mary’s University went on strike last Thursday in pursuit of increased wages and job security provisions. They joined a similar number of part-time faculty at Mount Saint Vincent University, who began striking a day prior. Both faculties are members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE). More than 300 classes at each of the universities have been “paused.”

The workers at both universities are amongst the lowest paid instructors in the country, with no health benefits and no pensions, whilst working under the most precariously insecure employment conditions. The teachers and teaching assistants often find themselves required to apply or re-apply for employment once or twice each year even when they have 10 or 20 years seniority.

As the two strikes were beginning, CUPE officials at nearby Dalhousie University agreed to a tentative contract that abruptly ended a looming strike that was to begin within hours of the last ditch negotiations. One thousand faculty members there will vote on the contract proposal in the coming days. Already anticipating opposition to the agreement, CUPE officials felt it necessary “to make this clear” that the contract proposal was “not perfect” but would nonetheless recommend ratification of the proposed contract.

Faculty association members at Dalhousie had been locked out on August 20 in a contract dispute over wage increases. The union responded with its own strike declaration two days later, but by mid-September the two sides agreed to suspend the lockout/strike for one final round of contract talks.



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