

Protests continue at shuttered FATE tire factory outside Buenos Aires; Portland Community College faculty and staff strike over wages

Workers Struggles: The Americas

16 March 2026

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

Protests continue at FATE tire factory outside Buenos Aires

On March 11, workers at the FATE tire factory rallied at the San Fernando plant, in northern Buenos Aires province, demanding that all 900 workers fired due to the closure of the plant be given their jobs back.

Joining the protest were workers from across the Buenos Aires industrial belt, students and political groups.

In the vicinity of the protest rally, a soup kitchen was set up, exposing the precarious situation that many of the fired workers face.

While the Milei administration fined FATE for not paying back wages owed to the fired workers, it continues to justify the plant closures taking place throughout the industrial belt that borders the Parana River and in other cities, as necessary to end inflation and restore the economy. In the long run, according to Milei, new jobs will be created in new industries and in mining.

“Obviously, some workers will do very well; others, if they do not adapt, will suffer,” declared Milei. It is estimated that between 28 and 35 factories are closing every day from the economic implosion taking place.

Chilean security forces shoot at student demonstrators

Chilean gendarmes (Carabineros) fired on students at an antifascist protest on March 12 against recently installed president Jose Antonio Kast, a fascist defender of the tyrannical Pinochet regime (1976-1983). The demonstrators denounced Kast’s proposed cuts to high school budgets.

Kast won election waging a far-right campaign based on the model of US President Donald Trump, scapegoating immigrants for the social ills confronting workers. Among those attending his inauguration were right-wing leaders across Latin America, including María Corina Machado of Venezuela.

Teachers in Paraguay protest attacks on Social Security

On March 10 and 11, thousands of Paraguayan teachers and university educators carried out two days of protest strikes in several parts of Asuncion, Paraguay’s capital city, in defense of public sector retirement, as the national legislature debates reforms that attack every sector of the working class.

The new legislation would increase the amount that teachers, and other government employees, are required to pay into their retirement system and raises the age of retirement. The Santiago Peña administration proposes to force the nation’s debt crisis onto the backs of the working class.

Peruvian truckers protest over lack of fuel

On March 12, truck drivers, owner-operators and other logistics workers went on a strike of indefinite duration over the fuel shortage and the increase in fuel prices. Joining the truckers were taxi drivers and car services. Gasoline is selling for more than 22 soles (US \$6.40) per gallon in many parts of the country.

The fuel crisis, which preceded the war on Iran by US imperialism, began with the government’s plan to privatize and break-up Petroperu, the government-owned fossil fuel company, and end price controls over fuel.

The strikers oppose the privatization of Petroperu and demand that the government take action to stop the explosion in fuel prices.

Workers protest attacks on labor rights in Ecuador

On March 13, trade unionists and their supporters marched in Quito, Ecuador’s capital city, against labor decrees that take away workers’ rights, including imposing a 10-hour working day, up from eight hours. The demonstrators also opposed legislation that would open up the Galapagos Islands to fossil fuel exploitation and rules that would negatively impact regional economies.

Despite its peaceful character, the protest was savagely repressed by the Noboa administration. National police, backed by the military, dispersed the demonstrators with tear gas and noise bombs; one person was intentionally run over on by a police motorcycle; other protesters were beaten, taking control of the central square in Quito.

Portland Community College faculty and staff strike over wages

Unions representing 2,300 of Oregon's Portland Community College (PCC) faculty and staff went on strike March 11 over the failure of midterm contract negotiations to adjust cost-of-living increases. The Federation of Faculty and Academic Professionals represent 1,600 employees and the Federation of Classified Employees represent another 700 workers who have been negotiating for 11 months over salary and benefits at the midpoint in their 2023-27 contract.

The staff union is seeking wage increases of 3 percent and 3.5 percent over the next two years while faculty has requested 4.25 percent and 4.5 percent, respectively. Against this, the administration is only proposing raises of .35 and .5 percent in the next two years.

The strike affects four campuses and 50,000 students. An impasse was declared on January 30 and in February workers voted overwhelmingly to strike.

The PCC administration is seeking to impose the burden of a \$21 million budget deficit and declining enrollment on workers. The union responded that "PCC's current budget prioritizes management bloat..." pointing to spending on PCC president's office and "large sums to non-student-facing special projects and contingency funds."

Ohio ArcelorMittal steelworkers enter third month on strike against concessions

The 450 steelworkers at ArcelorMittal's plant in Shelby, Ohio, held a rally March 13 to mark two months on strike against concessions over wages, healthcare benefits and the company's attempt to end weekend overtime pay in their current seven-day workweek.

Management wants to side-step time-and-a-half on Saturday and double-time on Sunday by forcing members of United Steelworkers Local 3057 to increase production over a shorter period of time. The company also wants to end healthcare coverage for workers' spouses.

The union and company exchanged proposals at the beginning of March and strikers overwhelmingly voted down the company's proposal. No direct talks have taken place since the strike began on January 13.

ArcelorMittal, based in Luxembourg, is ranked 190th on the Fortune Global 500. It employs over 125,000 workers in 15 countries in the Americas, Europe and Africa.

Wisconsin construction workers picket to demand payment of wages

Construction workers picketed outside the City-County building in Madison, Wisconsin, March 10 to protest unpaid wages. The 13 workers, represented by the Worker Justice Wisconsin (WJW), pressured the city council to not grant contracts to companies that engage in wage theft.

WJW was calling attention to the fact that Raramuri Construction, which was subcontracting from Bear Development, failed to compensate the workers for work on a Madison affordable apartment complex called "The Intersect." Bear Development called the allegations "baseless," although one day earlier it paid the workers \$75,000 for construction work performed in the spring of 2025.

WJW still maintains the company's payment was only partial and workers are still owed \$38,000. One worker also charges he has not received workers' compensation for an injury that left him partially blind.

David Ortiz-Wittingham, who represents the workers, believes the company may have taken advantage of the situation because of the workers immigrant and Hispanic backgrounds.

Thousands of Nova Scotia long-term care workers move toward strike

Last week, workers at the Harbourside Enhanced Care center in Sydney, Nova Scotia voted 87 percent for strike action should a new collective agreement not be reached over the next several weeks. The care center is the largest in the Cape Breton region of the province.

The Harbourside facility is the 39th such care center in Nova Scotia that has voted for strike action. All the workers are members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE). On average, strike mandate votes have averaged about 95 percent in favour since balloting began across the province this past autumn.

The long-term care workers are demanding improvements to address the cost-of-living crisis, chronic understaffing, and to bring their pay, often less than \$20/hour, in line with other Atlantic Canadian provinces. Similarly skilled care workers in nearby Prince Edward Island, for instance, earn \$10 per hour more than their Nova Scotia colleagues. Beyond wages, workers are fighting for better retention, guaranteed hours, and safety against burnout, with some workers reporting they are forced to take on multiple jobs just to make ends meet.

Bargaining with the Conservative government of Premier Tim Houston has been an interminable "slow walk" over contracts that have expired some two years ago. CUPE long-term care workers are set to return to bargaining with the government on March 24 for a final conciliation meeting before they can enter a legal strike position. If a settlement is not reached, several thousand care workers across the province can begin strike activity sometime in April.

The combativeness amongst the care workers—as well as amongst thousands of university and college education workers at four provincial institutions over the past several months—has been further fueled by a February ruling by the provincial Supreme Court that struck down wage restraint legislation passed by the previous Liberal government in 2015.

The wage suppression program, dubbed the Public Services Sustainability Act, impacted over 75,000 workers. It imposed an initial two-year wage freeze followed by paltry annual increases of 1 percent, 1.5 percent and 0.5 percent. It also included the removal of the public service award, a lump-sum payment at retirement based on years served for qualifying workers. The ensuing Conservative governments of Premier Tim Houston refused to repeal the legislation.

Fully 11 years after the Act was passed, the court found the legislation unconstitutional, writing that the bill "substantially interfered" with the applicant unions' charter right to a process of good faith collective bargaining. The court, however, granted the government's request to suspend any declaration of invalidity for another 12 months. In the meantime, the current Conservative government has not ruled out launching an appeal of the court decision.



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