

Student protests in Uruguay, Illinois IKEA warehouse workers strike, Nova Scotia ambulance dispatchers strike in fifth week

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Latin America

Uruguay's main trade union federation PIT-CNT led a partial 12-hour strike in Uruguay on August 11, demanding the government provide more resources for social welfare, including for education and fighting poverty. The teachers' union extended its strike to 24 hours.

In Montevideo, hundreds of strikers marched from the public university campus to the national legislature. The crowd was addressed by leading union bureaucrats, who refused to hand over the microphone to students from several local colleges. Chanting "*Allá están...ellos son... alcahuetes del patron*" (there they are... that's them...servants of the boss") students then denounced the PIT-CNT leaders for having repeatedly refused to launch a general strike and limiting workers' protests to short cooling-off protest strikes and demonstrations.

On August 14, workers and peasants marched and rallied in the capital city of Asunción to denounce poverty and unemployment three years after President Santiago Peña took power.

The demonstrators marched behind a sign that said "Paraguay Duele" (Paraguay suffers) from Plaza Uruguay square and rallied at the National Heroes Monument. One of the two marches, which involved educators and government workers, was blocked by the police. In response, the demonstrators rallied on the spot, beating pots and pans, and denouncing the government for the crisis in education.

Both demonstrations shared the same theme, that the Paraguayan working class and peasantry is suffering hunger and misery despite government prosperity propaganda.

On August 11, workers at the Enaex plant in Mejillones, a port city near the Peruvian border, began their strike by blocking major highways in the region. The workers are opposing the company's refusal to listen to their demands over wages and working conditions. They also want to prevent the employment of strikebreakers, whose lack of experience endangers inhabitants of the area.

The strike involved 80 percent of the workers at the Mejillones plant, say the company is refusing to improve wages and working conditions even as it accumulated more than US\$500 million in profits since 2023. They demanded wage increases that make up for Chile's inflation and a strike-ending bonus. Union officials announced a

settlement on August 14 and the plant reopened the next day despite workers not attaining their demands.

Enaex, based in Santiago, Chile, and with plants in Colombia and South Africa, prides itself as one of the largest manufacturers of "efficient and innovative explosives" servicing the mining industry across the world, including ecologically neutral "green ammonia."

On August 13, young workers and students rallied at the US consulates in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo condemning US imperialism's intervention in Latin America and denouncing the naval blockade of Cuba.

The demonstrators emphasized the impact of the US war economy on the natural environment and the economic conditions that people live under across the globe. They demanded that the money being spent on war and armaments be re-oriented toward the production of food, the struggle against hunger, and putting an end to inequality.

One day earlier a protest rally also took place at the US embassy in Brasilia, the nation's capital, where the demonstrators carried signs with the US flag decorated with skulls and missiles, symbolizing US warmongering and profiteering. They burned a symbol of a dollar bill.

More than 500 striking workers employed by the Water and Sewage Authority (AAA) of Puerto Rico, protested at the government house in San Juan on August 12. Workers have launched a strike over wages, working conditions, and the outsourcing of jobs. The demonstrators included water emergency workers, pipefitters, water truck drivers and office employees.

The AAA workers link their struggle to the current crisis in water availability in this Caribbean Island, pointing out that only 2,500 AAA workers service the entire island, down from 5,000 before the financial crisis that bankrupted the economy. Wages have been frozen, with many workers making hunger wages of \$10.50 per hour. Hector Quiñones, a father of two interviewed by a local news outlet, described the situation in the city of Fajardo, where he is the head pipefitter: "There is no justice. I have 19 and a half years of seniority and get \$10.50 an hour. We do not have proper equipment to transport the pipes; I work 12 hours daily. It is sad because I get a wage, that, like an onion, easily comes apart. It makes one cry."

United States

Workers at the Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden in Richmond, Virginia, voted August 12 by a 77 percent margin to reject

management's final offer. The vote by the more than 60 staffers in the International Association of Machinists (IAM) sets up an upcoming decision by workers on whether to launch a strike after nearly a year of negotiations.

Neither the IAM nor management would make public the "last and best offer." IAM organizer Bridget Fitzgerald said the decision was to prevent "any outside influences." The IAM said the two remaining issues that separated the two sides were wages and the collection of union dues.

Workers have held several protests since April over the fact they have gone without a raise over the past two years, including the most recent, a one-day unfair labor practices strike on July 29.

Starting wages for the garden workers is \$15 an hour and management has only tentatively agreed to raise that to \$16. An early proposal by management called for a 3 percent wage hike, amounting to about 52 cents for the average worker. The IAM had requested an increase of \$3.50 an hour, but later reduced that to \$2.15 an hour.

Back on July 27, workers called on the public to cancel their memberships and not visit the garden. The appeal led to a number of musicians to cancel their concert appearances for Lewis Ginter's "Groovin' in the Garden" summer series. Ginter CEO Brian Trader said these cancellations had cost the Garden "tens of thousands" of dollars.

Over 190 warehouse workers at IKEA's Joliet, Illinois, distribution center went on strike August 12 demanding higher wages, improved working conditions and protections against automation. Workers at the facility voted to organize under Teamsters Local 179 back in March of this year under conditions where their living standards have not improved as IKEA raked in \$1.7 billion in profits in 2025.

Local 179 President Chris Richter called the company's wage offer "disgraceful." IKEA has put up fencing around the facility which the union labeled "intimidation." The Joliet workers are the third group of IKEA warehouse workers in North America to join the Teamsters.

A group of experts appointed by the United Nations Human Rights Council criticized New York State's Medicaid-funded home care system's scheduling, charging it would lead to home care workers putting in 24-hour shifts. The New York system pays home care workers for 11 hours with the assumption that the additional 13 hours of the shift are spent eating and sleeping.

UN-backed experts stated, "We are seriously concerned that the reported system may enable exploitative practices and that it has a disproportionate impact on migrant women and their families." The concentration of migrant women in this sector made it a target for exploitation that could amount to forced labor under standards laid out by the International Labor Organization.

"Homecare workers must be able to enjoy just, favourable and safe working conditions, adequate rest, fair remuneration, protection of their rights, and access to effective remedies," the UN officials stated.

Canada

Eighty-six ambulance dispatchers are entering their fifth week on strike in pursuit of wage increases comparable to similar workers in other jurisdictions. Police dispatchers in the province, for example, earn 30 percent more for performing nearly identical work.

The medical emergency dispatchers are also demanding that

management address the chronic under-staffing of the shifts that not only place significant pressure on the dispatchers but also impact service to the community. Although there are 86 members of the bargaining unit, so onerous are the working conditions that as many as 26 workers have been on medical leave at any given time.

The strikers are members of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) Medical Communications division. They are employed by Emergency Medical Care Inc., a private firm contracted by the provincial government's Emergency Health Services.

A government mandated Essential Services Agreement negotiated with the union requires that 20 dispatchers must be deployed on every shift during weekdays and somewhat less on weekends. Tellingly, the legal requirements of the essential services mandate is at a higher staffing level on shifts during the strike than typically provided on a normal weekday, meaning some shifts actually have more dispatchers on duty than before the strike began.

Workers—who for many months have complained of management's under-staffed shifts that often comprise only 15 dispatchers—now see that what really is "essential" to the government contracted department is to have enough employees on the job only when there is a strike to break.

This particular "straitjacket" on the workers is just one of many pro-company provisions that strikers face. The collective bargaining process in Nova Scotia and across Canada is rife with every imaginable hoop and hurdle to contain the class struggle. Provincial and federal labour codes impose all manner of impediments, including endless conciliation requirements with government-appointed arbitrators, "cooling off" periods, Industrial Relations Board adjudications, the illegalization of wildcat job actions in standardized labour contracts, fines, legal deployment of scabs and, when all else fails, back-to-work orders and/or enforced binding arbitration. In effect, quasi-dictatorial powers are activated with the complicity of the union bureaucracies to guarantee the profits of the corporations over the rights of the working class whenever needed.



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