Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

National strike by university staff in Argentina

On Tuesday, September 8, university workers, educators and support staff carried out strikes in every university in Argentina. The issue is below poverty-line wages, despite phony claims by the Milei administration that wage increases have reached a "just" level.

A press release from the Association of University Workers (ATULP) reported that 97 percent of their members participated in the 24-hour walkout. In at least one province, Tucuman, professors, members of the ADJUNT union, are demanding a one-week general strike, arguing that "rotating 24-hour strikes lack perspective and wear out the workers."

At the University of Buenos Aires and other provincial campuses, the strike went beyond the original 24-hour limit. In at least one campus (Bahia Blanca) the strike was extended one more day, with a third day of public protest classes on the streets across from campuses.

Additional protests took place in the city of Buenos Aires, part of the industrial belt that extends north of this metropolis, scores of students, scientists, retirees and industrial workers marched in defense of science, technology, health and education jobs that are being cut by the Milei administration.

This July, the monthly poverty line wage for a family of four was set at 1,564,716 pesos (US$1,565), compared to an average wage of less than US$500 for university workers, and less than US$2,000 for the highest paid professor.

While the universities in Argentina have faced financial attacks by previous administrations, attacks have accelerated under the current government.

Strike by Brazilian postal workers joined by bank employees

On Thursday evening September 10, postal workers across Brazil went on strike. The walkout was in response to a proposed 0.87 percent wage increase that went hand in hand with reductions in health benefits. In addition, workers are demanding preserving a 70 percent holiday bonus, double pay for working on scheduled days off, a year-end bonus; and a counter-service payment worth US$. The strike is open ended.

Post office management argues that it is going through a "very serious economic situation."

The strike coincides with the strike by employees of the federal government-owned Caixa Savings bank, one of Brazil's largest, also over attacks on wages and cuts in health benefits. Caixa is a major lender and holds most mortgages, serving some of Brazil's poorest families.

The Caixa walkout began on September 10, and is also of indefinite duration. It was triggered by a massive rejection of a proposed contract by 90 percent of the workers in 93 banks across the country (negotiations are still taking place in 35 others). In addition to opposing the attack on health in the proposed contract, the strikers are demanding better pay and improved working conditions.

The attacks on public employees' wages and benefits are part of an austerity policy by the Lula administration and several states.

September 11 protests mark anniversary of Chile 1973 military coup

On September 11 thousands marched in Santiago and other cities in Chile to mark 53 years since a military coup killed the social democratic President Salvador Allende and installed the murderous Pinochet dictatorship. Among the marchers were students, young workers and members of human rights organizations.

The demonstrations also condemned the repression of workers' struggles by the fascistic Kast administration.

The marches and rallies also condemned attacks on health benefits and education, police violence and the repression directed against the Mapuche Indians.

In a separate protest rally at the Santiago Court of Justice building, the Association of Missing and Detained Family Members (AFDD) denounced 53 years of impunity against the agents of the dictatorship, demanding truth and justice for the victims of the Pinochet dictatorship.

Chile educators hold 120 kilometer walk to protest education cuts

Public school educators and education workers, joined by construction workers in a show of solidarity, staged a rally at the National Congress in the port city of Valparaiso, west of Santiago, on September 8. The rally concluded a three-day, 120-kilometer walk from Santiago.

The demonstrators demanded an end to government cuts in education, part of the budget recently implemented by the José Antonio Kast administration.

As the demonstrators were arriving in Valparaiso, they were joined by educators from Valparaiso schools.

The new budget will result in mass layoffs of school workers and teachers.

Boston Medical Center nurses vote by 90 percent for strike action over deteriorating wages

Nearly 90 percent of the 2,000 nurses at Boston Medical Center (BMC) in Massachusetts voted to authorize a three-day strike over noncompetitive wages after six months of bargaining.

Members of the Service Employees International Union Local 1199 at BMC’s main campus and the BMC-affiliated Brockton Behavioral Health Center charge they are the lowest paid nurses in the Boston area, some making half of what their counterparts make at other facilities.

BMC has responded to the challenge by nurses, declaring, 'any agreement must reflect the significant financial pressures facing BMC...' BMC is bracing for a major hit to their finances as federal changes to Medicaid eligibility kick in over the course of the coming months. The *Boston Globe* reports that over 40 percent of the hospital’s patients are on Medicaid.

Back in May, BMC reported a $41.7 million operating loss for the first six months of its fiscal year. This comes on top of a $30.4 million loss for the same period last year.

Marion County, Oregon public workers are set to strike September 22 over healthcare costs and wages

The 1,000 public workers for Marion County, Oregon, are slated to walk off the job September 22 after the county failed to budge on its refusal to increase its contribution to offset the rising cost of healthcare. The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 503 declared an impasse back on September 5 and the county announced it would unilaterally impose its final offer that includes a 2 percent wage increase and will only pay an additional $50 towards healthcare costs in the first year of a three-year contract.

The SEIU had requested that the county pay 95 percent of health insurance costs. Currently, the county pays a flat rate on health insurance at a time when these costs are increasing.

As far back as July, workers set up food donation boxes in anticipation that the county’s hardline bargaining would lead to a strike. However, the county confiscated those collection boxes saying they were “misleading” and conveyed the impression that there was an active strike.

The SEIU bargaining unit comprises all county workers except law enforcement. The county seat of Marion County is Salem, Oregon’s capital.

Chicago workers strike bulk transport company Quala

Some 60 workers at the intermediate bulk transportation services company, Quala, in Chicago, Illinois, walked out on strike September 2 over a variety of issues, including insufficient wages, surveillance, threats and company interrogations. Members of Teamsters Local 727, comprising technicians, cleaners, washers, maintenance and mechanics, voted unanimously to strike after the contract extension expired on August 31 and company negotiators made no move to improve its contract proposal.

Back in June, as a third round of negotiations commenced, the company withdrew previous agreements. One of them a guarantee of paid work hours, both daily and weekly. The union has also charged that company management employees tried to hit workers on the picket with a car on the opening day of the strike.

Quala, following a merger with Boasso Global in 2023, operates under the umbrella group Depot Connect International (DCI), one of the leading providers in the tank container services industry. It operates in Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Its network includes more than 190 locations.

Ontario Community Services strike continues as union sanctions piecemeal settlements

Community service workers at 11 of 23 Ontario agencies that walked out on June 2 remain on strike, as the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) has authorized a series of piecemeal settlements. About 4,400 public service workers were originally involved in the walkout.

Although OPSEU officials have not released full details of the contracts already signed, some information has become available. However, the specific contract durations for the individual local agency agreements ratified under the coordinated strike have not been detailed in a single, province-wide announcement.

The strikers had demanded improved base funding for community services, along with wage increases that include retroactive pay following a 2022 court decision and the Ontario Conservative government’s belated 2024 repeal of its now-unconstitutional wage restraint legislation. That legislation, known as Bill 124, had originally been passed in 2019.

These low-paid workers perform critical support functions in autism programs, palliative care facilities, psychiatric treatment centers, substance abuse programs, women’s crisis units, homeless shelters, youth programs, and many other fields serving the province’s most vulnerable people.

Bill 124, introduced by Ontario Premier Doug Ford, had capped annual compensation increases for most public sector workers at 1 percent for three years, a period marked by sharply rising inflation. Since the law’s repeal, many public sector workers have negotiated retroactive wage increases of 6.5 percent or more.