Paraguayan healthcare workers protest; Thousands of Chicago hotel workers authorize strike action

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

Paraguayan healthcare workers protest

The Paraguayan National Federation of Health Workers (FNTS) and 28 other healthcare unions and associations rallied at the headquarters of the Public Health and Welfare Ministry (MSPBS) in Asunción on Tuesday, September 22, demanding a 50 percent raise in wages for the 45,000 administrative employees excluded from raises recently granted to other health workers, following a five-day strike. Among those protesting were chemical biologists, social workers, anesthesiologists and ambulance drivers.

Nurses are also demanding that 624 temporary nurses be made permanent, and changes in their retirement system, in addition to the 50 percent raise.

The protest took place in the heels of a five-day strike by Paraguayan public health doctors demanding the hiring of more doctors and an increased budget for public health hospitals in addition to wage increases.

The Paraguayan government claims that there is no money to fund improvements.

Artists protest proposed budget cuts by Colombia's right-wing government

On Monday, September 21, scores of artists, performers and creators, rallied at the Culture Ministry in Bogotá, condemning proposed budget cuts by the recently installed Abelardo de la Espriella administration. The demonstration included musical and theatrical performances. The artists point out that these budget cuts will essentially kill artistic expression and creativity in Colombia, including the movie industry, which depends on government stimuli.

The protest, originally planned as a sit-in, turned into march to historic Bolivar Square, bordering the national legislature, as more and more people joined the protest, including students and workers.

The budget cuts are in line with the recently installed right-wing administration's declared austerity policy. Colombia has subsidized artistic creativity since the turn of this century. Individual artists present their projects, which compete for yearly stipends out of a fund of more than US$20 million. This year, the Culture Ministry cancelled all the awards in the context of a "war of cultures" declared by the government against left-wing and socialist political and artistic expression.

Thousands demonstrate to mark 12 years since Mexico's Ayotzinapa massacre

On Saturday, September 26, around 5,000 demonstrators, led by the family members of the 43 students disappeared in 2014 from the Raul Isidro Burgos Rural Teaching College in Ayotzinapa, marched in Mexico City.

Tens of thousands more protested and rallied in cities across Mexico.

The abducted and presumed murdered students had planned to commandeer a bus to transport them to a protest in Mexico City in memory of the student victims of the Tlatelolco Massacre in 1968 near Mexico City.

The marchers rallied at Mexico's government house, where family members demanded that President Claudia Sheinbaum reconvene the Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts, originally put in charge of the investigation and make public 800 documents held by the National Defense Secretariat.

There is widespread suspicion that the elements of the government officials, police and the armed forces were involved in the disappearance of the students—only three cadavers have been identified, the rest, presumed dead, have never been found.

In a provocative act, Mexico City authorities sent in over 1,000 police to surround the marchers, and block demonstrators attempting to join in the protest rally.

President Sheinbaum has repeatedly denied the state's involvement in the Ayotzinapa kidnappings or that a cover-up has taken place. Recently, the then governor of Guerrero Province was arrested for concealing evidence about the case.

Sheinbaum promised to make public a new investigative report this week.

United States

Thousands of Chicago hotel workers authorize strike action

The union representing thousands of hotel workers in downtown Chicago voted by an 85 percent margin to authorize strike action after contracts with Hyatt, Hilton and Marriott expired August 31 and negotiations over wages failed to meet workers' expectations. UNITE

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HERE Local 1, which represents up to 7,000 workers, from room attendants to front desk and food servers at 46 hotels, said that unless negotiations show progress over the next two weeks a strike could be called at any of the hotels.

"I voted yes to strike because I've had enough," said room attendant Cassandra Pope. "They're putting us on the schedule six consecutive days without even asking us. They demand and demand, always rushing us in the rooms, without acknowledging that we are human beings. We only have two hands and two feet. I'm coming out of here extremely exhausted. And I have to come and work, because I need money to feed my four children."

The union conducted a survey among its members that indicated nearly a third of its hotel worker members did not receive enough in wages in the course of the last year to pay for rent or mortgage payments. Another 30 percent were unable to cover utility bills.

Michael Jacobson, president of the Illinois Hotel & Lodging Association, said the hotels have prepared "robust contingency plans" to counter a strike and continue operations.

Cleveland Orchestra musicians end three-day strike, ratify agreement

Musicians of the Cleveland Orchestra ratified a new three-year contract on Sunday, ending a strike that began at midnight Friday. It was the orchestra's longest work stoppage since 1980. The strike followed by less than two weeks a walkout by members of the San Francisco Opera orchestra.

The previous agreement expired August 30 and was extended through September 23 by the American Federation of Musicians. The walkout resulted in the cancellation of a concert Friday at the University of Michigan and Saturday's program at Cleveland's Severance Music Center.

The contract provides 5 percent raises in each of its three years. The union had sought an overall 25 percent pay increase. Management dismissed the demand as "simply not sustainable for the institution." The settlement will force musicians on to a high-deductible, HSA-qualified health plan.

The settlement also included an arrangement to give orchestra musicians a seat on audition committees, including a voice in the final round. Music director Franz Welser-Möst retains final authority over appointments.

The musicians' negotiating committee chair Elayna Duitman, a violinist, said musicians were forced out by management. Cleveland Orchestra President and CEO André Gremillet called the strike "unnecessary."

Orchestras in the US have been struggling with declining attendance, increasing costs and the scrapping of the few government subsidies that once existed.

Texas industrial workers strike against mandatory overtime

The 350 workers at the Safran Seats in Gainesville, Texas, walked out on an indefinite strike September 24 after the company failed to meet their demands for increased wages, a restoration of holiday pay and the company's refusal to remove contract language over mandatory overtime. Members of Teamsters Local 767 rejected the company's offer back on September 18 and the Teamsters leadership communicated to the company that any contract containing mandatory overtime would not get ratified by the rank and file.

Michelle Shero, veteran employee at Safran Seats stated, "We are out here striking because we want no mandatory overtime, our holiday pay back and fair wages for all of us Teamsters—even those who have topped out."

Safran Seats is a global supplier of seats for passengers and crews of the major airlines. It is a subsidiary of the French aerospace, defense and security corporation Safran S.A. which employs 92,000 workers worldwide.

Confrontation at Cleveland Clinic Lutheran Hospital as workers launch strike

Some 200 healthcare workers at Cleveland Clinic Lutheran Hospital went on strike September 23 after months of negotiations, stretching well past the expiration of their contract back in April of this year. Members of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) District 1199 are opposing increases in healthcare costs and random drug testing and demand the right of non-Christian workers to use paid time off for religious observances without management harassment.

A 30-minute confrontation took place just before the strike at noon when, according to the union, clinic police tried to prevent workers from walking out. When District 1199 regional director Vanessa Dalesandro and union president Becky Williams entered the lobby police grabbed and tried to remove them.

The union believes hospital management did not have a contingency plan in place to replace striking workers. Replacements would likely have to come from other Cleveland clinics. The bargaining unit represents Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) nursing assistants, along with workers in maintenance, environmental services, dietary services, housekeeping, laundry and sterile processing.

Canada

Peterborough, Ontario paramedics vote to strike

Fully 99 percent of paramedics operating in Peterborough, Ontario and the surrounding county have voted to strike in pursuit of a contract that addresses concerns around working conditions, wages and benefits. The 193 workers have been in talks since March. They are members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE).

The paramedics are demanding increased mental health coverage in an industry where psychological trauma as well as injuries suffered due to violent attacks are increasing. Currently, the workers only receive an annual benefit of $500 to see a psychologist—roughly enough to cover 3 sessions. Part-time workers receive no benefits.

Between 2024-2025 studies show an increase of 50 percent in workplace injuries while 14 percent of full-time paramedics were absent from work due to injuries last year. According to a press release, Peterborough paramedics earn roughly 20 percent less than other first responders. Due to this pay inequity, poor benefits and dangerous working conditions, 54 paramedics have left the service over the past 3 years.

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