

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Venezuela oil workers stage protest strikes over hunger wages, abysmal conditions

Beginning on Monday, October 19, active and retired oil workers in Venezuela's northwestern Zulia state, Venezuela's main oil-producing region, on the border with Colombia, engaged in protest strikes against hunger wages and the collapse in their working conditions. On Wednesday, the protest strike extended beyond Zulia, to the coastal states of Anzoategui and Guaraguao.

In the city of Macaraibo, workers and retirees took over the headquarters of Venezuela's state-owned oil company PDVSA. The workers demand an increase in their current weekly wage of US\$5. The retirees are demanding pension payments that are owed to them and the restoration of the health system.

Working conditions for Venezuelan oil workers stand in contrast to the enormous wealth generated by oil production. Oil workers have been demanding decent wages and working conditions for a long time, while the unions that supposedly represent them work with the oil bosses and the government to keep them in poverty.

In addition to protest-strikes, oil workers have also engaged in frequent slow-downs.

Workers protest cuts by President De La Espriella in Bogotá, Colombia

On Friday October 23, hundreds of workers rallied across the Labor Ministry in Bogotá against the ultra-right De La Espriella's administration's repeated attacks on jobs, living standards and democratic rights. The demonstrators denounced government budget cuts that have led to the layoff of about 700,000 government workers.

The government attacks on the working class go beyond public employees. De La Espriella is accused of giving big business carte blanche for mass layoffs; protests are met with police repression.

The De La Espriella administration is also attacking cultural institutions, such as the removal of art from the world-famous Colombian National Art Museum, from which 30 artistic pieces were removed for political reasons, provoking a mass protest on

October 18, with scores of demonstrators denouncing the government for its fascism. This protest was also heavily repressed by police forces.

Costa Rican students and teachers protest cuts to public education

Thousands of students, university staff, union members and social activists marched through San José yesterday against cuts to public university funding last week. The protest-march in San Jose de Costa Rica brought together students, educators and administrative workers. Marches and rallies also took place in Guanacaste, San Carlos, Limón and other Costa Rican locations.

The protests take place in the context of the elaboration of the 2027 national budget, and possible massive budget cuts to public education and universities, while the Laura Fernandez administration proposes building mega prisons modeled after the ones in El Salvador.

In higher education, the proposed budget cuts threaten student loans and scholarships, university expansion and new careers.

Student protests in Lima, Peru

On Saturday October 24, hundreds of students and youth marched in central Lima, Peru's capital, demanding government action against the waves of assaults on public transit drivers, the lack of response to forest fires, the high cost of living and police impunity.

The march included students from the San Marcos and Catholic Universities, human rights organizations, trade unionists and young members of Gen Z.

In addition to seeing an increase in assaults on public transit drivers, Peru also has been hit by forest fires in 16 regions, with hardly any government response. Crops and forests have been lost. Had it not been for recent rains, the fires would have continued without adequate response from the Keiko Fujimori administration.

University of Rochester and Strong Memorial Hospital

workers vote for informational picketing as contract talks stall

Two unions representing 2,000 workers at Strong Memorial Hospital and the University of Rochester's River Campus voted October 22 to carry out informational picketing as contract talks over wages, health insurance, retirement benefits and paid time off have stalled. Local 1199 and Local 200, both with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), are bargaining for a joint contract and say current wage offers are minimal.

Negotiations began in August and the old agreement expired September 5. A contract extension to October 3 was agreed to but apparently no further extension followed that, stirring the ranks of workers to press for action.

The unions, however, have not issued a formal notification that informational picketing will begin. They have chosen to withhold that pending further negotiations.

The negotiations also cover staffing, workloads and related burnout among workers. Recently, management revealed it wants to roll back past contract language over discrimination.

Local 1199 bargains for 1,400 workers, including patient care technicians, environmental services, food service, secretaries, transport assistants and other workers. Local 200 covers about 500 support staff, custodial, dining and truck and bus drivers.

Hospital CEO David Linehan stated in 2025 that he could not "sugar coat" difficulties faced by the institution given cuts in Medicaid and Medicare. Medicaid cuts of \$20 million are expected to impact the university beginning in 2027.

Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania teachers vote overwhelmingly to strike

Teachers for the Hollidaysburg Area School District in Pennsylvania voted by a 227 to 3 margin to authorize a strike, as nearly a year of negotiations has passed without a settlement.

The Hollidaysburg Area Education Association has set a tentative strike date of November 23 and charges that district negotiators have conducted bargaining sessions and presented offers with a "take-it-or-leave-it" attitude.

"Right now, our school is sixth out of eight in our county on starting salary, and we're falling further and further behind in career salary," union president Michael Rawlins told WPSU. The union is asking for a 5 percent wage increase. "But what's causing the holdup is they're also asking for significant reductions in our healthcare benefits and increasing the cost of our healthcare benefits to the employee quite a bit."

The old agreement expired in August and the union has not received a counteroffer to its last proposal tendered September 1. Since the strike vote, the two sides have now set up a series of negotiating sessions.

The union admitted it chose to begin its strike November 23 to coincide with the Thanksgiving holiday to lessen its impact on the district.

British Columbia copper miners strike

Nearly 1,300 copper miners at Teck Highland Valley Copper operations southwest of Kamloops, British Columbia, began a strike on October 24 against the company's concession demands and in pursuit of wage and benefit increases. The workers are members of the United Steelworkers (USW) union.

Earlier this month, in a high turnout strike vote, the miners unanimously called for strike action. The previous contract expired last June. Management has announced that the mine will continue to operate at a reduced capacity.

The mine is the largest open pit copper mine in Canada. An already highly profitable operation, a multi-billion dollar development project will extend the life of the mine until at least 2046. The strike comes as Teck ownership seeks to close a merger deal with Anglo American PCL, a multi-national mining giant headquartered in London, England.

Nova Scotia public school education support workers set to strike

Some 5,500 school bus drivers, education program and special needs assistants, librarians, janitors, cafeteria workers and secretaries, members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), are set to strike this week after contract negotiations reached an impasse this past Friday.

The low-paid workforce is demanding staffing increases, protections against violence in the workplace and a significant wage increase after provincial government-appointed negotiators offered a paltry increase of \$1.62 per hour that would only be reached by the end of a four-year contract.

The province's Department of Education has announced that schools will be open on October 26 and 27. A strike is expected to begin as early as October 28.



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