

Workers Struggles: The Americas

University of California workers rally ahead of strike vote and October 31 contract expiration

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

As Buenos Aires hospital workers celebrate partial victory management appears to renege on deal

On October 19 the “Bonaparte Hospital workers in struggle” transformed their rally into a community festival under the slogan “No admissions, no hospital!”

Their occupation of the hospital brought together the surrounding community, health and education workers and students, in solidarity.

The Ministry of Health responded by agreeing to keep the hospital open. However, at the last moment they canceled patient admissions, with the consent of the apparatus of the two unions involved.

Workers have vowed to continue the struggle until all the hospital departments are fully operational.

Bonaparte is one of three Buenos Aires hospitals threatened with closure as a result of the Milei administration’s brutal austerity policies. Health workers at the other two, Posadas and Garrahan, are resisting their imminent closure with strikes and protests.

Rio de Janeiro health workers fight privatization

Health workers employed by the Bonsucesso Hospital in Rio de Janeiro began occupying parts of this federally owned hospital on October 17, while the Lula administration threatens to mobilize the police against the protest.

The workers are demonstrating against the proposed sale of the hospital to a private corporation which has already announced plans to reduce the workforce. Bonsucesso currently employs 2,000 health workers.

The proposed privatization of Bonsucesso is part of a wave of privatizations of public hospitals in Brazil, supposedly with the intention of “improving public health.”

Protesters in Santiago, Chile confronted by police

On October 18, motorcycle police confronted and attempted to corral a march of scores of students and workers who had marched and rallied in

Santiago’s Plaza Dignidad and Plaza Italia squares marking the fifth anniversary of the first of many mass national protests against the rising cost of living and government austerity policies. Those mass protests led to the collapse of the Piñera administration.

Chants and signs in this protest, such as: “To fight for and to build people’s power,” “housing is a right” and “the eyes of the people demand justice and dignity” signaled how little things have changed in the intervening five years.

Protesters responded to the police repression chanting “murderers,” a reference to the victims of the 2019/2020 protests, at the hands of the police, for which almost nobody has been held liable.

Out of the denunciations of human rights violations, including 227 victims of eye damage from police shootings, 30 deaths, 603 wounded minors, and a great number of victims of sexual abuse, among those arrested, only 42 police officers have been charged.

Workers stage protest demonstration in El Salvador against austerity budget

Over 1,000 trade unionists and human rights groups marched on October 19 in El Salvador’s capital, San Salvador, against austerity budget cuts being imposed by the Nayib Bukele administration that will sharply reduce health and education by millions of dollars, which will result in layoffs across the board and the closure of schools and clinics.

Trade unionists marched along with doctors, health workers, teachers and education workers and rallied in central San Salvador.

The demonstrators also denounced the lack of medications and the poor working conditions in the health sector.

Haitian refugees protest in Dominican detention centers

On October 16, Haitian refugees imprisoned in the Dominican Republic and awaiting deportation, mutinied in the Haina detention center, protesting the oppressive conditions they are being held in and the lack of food.

“This is no place for migrants,” declared a protester, referring to the animal-like and overcrowded conditions they face.

So far this year, 67,000 Haitians have been deported by the government of the Dominican Republic, which claims there is no money for refugees. Eleven thousand were deported last week.

On October 2, the government of the Dominican Republic announced

that it would deport 10,000 Haitians a week, including children. Half a million Haitians reside in the Dominican Republic.

University of California workers rally ahead of strike vote and contract expiration

Thousands of University of California (UC) workers rallied on October 16 to build support for wage increases, measures to provide affordable housing and decreased parking rates. The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 3299 represents over 37,000 workers at 10 UC campuses, five medical centers and other facilities whose contracts expire October 31.

Workers will be voting to authorize an unfair labor practices strike from October 28 to 30. Bargaining began back in January of this year. Since then, UC negotiators have offered to increase salaries by 26 percent, but stretched out over a five-year contract. The union is seeking a three-year contract with increased healthcare coverage, a mix of wage increases along with shift differentials and additional on-call, night and weekend pay supplements.

California's high inflation rate and an affordable housing crisis had led workers to demand a housing fund for rent and mortgage assistance and access to low-interest home loans. In contrast, UC president Michael V. Drake rakes in an annual base salary of \$1.3 million.

Earlier this year tens of thousands of UC academic workers struck over the brutal police crackdown on protests against the Gaza genocide.

New Orleans nurses set one-day strike to protest under-staffing and workplace violence

The 600 registered nurses and nurse practitioners at University Medical Center New Orleans (UMC) have set a one-day strike for October 25 to pressure management to accommodate their demands for safe staffing, compensation and a comprehensive program to deal with workplace violence. Nurses voted to organize back in December of 2023 with National Nurses United (NNU), becoming the first unionized private-sector hospital workers in the state of Louisiana.

Negotiations, which commenced last March, have failed to get a substantive response from management.

"We cannot continue caring for our patients in a hospital where violence and chronic understaffing threaten both nurses and patients," said Lauren Waddell, a nurse practitioner, in a press release. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services have produced data that indicate a staffing crisis at UMC.

Violence presents not only a physical threat, but is causing immense psychological stress among nurses. Over 80 percent of UMC nurses signed a letter calling on UMC to adopt preventive measures.

Nurses are also seeking to facilitate representation for some 200 UMC nurses who are part-time.

It has been estimated by the *Times-Picayune* that the cost of replacement nurses for the October 25 strike could reach \$6 million.

Workers at Washington state brewery grant strike authorization

Over 30 workers at Elysian Brewery in Tukwila, Washington, granted strike authorization October 12, more than a year after voting to unionize with Teamsters Local 117 and still without a first contract. At the top of their list of demands are increased wages and better healthcare coverage.

In 2015, the world's largest brewing company, Anheuser-Busch, purchased the local craft brewery. In response to the workers' organizing effort, the company has hired the law firm Jackson Lewis P.C. which specializes in labor and employment law and, according to Wikipedia, "has a reputation as one of the top U.S. union-busting practices."

The Teamsters have indicated that they will await the outcome of bargaining sessions on October 24 and 25 before acting on the strike vote. The union's only response has been to establish an online petition calling on supporters to demand that Anheuser-Busch return to the bargaining table and negotiate a fair contract.

UAW-represented staff strikes Association of Professional Flight Attendants

The staff at the Association of Professional Flight Attendants (APFA), which represents American Airlines flight attendants has gone on strike, citing management's refusal to bargain in good faith. The unit comprises 11 clerical and administrative support staff and are members of the United Auto Workers. The UAW cited erosion of the bargaining unit, concessions, unfair wages, loss of staff positions and other issues as the basis for the strike.

APFA announced ratification of a new five-year contract covering 28,000 American Airlines flight attendants in September.

Edmonton public school workers to begin strike Thursday

About 1,700 educational assistants along with another 1,000 clerks, administrative assistants, librarians, food preparation staff, licensed practical nurses and technicians are set to launch their first-ever strike against Edmonton Public Schools this week in pursuit of a significant wage increase. Workers voted last Friday by 97 percent to mandate CUPE Local 3350 to immediately give legal strike notice to the Alberta Labour Relations Board.

The education workers have seen their wages drastically eroded by the recent years of inflationary pressure. Currently, they earn an average of only \$27,000 to \$30,000 per year. The wages are so low that the Edmonton school board has difficulty attracting qualified workers to fill a growing number of vacancies in the public school system that have topped 200 in the recent period. In addition, the chronic understaffing has increased stress-induced "burnout" rates and medical leave for growing numbers of workers.

The hard right United Conservative government of Premier Danielle Smith has capped school boards from providing wage increases higher than 2.75 percent spread out over four years. The insulting offer given to the Edmonton workers would provide zero wage increases in the first two years. In the third year, they would receive 1.25 percent and then another 1.5 percent in the final year of the offer.

Another 950 CUPE public school custodians in Edmonton also voted this past weekend to mandate their union to issue a strike notice to fight against a similar miserable wage package in their contract dispute.



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