

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

## Week of strikes and protests in Argentina; Oregon nurses set to strike

9 December 2024

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

### Week of strikes and protests in Argentina

- December 2: University staff and educators protest wage crisis

The National Universities' Trade Union Front led a protest rally in Buenos Aires on Monday December 2, demanding wage increases for educators and supporting staff, so that no one has to spend Christmas under the poverty line, according to one of the leaders of the protest. The workers are also demanding improvements in working conditions.

The rally took place at the offices of the Education Ministry in the wealthy Recoleta district of the city.

The Education Ministry and the Milei administration have refused to negotiate with educators and supporting staff. Wages for both categories of workers increased by 2 percent in November, way below the inflation rates for the previous month. The government refuses to negotiate on working conditions.

- December 5: National day of protests over austerity

Protests led by the two factions of the Peronist Central Union of Argentine Workers (CTA), took place in many Argentine cities. The rallies demanded a "fighting strategy" and a national general strike to fight the austerity policies of the Milei administration. Protesting with striking CTA members were students, retirees, and members of the Mothers of the Disappeared during the 1976-1983 military dictatorship.

In addition to the rallies, one-day strikes took place by government workers, belonging to the CTA.

Absent from the demonstration was the General Labor Confederation (CGT), the largest union federation in the country. On November 19 the CGT apparatus declared a "truce" with the Milei administration, postponing all strike action at least until 2025 and declaring that a "fighting strategy" was not necessary at this juncture.

On December 3-4, slowdowns also took place among railroad workers and press workers.

### Workers denounce police violence in São Paulo, Brazil

Scores of protesters marched and rallied in the industrial city of São Paulo, Brazil to denounce the latest instance of police violence and to demand the removal of the regional Security Minister Guilherme Derrite, who routinely defends the police. The demonstrators rallied in front of São Paulo's Municipal Theatre.

On Monday, December 2 a group of 13 military motorcycle police had

thrown a man that they had been chasing from a bridge into the muddy and infected waters of a river below. The victim would have died had he not been rescued by people below. This attack was preceded by other incidents over the last few weeks that have also gone viral in social media.

São Paulo police killed 580 people between January and September 2024. Relative to 2023, this number represented an increase of 55 percent for white victims and 80 percent for black victims.

Early in November, a military police agent fired 11 bullets at the back of a black youth who had stolen some cleaning products in a market. Two days later, a 4-year-old was killed by military police while playing in the sidewalk in the coastal city of Santos, also in São Paulo State. Two days later police officers surrounded the 4-year-old's wake and tried to film the event, angering those in attendance.

Then, two weeks later, an unarmed 22-year-old medical student was executed by a military police agent for resisting arrest for vandalizing a police vehicle.

Police also fired at two teenagers, age 15 and 17. The oldest died.

### Protests against the construction of maximum-security prison in Central Ecuador

Citizens of the city of Archidona, in the Andes Mountains of Central Ecuador, and a center for tourism, protested on December 3 and 4 against the construction of a maximum-security prison. The demonstrators were joined by representatives of Indigenous communities in Napo Province, where Archidona is located.

A statement issued in a leaflet distributed at the protest march, denounces the "irreversible impact that this prison will have on the area." Instead, it calls on Napo officials to "prioritize the real needs of peoples in the area, such as health, education, roads, and industrial development."

Amada Grefa, Archidona's mayor, declared: "We give the government 24 hours to stop this project. If not, we will radicalize our activities and make use of our right to resistance."

Angry demonstrators questioned why they were denied the right to express their opinions before the prison project was launched a year ago.

The construction of maximum-security prisons was one of the election promises of Ecuador's President Noboa, ostensibly to address prison overcrowding. A total of two prisons are being built, including the one at Archidona.

### Oregon Nurses Association says 5,000 Providence health staff could strike

The Oregon Nurses Association (ONA) says that nearly 5,000 healthcare workers at seven Providence hospitals and seven clinics across the state have now voted to authorize a strike as contract talks continue. The latest strike vote took place at Providence Seaside. No strike date has been set.

An ONA statement said that “dangerous practices like understaffing critical care units and emergency rooms that delay care and endanger patients” were some of the key issues under negotiations. The bargaining unit includes newly organized doctors. The ONA called a walkout a “last resort.”

In October, 1,800 Providence St Vincent nurses in Portland voted to authorize strike for the second time this year.

In June, 3,000 Providence staff struck at six locations for three days over staffing levels and other issues in a largely choreographed action that allowed the hospital to maintain its operations. The walkout followed months of fruitless negotiations. The ONA agreed to end the walkout with no contract settlement.

### **University of Massachusetts Amherst faculty and staff rally against poverty wages**

Some 250 faculty and staff rallied with student support at the University of Massachusetts Amherst December 5 to protest low wages and poor working conditions. Chanting “UMass bosses make the money—while workers’ families go hungry,” members of AFSCME 1776, Professional Staff Union, the Massachusetts Society of Professors, the University Staff Association and the Graduate Employee Organization are all in negotiations with UMass management.

Workers charge that UMass wages are far behind other institutions. A survey of clerical and technical staff workers with the University Staff Association found one out of three suffered from food insecurity. When workers quit UMass to find better pay, the workload falls on remaining workers as management refuses to find replacements.

“UMass needs to stop acting like a Wall Street bank and invest in the staff and faculty who help our students succeed,” Andrew Gorry, co-chair of the Professional Staff Union, told Amherst Indy. “This campus is seeing massive surpluses—over \$100 million excess cash for two years running—while its employees take on second jobs and struggle to put food on the table. This is what failed leadership looks like.”

UMass has seen well over 100 arrests of anti-genocide protesters this year.

### **Seattle Art Museum issues final offer to museum security workers**

The Seattle Art Museum (SAM) issued their “last, best, and final offer” December 4 to museum security workers who are in their second week on strike over wages. Workers organized back in 2022 and after two years of bargaining are still without a contract.

The union, SAM VSO (VSO stands for Visitors Services Officers) began bargaining for a wage rate of \$27 an hour, then reduced that to \$24.75. Museum management’s final offer is \$23.25 and in a threat to workers, they indicated that offer will expire December 20.

But even the SAM VSO request falls far short of a living wage. The *Seattle Times* has reported that a renter in the city would need to make \$40.38 an hour in order to rent a one-bedroom apartment.

Workers are also seeking a union shop and the full restoration of

retirement benefits that were slashed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Minnesota healthcare workers slated to go on open-ended strike over staffing and wages**

About 70 healthcare workers at Essentia Health’s clinic and nursing home in Deer River, Minnesota were slated to strike December 9 unless management met their demands. The workers, members of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), carried out a five-day strike in early November that failed to move management. The current strike will be open-ended.

Essentia Health is using the excuse that the Deer River facilities service a rural community and therefore require substandard wages.

In an SEIU release, Sarah Roberts, a certified surgical technician, bargaining unit member and 20-year veteran at Deer River, stated, “We do the same work as other facilities and are tired of not getting paid the same ... We’ve seen such a reduction in staffing levels and are so overworked. It is unacceptable that we are so undervalued.”

In general, Essentia Health workers receive on average 5 percent less pay than their counterparts at other healthcare systems. Due to the understaffing, workers outside the SEIU bargaining unit who receive higher pay are allowed to float into their unit and perform SEIU labor. But Essentia refuses to adjust workers’ wages upward.

Essentia Health, based out of Duluth, Minnesota, employs 15,000 workers. Its CEO, David Herman, rakes in \$3.07 million in annual compensation.

### **Municipal workers strike in Greater Toronto area continues**

About 200 Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) workers are in their third week of a strike for a significant wage increase and job security protections for seasonal workers. The strike in Richmond Hill, a city of about 210,000 people just north of Toronto affects roads, water/sewage system, parks, arenas and community center workers. They have been without a new contract since March 31.

The union points out that city management has received massive pay increases, while workers are still being offered a pittance. Top managers received pay raises from 2020-2023 which boosted their salaries by as much as 49 percent. Department heads make as much as \$331,000, with many taking home upwards of \$200,000. Meanwhile, over that same period, workers were receiving paltry annual raises averaging about 1.5 percent per year.

After four years of wage erosion due to inflationary spikes, city management has only offered a 9.5 percent increase spread over three years. Workers are demanding that due to the large percentage of low-paid employees in the bargaining unit a significant wage increase must be made as a flat rate offer for all because percentage increases mean that lower-paid workers receive less. That arrangement could average out over two years to up to a 12 percent wage raise for lower-paid workers.

In addition, city management employs a large group of so-called seasonal workers with substandard contracts. Yet these workers can work as much as 49 weeks a year. Workers are demanding that these members of the bargaining unit be made permanent employees.





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