

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

## Renewed protests against President Boluarte in Peru; Duluth, Minnesota city workers vote to strike over wages and understaffing

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

### Renewed protests against President Boluarte in Peru

Holding signs that read “Boluarte Assassin!” protesters rallied in the airport of the city of Ayacucho in South Central Peru, waiting for President Boluarte to fly-in from Lima, the nation’s capital, to lead the ceremony celebrating the 200th anniversary of Battle of Ayacucho, the final battle for South American independence from Spain. The airport rally included family members of 10 victims of police repression carried out on December 15, 2022, in this region. Further protests will take place on that day.

Perhaps because of the airport protest, Boluarte skipped the ceremony and led the celebration from Lima.

The Ayacucho rally was part of a series of protests against the repressive Boluarte regime and in favor of social change in Peru, including in the city of Quinua, north of Ayacucho.

### Protests over new El Salvador mining legislation

Environmental NGOs and Salvadorean citizens rallied in front of the National Legislature building on December 10 demanding there be no changes to a 2017 law that prohibits mining of metallic ores.

The protests were sparked by President Nayib Bukele’s recent declarations that El Salvador has gold reserves valued at US\$131 billion, 380 percent of the nation’s gross domestic product, a huge sum that could transform that nation’s economy.

As the rally was taking place, other protesters marched on the Presidential Palace to deliver a petition against Bukele’s “state of exception,” police state measures being used against the population.

In addition to people from San Salvador, the nation’s capital, the rally included people from communities that would be most affected by the mining of gold and other metallic ores. The demonstrators warned that mining would imperil underground water supplies and water from the Lempa River, the largest and most important in the country. In addition, mining would risk the health of miners and those living in cities along the Central American Gold Belt in the mountains along El Salvador’s northeastern border with Honduras.

Due to El Salvador’s lack of sufficient modern water treatment plants, surface water is already highly contaminated and the population depends

on water from aquifers.

The mining of metallic ores was banned in El Salvador in 2017 after years of protests by members of communities most affected by the contamination produced by mining operations.

### Protests in 18 Brazilian cities demand arrest of coup leader Jair Bolsonaro

Protests took place on December 9 in 18 Brazilian states and in Brasilia, the nation’s capital. The demonstrators demanded the arrest of former president Jair Bolsonaro and 36 other people [mostly military officials] accused by the Federal Police (PF) of attempting a military coup to prevent president-elect Lula da Silva from taking power.

The marches and rallies took place in a popular reaction to news that the Bolsonaro had been informed of everything that had been planned for that day, including plans to assassinate Lula.

The thousands of demonstrators demanded no amnesty and jail terms instead for Bolsonaro and his fellow plotters.

Protesters also raised the demand against the 6-day work week, for a higher minimum wage, improved pensions, taxes on the wealthy, and an end to police violence.

### Mexico City professors protest Palestinian genocide

On December 10, the organization Academics with Palestine (Académicos con Palestina) organized a protest at Mexico City’s Benito Juárez Independence Monument (Hemiciclo a Benito Juárez). The theme of the protest was “Neutrality means supporting the genocide State that is killing children every 30 minutes in the Gaza strip.”

Over 20 academicians lined up at the monument and carried out a protest performance. One by one they lifted up signs that read “Stop the Genocide!,” “Palestinians have lived under occupation since 1967,” “hunger kills them, humiliates them, exterminates them!”

Some wore letters on their chest that together spelled “GENOCIDE.” They also displayed a sign that read “Human Rights also exist in Palestine.” At one point the performers dropped to the ground in a die-in.

The performers called on the audience and all Mexicans to boycott Zionist run corporations, and that Mexico could be next, since there are no guarantees that “they will not want to invade another nation.” The academicians also called on the Sheinbaum administration to break diplomatic relations with Israel.

Académicos con Palestina was established shortly after October 7, 2023. Its members are academicians and research specialists, from various prestigious campuses, including Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México [Mexico's largest university], Colegio de México, and Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana.

### **Duluth, Minnesota city workers vote to strike over wages and understaffing**

The union representing 483 city workers in Duluth Minnesota announced at a press conference December 11 that members had voted to grant strike authorization, accusing the city of paying substandard wages and under-staffing. The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 66 said workers had rejected a November 26 offer by the city that would pay a mere 1 percent in the first year followed by 6 percent over the remaining three years of the contract.

Two years ago, Duluth Mayor-elect Roger Reinert admitted workers were underpaid and data indicated an 8-12 percent market adjustment was needed. But the city has reneged on its promise to provide competitive wages.

AFSCME reports that workers at the city's water plant are compelled to work six, 12-hour shifts per week due to under-staffing. In a statement, the union revealed, "Essential workers across all departments... continue to face crushing workloads due to unfilled vacancies and non-competitive wages... Privatization of public services has further strained the budget, costing more than paying fair wages for our union members."

Local 66 represents snowplow drivers, inspectors, utility workers, library workers and parks, gas and waterline maintenance employees. The next mediated bargaining session will be January 6 and the current contract expires December 31. The union is required to grant a ten-day notice before embarking on a strike.

### **Custodial workers strike over wages at Catholic university in Rockville Centre, New York**

The 45 custodial workers at Molloy University in Rockville Centre, New York walked out on strike December 10 to demand higher wages. The members of 32BJ Service Employees International Union (SEIU) sent a letter to the administration declaring they have arrived at a "crossroads" and "many members of the custodial team must work two or more jobs simply to make ends meet."

Wages constitute the major disagreement according to the SEIU. The average wage is less than \$19 an hour with the bottom dropping to \$16.50 an hour.

Molloy and union negotiators last met on November 25 and the management has not agreed to any additional bargaining dates. The old agreement expired October 31. Custodians at the private Roman Catholic university first unionized back in 2018.

### **UnitedHealthcare sued for denying and underpaying physicians group**

lawsuit November 14 against UnitedHealthcare (UHC) alleging the insurance company has engaged in a policy of "deny, delay and underpay" resulting in unpaid services. The lawsuit charges UHC with over \$900,000 in unpaid independent dispute resolution (IDR) awards.

UHC is accused of deliberately delaying out-of-network payments beyond the mandated 30-day deadline. Once SpecialtyCare is either stiffed by UHC or receives an underpayment from UHC, the physicians are forced to slog through the Federal No Surprises Act (NSA) for a determination of fair compensation.

In a separate suit back in November 2023, United Healthcare was sued by Clarkson Law Firm on behalf of the families of two deceased patients. The suit alleges that United Healthcare used AI software with a 90 percent error rate to override the determinations of patients' doctors and deny care to patients under Medicare Advantage Plans.

### **Strike ends at Strand Bookstore in New York**

Workers at the Strand Book Store in New York have ratified a new multi-year agreement ending a brief strike.

The 110 employees walked out December 8 demanding an increase in starting pay, which currently stands at just \$16 per hour, the minimum wage in New York City. Management kept the stores open with part time and non-administrative staff.

The deal negotiated by United Auto Workers Local 2179 runs through August 31, 2028, provides for a starting wage just \$.50 per hour above the New York minimum wage. Paid time off will remain the same at 9-days annually. The union agreed to drop unfair labor practice charges.

### **Strike vote by workers at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario**

More than 1,000 campus workers belonging to three different CUPE (Canadian Union of Public Employees) locals have given overwhelming authorization to strike

The workers include skilled trades, custodial and foodservice as well as educational and laboratory technical staff and library technicians. The overall vote in favor of a strike was 96 percent.

According to a CUPE news release workers have seen their wages fall behind inflation by 11 to 14 percent in recent years. Many workers do not earn a living wage and one quarter have taken on second or third jobs to make ends meet. Trades workers earn \$10 - \$15 an hour less than similar skilled workers in the area. Understaffing is also an issue.

While the contacts for trades and other workers expired back in June, contract talks did not get underway until the fall. CUPE has still not set a strike deadline.



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Physicians who work for Tennessee-based SpecialtyCare filed a federal