

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

## Contract talks stalled between Costco and 18,000 Teamsters; Ontario community college faculty near possible strike

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

### Parents hold protest in Mexico City to demand justice for Ayotzinapa 43

On December 26, parents of the 43 teaching students disappeared on the night of September 26 and 27, 2014 marched in Mexico City and rallied at the historic Church of Guadalupe demanding justice for the now presumed dead students.

On September 26, 2014, 57 students at the Ayotzinapa teaching college in Guerrero State were attacked in the city of Iguala by police and army forces, while preparing to join a protest in Mexico City. Forty-Three were abducted and “disappeared.”

The demonstrators demanded that the Sheinbaum administration release information about what happened that day, and where their children’s bodies may be located. “We keep on insisting that this crime not go unpunished” declared the official call for the march and rally. “Not one minute of silence, and a whole life of struggle” was the slogan of the protest march and rally.

### Protest demands an end to lay-offs in El Salvador

On Monday December 23, the Movement of Fired Workers (Movimiento de Trabajadores Despedidos, MTD) and other political groups condemned the layoff of over 3,000 education, healthcare, court employees and other government employees by the administration of fascist President Nayib Bukele. There are plans to lay off another 8,000, according to a recently approved government budget, part of a deal between the government and the International Monetary Fund.

Among the sacked workers are 800 indispensable Health Ministry employees, including doctors, nurses, and laboratory workers. Public clinics will be closed.

Scores of workers rallied at the monument to the Constitution in San Salvador, the nation’s capital city.

The demonstrators called their protest “Banging pots 2024, black Christmas” (El Cacerolazo 2024, negra Navidad). Demonstrators

pointed out that the ongoing wave of layoffs meant that thousands of families face a black Christmas. Many of the protesting workers described how, with no explanation, workers were escorted out of their jobs by security officers when they arrived in the morning.

### Argentine workers march against closure of memorials to victims of torture

On Friday December 27, employees the Human Rights Secretariat (DD.HH), facing government layoffs together with hundreds of workers and students rallied around the ESMA Memory Museum, formerly a military School (ESMA) that was largest of dozens of torture and murder centers used by the 1976-1981 Videla dictatorship. Hundreds also rallied around a lighthouse tower in the city of Mar del Plata, another center of torture and murder.

The protest was in response to the announced intentions of the Milei administration to shut down the museums and exhibits set up in remembrance of the thousands of victims of the dictatorship.

A day before the rallies, DD.HH. employees had begun to receive lay-off telegrams.

The shutdown of memorials to the victims of the dictatorship, and of the Human Rights Secretariat, is in line with the historical revisionism that President Milei and Vice President Villaruel now promote that glorifies the tyrannical, fascist junta headed by Videla, which disappeared over 30,000 workers and youth, in alliance with military regimes in Chile, Brazil and Uruguay as part of the US sponsored Operation Condor.

### Contract talks between Costco and 18,000 Teamsters stalled

The Teamsters union announced December 20 that contract negotiations with Costco “remain stalled.” The union said the company had rejected 98 percent of the drivers and warehouse workers’ non-economic proposals. Management has also reduced the number of remaining negotiating sessions from five to three.

Confronted by the militancy and anger of workers, Tom Erickson, director of the Teamsters Warehouse Division, issued a blustering statement declaring, “We won’t settle for a penny less than a record-

breaking agreement that reflects their worth. And if Costco fails to present an acceptable contract offer, we will not work a day past the January 31 expiration date.”

Some 18,000 Costco workers have joined the Teamsters in the recent period and are demanding improvements in wages, seniority and a grievance procedure. Costco workers around the country have voted to grant strike authorization, in some cases by near-unanimous votes.

### **Utah ski patrol workers strike over wages and benefits**

Nearly 2,000 ski patrol workers at the Park City Mountain Resort in Park City, Utah, launched a strike December 27 after months of negotiations failed to meet workers’ demands on wages, benefits, paid time off, holiday pay and parental leave. Workers with the Park City Professional Ski Patrol Association (PCPSPA) voted by a 98.5 percent margin a week earlier to strike and a subsequent seven-hour mediated negotiating session did nothing to change matters.

Vail Resorts, which operates Park City, says their current proposal amounts to a 4 percent increase. The union responded, “The company confirmed the 4 percent offer it has been publicly communicating includes our merit increases earned last season under our old contract, which the company has been withholding as leverage in these negotiations. This makes the company’s latest proposal effectively a 0.5 percent increase for the bargaining unit.”

The union is seeking a starting wage of \$23 an hour over the current \$21 and additional pay for veteran patrollers with advanced skills. Also, workers want to adjust their benefits package to include a stipend for the months they are employed and put an end to the burden of having to switch insurance brokers every six months.

Vail has responded to the strike by bringing in ski patrols from its other resort operations. The PCPSPA has issued an Instagram post appealing to ski patrol workers at other mountain resorts: “We are reaching out to our larger patrol family, either with Vail Resorts or not, and asking you to NOT accept any offers to come and work at Park City in the event we are forced by the company to go on strike.”

Park City Mountain Resort is a major tourist attraction and employs a considerable number of Park City residents. It features several training courses for the US Olympic ski team and has hosted snowboarding and alpine giant slalom events.

### **Piedmont Airline workers rally to demand increased wages**

Passenger service and ramp workers for Piedmont Airlines picketed outside Norfolk International Airport December 16 to draw attention to dismal wages, safety issues and the lack of healthcare for part-time workers. The 176 Piedmont workers are one section of the Communications Workers of America (CWA) who have been holding pickets at ten airports across the United States.

The CWA has been negotiating with Piedmont for more than a year. The company’s proposal calls for a mere 16 cents an hour pay increase over the course of a five-year contract where starting pay is \$12.50 an hour. The upper pay range tops out at under \$19 an hour.

Piedmont is a regional airline headquartered in Maryland and is a

wholly owned subsidiary of American Airlines Group. In 2023 it brought in revenues of \$13.6 billion.

### **Ontario community college faculty near January strike date**

About 15,000 full and part-time professors, instructors, counsellors and librarians, members of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU), could be in a legal strike position early in the new year at the province’s 24 public colleges. The countdown to any possible job action comes after 30 days of bargaining, 4 days of conciliation, a 76 percent strike vote, and 3 days of mediation with the College Employer Council (CEC)—the bargaining agent for the managements of the colleges. The union and management have scheduled one last non-binding arbitration mediation to be held January 6 to 7.

The education workers are demanding a significant increase in wages, an end to unpaid labour and enhanced job security. Three-quarters of teachers, counsellors and librarians are employed under low wage short term contracts with little to no benefits or job security. In addition, the workload formula for the education workers has not been revised in 40 years. Today, about one-half of bargaining unit members are not paid for preparation time, student evaluations and curriculum development. The unpaid time can amount to a significant portion of the workers’ workday.

The predicament faced by college employees is rooted in years of budget cuts by Ontario governments of all political stripes over the past several decades. In order to fund the Ontario colleges to the average of other provinces, it is estimated that the disbursements by the hard-right provincial Conservative government of Premier Doug Ford would have to double.

With no such funding expected, colleges have moved to prop up dwindling finances through a steady increase in tuition fees, with particularly large jumps in tuition for international students. But with recent moves by the federal Liberals to slash the number of foreign student visas, revenues from tuition sources have already decreased by \$752 million.



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