

Workers Struggles: The Americas

4 April 2018

Newfoundland ironworkers continue strike

Canada

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

Newfoundland ironworkers continue strike

Iron workers in Labrador City in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador went on strike March 27 against the Iron Ore Company of Canada (IOC) after rejecting the company's final offer at the beginning of the week.

The 1,300 ironworkers voted 92 percent in favor of strike action last month, which brought some improvements of wages and pension benefits in a new offer, but the company's use and treatment of temporary workers remains an outstanding issue.

While both sides say they are willing to continue negotiations, no new talks are currently scheduled and the company has put operations on temporary shutdown. In a related development, 305 workers at IOC's port operations in nearby Sept Iles, Quebec have voted in favor of strike action, which could come as early as April 10.

A march in support of the ironworkers is set for April 5 ending in a rally in front of the main gate of the facility.

Ontario casino workers set to strike

Nearly 2,300 workers employed at Caesars Windsor, who voted almost unanimously in favor of strike action in March, could be on strike this week if a deal is not reached by the strike deadline of April 4.

Members of Unifor who are affected by the contract dispute include dealers, housekeepers, servers and cooks. The main issues in dispute include wages and working conditions, but the union has said they want to table all nonmonetary issues to focus on financial demands. While the union is promising that a strike will force the closure of the casino, they say they are hopeful that can still be avoided.

Carleton University strike resumes after failed mediation

The month-long strike by 850 workers at Carleton University in Ottawa

resumed last week after a 19-hour mediated bargaining session concluded last Thursday in the latest of failed attempts to reach a new deal.

The workers on strike include administrators and support workers, members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE). The union is accusing the university of making false and misleading statements. This is the second round of mediated negotiations to end in a stalemate.

Though there has been certain agreement on wages, the issue of pensions remains the main obstacle to a deal, with the union indicating it will not allow the plan to change from defined benefits without concessions from Carleton.

Although both sides say they want to resume talks, none are currently scheduled while some classes have been cancelled as a result of the strike.

Latin America

Argentine bank employees to hold fourth short strike over pay, benefits

As parity talks between representatives of Argentina's banks and their employees remain stalled, the Bank Employees Association (AB) announced a one-day strike for April 6 if the banks do not offer "a superior salary proposal" in place of their current offer. The banks have offered a 7 percent raise to be paid in four or five installments. Since inflation in Argentina this year is projected to reach around 20 percent, the raise would in effect represent a substantial salary cut.

At the same time, the banks want a 50 percent cut in some benefits, including the annual Bank Employees Day bonus. AB warned that "the absence of a just and definitive salary agreement will provoke consequences for the workers' family economy."

The AB statement also called for a 48-hour strike on April 3 and 4 at all Bank of Buenos Aires Province branches due to "the situation of this financial entity and the benefit situation of its personnel." If there is still no shift in the banks' proposals, AB will call for a 48-hour strike next week.

AB has already called limited strikes in each of the last three months, with no movement by management.

Cottonseed oil workers in Argentina strike over wages, labor conditions

Following plenary assemblies and a vote by delegates, Federation of the Oleaginous Industrial Complex, Cotton Gin Operators and Related Industries of the Argentine Republic called a one-day strike to begin the night of March 27. The strike was called in opposition to management intransigence over wage demands and threats and intimidation against workers.

Federation bargainers have proposed a 22 percent wage increase, while

the CIARA and CARBIO employer associations “attempt to make us accept a 15 percent offer and cede labor conditions,” according to the federation’s website. It cites the recent firings of 44 workers at Cargill, the nation’s largest agro-export firm, as an example of the campaign of intimidation by management.

In addition, management is pushing for separate contract negotiations to be held at individual companies and for a tier-based wage system, gambits that “seek to fragment and divide the collective into first, second and third [tiers].”

Within a few hours of the start of the strike, the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security decreed “obligatory conciliation” with a 15-day deadline. The federation then suspended the strike.

Cabin crew workers at Chilean airline vote for strike over contract

Members of the Cabin Crew Union of LAN Express, a Chilean subsidiary of LATAM Airlines, voted March 29 in favor of strike action following the failure of contract talks that have gone on for months. The vote to walk out was over 90 percent. The union has about a thousand members.

The strike, however, will be delayed until April 9 due to mandatory mediation to be held by the Labor Inspectorate. A LATAM communiqué, while mouthing “commitment to reach a satisfactory accord for the parties,” said that “the company will adopt all necessary measures with the objective of mitigating the impact” of a strike, according to [adnradio.cl](#).

Chilean copper mine workers reject contract offer as government orders mediation

Workers at the Radomiro Tomic mine complex in northern Chile’s Antofagasta region rejected a final offer by state-owned Codelco, the world’s largest copper mining firm, on March 27. The union, with around 740 members, claims the majority of workers at the complex.

The union and management are now engaged in government-initiated mediation. With pretax profits from 2017 at about US\$2.88 billion, and expectations of a rise in copper prices, Codelco CEO Nelson Pizarro “called on workers to show restraint and moderation in negotiations,” according to a Reuters report.

A smaller union, the 109-member administrators union, voted to accept a contract that includes a one-time bonus of US\$14,500 over three years and a raise that is 1 percent above the inflation rate.

The United States

Strike at Georgia Pacific plant in Mississippi

Workers at the Georgia Pacific plant in Taylorsville, Mississippi are continuing a walkout that began last week over scheduling issues. The strike followed 12 months of fruitless negotiations with management at the wood products firm. The plant employs more than 400 workers from across central Mississippi.

The workers are members of Carpenters Local 2086. They say that constant uncertainty over vacations and time off wreaks havoc on their

personal lives. One worker told the local news media, “All we ask is for them to give us something in writing say they won’t work us like that. They say this is supposed to have work-life balance, but there is no balance, because all we do is work.”

Management says “flexible” working arrangements are necessary for the company to stay “competitive.”

North Carolina construction workers picket construction company guilty of workplace violations

Construction workers for Border Rebar in Charlotte, North Carolina picketed Interstate 77 and held demonstrations last month to protest safety conditions, injuries, low wages and lack of benefits such as health care. Last year the Department of Labor cited serious violations and imposed fines against the company that provides rebar or reinforcement steel products for the construction industry.

The workers are calling on the North Carolina Department of Transportation to cease working with Border Rebar on construction projects, including those on Interstate 77, given its abysmal record in relation to living standards and injuries of its workers.

Workers also protested to the City of Charlotte about Border Rebar. City officials said they would study the construction company and took refuge behind the fact that the company is subcontractor and thus it has limited legal authority to deal with the company concerning workers’ issues.

A recent report called “Build a Better South” noted that Charlotte experienced a 24 percent increase in construction between 2010 and 2015. Some 44 percent of construction workers go without benefits and 38 percent have no workers’ compensation coverage. They suffer similar injustices as those experienced by Border Rebar, including the disturbing occurrence of wage theft.

University of Washington laundry workers face layoff

Some 120 laundry workers employed by University of Washington hospitals and clinics are facing the loss of their jobs as UW Medicine is considering replacing its laundry service with a private contractor. Almost all the workers, many of whom are immigrants, work for only \$15 to \$18 per hour.

Wednesday, March 28, virtually all the laundry workers and students from the UW chapter of United Students Against Sweatshops staged a rally at the University of Washington to protest UW Medicine’s plans. They submitted a petition to the office of UW President Ana Marie Cauce demanding that UW drop its plan for the laundry. The following day, layoff notices were issued to 15 workers. UW Medicine was quick to deny that the layoffs were not punitive but due to a decrease in workload.

The workers fear, and rightly so, that privatization of the laundry will result in even less pay, less benefits, if any, and loss of their jobs. With poverty wages, they also feel threatened with the prospect of being homeless. The Seattle area—where the two richest men in the world, Jeff Bezos and Bill Gates, have homes—has the third highest rate of homelessness in the US.

UW Medicine is seeking to justify the measures saying it incurred a \$75 million loss in 2017, even though it has an operating budget of \$5 billion and received \$750 million in federal grants and contracts in 2016 while the annual operating budget of Consolidated Laundry is only \$5 million.



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