

Canadian Pacific Railway workers vote to strike

Workers Struggles: The Americas

17 April 2018

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

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More than 3,000 conductors and engineers employed by Canadian Pacific Railway (CP Rail) across the country could be on strike as early as April 21 if negotiations between the company and Teamsters Canada Rail Conference (TCRC) do not produce a deal before then.

Workers recently voted 94 percent in favor of strike action following the expiry of their last contract at the end of 2017 and after they voted in November to reject a deal previously accepted by the union. Union negotiators claim that the rising profits of CP are based on job cuts, work speedup and stagnant wages. They point to demands by the company for crews to be available 24/7 and requirements that they work “to the point of exhaustion,” which they say must be addressed in any new deal.

At the same time TCRC is currently carrying out ratification voting on a new contract with CP’s rival, Canadian National Railway.

Yukon city workers set to strike

Around 300 workers employed by the City of Whitehorse in the Yukon Territory are set to walk off the job this week as their union, the Yukon Employees Union (YEU), continues mediated negotiations in avert a strike or possible lock-out.

The strike notice issued by the YEU, which is part of the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC), covers waste, water and parks workers and extends to include 34 transit workers who have been on a work-to-rule since March 19. The main issues in dispute include severance pay and the proposed cancellation of bonuses for new hires that would create a two-tiered system. A number of workers will remain on the job as a result of essential service provisions agreed to last week.

Montreal teachers prepare job action in violation of contract

Nearly 9,000 teachers in primary, secondary and vocational schools across the city of Montreal are preparing a one-day walkout on May 1 in violation of a contract signed by their union, the Alliance des professeurs de Montréal, that deprives them of the right to strike.

According to union leaders, teachers in Montreal are fighting to

maintain hard-won rights, such as the right to strike, that are under threat by the Commission scolaire de Montréal (CSDM), the school board they are negotiating with. Other matters at issue include working conditions and the lack of substitute teachers. The teachers voted 77 percent in favor of the “illegal” strike to take place on International Workers’ Day, and union leaders have said they are prepared to pay any fines incurred through the job action.

Thunder Bay health clinic workers strike

Sixty-five workers at the Port Arthur Health Centre in Thunder Bay, Ontario, went on strike last week after working without a contract since December of last year.

The striking workers, who are all women, include secretaries, medical aides and other staff who are organized under union giant Unifor. According to union negotiators, most of the workers at the clinic are so poorly paid that they will see a wage increase when the minimum wage goes up next year. In addition, most of the workers are employed on a casual basis with fewer benefits and job security than full-time employees.

No talks are currently scheduled, and officials at the Centre say it will remain open and operating in spite of the job action.

Settlement in four-week Ohio strike

Just under 200 workers at the Gradall Industries industrial plant in New Philadelphia, Ohio, returned to work April 9 after four weeks on strike over health care and wages. The strike began on March 12 after members of the International Association of Machinists (IAM) Local 1285 overwhelming voted down a company proposal that according to the union contained language that left workers vulnerable to the ever-increasing cost of health care.

Details are limited, but the new contract contains a wage increase of 8.25 percent spread across three years, and the IAM has told the media it “held the line” on health care. There was supposedly also an increase in pensions.

Gradall Industries was purchased in 2006 by Texas-based Alamo Group when the New Philadelphia plant had a workforce of 400. Alamo Group retains a workforce of 3,300 employees and operates 26 plants in North America, Europe, Australia and Brazil.

Drivers and warehouse workers strike Minnesota beer distributor

over safety concerns

Drivers and warehouse workers for beer distributor J.J. Taylor in Minneapolis, Minnesota, walked off the job April 9 over safety concerns for drivers. Management tried to split the 93 members of Teamsters Local 792 by offering warehouse workers a 10 percent wage increase, but they declined the offer and voted down the contract in solidarity with drivers.

J.J. Taylor, the largest beer distributor in Minnesota, sought to introduce greater efficiency in its delivery routes. One element of its plan was to put an end to what it calls package-only beer deliveries, in which a driver with high seniority, generally over 50 years of age, could bid on a route that delivers only cases and not heavy beer kegs.

“They are expected to pick up a 175-pound keg by themselves,” Teamsters District 32 official Edward Reynoso told WCCO, “and historically they’ve provided helpers and they’ve decided to change their whole delivery system to where these guys wouldn’t have these helpers.”

Argentine teachers go on five-day strike over pay demands

Teachers in Argentina’s western Neuquén province began a five-day strike on April 12 to demand a “dialog discussion” with the Provincial Education Council (CPE) over wage issues. The walkout followed a yes vote of 1,755 out of 2,500 attendees in a plenary session called by their union, the Neuquén Education Workers Association (ATEN) in the town of Zapala.

The provincial government has held fast to extending for a trimester last year’s contract, which provides for raises in accordance with the inflation rate, which is habitually underestimated by official statistics. The teachers want a more definite figure. They also are striking to protest the docking of their pay for their participation in a two-day nationwide teachers strike on March 5 and 6.

On April 12, hundreds of teachers congregated at the CPE headquarters in the province’s eponymous capital to demand that the CPE set a date for the meeting. Plans for the rest of the week included a demonstration at the Government House on April 16 and assemblies on April 17 and 18 to assess the situation and decide on the next steps to take in case of continued government intransigence.

Mexican medical workers hold 12-hour strike over “criminalization” of medicine

Doctors and other medical workers in México City and the states of Nuevo León, Jalisco, Oaxaca, Tabasco and Quintana Roo, as well as other regions in Mexico, stopped work for 12 hours on April 13 to demand the “decriminalization” of their work. Protest actions were directed at the imprisonment of a doctor in Oaxaca after a three-year-old on whom he operated last November died from an allergic reaction to an anesthetic. The doctor was accused of “malicious homicide”—i.e., first-degree murder—and taken to a penal facility in the town of Ixcotel on April 2.

Medical workers in various cities demonstrated, chanting, “We are all doctors, not criminals; we are all Luis,” referring to the accused doctor, Luis Alberto Pérez Méndez, who was released the day of the strike. #YoSoyMedico17, which organized the walkout, issued a statement calling for modification of the Federal Penal Code to decriminalize the practice of medicine. The statement said, “All that we want is that

[doctors] not be punished without having been judged beforehand, and that they be judged by an expert in the field.”

The statement referred to a meeting with Health Secretary José Narro Robles and his team in December 2016 to discuss problems in the delivery of health care and medical services, but complained that since then, he had “fed us atole [a corn-based hot beverage] with his finger.” In other words, he had strung them along with “a lack of commitment and seriousness and with ineptitude.”

Demonstrators, many speaking anonymously for fear of reprisals, told reporters of the lack or state of disrepair of equipment, of decaying infrastructure and shortages of medication and supplies. #YoSoyMedico17 is calling for the creation of commissions in each state to take proposals to state legislatures and to the national government. It is also soliciting a meeting with President Enrique Peña Nieto.

Dominican Republic teachers protest over privatization plans, benefits, retirement and other issues

Several thousand members of the Dominican Professors Association (ADP) and their supporters gathered in front of the Ministry of Education in the Dominican Republic’s capital, Santo Domingo, on April 13. The protest was not part of a strike action, since the day marked the 48th anniversary of the founding of the ADP, a day off for members.

The ministry building had a heavy police presence and perimeter fences to keep the protesters away. Protesters, mostly dressed in blue, called for more investment in education, repairs of infrastructure, construction of kitchens and lunchrooms, improvements to school lunch programs, equalization of salaries, readjustments of retirement payments and the end of delays in overdue wages, among others.

A primary demand was made against plans to eventually privatize education. The ADP accused Education Minister Andrés Navarro of “a series of provocations and a campaign against teachers,” who have seen a number of benefits acquired years ago being rolled back.

Bolivian soccer players strike for overdue wages

Members of Blooming, a top Bolivian soccer team, went on strike April 13 to demand the payment of overdue wages. The team, which is riding on the crest of a six-game winning streak, has had chronic problems getting paid for their efforts. Players have yet to be paid for February and March, while some are still waiting for their January deposits. Adding insult to injury, management has not yet paid them for a South America Cup classification reward, either.

Club manager Juan Jordán has held them off a number of times with promises that he would pay them after the next game. The last time he swore that he would pay them on April 12 following a scheduled match on April 17, in which Blooming squeaked by 1-0. The promised money did not materialize.

This is the second time in two weeks that the Blooming players have walked. On March 30, two days before an important match, they refused to practice and demanded 30 percent of their January salary, which they got. They went on to win the game. They are now demanding 50 percent of one of their two salaries before they will return to practice and play.



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