

Chilean copper miners vote for strike; Toronto Bombardier workers ratify deal as De Havilland strike continues

## Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Latin America

### Chilean copper miners set to strike

Miners from BHP Escondida Copper overwhelmingly rejected a proposed contract and have announced their intention to strike over wages and profit sharing. Escondida, in Chile's Atacama Desert, is the largest privately-owned copper mine in the world.

In an attempt to prevent the strike by the 2,175 miners, management offered US \$23,000 per worker, a combination of sign-in bonus and loans, far short of the workers' demands of one percent of dividends. BHP management is demanding givebacks on job conditions and working hours under conditions of record copper prices across the world.

Miners point to the sacrifices many of them have made under conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, which have seen scores of workers infected. A year ago, BHP management had confirmed the infection of 150 miners at Escondida.

This will be the first strike by Escondida miners since the 44-day strike of 2017, their longest work stoppage ever.

### Teachers demand education reform

The National Educators Union organized a protest rally last Wednesday across the western province of Guayas, Ecuador, to demand that education reforms approved by the outgoing parliament be implemented. Since then protests have continued across the country. On August 2, teachers blocked bridges in the port city of Guayaquil. Union leader Jose Escala warned the government that teachers were fed up and ready to take "radical" measures unless the government and courts carry out

the reforms.

The reform legislation set a minimum wage of US \$1,000 per teacher and called for the rehiring of teachers laid off during the COVID pandemic, the rehiring of special education teachers and the right of teachers to retire after 30 years on the job. However, the Ecuadorean government of President Guillermo Lasso insists that there is no money for teachers.

Over three weeks ago, on July 12, 30 teachers declared a hunger strike in the Ecuadorean cities of Quito, Guayaquil, Portoviejo and Cuenca, demanding that the Constitutional Court rule in favor of the education reform.

Others have joined the hunger strike since then, increasing the number to 80, including teachers, parents and students from across Ecuador. Union leaders fear that the situation is getting out of their control and are calling for a compromise solution.

### Guatemala national strike demands the resignation of President Giammattei

On July 29, students, peasants and social organizations rallied in Guatemala demanding the resignations of President Alejandro Giammattei and other public officials, an end to corruption and a science-based attack on the COVID-19 pandemic, which has affected 360,000 people in Guatemala, killing more than ten thousand.

The rallies took place in Guatemala City and in the nation's 22 departments, with participants blocking roads and organizing other acts of protest. Joining in the protests have been many sections of the working class, including part-time transportation workers.

United States

### Pittsburgh nurses vote to authorize strike over staffing shortage

Nurses at West Penn Hospital in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania voted to authorize a strike after six months of negotiations. Nurses are frustrated that hospital management has failed to respond to their request for measures to deal with the nurse staffing crisis, which is placing enormous stress on the workforce.

“A nursing crisis has been happening before the pandemic,” Kayla Rath, a postpartum nurse, told a rally last month. “It’s just gotten much worse. I know many nurses that left because it was too stressful and we haven’t replaced them.”

Despite the fact that the hospital has consecutively earned the Magnet designation for excellence in nursing, management has not seen fit to respond to the crisis. In August of 2020, the 650 nurses voted to join the Service Employees International Union (SEIU).

West Penn Hospital is part of the Allegheny Health Network, which comprises several facilities. The SEIU already represents some 4,000 workers at Allegheny Health, and there is no indication that they will seek to unite these workers in a common struggle. Dan Laurent, vice president of corporate communications, responded to the strike vote, saying, “This is a normal part of negotiations and it does not mean that a strike will occur.”

### **Workers conclude three-day strike against Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory**

Some 235 skilled trades workers ended their three-day unfair labor practices strike July 29 against the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, in Livermore, California. Members of the Society of Professionals, Scientists and Engineers (SPSE) Local 11 were protesting management’s recent move to make on-call work rotations mandatory without negotiating with the union.

On-call work had been voluntary for a number of years, but according to SPSE, management was not hiring a sufficient number of workers and was placing restrictions on the process. The result was that workers began to refuse on-call work, leading to the lab’s move to make it mandatory.

The National Labor Relations Board ruled against Lawrence Livermore National Security (LLNS), a group led by the University of California and Bechtel National, which manages the lab. A court date has been set for October.

But other issues clearly underlay the strike conducted by electricians, mechanics, plumbers, pipe-fitters, sheet metal workers, welders and other skilled trades. The LLNS and the union have been bogged down in negotiations since the old contract expired in 2019. A spokesperson for LLNL said the two sides “remain separated by several economic issues and management rights.”

The Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory oversees research and development of weapons, manages the United States’ nuclear arsenal and is involved in security and intelligence planning in relation to global adversaries.

Canada

### **Toronto Bombardier workers ratify contract; De Havilland workers continue strike**

One thousand five hundred aerospace workers, members of Unifor, voted Saturday to ratify a new three-year contract after a five-day strike against aircraft manufacturer Bombardier. The contract ratification leaves another 700 De Havilland workers, also members of Unifor, in the lurch. The workers remain on strike at the same Downsview manufacturing facility.

The 2,200 workers build Bombardier’s Global business aircraft and the final orders for De Havilland’s discontinued Q400 Dash 8 turboprop. Although full details of the just ratified Bombardier contract have not been released, workers took deep concessions on wages. With cost-of-living indexes in Canada running to 3.4 percent year-over-year, the new contract provides for increases of only 0.5 percent in Year 1, 0.75 percent in Year 2 and one percent in Year 3—in effect a significant real-wage cut.

At the De Havilland operation, the 700 workers are continuing their strike. Hundreds of workers assigned to the Dash 8 operation are already on layoff as production comes to an end. Although no plans have been officially announced, Unifor fears that the company will move any future contracts to another facility in Alberta.

Unifor is insisting that any contracts for new De Havilland turboprops must be located in the Greater Toronto Area. De Havilland has refused to offer this commitment. The union has been lobbying the Ontario and federal governments to support initiatives that would keep any future production in the province. De Havilland’s parent company, Longview Aviation Capital, also operates in Calgary, Alberta and Victoria, British Columbia under Unifor contracts.

In earlier statements, local union officials told reporters that should either contract remain unsettled, Unifor would strike both companies because they share some of the same facilities at the Downsview complex. However, the union has quickly jettisoned that so-called commitment with the ratification of the deal at Bombardier.



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