

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

26 February 2024

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## Argentine dockworkers declare a national strike

Due to a wage dispute in the Patagonian province of Chubut, the Argentine Dock Workers Federation (FEPA) declared all Argentine ports on strike. As of now, the strike, set to begin on Monday, February 26, is of indefinite duration.

At issue is the refusal of several companies in the port of Puerto Rawson, Chubut to abide by a contract agreement on wages and working conditions for dock workers. The decision to strike was approved by all the local dock worker unions that belong to FEPA last Wednesday, February 21.

The strike action takes place in the context of a national dispute between provincial governments and the administration of President Javier Milei, over the cancellation of federal subsidies to the provinces.

The FEPA is also appealing to Chubut Governor Ignacio Torres that the provincial administration intervene on the dock workers behalf.

## Three days of struggle in Argentina against Milei's austerity policies

As with the national strike of January 24, and other protests, the Argentine trade union apparatuses are limiting workers' job actions to one-day strikes, to cool off workers anger over the attacks of the far-right Milei government.

### *Wednesday: Railroad workers strike*

Railroad workers carried out a protest 24-hour strike on February 21, demanding an increase in real wages to compensate for the inflationary spiral affecting Argentina. Omar Maturano, who heads the Fraternidad rail workers union made it clear that the union apparatus was not demanding a raise, but a "re-composition" of salaries that mirrors the rise in prices. He also called for a general strike by all the unions.

### *Thursday: Health workers strike*

Health workers carried out a 24-hour national protest strike on February 22 demanding the "re-composition" of health workers' wages, and to protest President Milei's brutal austerity measures. The health workers' union (FATSA) pointed out in a communique that workers' wages have not kept up with inflation since 2023.

Striking workers went to work on Thursday but attended no patients, except for emergencies.

### *Friday: Hunger protests across Argentina*

On February 23 thousands of people rallied across Argentina demanding food for soup kitchens, whose supplies have been totally cut-off by the Milei administration. There were 500 protest sites across the nation. The demonstrations were led by humanitarian groups, neighborhood and

peasant associations in charge of 44,000 soup kitchens, left-Peronist and pseudo-left groups.

"Hunger does not wait" read one of the banners displayed in Buenos Aires. As a result of Milei's brutal austerity policies, government food subsidies have been totally cut off, while an increasing number of desperate citizens are forced to look for food in garbage dumps.

In Buenos Aires, at a rally at the Ministry of Human Capital, protesters were attacked by police, who were armed with nightsticks and pepper gas.

## Workers and retirees demand wage and pension increases in Peru

On Wednesday, February 21, thousands of workers and retirees demanded higher pay in demonstrations across the country, and an end to the country's inflationary crisis. The marches and rallies were sponsored by the General Workers Federation (GGT) and the National People's Assembly (ANP), which represents indigenous groups.

In addition, an ANP spokesperson denounced the government, "which took power with blood and fire, illegal executions and other crimes against humanity," criminalizing protests "under conditions of economic depression and working-class hunger."

## Venezuela steelworkers demand freedom for strike leaders

On February 21, scores of workers protested in the city of Guyana, Bolivar state, demanding that steelworkers Leonardo Azocar and Daniel Romero be freed. The workers rallied at the Venezuelan Guyana Corporation (CVG), which owns the steel company Sidor, and then marched to the Court Building. The next day, workers rallied in Caracas' financial center with the same demands, calling for support from all workers and youth in Venezuela.

Both workers have been under arrest since June 11 of last year, when they led a week-long strike by 600 Sidor workers demanding collective bargaining rights and higher wages, and condemning the government's rejection of a promise to take over CVG. On February 19 Azocar and Romero were transported to El Rodeo Prison, a military prison where their safety is threatened.

## Hundreds of Minnesota nursing home workers vote for one-day walkout

Hundreds of workers at 10 nursing homes across the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan region have voted to carry out a one-day strike March 5

to protest under-staffing and to demand improved wages, benefits and working conditions. Members of Service Employees Local 663 want a minimum wage of \$25 per hour to combat the fact that nearly half of all workers make less than \$20 an hour.

Minnesota has seen the loss of 26 nursing homes since 2019 and the poverty wages have led to a loss of workers, resulting in understaffing that affects patient care. Workers are being forced to take extra shifts and are working as many as 20 or 30 days in a row. In addition, lack of staff is resulting in an escalation of injuries making nursing home injury rates the highest among all industries.

### **Teamsters at Anheuser-Busch preparing for March 1 strike**

Some 5,000 members of the Teamsters union are preparing for a March 1 strike after union president Sean O'Brien declared a strike is "imminent and unavoidable" earlier this month. Workers voted by a 99 percent margin back in December to authorize strike action against 12 Anheuser-Busch plants across the United States.

Details of negotiations have not been divulged, but the Teamsters indicate that Anheuser-Busch's proposals are "regressive" and have been accompanied by the threat of layoffs and the closure of breweries. In the last year the company has laid off 750 members of the union's bargaining unit. The old agreement expires February 29.

### **New York City building workers hold protest demonstrations against concessions**

Building workers held rallies across the Bronx in New York to protest the threat by the Bronx Realty Advisory Board (BRAB) to terminate contracts with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 32BJ. Last year BRAB negotiated a four-year agreement with the SEIU with 3 percent annual wage increases and no cuts in benefits.

BRAB is now demanding this contract be reopened and wage and benefit concessions be made by the union or it will terminate the contracts on March 31.

### **Strike wave building at Toronto's largest universities**

A strike by 3,000 contract instructors, teaching assistants and researchers at York, Canada's second largest university, began on Monday. Workers at CUPE local 3903 are determined to win their demands for better working conditions, an end to precarious contract work, and real wage increases.

The last strike at York University was in 2018 by 2,000 graduate teaching and research assistants and lasted for five months, the longest ever at a Canadian university. It was shut down by Ontario premier Doug Ford, whose hard-right Tory government, with the assistance of CUPE, imposed an austerity contract through binding arbitration, leaving the critical issues currently under dispute unresolved.

Thousands of workers are also preparing to strike at the nearby University of Toronto. On Friday, 1,000 service workers voted 93 percent in favour of job action, following the 7,000 academic workers at the same institution who voted 94.4 percent in support of a strike earlier in the

month. For both groups, low wages, burnout, and job insecurity are the main issues at stake. The University of Toronto is the country's richest post-secondary institution, boasting an endowment fund well over three billion dollars. According to CUPE, which is handling the negotiations, the earliest legal strike date for both agreements is March 4.

### **Hundreds of workers at critical Nova Scotia transit hub set to strike Tuesday**

On Friday, workers at the Autoport Eastern Passage vehicle transit hub located in Nova Scotia gave 48-hour notice of a strike planned for this Tuesday. The 239 members of Unifor local 100 have been working without a contract since December 31 and in January voted 98.4 per cent in favour of job action. The union is keeping the details under wraps, but a tentative contract presented late last month, which Unifor hailed as a "significant milestone," was shot down by the membership.

The last major port struggle occurred last July when a two-week strike by 7,400 West Coast port workers halted freight flows through port terminals and disrupted billions of dollars in shipment revenues. At the behest of the big business lobby, the federal Liberal government appointed a mediator who, with the connivance of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, rammed through a rotten contract that imposed the same concessions-laden terms twice rejected by workers.

Autoport is one of North America's largest vehicle processing and trans-shipment facilities, handling huge volumes of cargo—roughly 185,000 vehicles per year, mainly from the European imports market. The Port of Halifax, where it is located, is a critical global trade node, the first point of call across the Atlantic and the last outbound port when leaving North America.

Autoport's parent company, railway giant CN Rail, has significant investment in the port's infrastructure, which comprises a critical element in CN's North American rail network. However, the recent conflict in the Red Sea, which has forced carriers to use longer alternative routes, has produced delays of up to three weeks for most container ships slated for entry at the Port of Halifax.

To compete with its rival Canadian Pacific, which, newly merged with Kansas City Southern (now CPKS), saw bumper profits last year, CN has promised its shareholders a 10 percent growth in earning. The company also approved a 7 percent increase to its 2024 quarterly cash dividend for its board of directors this year.

### **Federal mediator called on to avert potential railway strike**

More than 9,000 train conductors, engineers and yard workers at Canada's two biggest railways could strike as early as May. In a press release, Teamsters Canada President Francois Laporte announced that contract negotiations stalled earlier this month when CN Rail and CPKC (formerly Canadian Pacific) demanded in "non-negotiable" terms the elimination of all safety-critical rest provisions essential for the protection of workers and the general public.

On Friday, both North American railway giants called on the federal labour minister Seamus O'Regan to appoint a "conciliator" to force through a concessions contract before a strike takes place. Since 1993, federal mediators have been used by Conservative and Liberal parties alike to impose pro-employer terms in nine of the 10 contract disputes between Canadian Pacific (now CPKC) and the train and yard workers

represented by the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference.

The last rail dispute occurred in March 2022, when a two-week strike by 3,000 conductors and engineers over benefits, scheduling, and safety issues was scuttled within a matter of hours with the imposition of a federally mediated pro-employer contract which enforced ever more grueling work schedules and deadly working conditions for the next four years.

Dangerous working conditions have prevailed for decades on the country's railways, enabled by the federal governments of all stripes which have turned a blind eye to the well-known safety issues that have led to countless accidents and deaths. These include the horrific cargo explosion in downtown Lac Megantic, Quebec which killed 47 people in 2013, and the 2019 train derailment near Field, British Columbia which claimed the lives of the three crew onboard.

### **Edmonton city workers stage protest rally**

Three dozen workers staged a protest at the Muttart LRT tram station in Edmonton, Alberta over the breakdown of negotiations in their expired contract. They are among some 5,000 members of the Civic Service Union (CSU) Local 52 who work at the City of Edmonton, including 911 operators, recreation staff, librarians, and city planners, who have been without a contract since 2020.

Earlier in the month, the overwhelming majority of the CSU Local 52 membership voted in favour of strike action when their municipal employer offered an “insulting” 7.25 percent wage increase over five years, an effective 16 percent cut to their real wages when inflation is calculated. Both employers—the city and its library—have applied to the province's labour relations board for lockouts in an effort to starve the workers into accepting these dramatic concessions.



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