

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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Latin America

Protest strikes by Argentine educators, government employees

On Thursday, April 4, thousands of striking schoolteachers and university professors walked-out in a national strike against President Javier Milei and his public education policies. The educators demand the reopening of salary negotiations and the restitution of the National Teachers Incentive Fund, eliminated by Milei. The strikers also demanded that pensions for retirees be protected from the ravages of inflation. Educators have yet to receive a raise this year.

The educators, accompanied by workers from other sectors, marched in central Buenos Aires, paying tribute to Carlos Fuentealba, a professor from the southern province of Neuquen who was killed by a police grenade on April 4, 2007.

The next day, Friday April 5, thousands of striking government workers, members of the Government Workers Association (ATE), and retirees marched and rallied at the Economics Ministry in Buenos Aires protesting the wave of sackings by the Milei administration. More than 11,000 workers have been sacked so far; many of them were fired during Easter vacation, and learned that they had lost their jobs upon returning.

Government sources indicated that another 70, 000 workers, whose contracts ended in March, are being considered for layoffs.

The protesters demand the renewal of all contracts and that those already sacked be returned to their posts.

Chilean fishers protest

Small scale fishers from the Biobio region in south-central Chile protested and blocked access to ports and highways on April 4, demanding an agreement with the government to resolve the “sardine and anchovy crisis.” The population of these two fish species is declining due to the climate crisis.

The protest demanded government permission to add mackerel to the mix that they bring to the region’s ports.

On April 5, the day after the protests, the government reached an agreement with the fishers that grants them some of their demands.

Six thousand small-scale fishers operate out of Biobio ports.

Protest over government repression of peasants opposed to mine

expansions in Ecuador

An alliance of Ecuadorean peasant groups demonstrated on Saturday, April 6 against the violent offensive by the administration of President Daniel Noboa and the mining conglomerates aimed at criminalizing protests against the expansion of mining and its ecological consequences.

The protesters pointed to the fact that in the last two weeks 91 peasants in the provinces of Bolivar and Cotopaxi were repressed by the transnational mining corporations. Six peasants were sentenced to three years in jail by Noboa, acting on behalf of Adventus Mining, a Canadian company. Another 72 peasants are being processed for “terrorism.”

The British Anglo-American firm also directed the Noboa administration to criminalize 13 peasants.

The demonstrators stressed that the victimized peasants are being persecuted for insisting on their right to a voice to protect their lands from the mining oligarchies. The peasant alliance made an urgent call to workers and citizens to unite in solidarity with the Ecuadorean victimized peasants.

Dockworkers’ one-day “warning” strike in Chile

On April 4, dockworkers began a one-day national “warning” strike, led by the dockworkers Union (Union Portuaria, UP), stopping activities in Chile’s Pacific ports. The UP bureaucracy accused the Boric administration of not being serious in carrying out past agreements with dockworkers. Its aim is to pressure the Boric administration to carry out electoral promises on health, safety, decent working conditions, “socio-ecological reforms” and an end to layoffs. The strike was set to last three shifts.

The union bureaucracy’s opportunism contrasted with the militancy of the strikers. The strike began with marches and road blockages in major Chilean ports.

Santa Clara Valley nurses stage three-day strike over working conditions and under-staffing

Over 3,750 nurses in the Santa Clara Valley Healthcare system in Santa Clara County, California, carried out a three-day strike last week demanding increased wages, improved working conditions and safe staffing ratios. Members of the Registered Nurses Professional Association (RNPA) launched their strike April 2 after rejecting a mediator’s proposal and formed picket lines at three main hospitals—Valley Medical Center and O’Connor Hospital in San Jose and St. Louise Regional Hospital in Gilroy.

The RNPA is asking for a 15 percent wage increase through October

2025, while hospital management is offering 13 percent. But the two sides remain far apart on staffing and working conditions.

Nurses are opposed to the hospital system's demand to float nurses between hospitals and clinics. Nurses counter that being shifted to unfamiliar settings poses a safety risk for patients and they want limitations on the proposal.

Santa Clara County claims it has a \$250 million structural deficit and the executive has slashed departmental budgets. Nurses were deeply angered when Santa Clara Valley revealed it was spending \$20 million to bring in 1,000 replacement nurses during the strike as opposed to settling contract issues.

The old contract expired back in October of 2023. Last week's walkout was the first strike in the RNPA's history at Santa Clara County, the heart of Silicon Valley.

Railworkers at CN and CPKC begin vote on strike authorization

On Monday, more than 9,000 railworkers at Canada's two biggest rail operators began a vote on strike authorization that will continue throughout the month.

Ballots will be cast by some 6,000 conductors, locomotive engineers, and yard workers at Canadian National (CN) and nearly 3,200 conductors, locomotive engineers, yard workers, and approximately 90 rail traffic controllers at Canadian Pacific Kansas City (CPKC)—all of whom are represented by the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference (TCRC). If railworkers vote to authorize a strike, the earliest a walkout could occur is May 22.

Fruitless talks between TCRC and management began last fall and have been mediated by federal conciliators since March 1. The railworkers' collective agreement expired on December 31, 2023.

In a union bulletin, the TCRC wrote that CPKC has rejected the majority of the members' demands for improved pay and working conditions and that CN's proposal would "destroy" their working conditions. Additionally, the CN and CPKC hourly rate proposals would mean a pay cut for half of their membership, strip away "every quality of life provision attained through years of fighting," and make seniority redundant by eliminating the distinction between road and yard crews. The union also noted that the railways aim is to strip collective agreements of "safety-critical rest provisions."

TCRC spokesman Christopher Monette told Trains.com that "our union will not bargain with Canadian lives," which is precisely what the TCRC is committed to doing. For decades it has enforced the criminal profits-before-lives policies of the rail barons, scuttling strikes and ramming through contracts that impose increasingly hazardous working conditions produced by de-manning, one-worker crews and onerous work schedules that keep the trains moving at all costs.

WestJet Encore pilots vote overwhelmingly for strike mandate

On Tuesday, April 2, pilots at Calgary-based airline WestJet Encore approved a strike mandate after seven months of federally-mediated contract negotiations came to a "near standstill." Eighty-nine percent of pilots represented by the Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA) cast a vote, with 97 percent voting in favour of job action if a contract isn't agreed to by April 17.

The 355 pilots have been forced to work without a contract since their

five-year agreement expired January 1. The pilots' demands include real improvements to work scheduling, wages, and career progression.

By the ALPA's own admission, WestJet Encore pilots are some of the lowest-paid regional pilots in Canada—conditions that the ALPA formalized in the pilots' first collective agreement with WestJet in 2019. In 2023, a first-year First Officer made a meagre salary of \$43,122, with the addition of a lump sum payment of another \$10,200. After six years the amount was still only \$54,918 plus the aforementioned lump sum.

Last June, 1,800 pilots with WestJet's mainline operation and the now defunct budget subsidiary Swoop ratified an agreement that included "industry leading" pay increases—24 percent over the next four years. The modest pay increase which the union termed "industry-leading" is a bid to attract pilots from its main rival, Air Canada, whose 10-year contract locked in a measly 2 percent annual raise that expires this year.

Generally lower pay in the Canadian airline industry has prompted a major exodus of Canadian pilots to higher-paying jobs in the United States. In 2022, at least 147 Canadian pilots applied for licenses to fly in the US according to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

In wake of protest scuttled by union, Newfoundland fish harvesters reject government's floor price for crab

As the snow crab season gets under way, fish harvesters in Newfoundland say they will refuse to fish with the floor price of \$2.60 per pound—the recently released price formula dictated by the Association for Seafood Producers (ASP) and approved by the province's price-setting panel.

In a media release, Greg Pretty, president of the Fish, Food & Allied Workers (FFAW) union, announced, "This injustice must be corrected, and we expect that harvesters will support leadership's position to not fish."

Only two weeks ago, on March 24, Pretty and the FFAW declared a victory over the province's "cartel-like" fish processors after striking a secret deal with the province in a private parking lot and shutting down the weeks-long protest by hundreds of Newfoundland fish harvesters.

The province has yet to make good on those vague promises to address the protesters' key demands, which included the ability for fish harvesters to sell any catch of any species outside of the province to raise the price per pound as well as an increase in processing caps.

Unifor foists concessions contract onto Autoport workers, shutting down month-long strike

Unifor, which represents almost 240 striking workers at the Autoport vehicle shipment facility in Eastern Passage, Nova Scotia, has pushed through a new three-year concessions contract—virtually identical to the one its members rejected in early February.

After voting took place on Wednesday, April 3, Jennifer Murray, Atlantic regional director for Unifor, announced that the ratified deal is "very similar" to the tentative agreement that was previously rejected by the members, adding with resignation that "it's been incredibly challenging for our members as you can imagine."

Murray did not mention that the strike was "challenging" because Unifor strangled it into submission. Within hours of the strike's initiation, Autoport—in league with its parent company, ruthless railway giant CN—mobilised its contingency plan and brought in scab labour to keep

services running. Over the course of the 37-day strike, Unifor—Canada’s largest private-sector union—did nothing to broaden the strike to workers throughout the port or mobilize its vast membership throughout the country in support of the Autoport workers. Instead, it staged toothless “solidarity” rallies and bleated hollow appeals to the anti-worker provincial Liberal Party government to enact anti-scab legislation.

Saskatchewan teachers union continues to isolate teachers as province attempts to scuttle strike

Saskatchewan teachers began limited “work to rule” job action on Monday, after discussions with provincial negotiators once again fell apart this week.

On Friday, Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation (STF) president Samantha Becotte announced that all voluntary services will be indefinitely paused and staff will begin and end their days 15 minutes before and after school until the province adequately addresses classroom size and complexity issues.

Saskatchewan teachers have been involved in limited and sporadic job action for months, beginning with a province-wide one-day strike on January 16 following the breakdown of months-long negotiations between the STF and the Saskatchewan hard-right Conservative government.

Throughout the contract struggle, the province has refused to address teachers’ central demands, including classroom sizes and complexity, claiming that the matter rests with local school divisions, flouting a December ruling by a third-party conciliator that such issues are indeed items for the bargaining table.

On Thursday, the province presented a non-legally-binding memorandum of understanding to teachers with support from the Saskatchewan School Boards Association in an attempt to shut down their struggle. Education Minister Jeremy Cockrill reiterated that his government and the school boards “remain firm” on the question of class size and complexity, which he made clear will not be included in the new collective agreement.

Saskatchewan teachers are some of the lowest-paid in Canada. The province has offered a new collective agreement that includes a dismal seven percent wage increase to teachers over a three-year contract, which is nowhere near the rate of inflation.

Earlier in March, the STF vowed to escalate job action after the government unveiled its regressive education budget, which the STF has condemned as a “status quo budget” that did not meet teachers’ needs when inflation and enrollment growth in the province is taken into account. The union calculated that the percentage of total education funding in support for learning has actually decreased over time from 15.1 percent in 2017-18 to 14 percent in 2024-25.

Despite the government’s staunch commitment to worsen the conditions for schools, the STF has thus far limited the job action to sporadic one-day strikes, demonstrations at the legislature, and the minimal curtailing of job duties, in a futile effort to pressure the government back to the bargaining table.



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