

Canadian railroaders set to strike as early as May 22; tens of thousands of Dominican teachers march and hold strikes demanding improvements

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

Dominican Republic educators reject inadequate pay offer

Thousands of teachers marched in Santo Domingo and other cities in the Dominican Republic on April 30 and then again on May 1, International Workers Day. Their demands included a 20 percent wage increase, the hiring of more teachers, changes to social security legislation, decent pensions, the building of two hospitals, centers for social interaction, and lower food prices. Some 120,000 teachers are participating in the protests.

The following day the protest strikes continued in many of the nation's schools, despite the unions' agreement not to call strikes, lest the "children suffer," while continuing negotiations with the Education Ministry, which, so far insists on an 8 percent wage increase and has not addressed any of the other issues.

More one-day strikes and protest rallies are planned for May 6, 7 and 8 across the Dominican Republic.

Film workers rally in Buenos Aires against budget cuts

On Friday, May 3, actors, producers and film workers rallied in Buenos Aires in defense of the National Film and Visual Arts Institute (INCAA) to oppose the withdrawal of government funding by the Milei administration. The demonstrators carried signs that read, "Milei: not everything is for sale or purchase" and "Film making is community."

A spokesperson for the "United for Culture Collective" declared, "We all talk and say that 'something must be done'; we have mobilized for a lot less; it is important to hit the brakes [on Milei's cuts]."

El Salvador May Day marchers demand freedom for political prisoners

Workers and family members of political prisoners victimized by the El Salvador government marched in downtown San Salvador on

International Workers Day demanding freedom for all political prisoners. The demonstration also denounced the state of siege imposed by the government in March 2022 (officially known as the "regime of exception") that imposed dictatorial measures. The marchers chanted, "No more arbitrary jailing!" and "freedom for all that are not guilty of any crime!"

The protest also denounced the recent wave of sacking of government workers.

In the midst of the protest march, government-operated buses tried to stop the demonstrators, with officials demanding to see identity cards before allowing them to proceed. Human rights lawyer Rudy Joya, speaking on behalf of the marchers, said, "We demand that the Salvadorean government respect democratic and human rights, including the right to jobs. The working class demands liberty, security in the court system, and housing."

May Day marchers in Paraguay press workers' rights

On International Workers Day, May 1, hundreds of workers participated in three marches in the city of Asunción, Paraguay's capital, demanding higher wages, decent working conditions, trade union rights, and democratic rights.

A union spokesperson declared that the purpose of these protests was to make public the terrible living conditions that exist in Paraguay, where a high proportion of workers labor as contingent, temporary, "gig" workers, with no set wages or hours guaranteed.

Peru May Day protests demand justice for victimized workers

Workers in Peru marched on May 1 demanding labor rights under conditions in which 70 percent of workers are in the informal, contingent, sector, with few if any rights.

In Lima, Peru the marchers denounced President Dina Boluarte's administration and the national legislature, demanding justice for the victims of the social protests that shook the country in 2022 and 2023.

At the Palace of Justice in Lima, the marchers rallied, demanding justice for victimized workers. At that moment police forces assaulted the demonstration.

Chilean workers honor murdered journalist, demand investigation

Thousands of workers marched and rallied at Santiago's Central Station district in honor of popular newspaper reporter Francisca Sandoval on May 1, 2024. The 29-year-old reporter was assassinated in 2022 while covering a May Day rally in that district for an alternative left-wing media channel Señal 3 de la Victoria. Sandoval's death has never been investigated.

Last week's rally took place amidst a heavy police presence. The police set up barriers to intimidate marchers, demanding identification documents. As speakers assembled at the rally site, government gendarmes set upon protesters using tear gas and water cannons. Over 20 protesters were arrested and later released without charges.

United States

Aramark concession workers engage in open-ended strike in Philadelphia

The strike by some 400 concession workers at the Wells Fargo Center sports arena in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, continues over the service giant's refusal to expand healthcare coverage to more workers while offering a miserly 25 cent wage increase. Members of Unite Here Local 274 launched an open-ended strike on April 25 in the midst of the National Basketball Association's playoff series between the New York Knicks and the Philadelphia 76ers.

About 90 percent of the bargaining unit voted for the strike after a one-day strike on April 9 failed to shift Aramark. Currently, only 20 of the concession workers qualify for year-round health insurance benefits. The union is asking that benefits kick in for workers who log 750 hours a year. Aramark is demanding 1,500 hours, twice that number.

Aramark employs 260,000 workers and provides staffing to entertainment venues all over the world. In the Philadelphia region alone, it employs some 8,000 workers.

Lakeville, Minnesota, teachers approve strike action after 300 days of negotiations

Teachers in Lakeville, Minnesota voted by a 99 percent margin to authorize a strike April 30 as negotiations between the district and Education Minnesota, which represents the teachers, have dragged on for over 300 days. Despite this, the union has still not given the mandatory 10-day strike notice.

Back in February, both the union and district negotiators arrived at a tentative agreement that would have raised wages by an insulting 1 percent in the first year and 5 percent in year two of a new contract. That agreement also introduced new language that would have given the district the unilateral right to transfer up to 15 teachers per year between facilities, grades and subject areas without any voice for teachers. That agreement was overwhelmingly voted down by the rank and file.

According to the union, Lakeville teachers' compensation is sub-par, and the district is losing teachers to other schools with higher compensation. A strike would impact some 12,000 students. Negotiations first began in July of 2023.

Ohio Gradall Industries workers reject new company proposal as strike passes three-week mark

The 230 striking workers at the Gradall Industries excavator plant in New Philadelphia, Ohio, overwhelmingly rejected the company's most recent contract offer. The International Association of Machinists Local 1285 issued a statement saying, "The company's wage and benefit package does not meet the expectations of its dedicated workforce, which worked through a pandemic and continues to make this company profitable. Workers are also struggling with work-life balance to spend time with their families due to the amount of overtime demanded, and have concerns about worker safety within the facility."

The IAM did not release details of the rejected proposal. When workers struck on April 15, Gradall was offering a mere 6 percent wage increase. Workers charged that the company's demands for increases in the workers' portion of healthcare costs erased the company's wage offer.

Gradall Industries, which manufactures state-of-the-art excavators, was purchased by the Alamo Group in 2006. Alamo, which operates some 26 plants in the United States, finished 2023 with net sales of \$1.7 billion, a 12 percent increase over the previous year, with net earnings of \$136.2 million, up 34 percent over the previous year.

Canada

Workers at Canada's two major railways vote overwhelmingly to strike

On May 1, some 9,300 Canadian railway workers at Canadian National Railway (CN) and Canadian Pacific Kansas City (CPKC), which own the vast majority of Canada's rail networks, voted overwhelmingly to strike as early as May 22. The potential strike is unprecedented in that it would involve powerful workforces across both major railways.

Railroad workers voted by 98 percent to authorize a strike on contracts covering locomotive engineers, conductors and yard workers at CN and CPKC which expired on December 31, 2023, as well as a third agreement covering CPKC rail traffic controllers.

Rail workers are demanding safety-critical rest rights, work-life balance as well as significant wage increases. According to the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference (TCRC), no progress has been made in six months of negotiations and the railways are trying to remove rest provisions. Unsurprisingly, CPKC issued a lying statement which denies that the rest provision concessions compromise rail safety.

The TCRC's concern for workers' safety is completely bogus. For decades, the union has worked hand-in-glove with the lawless rail barons and their government enablers to enforce ever more exploitative and hazardous conditions on the railways to boost their profits.

On March 1, the union and employers yet again agreed to the appointment of federal conciliators, the preferred labor dispute mechanism used countless times in the past to impose the criminal profits-over-lives policy of the railways, which leads to preventable and potentially catastrophic accidents. This includes the multi-car train fire in London, Ontario in late April which endangered the lives of railroaders, residents, and firefighters.

The federal government is already signaling to anxious grain and other commodity exporters, whose shipments could be disrupted by a strike, that his government is willing to intervene. In recent statements, Federal Transport Minister Pablo Rodriguez expressed concern about a potential strike's impact on the supply chain and urged the sides to "negotiate in good faith," in other words, he signaled his confidence in the TCRC to

ram through the employers' dictates before his government has to step in.

Province appoints mediator to shut down five-month-long strike by determined Hudson's Bay workers

On Friday, British Columbia's Labour Minister Harry Bains appointed "special mediator" David Schaub whose aim is to shut down the strike by retail workers in Kamloops and impose Hudson's Bay's concessions-filled contract. Schaub, a board member of a variety of provincial infrastructure, real estate, and agricultural corporations, will meet with the parties for up to 14 days to reach a settlement. If one cannot be reached, he will issue recommendations for both parties to accept or reject.

Hudson's Bay workers in Kamloops have been on strike for nearly five months, committed to winning their demands for better wages and improved working conditions, which they say is "a fight of principle." Their strike, which began on December 10, 2023, forced the closure of the Kamloops location.

Earlier in the year, the retail workers rejected Hudson Bay's initial offer of a pathetic 1 percent wage increase, which amounts to a paltry \$0.17 an hour. As of 2023, the living wage in Kamloops was \$20.91, almost \$4 per hour more.

In January, the United Steel Workers met with Hudson's Bay management and the pro-corporate BC Labour Relations Board in an attempt to quickly cut a sellout deal and shut down the strike. However, workers promptly rejected it. In subsequent months the USW has prevented the striking workers from expanding their struggle, refusing to mobilize its more than 225,000-strong workforce for fear that the strike could spill over into the Hudson's Bay's 85 locations across Canada and to other sections of workers.

Nestle chocolate workers strike Toronto factory

Some 461 workers at the Nestle chocolate plant in Toronto walked out May 5 after rejecting the company's latest contract offer. The workers, members of Unifor, include bar packers, shippers and receivers, general laborers and skilled trades. Workers want improved pensions and an end to a freeze on cost-of-living raises.

The plant produces Kit Kat, Aero and Coffee Crisp chocolate bars, as well as Smarties, but management claims the walkout will have no immediate impact.

Unifor hails sellout contract for Loblaw-owned Dominion grocery workers' an "important victory"

Unifor obtained ratification of a new contract covering 1,600 grocery workers at eleven Loblaw-owned Dominion stores in Newfoundland. The union claims 88 percent voted in favor of the totally inadequate deal on Monday, April 29. The store clerks, a severely underpaid section of the workforce, will see a wage increase of \$4.50 per hour by the end of the five-year agreement, resulting in an annual raise of just 90 cents per hour.

Faring even worse are the precarious part-time workers, who will receive \$3.20 per hour over the contract, or an annual raise of just 64 cents per hour. Inflation in the region in March was conservatively calculated at

3.1 percent year over year.

In a press release, Unifor claimed these effective wage cuts represent an "important victory" for workers and shared its observation that workers didn't face significant resistance from the employer in bargaining. "I guess they didn't want to put up a fight with Unifor," Carolyn Wrice, president of Unifor Local 597 said smugly, as if accepting a contract which keeps workers in poverty and increasingly precarious working conditions constitutes some sort of fight.

Union forces sellout contract onto Montreal-area Airbus workers

The union representing A220 jet assembly workers in Airbus' Mirabel plant in Montreal has forced through a sellout deal on behalf of employer Airbus, enshrining ever-more dangerous conditions in the plant and for the general public.

The assembly workers' contract ended in December 2023. In late April, workers rejected the company's third contract offer, with nearly 70 percent against. However, in late April the union representing the workers, the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAMAW), begged for conciliation talks with Airbus which then threatened to lock out workers on May 2 if the conciliator's recommendations were rejected. On May 1, workers voted 77 percent in favor of the contract, with nearly 81 percent of the 1,300 workers participating.

The new five-year contract, which includes a 23 percent salary increase over five years—a meagre 4.6 percent a year—ignores other crucial demands made by workers such as improvements around job security, work scheduling and work-family balance, and further erodes working conditions which endangers the health and safety of Airbus workers and the general population.

Written in the new contract is the "transfer of knowledge" between more experienced employees, who generally work day shifts, and those who have less seniority and often work later shifts, a condition which Airbus views as "essential as the A220 production rate is ramping up."



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