

Workers Struggles: The Americas

13 May 2024

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

Latin America

Argentine protest strikes continue

Argentine workers carried out their second national protest strike this year against the Milei administration policies and omnibus law. This strike was led by the Peronist trade union bureaucracy using the nationalist slogan “our fatherland is not for sale,” opposing plans to privatize government and provincial state-owned firms, and the phony “modernization” of the labor market. The strike coincided with protest strikes by teachers and government workers and included major participation by rail workers, truckers and healthcare workers.

The omnibus law, with its massive imposition of austerity measures, wage cuts, tax increases and pro-business measures, is to be discussed in the Senate this week.

In other actions across Argentina.

- On Monday, May 6 Buenos Aires’ transit workers (subway and bus) protested against the approval by the House of Deputies (Argentina’s lower house) of President Milei’s omnibus law, by “opening the turnstiles” for two hours in selected major train stations, thus allowing passengers to enter without paying. Workers were protesting a 54 percent increase in subway and bus fares imposed by the Economics Ministry.

- Argentine teachers carried out a 48-hour national protest and partial school shutdowns in rejection of attacks on wages and layoffs on May 8. They were joined by government workers.

Chilean students and faculty protest Gaza genocide

Last Thursday, led by the Catholic University Students Federation (FEUC), students rallied at the entrance of the main building of Santiago’s prestigious Catholic University, demanding their institution break all ties with Israeli universities that “participate in war crimes and violations of Human Rights.”

According to FEUC spokesperson Catalina Jofré the students are demanding that the Catholic University break relations with the Israeli Technological Institute, Tel Aviv University, and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. There are 1,500 Palestinian students enrolled in the Catholic University.

Also on Thursday, students and instructors at the Juan Gómez Millas campus of the Chile University, also in Santiago, carried out a pasacampus protest (inside protest march through the buildings of the campus) in solidarity with the inhabitants of Palestine.

Jofré indicated that the FEUC is coordinating its protests with those of the above campus and other Chilean universities and “staying in touch

with students around the world” to carry out new protest marches and occupations.

Peasants demand land reform law in Paraguay

On Wednesday, May 8, the Paraguayan National Peasant Federation mobilized its members in Asuncion, demanding that the government act on a long overdue land reform, guaranteeing land ownership, outlawing evictions, and paving and maintaining rural roads.

With the approach of planting season, Wednesday’s marches and rallies demanded a sufficient supply of seeds and that so-called illegal settlements be made legal.

Speculators are amassing seeds and fertilizers and farming equipment at the expense of peasant farmers and to the benefit of the big landlords.

Under the terms of a 1963 Land Reform Law, the Paraguayan government guaranteed land rights to peasants and indigenous communities. Since then, those guarantees have been eroded to the benefit of the landed oligarchs.

United States

Illinois postal workers protest plans to dismantle Springfield mail processing and distribution center

About 100 postal workers held a picket outside the Springfield, Illinois, post office May 3 to protest the lack of transparency in the United States Postal Service’s (USPS) plan to dismantle postal facilities and attack workers’ job security. Workers carried signs saying “Dump DeJoy,” referring to the USPS postmaster general.

The USPS is planning to transfer Springfield’s processing and distribution center operations to St. Louis, Missouri. After sorting is completed, mail will be sent back to Illinois. This plan will be applied to some 58 other processing and distribution centers.

The USPS claims the changes will speed up mail processing and delivery. But Illinois Postal Workers Union president Bob Gunter explained, “The (USPS) changed the delivery standards. Why did they add another day onto delivery —if this is such a good deal and is going to get the mail delivered faster. They know the mail isn’t going to get delivered faster.”

The USPS has also claimed there will be no layoffs. Instead, they have substituted the undefined phrase “job impacts.” The USPS claims the changes will save between \$1.7 million and \$2.2 million annually.

Before becoming postmaster general, Louis DeJoy was CEO of the logistics and freight company New Breed Logistics. He also served as a major donor and fundraiser for Donald Trump.

St. Louis charter school faculty launch strike for first contract

Charter school teachers at KIPP Columbia high school in St. Louis, Missouri, launched a strike April 19 to demand job protections and a grievance procedure as they seek to negotiate their first contract. The 130 members of the American Federation of Teachers Local 420, comprising teachers, intervention specialists, social workers and paraprofessionals, have already concluded talks on salary and benefits after a year of negotiations.

The union charges that there has been a 50 percent turnover rate at KIPP Columbia as teachers have left the charter facility for jobs at public schools due to low pay and insecure working conditions. Currently, math course work is done online due to the fact that the school has been unable to hire faculty in that department.

Faculty and staff first unionized in May of 2023 as 78 percent voted for a union. KIPP Columbia is the first charter school in the St. Louis region to unionize. Nationwide, some 10 percent of charter schools have voted in unions.

Canada

Federal Liberal government effectively criminalizes nationwide rail strike planned later this month

The federal Liberal government has effectively criminalized the planned strike by 9,300 rail workers across the country's largest rail networks—Canadian National Railway (CN) and Canadian Pacific Kansas City (CPKC).

Rail workers voted overwhelmingly for job action at the beginning of the month with a strike scheduled by the Teamsters Rail Conference Canada as early as May 22. However, on Thursday, the federal government intervened to delay the strike indefinitely. At the behest of big business commodities exporters, federal Labour Minister Seamus O'Regan called on the Canada Industrial Relations Board (CIRB) to investigate whether the strike might have "potential impacts to the health and safety of Canadians," cynically highlighting the heavy fuel, propane, food and water treatment materials needed in remote communities and "throughout Canada."

O'Regan also asked the CIRB to rule on which "activities need to continue during a strike or lockout," with the aim of undermining workers' democratic right to strike, and to keep profits flowing. The CIRB has no set timeline for its decision, but it's certain it won't be issued until well past May 22. Until then, strike action is legally barred.

Teamsters immediately surrendered to O'Regan's dictat and the reactionary collective bargaining framework, announcing that it would "obviously comply with any order" from the CIRB.

Last July, O'Regan was instrumental in shutting down the two-week militant strike by 7,400 West Coast port workers, repeatedly threatening to impose back-to-work legislation—which the Teamsters union did nothing to oppose—and finally succeeded in intimidating dockers, who saw no way forward, into signing off on a sellout contract. Last month, O'Regan appointed veteran mediator Vince Ready, who has a rotten record of imposing pro-employer sellout contracts onto workers, to head an Industrial Inquiry Commission into the July port dispute with the stated goal of providing "stability" for the country's supply chains.

Saskatchewan teachers decisively reject province's final offer; union

continues to stifle struggle

On Thursday, 13,000 teachers in Saskatchewan rejected once again the province's contract proposal, which continues to ignore their key demands. With 92.2 percent of teachers casting a vote over a two-day period on May 8 and 9, 90 percent rejected the Government-Trustee Bargaining Committee's "final" offer. The teachers have been working without a contract since last August.

Since initiating strike action in January, the teachers union, the Saskatchewan Teachers Federation, (STF) has refused to mount a serious struggle that would come into conflict with the province's pro-austerity hard-right Conservative government, which has repeatedly made clear that the new contract will not address the teachers' key demands around classroom size and complexity. The STF has restricted job actions to "work to rule" sanctions, sporadic one-day strikes, demonstrations at the legislature and the minimal curtailing of job duties, in an impotent effort to pressure the province back to the bargaining table.

On March 28, the province presented a non-binding Memorandum of Understanding that reiterated its hardline position, which was promptly rejected by teachers. However, two weeks later, the STF cynically claimed that "sufficient progress" had been made and shut down the teachers' limited job action.

Earlier this month, the STF appealed to the province to agree to anti-democratic binding arbitration to shut down the strike and impose the province's terms. But the province shied away from agreeing just yet to such an open attack on teachers' rights, fearing its effects on public opinion in an election year, preferring instead to utilize the STF to force through a sellout deal.

Cargill workers in Guelph, Ontario prepare for strike action

Nearly 1,000 workers at one of the Guelph, Ontario meat facilities owned by the global food giant Cargill could walk off the job soon in demand of wage rises to offset the untenable cost of living. The workers have been forced to work without a contract since the beginning of the year.

A "no-board" report has been received by the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Locals 175 and 633 representing the workers at the Cargill plant at the Dunlop Drive location. The formal notice, issued by the Minister of Labour, announced that a board of conciliation will not be appointed, thereby triggering the 17-day cooling-off period before the parties can begin a legal work stoppage.

Cargill is one of the world's largest private companies and one of four firms that control more than 70 percent of the global market for agricultural products. The combined wealth of Cargill family members has increased by \$14.4 billion since 2020, a rise of 65 percent. It grew by almost \$20 million a day during the pandemic, driven by food price rises, especially for grains.

The UFCW has said nothing about rallying workers in Cargill's second plant, located only a few blocks away in the same York district, to come to the defence of their colleagues, let alone the 8,000 Cargill workers across Canada, and the many thousands of other brutally exploited food products workers across the continent. In its announcement of the strike vote, the union merely recommended that workers wear "vote yes" stickers on their hard hats and call on community or religious leaders to support the strike.

The High River plant in Alberta became the site of the largest COVID-19 outbreak in North America during the first wave of the

pandemic in which two workers died and about half of its mainly immigrant workforce, at least 950 workers, were infected. When Cargill forced workers back into the industrial death trap with the aid of the reactionary provincial government, the UFCW upheld Cargill's profits-over-lives policy and refused to organize any job action to stop the work order.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact