

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

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## **Protesting teachers attacked by police in Mexico City and Oaxaca**

Last Monday, a protest by striking teachers in the city of Juan Bautista, near the city of Oaxaca in southern Mexico, was attacked by right-wing vigilantes armed with sticks and machetes; shots were also fired. The attack took place as the teachers, members of section 22 of the teachers' union CNTE, were blocking the Francisco Madero avenue. Several teachers were wounded by bullets.

When the news reached a protest rally of Mexico City workers, they marched on Mexico City's government house and were attacked by police who had been sent to remove them from the location. The CNTE is a dissident faction of the official teachers' union, SNTE.

## **Chileans march in Santiago demanding a free Palestine and end to genocide**

Hundreds of people demonstrated Saturday in Chile for the protection of children in Palestine and in support of the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip, an area that since eight months ago has been under siege by Israel. The march was peaceful, with no incidents with the police.

The two-mile demonstration took place in central Santiago. Marchers, students and workers, carried signs calling for an end to the genocide in Gaza and an end to Zionist occupation of the West Bank.

The march comes as students across Chile fight for their colleges to suspend agreements with Israeli institutions. Chile is home to nearly half million Palestinian immigrants.

## **Ecuador farm communities protest burning of natural gas in Amazonian forest**

On Wednesday, June 5, scores of indigenous farmers rallied in Quito at the headquarters of the Supreme Court demanding that natural gas burning cease. The protesters pointed out the environmental damage that is being caused to the jungle and to the health of their communities. Previously the court had ordered that the more than 500 gas burning installations that permanently burn gas be shut down, but the order has been ignored.

The natural gas is a byproduct of oil extraction. Originally the court had set a date of October 31, 2023 for the burning to cease, however the administration of President Noboa ignored the court order.

## **Argentine university workers conduct 48-hour strike**

University workers across Argentina carried out a 48-hour strike last Tuesday and Wednesday. The strike ended with no results, given that the Milei administration refuses to negotiate above the 8 percent wage increase for April, and 9 percent in May, half of what the strikers demand. A spokesperson for the university workers' union (CONADU) declared that the struggle will have to get "deeper" but gave no details.

## **Telecom workers in West Virginia authorize strike against Altice-Optimum**

Members of two local unions in the Beckley and Logan region of West Virginia have voted overwhelmingly to grant strike authorization against the telecommunications company Altice USA, paving the way for a walkout unless a favorable contract is forthcoming. The old four-year

agreement for Communications Workers of America (CWA) Locals 2002 and 2007 expired in April and a two-month extension will come to an end on June 28.

Workers first unionized in 2019 and got their first contract in 2020. They are demanding increased pay and benefits from Altice in the current round of negotiations.

Altice is a European-based telecom group owned by billionaire investor Patrick Drahi. In 2015 it began to buy up telecom companies in the United States as Altice USA. It is now the fourth-largest telecommunications provider in the United States and operates in southern West Virginia under the brand name Optimum.

### **North Carolina airport contract workers demand an end to poverty wages**

Contract workers at North Carolina's Charlotte Douglas International Airport staged a demonstration June 4 to demand an end to poverty wages, obtain affordable healthcare and better working conditions. Workers are currently seeking to organize under the Service Employees International Union.

Lashonda Barber, a driver at Charlotte Douglas, told the rally, "Without us, American Airlines won't fly. Yet we struggle to survive on poverty wages while the CEO makes \$15,000 an hour. I'm trying to support my son, my daughter, my grandbaby and mother on \$19 an hour. It's not enough. You know that doesn't work, especially when others only make \$14."

This action follows a one-day strike heading into Memorial Day weekend by contract workers to press their demands. While the workers are employed by various contractors, they took aim at American Airlines and its CEO Robert Isom, who made \$31.4 million in 2023. The Charlotte Douglas International Airport is one of the largest hubs for American Airlines with hundreds of daily flights.

### **Amalgamated Transit Union blocks Toronto transit strike at last minute as talks continue on sellout "framework agreement"**

With less than 30 minutes to go last Thursday night before a strike deadline that would have seen almost 12,000 subway and bus drivers, mechanics and maintenance workers shut down public transit across the city of Toronto, Amalgamated

Transit Union (ATU) Local 113 President Marvin Alfred told reporters that industrial action was indefinitely on hold while the union and the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) continued to hammer out the details of a so-called framework agreement.

Union officials did not notify their membership about any details of the negotiations nor has any date been set for information sessions or a ratification vote. Nonetheless, union president Alfred instructed his members to stand down from any strike action. He later told reporters he expected the demobilized workers would accept whatever final deal was placed before them.

In leaks to the press, it was reported that the proposed contract would offer a mere 13 percent wage rise spread over three years with new job-security language to prevent parts of routes along Toronto's borders from being transferred to other municipal transit authorities.

TTC CEO Rick Leary, for his part, told reporters, "We still have to dot the i's and cross the t's. You can imagine there's a lot of wording that has to be confirmed. But that's a normal process when it comes to bargaining and negotiating. And over the coming weeks, we'll do that." Like his union counterpart, Leary also boosted the framework agreement and arrogantly took for granted that workers would ratify the eventual deal.

The threatened strike action would have been the first since the right to strike was stripped from TTC workers in 2011 by the provincial Liberal government just as workers were moving into strike action. However, in May 2023, the Ontario Superior Court of Justice finally ruled on an action brought by both the ATU and the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE). The court struck down the anti-strike legislation passed 13 years ago as unconstitutional.

In the run-up to last week's strike deadline, many workers had expressed demands for significant wage and benefits improvements to catch up after 13 years of sub-standard contracts and the alarming rise in the cost of living in recent years. Over the past several years, workers across the country have regularly surprised union executives by voting against deals that had been enthusiastically recommended to them.



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