

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Colombia teachers protest in Bogota

Scores of teachers marched in Bogota, Colombia on Monday, June 17, rejecting the new Education Law passed by the legislature.

The new Education Law sets the stage for the privatization of public schools. It subsidizes private and religious schools and gives vouchers to parents. The protesting teachers consider the new law regressive because it ignores the needs of students, particularly poor students.

In addition to decent wages, the demonstrators also demanded increased funding to maintain school buildings, many of which have deteriorated over the years, making education difficult.

Argentinian teachers and retirees protest in Cordoba

Scores of teachers and retirees marched through the streets of the industrial city of Cordoba last Friday, denouncing the anti-working-class measures imposed by Argentine President Milei and Cordoba Governor Llaryora. The demonstrators also demanded freedom for the political prisoners arrested in the mass protests in Buenos Aires on June 12.

The protests, which began as separate demonstrations, met and joined together on their way to downtown Cordoba. At issue are wages and retirement benefits that are being attacked by Milei's austerity and made to fall behind price increases. One teacher carried a sign that said: "I love what I do, but I cannot survive with what I earn."

The demonstrators were greeted by neighbors holding signs in support of the educators.

The demonstrators chanted against Milei and Llaryora, calling them traitors. As the marchers reached downtown Cordoba passing cars honked in support.

Mexico science and technology workers hold protest strike

On June 18 over 350 workers employed by the Durango State College of Scientific and Technologic Study (CECyTDE) went on a sit-down protest strike in La Laguna, Durango. The object of the protest was the abuse by upper management of the workers.

The protest was triggered by the unjust sanctioning on May 29 of a worker who was not able, for personal reasons, to make himself available to install voting equipment at the school. The worker was punished with time off. When questioned, head administrator Monica Nava Mendoza

threatened to sue the employee.

Striking workers claim that this was the latest example of a policy of mistreatment by management, which is riding roughshod over employee rights.

Minneapolis city and park workers authorize strikes; Metropolitan wastewater workers in ten-day cooling off period

Some 400 employees for the Minneapolis Public Works department voted by a 99 percent margin June 19 to authorize a strike to overcome wage disparities and obtain cost-of-living protections. Members of the Laborers' International Union of North America (LIUNA) Local 363 lag behind by as much as \$6 and \$10 an hour compared to their counterparts in other regional cities.

Workers also face safety concerns and staffing shortages that contribute to overwork and burnout. All this was exacerbated during the pandemic and has been left to fester. The old agreement expired back on December 31, 2023, and LIUNA has not yet issued a ten-day strike notice.

LIUNA also represents 224 Minneapolis Park Board workers who had granted a 94 percent strike authorization on June 18. The city is attempting to alter contract language to "ensure fairness and prevent bias and discrimination." Workers are demanding competitive wages along with improved health insurance.

Meanwhile, the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 49, which represents 176 wastewater treatment plant workers at nine facilities across the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan region, filed an intent-to-strike notice June 17. Workers rejected a contract proposal from the Metropolitan Council and voted overwhelmingly to grant strike authorization. Negotiations are ongoing.

Pennsylvania Gardner Cryogenics workers strike over wages and healthcare

Some 180 workers at Gardner Cryogenics in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, walked out on strike June 10 over benefits, wages and working conditions. The strikers only joined Teamsters Local 773 back in February of this year and are seeking their first contract.

Rob Reznick, a production technician, said, "We are taking a stand because we have accepted substandard wages and costly health insurance year after year." Healthcare is seen as the main sticking point in negotiations.

Besides Bethlehem, Gardner Cryogenics has facilities in Alburtis, Emmaus and Upper Macungie Township, and another plant in Liberal, Kansas. It manufactures large pressure tanks, pumps and equipment for storing and transporting liquid gases.

Gardner Cryogenics is a subsidiary of Air Products, which reported

\$12.6 billion in sales for 2023. Air Products president and CEO Seifi Ghasemi made \$22 million last year.

New York city healthcare workers protest staffing crisis

Healthcare workers held a picket outside Jacobi Medical Center in New York's Bronx County June 14 raising the alarm that staffing shortages are threatening patients' well-being. The Doctors Council, which represents physicians, is demanding salary increases and an increase in staffing.

Dr. Trevor Dixon told CBS News that doctors are "burnt out because patient volumes and acuity have increased, but there has not been an increase in staff to match this increased demand." Patients are waiting for weeks or months for appointments and forced to reschedule surgeries.

"We're seeing hundreds and hundreds of patients, and with the staffing shortages, it's harder to accommodate all these patients," said Dr. Priya Patel. "The wait times are longer."

The crisis is deepening as healthcare workers are leaving New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation, which operates the public hospitals and clinics in the city.

Pharmacy chain Rite Aid closing 180 stores in Michigan

According to sources cited by the *Detroit Free Press*, pharmacy chain Rite Aid is planning to close all 180 store locations in Michigan starting July 1, 2024. The pharmacy chain filed for bankruptcy in October 2023 and has been closing stores in Michigan and across the US.

Separately, John Cakmakci, president of United Food and Commercial Workers Local 951 in Kentwood, told *Bridge Magazine* that all of the pharmacy chain's Michigan stores will close "probably by the middle of September." The union is the bargaining agent for 350 Rite Aid workers in southern and western Michigan. Cakmakci said the union is negotiating "severance" deals for the impacted workers and providing help with seeking new employment.

Rite Aid is the only pharmacy serving some smaller Michigan communities.

Bombardier workers in Toronto begin strike

Aircraft assembly workers walked off the job on Sunday after the expiration of their deadline for a new collective agreement. The 1,350 workers are members of Unifor. The jet aircraft manufacturing operation just relocated to the Pearson International Airport two months ago, after the closure of the Downsview plant earlier this year. That facility had accommodated both De Havilland and Bombardier workers in a massive industrial complex.

Both Unifor and Bombardier management are anxious to end the strike quickly, and announced that negotiations would continue. Both sides remained silent on the issues under discussion.

Unifor has notoriously sought to block strike action even after the expiration of contract deadlines in numerous industries where it has been active, including in the Canadian auto plants. Workers at Bombardier, however, saw things differently. They had already witnessed first-hand the bitter 2021 strike at Downsview by 700 remaining De Havilland workers,

in which Unifor bowed to company demands for layoffs and the decentralization of new projects to operations as far away as Alberta. Then the few remaining Downsview De Havilland workers were placed under the umbrella of a new, lower-wage employer, Longview Aviation Capital.

Before the beginning of an extensive restructuring program in the Canadian aviation industry, both Bombardier and De Havilland workers were under a singular Bombardier umbrella until 2019, when Bombardier violated commitments it had made to the union and to the government and sold the lucrative Dash 8 jet programme to De Havilland.

Rather than seeking to unify the struggles of Bombardier and De Havilland workers, who in 2019 confronted essentially the same issues of deteriorating living standards and working conditions, Unifor succeeded in ramming through a rotten concessions deal for the joint Bombardier-De Havilland workers after five days on strike.

The 2019 contract ratification left all workers at the Downsview complex in the lurch. Workers took deep concessions on wages. The settlement provided for increases of only 0.5 percent in Year 1, 0.75 percent in Year 2 and one percent in Year 3—in effect a significant real-wage cut. Today, after several years of spiking inflation that reached near 9 percent, Bombardier workers in the new Pearson Airport facility once again face a fight to defend their living standards.

Quebec ferry workers strike

One hundred and fifty navigation and mechanical officers, members of the United Steelworkers (USW) union, struck five ferry routes along the St. Lawrence River this past Friday and Saturday. These key workers have a 10-day strike mandate. Eight more days of strike activity remain and will be announced at a future date. The workers had voted by 93 percent for the job action after several months of fruitless negotiations.

The strikers are demanding a significant wage increase. They earn \$10 an hour less than other officers with comparable certificates. In addition, the USW charges that management pays agency contract workers at least twice the wages that full-time ferry officers earn to perform the same work.



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