

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

On June 25, the National Federation of University Educators (CONADU) carried out a 72-hour protest to “make visible” the university conflict taking place, triggered by a 50 percent loss of buying power. The protesters accused the Milei administration of failing to respond to the enormous wage crisis taking place in academia and elsewhere. The educators are demanding the immediate reconvening of wage-adjustment commissions, formerly used to adjust wages to monthly inflation.

A CONADU statement called for a 60 percent across-the-board wage increase for all education workers currently below the line of poverty. “Absent that,” declared the statement, “no public university can exist.”

Workers belonging to the Association of Government Employees (ATE) rallied last Friday and set up a food dispensary in front of the headquarters of the National Institute of Industrial Technology (INTI) in Buenos Aires. At issue is the dismissal of 282 INTI contingent “contract” employees by the Milei administration. The sacked workers are part of the tens of thousands of government workers fired by the government in the last six months. The INTI sackings are in line with the policy of privatization and closure of public enterprises.

The ATE has appealed to workers across Buenos Aires to join them in a protest on July 1, when the firings will take effect.

In anticipation of the protest, the streets known as the “tech corridor” in Buenos Aires were patrolled by federal police in an attempt to intimidate the protesters.

On June 20, transit workers in the city of Recife rallied demanding wage increases and improved health and other benefits, such as air-conditioned buses, that were agreed to by the transit bosses but never fully implemented. Recife is a coastal tropical city, not far from the Equator.

The protesters also denounced the policy of speed-up that has been imposed by transit companies in the last year. Scores of workers have quit over exhausting schedules combined with excessive heat inside their buses.

United States

Workers for the *Everett Herald* returned to work June 26 after the management for Carpenter Media Group agreed to negotiations over the sudden decision to sack more than half of the paper’s staff. Ten of 18 union staff were slated to get the ax along with two nonunion editors.

Members of the Pacific Northwest Newspaper Guild originally walked out on June 24 in what was supposed to be a one-day strike, but extended the work stoppage the following day when management did not respond to their demand for negotiations.

“The management at Sound Publishing and Carpenter Media Group have shown that they are in direct opposition to our mission as a reporting staff,” said Ryan Berry, a staff photographer and member of the bargaining team. “These are profit-driven businessmen who think nothing of the Herald’s staff, and even less of its readers.”

Herald staff first unionized in the fall of 2022 and began negotiations for their first contract in March 2023. Carpenter Media purchased the *Herald* in March 2024 and put forward a wage proposal last May of \$19.50 an hour, drastically under a wage calculator put out by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology that sets a living wage of \$29.59 for a single adult with no children in Washington state’s Snohomish County.

Carpenter Media owns some 100 papers in the United States and continues to buy up local publications. Management said the layoffs at the *Herald* are “part of a larger plan to improve the economics of the newspaper ...”

Some 450 Cuyahoga County, Ohio library workers voted overwhelmingly to begin a strike July 18 unless the public library system provides wages comparable to those of other northeast Ohio libraries. Members of the Service Employees

International Union Local 1199 have seen “no growth” in their wages over the last 15 years.

The SEIU has met with Cuyahoga County Public Library (CCPL) negotiators 20 times since bargaining commenced back in January, but the two sides have remained deadlocked on wages.

The SEIU claims CCPL executive director Tracy Strobel is “paid almost \$80,000 a year more than Governor [Mike] DeWine,” who makes about \$245,000 a year.

The union representing some 2,000 nurses at the University of Vermont Medical Center announced June 25 that nurses voted by just over 84 percent to strike unless they can come to terms with management over wages. The old agreement will expire July 9, but the union has yet to issue the required 10-day strike notice.

The Vermont Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals are calling for a wage hike of 45 percent over the next three years while hospital negotiators are stuck on a meager 17 percent wage package.

UVM Medical Center nurses carried out a two-day strike in 2018, but the rank-and-file is calling for a five-day walkout this time and is prepared to follow up with an addition strike if their terms are not met.

Canada

A strike by 680 airline mechanics ended late Sunday night after the union and WestJet management announced a new tentative agreement. The workers had been on strike since June 28 after WestJet, the Calgary-based airline, and the Airplane Mechanics Fraternal Association (AMFA) failed to push through a tentative deal on wages and working conditions. WestJet is the second-largest commercial air carrier in the country. Over the course of the three-day holiday weekend in Canada, about 110,000 passengers had seen their flights cancelled. It will take several days for the company to fully restore its flight schedules.

WestJet president, Diederik Pen, addressed reporters shortly after the new tentative settlement was reached. “We will see no further labour action coming out of this dispute, as both parties agree to arbitrate the contract in the case of a failed ratification,” he said.

Both the company and the union remain unsure whether the new contract proposal will pass muster with the mechanics. An earlier rejected contract offer in mid-June failed to address the real wage cuts already induced by several years of significantly rising inflation. WestJet management said it had then offered a 12.5 percent wage

rise in the first year of the contract, and a compounded wage increase of 23.5 percent over the rest of the five-and-a-half-year term.

With negotiations stalled since the mid-June contract rejection by an overwhelming majority of the mechanics, Federal Liberal Labour Minister Seamus O'Regan had attempted to end a looming strike threat by ordering WestJet management and the union into binding arbitration. With reports that both management and the union had agreed to such arbitration, workers nonetheless went ahead with their planned strike, arguing that O'Regan's order failed to impose any legally sanctioned requirement outlawing strike activity.

With WestJet management viciously smearing the strikers and calling on O'Regan to urgently clarify his intentions, the labour minister signaled he would move to ensure that an anti-strike mandate would be legally organized if the union and management failed to bring the dispute to a quick resolution. In effect, Sunday night's agreement was imposed under government duress, with the threat of strikebreaking legislation hanging over the workers.

Three thousand screeners, organized by the Canadian Airport Workers Union, have rejected a tentative agreement presented to them by an overwhelming 95 percent. The workers at Canada's largest airport are employed by Garda World, a private company that is contracted by the Canadian Air Transport Authority.

The turnout for the contract rejection was large, with 2,832 workers casting a ballot. The proposed deal offered a 24 percent wage increase spread over three years. Under conditions of years of spiking inflation in one of the country's most expensive cities, workers concluded that the wage offer would not make up for real wage cuts endured in previous years.

Union officials stated after the vote that they hoped Garda management would soon return to the bargaining table. Workers had already voted heavily for a strike mandate in the event that a contract settlement cannot be reached. However, the union did not call for immediate industrial action. The last time screeners at Pearson airport took job action against Garda was in 2011. Then a work-to-rule campaign caused considerable disruption to the processing of passengers passing through the airport. Queues in the screening lines delayed passengers for as long as five hours.



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