

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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Protesting Argentine government workers battled police

Police attacked a rally on Monday July 1 by Argentine workers protesting the sacking of 2,305 technology workers by the Milei administration. The rally took place at the offices of the National Industrial Technology Institute (INTI) on General Paz Avenue, which marks the border between the city of Buenos Aires and Buenos Aires Province.

The municipal police, in military combat gear, tried to cordon off the protests, allegedly to prevent the blocking of the avenue. Demonstrators were attacked with pepper gas. Many demonstrators were injured, including the general secretary of the government workers union (ATE), Rodolfo Aguilar.

At the rally, Aguilar had indicated that the number of workers sacked does not include those who are being laid off in other provinces and other state agencies. Between December 2023 and July 50,000, government workers have been laid off, including the INTI employees. “The fired workers are the new ‘disappeared,’” said Aguilar, making a comparison to the 1976-1983 dictatorship.

Hunger strike at Mexican women’s prison

Cleaning workers in health centers and clinics rallied on Monday July 1 across the Guerrero State health ministry office in Acapulco demanding three months of back pay. The 60 cleaning ladies, who work at 60 health centers in the neighborhoods of Acapulco, earn 100 pesos a day (US\$5.25) and work six days a week. Though it is not uncommon for them not to be paid on time every 15 days, this is the first time their pay has been three months late.

Health officials who spoke to the protesters said that they had no explanation as to why they had not been paid.

Reno, Nevada transit workers authorize strike

Negotiators for Keolis Transit in the Reno, Nevada region, walked out of negotiations June 29 as the contract expired for 200 bus drivers, technicians, dispatchers and utility workers. Keolis, a French-owned international corporation with over 68,000 employees worldwide, operates the transit system for the Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) of Washoe County.

Keolis claims to have offered members of Teamsters Local 533 a 29 percent wage increase over three years, something that workers are rejecting as they will not be compensated for losses due to inflation. Local 533 Teamsters president Gary Watson told News 4 and Fox 11, “Their last best and final offer has concessionary proposals attached to it.”

Among the concessions, according to a Teamsters press release, is contract language that would weaken attendance and leave of absence policies, which are “nonstarters for the members.”

In 2021, RTC transit workers carried out three separate strikes against Keolis. In that struggle, Keolis offered a 6 percent wage increase, while gutting 39 safety and workers’ rights articles from the old agreement. Among its demands was the right to hire an unlimited number of permanent temporary workers. Other contract language would have allowed the company to cancel the Teamsters-controlled healthcare fund within a 60-day period.

Ironworkers voting on new proposal from Oregon and Washington state contractors’ group

Ironworkers throughout Oregon and Washington state are voting on a new proposal from the Northwest Ironworkers Employers Association (NWIWEA) with the final tallies due July 29. Ironworkers defeated a previous three-year proposal back in June for a \$7.50 an hour increase. The old agreement expired June 30.

The new proposal by NWIWEA is for \$15 an hour. But the catch is that this proposal will be spread out over four years, as opposed to the traditional three-year contract.

As an ironworker commented to the *Northwest* “NOPE! \$3.75 a year is not what I want to see our membership buying! Every aspect of our life as tradesmen and tradeswomen has been devastated by historical inflation! To accept a four-year contract is absurd! The inflation-dynamics continue to erode purchasing power of every working citizen. The contract for the Northwest Ironworkers District can be no less than 3 years @ \$5.00 per year! Union Trades buy their Pensions, their Health & Welfare, their vacation allotment, their annuities savings, their Dental Plan, their Apprenticeship Programs, their personal Savings Plan and their Mortgage. With these economic times ripping at the fabric of all of us, this offer is left wanting! Vote NO!”

Union shuts down Guelph, Ontario Cargill strike, rams through sellout

The 41-day strike by 960 meat processing workers at the giant Guelph Cargill beef slaughterhouse ended this past weekend when workers narrowly accepted a second inferior contract offer that had been recommended by their own union leadership. The contract passed by only 52 percent.

The strike began on May 27 after the workers, members of United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 175, rejected by an overwhelming 82 percent the initial tentative contract that had been unanimously recommended by the union leadership. Other than a \$500 signing bonus and the backdating to January of the first-year wage increase, the deal largely reflected the original Cargill offer.

UFCW officials were keen to suppress any public reporting of the details of the agreement, with Region 6 Director Sam Caetano telling reporters that at the “request” of Cargill, the union will withhold contract details. However, despite the union’s kowtowing to company management, fully informed beef farmer organizations announced the deal provided for a \$3.75 increase spread over at least four years—another real cut in wages after the losses from the last contract plus recent cost-of-living spikes are calculated into the equation.

In the past two weeks over 200 strikers, many of them employed at poverty-level wages, had been driven to register at food banks as their meager savings dwindled. Even before the strike began many of the lowest-paid temporary workers in the plant depended on support from local food pantries.

With local Guelph union officials refusing comment, it was left to UFCW Local 401 officials in Calgary to admit that workers had been driven back to work with an inferior contract. “Settling was the choice of Local 175 members, and it’s an understandable one. As the strike dragged on, economic hardships grew and more Guelph workers were forced to turn to the food bank. They made a calculated decision that ending

the ~~strike~~ was better than ~~pro~~continuing it,” stated the union. Unmentioned, of course, was the strikers’ realization that their own union leadership would not fight for a significant wage increase.

The UFCW officials in Calgary are preparing to push through their own rotten contract for about 400 meatpackers at the Alberta Case Ready plant. That tentative contract proposal will be voted on early this week. It is largely based on Cargill’s settlement in Guelph.

Federal Labour Court rules Vancouver dock strike notification illegal

A strike by 600 docks foremen at the Port of Vancouver scheduled to begin Monday, July 8 was abruptly ruled illegal Sunday afternoon by the Canada Industrial Relations Board (CIRB). On Friday, the foremen’s union, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, gave 72-hour strike notification to cargo-handling company DP World. In a strike vote held last month, 99 percent of the workers voting approved strike action. In retaliation, the BC Maritime Employers Association threatened a full lockout to begin on Tuesday if workers went ahead with any job action.

After an intervention by the federal labour minister on Saturday, the CIRB announced on Sunday that they had determined the strike vote held by the ILWU was an “unfair labour practice” and therefore illegal because, they claimed, not all union foremen had the opportunity to vote.

Both business leaders as well as government officials have been clamoring for a declaration outlawing all strikes at ports and railways in the wake of militant job actions amongst infrastructure workers over the past several years. Last year, a 13-day strike by British Columbia port workers was scuttled after ILWU leaders buckled to federal pressure to end the strike. And only last week, the government intervened in a WestJet airline mechanics strike to end the action and finalize a contract before binding arbitration could be imposed.



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