

Workers Struggles: The Americas

Transit workers strike across Argentina over wage controls; Alberta, Canada teachers reject contract recommended by union

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

industry employs as many as 500,000 workers in growing, ginning and clothing manufacture.

Transit workers strike across Argentina over wage controls

On May 6 transit bus drivers took militant strike action across Argentina, particularly centering in the industrial centers of Cordoba, Rosario, Santa Fe and Buenos Aires. In greater Buenos Aires, 103 lines stopped, and 102 others halted across the province. Hundreds more lines stopped in other areas of the country.

The issue was an end to wage controls imposed by the fascist government of Javier Milei on all workers and pensioners.

Workers rallied in front of their workplaces and blocked roads and bridges. In Buenos Aires protests also took place at the headquarters of the Transport Workers Union (UTA), demanding that the strike not be cut short, as has happened repeatedly, and calling for the removal of the UTA leadership. In opposition to the union's demand of a minimum monthly wage of 1.5 million pesos—which, given Argentina's inflationary crisis, is a hunger wage—many of the strikers are demanding 2.5 million pesos.

In Metropolitan Buenos Aires, drivers for one of the major transit lines, Linea 60, confronted security forces to block access into the city. Transit companies appealed to the Milei administration to intervene, arguing that workers are “abusing their right to strike.”

Argentine agricultural workers strike over wages

Cotton processing workers in Argentina went on a 24-hour strike on Tuesday, May 6, over wages at plants in Chaco, Santa Fé, Santiago del Estero and Formosa provinces. Strikers pointed out that despite record cotton exports, management is refusing to negotiate a wage increase.

Argentina is considered a medium-sized cotton-producing country, and cotton is one of its principal crops. The cotton

Sao Paulo public school teachers strike

Sao Paulo public school teachers went on strike on Friday, May 9, demanding a wage increase from the state government led by Tarcísio de Freitas. Freitas proposed a 5 percent increase; the educators are demanding 6.27 percent. The teachers are also insisting on better working conditions, including a more equitable distribution of classes, the hiring of 44,000 more teachers, the building of more schools, upgrades to existing schools and the installation of air conditioning in the classrooms. Sao Paulo has suffered significant heat waves in the last few years.

Other demands include the ending of school privatizations and military training.

In 2017 the Supreme Court had approved a 10.15 percent bonus for teachers that was never paid. The strikers are also demanding that bonus be paid.

A teachers union spokesperson informed *Prensa Latina* that the decision to strike also was in response to a lawsuit against the union seeking to block the strike.

Public education in Sao Paulo state employs over 190,000 full-time and over 81,000 temporary teachers. There are 400 schools for 3.5 million students.

Student protest at University of Panama

Hundreds of University of Panama (UP) students, educators and administrators marched on Tuesday, May 6, demanding that the government of President José Raúl Mulino respect the university's autonomy and the nation's sovereignty and the privatization of the workers' pension system. The students also demanded that the police and military be banned from campus. At the rally students denounced the recently signed Memorandum of Understanding with the United States, which they said undermines Panama's

control of the Panama Canal.

The protest was triggered by Mulino's recent remarks calling the UP campus a "den of thieves," with riot police arresting students over terrorism charges. One student was arrested for distributing leaflets.

Maine nurses and community supporters oppose closure of obstetrics unit in Bar Harbor

Nurses and supporters in Bar Harbor, Maine, held a march and protest on May 8 against the decision by management of Mount Desert Island Hospital (MDIH) to close its obstetrics department. The demonstration came on the heels of a packed community meeting at the end of March, when opposition to the closure was heated.

MDIH and its CEO Chrissi Maguire took the decision to close the facility on July 1 without any input from the public. The decision is firm, according to a management spokesperson, who cited declining birthrates and a drop in maternity services provided.

Erin Oberson, an RN in the obstetrics department at MDIH, issued a statement, "Who is going to hold these private hospitals accountable for making decisions that will eventually kill people? You cannot expect to end vital services, especially in rural Maine communities, without risking people dying as a result of lack of access to care."

In the last year alone, three Maine hospitals in Belfast, Waterville and Houlton have closed their obstetrics units.

California beverage workers strike over unpaid arbitration award

More than 150 workers at the Keurig Dr Pepper (KDP) facility in Victorville, California, expanded Monday to include hundreds of workers at other facilities in the area. The strike now involves 700 workers at five other Keurig Dr Pepper plants including Riverside, Vernon, Thousand Palms, San Fernando and Ventura.

The Teamsters launched the Unfair Labor Practice (ULP) strike May 5 over an unpaid arbitration award. The walkout comes as Teamsters Local 896 is in negotiations with the company over workers' demands for increased wages and pensions.

"KDP was ordered to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars last year after it unlawfully attempted to end its sick time policy, but these members still haven't seen a dime," said Local 896 Secretary-Treasurer Phil Cooper. "That is a blatant violation of federal law, and we will be out here every day, 24 hours a day, until KDP pays its workers what they are legally owed."

The California strike follows the ending of a 12-day strike by KDP workers in Ottumwa, Iowa.

Alberta, Canada teachers reject contract recommended by union

In rebuke to the Alberta Teachers Association (ATA), teachers in the provincial public, Catholic and French schools voted down by a 62 percent margin a mediated tentative agreement that had been recommended by the union. There are 51,000 teachers across the three systems, with 36,000 casting votes.

The defeated contract offered a mere 12 percent general wage increase spread out over four years. In addition, the provincial Conservative government of right-wing Premier Danielle Smith failed to significantly address the burning question of unmanageable and large classroom sizes. A recent survey found most teachers had classes numbering 30 to 35 students. Thirteen percent taught classes of more than 35 students, with some teachers overburdened with classes as large as 50 students. At the same time, steady increases in students with "complex" needs were not adequately addressed in the proposed deal.

The teachers must now enter a 14-day "cooling off" period before they are allowed to approach the Alberta Labour Relations Board for authorization to conduct a strike vote. Under terms of the highly restrictive labor laws, if a vote is then permitted by the labour board and if that vote subsequently results in favour of a strike, the teachers then have 120 days to initiate job actions.

In the event that teachers vote for a strike, union leaders have not indicated whether any job action will take the form of a work-to-rule, a simple cancellation of extracurricular activities, rotating strikes or an all-out strike. The union is also silent on whether any such actions would take place, as the current school year draws to a close or when schools reopen in September.

The last full walkout of Alberta teachers took place in 2002. The current dispute comes on the heels of a winter of job actions by 7,000 non-teaching support workers in Edmonton, Calgary and Fort McMurray school districts that ended in March, with a new contract that failed to make up for years of real wage cuts that have kept these workers earning poverty-levels of compensation.



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