

Workers Struggles: The Americas

Strike wave hits Milei administration policies in Argentina; GE Aerospace workers in Kentucky and Ohio cast solid strike vote

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Strike wave hits Milei administration policies in Argentina

A wave of protests strikes took place in Argentina last week, from the very tip of South America, to the border with Brazil, Paraguay and Bolivia.

In addition to the weekly protest marches by pensioners in Buenos Aires against the attacks on Social Security and medical services by the Milei administration, strikes took place by university workers, teachers, health workers, oil, mineral, tire workers and energy company employees protesting layoffs and hunger wages.

On August 19 government employees (transportation, health care, merchant marine, and road repair) carried out a massive march and rally in central Buenos Aires against wages cuts and layoffs.

On August 21, educators in Jujuy province and in the city of Rosario, Santa Fe province, carried out strikes against the government's attacks on education; joining education workers in over 60 universities (on a 48-hour strike August 21 and 22). Teachers are also striking in Tierra del Fuego, in the extreme south of the country.

Santiago, Chile bus drivers strike

On Tuesday, August 19, 300 RDU ("Redbus") drivers serving neighborhoods in Santiago, Chile's capital city, went on strike after mediation efforts with the company failed.

At issue are wages, working hours and working conditions. The strikers are part-time workers, with irregular working hours. Real wages have fallen for three years, workers report that the company does not recognize meal breaks or vacation time, or days off. Many of the strikers are forced to work a second job. A striking worker pointed out that precariousness affects not only drivers, but

all staff:

"The company still hasn't listened to our demands; it constantly manages to isolate us from the other transit workers by reaching agreements with them that are no good for us. We need support because we have very precarious work with salaries that don't match the responsibilities we perform. Not just drivers, but also cleaning crews, and other transport workers."

Paraguay teachers strike betrayed unions

On Monday and Tuesday, August 18 and 19 scores of striking teachers from across Paraguay marched and rallied in Asunción, Paraguay's capital city, demanding an 8.6 percent pay raise, a better retirement and improvements in working conditions, rejecting, as a lame excuse, a government claim that there is no money, in the face of substantial increases to legislators and government officials.

Addressing the demonstrators, union officials denounced the government offer of 3.6 percent for next year as "miserable" and promised another strike at the end of the month.

True to form, however the educators' unions shut down the strike following two days of talks and settled for the government offer. The wage increase barely exceeds the official inflation estimate for 2024 of 3.8 percent. None of the other issues, such as a reduction of the retirement age, and improvements in hours and working conditions, were addressed.

Tentative agreement for University of Minnesota service workers heads off strike

The union representing 1,400 service workers for the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis-St. Paul and Duluth, Minnesota, announced a tentative agreement August 19, one day before workers were slated to walk off the job. Teamsters Local 320 officials have called for a "no vote" on the contract, which contradicts calling off the strike, after workers voted by a 97

percent margin to authorize strike action earlier this month.

Health care premiums are set to increase around 10 percent for university workers. Currently the university pays 78 percent of healthcare costs with workers shouldering the rest. It is not clear the proposal offsets these cost increases in any way.

The two-year agreement will raise wages by a mere 5 percent with so-called market adjustments that range from a half percent to 2 percent, and there are increases in shift differentials. University management attached a \$1,000 bonus in attempt to make the agreement more palatable.

The Teamsters are conducting the ratification vote by mail and in-person voting. The ballots will only be tallied on September 5 when the old agreement expires. The union has given no indication whether a no vote will translate into a strike.

GE Aerospace workers in Kentucky and Ohio cast solid strike vote

Hundreds of workers at GE Aerospace plant facilities in Erlanger, Kentucky, and Evendale, Ohio, voted August 22 by an 84 percent margin to grant strike authorization as they head towards an August 27 contract expiration.

Issues such as wages, job security, health care and time off remain unresolved. United Auto Workers Local 647 President Brian Strunk stated that “a 36 percent increase in your health insurance isn't sustainable, especially from a company whose CEO made \$89 million last year alone.”

UAW members at the Evendale plant fabricate marine and industrial engines for the US Navy. The Erlanger plant is a GE Engine Services Distribution Center.

Teamsters order Iowa dairy workers back to work after announcement of tentative agreement

Teamsters Local 554 ended a two-day strike by 196 workers at the Kemps dairy plant in Le Mars, Iowa, after reaching a tentative agreement on August 22, and ordered workers back into the plant the following day. Local 554 secretary-treasurer Adrian Macias said the strike was due to workers being “really behind on wages, on certain safety issues, (and) health benefits.”

Workers have yet to vote on the tentative agreement. Details were not available.

Kemps is a subsidiary of the Dairy Farmers of America, a cooperative which, according to the Teamsters, controls nearly one-third of milk production in the United States. Kemps purchased the Le Mars facility five years ago after the previous owner, Dean Foods, declared bankruptcy.

Dalhousie University faculty in Nova Scotia locked out

About 1,000 faculty association members were locked out last week in a contract dispute over wage increases at Dalhousie, the largest university in Atlantic Canada. The university has 15,000 full-time undergraduates and 4,000 graduate students. The educators' Faculty Association leadership then responded with their own strike notification. Students will arrive for the school's autumn term immediately after Labour Day.

Workers had turned down management's proposal offering 2 percent in each year of a three-year contract. The tenured and non-tenured professors and their assistants and school librarians rejected that proposal by a vote of 82.7 percent. They are seeking wage increases of 3.75 percent, 4.75 per cent and 5.75 percent over three years.

University officials have sought to disparage the educators' struggle for a better contract by noting that tenured professors with high seniority can earn over \$160,000 per year. However, junior educators—who comprise an increasing majority of teaching staff—receive compensation so low that many are required to take second jobs in the community to make ends meet.

Toromont strike near Toronto in eighth week

A strike by 120 skilled and semi-skilled workers is entering its eighth week at Toromont's Caterpillar component remanufacturing plant in the town of Bradford, just north of Toronto. Last week Toromont management, using pro-company government labour laws in the province, forced workers to vote on a miserable contract offer. Workers rejected the deal by over 87 percent in a vote held last week.

The Toromont facility was opened last year and restores “near end-of-life” machinery for use in construction and mining operations. The workers, members of Unifor, are fighting for a first collective agreement with the company and are seeking industry-standard wages, benefits and working conditions.



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