

Dalhousie University strike/lockout continues in Canada; Toledo Libbey Glass workers in third week of walkout

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

Argentine ceramic workers protest mass layoff

On September 5 workers at the ILVA industrial ceramics plant in Pilar, in the industrial belt northwest of Buenos Aires city, set up camp around the plant, which was shut down, allegedly because of a crisis in trade, but in reality to force its workers to accept brutal conditions, beginning with the layoff of 300 workers.

ILVA management is demanding that workers subordinate their rights to management needs, accepting the layoff of 300 workers with no compensation, wage cuts, and adjust their work days and hours to management demands. “They want to turn us into slaves,” declared one of the strikers.

All this is being made possible by attacks on workers’ rights by the fascistic Milei administration, which have encouraged management attacks on Argentina’s industrial working class. Protest strikes will continue this week.

Bolivian students and workers protest Gaza genocide

Students and workers marched and rallied on September 5 in five Bolivian cities—La Paz, Cochabamba, Santa Cruz, Sucre and Tarija—in solidarity with the Palestinian people and to show support for the 30-ship Sumud Global Flotilla that is on its way to the shores of Gaza with supplies.

In the Bolivian capital of La Paz, demonstrators rallied at the San Andrés University waving Palestinian flags and the wiphala flag of the indigenous Andean tribes. The protesters also rallied at the Argentinian and US embassies, denouncing the support given by those government to the Netanyahu regime.

Pensioners in Ecuador protest Social Security privatization

Beneficiaries of the Ecuadorian Social Security Institute (IESS) marched and rallied in several cities of Ecuador on Thursday September 4 to

protest legislation that would privatize Social Security. The new legislation would transform IESS into a private financial entity.

Retired workers rallied at provincial government houses and in Quito at the National Legislature.

Fabiola Basantes, one of the protesters quoted by the Telesur news agency, declared: “This will not only affect those already retired but also the youth, today’s workers, that tomorrow may find themselves without any security.”

The demonstrators also protested the failure of the IESS to provide cost-of-living raises and the participation of Social Security recipients in IESS decisions.

United States

Novato, California city workers walk out again over contract

Novato, California, city workers staged a one-day walkout September 2, the second in less than a month, to demand the city adjust its contract offer on base wages and cost-of-living escalators. The 76 members of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 1021, comprising street maintenance workers, building inspectors, parks workers, city planners and office assistants, last struck for three days in August after the old agreement expired June 30.

Novato workers earn less than city workers in nearby jurisdictions. Understaffing is also a problem. Paul Perryman, a street maintenance worker, told CBS News workers are exhausted: “The biggest problem is our staffing is less than it was in 2006. The streets crew specifically was over 14. The street crew right now is seven.”

The Novato city administrators pushed through a sales tax increase last year called “Measure M,” with the direct support of the SEIU, that was to address “roadway repairs, and parks and facilities maintenance.” But now the city is holding back on using the funds to settle the contract.

“The city administrator and City Council have gone back on their word,” admitted Jennifer Esteen, vice president of Local 1021.

Toledo Libbey Glass workers enter third week on strike

Workers at Libbey Glass in Toledo are continuing a walkout that began August 23 after they previously voted to reject the company’s final proposal, which provided inadequate pay rises, imposed mandatory overtime, higher healthcare costs and undermined seniority rights along with other concessions. The workers are members of International

Association of Machinists Lodge 1297 and three locals of the United Steelworkers and produce a wide range of glass tableware.

Libbey employs around 900 office and production workers at its Toledo operations and just over 6,000 globally. Workers at the Toledo plant last struck in 2016, a walkout that lasted about two weeks.

In a now common move, the strike has been declared an unfair labor practice strike, not a contract strike, by the IAM and USW. The unions claim the company has not bargained in good faith. By declaring an unfair labor practice strike, the unions create conditions where the strike can be ended without a settlement based on the company merely showing “good faith.”

The IAM and USW agreed to major concessions in 2020 when Libbey Glass was in bankruptcy. While the company is now privately held, it has apparently returned to profitability and workers are demanding that the concessions be restored.

The USW and IAM have done nothing to broaden the struggle, instead bringing Democratic politicians to the picket line to mouth empty words of support, such as Ohio Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur.

Houston, Texas, hotel workers launch union’s first-ever strike

Some 400 workers at the Hilton Americas Hotel in Houston, Texas, walked off the job September 1 after management failed to meet workers’ demands for a \$23 an hour minimum wage. Some members of Unite Here Local 23 make as little as \$16.50 an hour. It is the union’s first-ever strike in the state of Texas.

Bill Guillen, who has worked at Houston’s downtown Hilton for 21 years, told Houston Public Media, “The reason I’m doing it is because I make \$16.50 an hour. It’s not enough to pay my bills. I’m always calling one creditor to pay another. I have utilities I have to pay. I have to pay a mortgage. Everything is going up. The cost of living is so high.”

Workers voted by a 99.3 percent margin back on August 13 to grant strike authorization. The old agreement expired on June 30. The current strike is set to end on September 10.

Local 23 represents some 3,000 hospitality workers. Despite the fact that other hotel workers whose contracts expire this year are also seeking a \$23 base wage, there has been no effort by Unite Here to mobilize joint strike action.

Strike continues into fourth month at Chicago’s Illinois International Port

Workers at the Illinois International Port on Chicago’s far south side are into their fourth month on strike over safety conditions that affect both workers and the port’s cargo. The International Union of Operating Engineers struck against the firm QSL America in May of this year after filing a series of complaints over labor practices.

WBBM Newsradio reported that workers “claimed the company has repeatedly brushed off complaints about broken safety and hauling equipment and inadequate training... workers’ complaints are not taken seriously.”

QSL has now hired replacement workers to perform port work. According to the union, the port provides more than \$700 million in economic activity annually.

Management threatens to permanently replace striking workers at New York City pharmaceutical plant

Management announced September 2 that it will hire permanent replacement workers at the Bronx, New York, pharmaceutical plant. Some 190 workers with Teamsters Local 210 walked off the job after Labor Day after management put forward a proposal to expand operations to seven days a week, increase shifts from 10 to 12 hours, and eliminate the previous overtime compensation policy. Management will also cease to contribute to the workers 401(k) retirement plan.

The announcement came in the form of a notice posted near the picket line with the threat in bold type that workers will lose their jobs “on a permanent basis...” Negotiations are slated to resume September 10.

Canada

Dalhousie University strike/lockout continues

The Dalhousie University board of governors and the Dalhousie Faculty Association agreed this past weekend to return to conciliation talks on September 8 as the lockout/strike continues. About 1,000 faculty association members have been locked out since August 20 in a contract dispute over wage increases at Dalhousie, the largest university in Atlantic Canada. The union responded with its own strike declaration two days later.

The university, located in and around Halifax, Nova Scotia, has 15,000 full-time undergraduates and 4,000 graduate students. Classes have been cancelled since students returned for the beginning of their fall semester after Labour Day.

The tenured and non-tenured professors and their assistants and school librarians rejected management’s proposal of 2 percent in each year of a three-year contract proposal by a vote of 82.7 percent. They are seeking wage increases of 3.75 percent, 4.75 percent and 5.75 percent over three years.

In the meantime, Dalhousie University employees, including part-time instructors and teaching assistants, have voted overwhelmingly in favour of their own strike mandate ahead of conciliation talks with the school on October 2. In a release on Friday, CUPE officials announced that its members at the university voted by 87.7 per cent in favour of job action.

Alberta teachers contract talks deadlock

Last week, contract talks between the Alberta Teachers’ Association and the provincial government broke down, leaving the two sides at a tense impasse. The union has already been granted a strike mandate in a vote by 51,000 rank-and-file members. The Teachers’ Employer Bargaining Association (TEBA) has also issued authorization for school boards to lock teachers out should they initiate a work-to-rule or any other job action.

Responding to the austerity policies of the right-wing Alberta government of Premier Danielle Smith, the TEBA is offering no pay increase for teachers larger than 12 percent over four years, which is completely unacceptable to rank-and-file teachers, who have endured years of wage restraint. In May, 62 percent of teachers rejected a mediator’s recommendation, and in June, 94.5 percent of the nearly 39,000 teachers participating in a strike vote supported strike action. The

union can now strike at any time after it gives 72 hours' notice. Union officials, however, have signaled that no imminent strike action is planned.

Teachers' wages have increased by only 5.8 percent total over the past 13 years. Most of those years saw teachers' pay frozen without any raise at all. The last teachers strike in 2002 involved more than 20,000 teachers at 22 school districts. They were ordered back to work by the ruling Conservative provincial party of then Premier Ralph Klein after 17 days.



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