Workers Struggles: The Americas

Strike mandate by WestJet cabin crew; 800 pharmacists in Southern California vote to strike

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

Argentina Sadowa Meat workers protests over wages and layoffs

On July 17 scores of workers at the Sadowa Meat packing plant rallied in a protest strike at the gates of the plant, located in Mar del Plata, in southern Buenos Aires province. The workers denounced a wave of layoffs, with no compensation. The sackings took place on June 24.

Protesting workers also denounced their union leadership that has taken no action, other than to denounce management to the provincial Labor Ministry. The remaining workers who were not fired are also owned back wages and benefits. The meat workers' trade union leadership insists on making side agreements with meat companies, like Sadowa, keeping workers in the dark and sabotaging their protests and strikes.

Among industrial cities, Mar del Plata, also a center of tourism, has been one of the most heavily impacted by the country's economic and industrial implosions.

Puerto Rico independence demonstration hits Wall Street financial control

Thousands marched on July 18 in the Old City section of San Juan, Puerto Rico's capital. The protest demanding political and economic independence from the United States has become an annual event. An important part of the protest was the repudiation of the US-controlled Financial Control Board, which subordinates Puerto Rico to the profit-interests of Wall Street Banks. Also denounced was the displacement of Puerto Rican citizens and the loss of natural resources to US firms.

As the demonstrators assembled in San Juan's Plaza Colón square they were entertained by Puerto Rican singers Bad Bunny and Residente, and by the Machete theater collective. As they marched many sang the 1868 revolutionary song La Borinqueña by poet Lola Rodriguez, written during the independence uprising against Spain, and later banned by the US occupiers.

Mexican teachers renew protests, claim government reneged on agreements

On July 16 hundreds of teachers, members of the CNTE union, marched in protest in Mexico City. At issue is the government's failure to carry out recent agreements, following protest strikes in June. Various columns of protesting teachers concentrated at education buildings across this city.

The demonstrators demand an end to the arbitrary transfer of educators, and to the disparities in salaries and health and vacation benefits between schools in Mexico City and those across the country.

Triggering these new marches and rallies were remarks made by Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum accusing the CNTE of refusal to meet with government authorities. CNTE leaders claim that the reverse is true, that the government has consistently refused to negotiate with the CNTE. When negotiations did take place, the Sheinbaum administration ignored them.

Street protests continue in Cuba amid blockade, shortage of basic necessities

An implosion in energy supplies in the midst of a crisis in basic economic conditions, together with increases in the number of political prisoners around the island, are causing daily protests in Cuba. In response the Cuban government headed by President Diaz-Canel is responding with repression, jailing and punishing many of those who have taken to the streets.

Most of the protests are peaceful, involving neighbors banging pots and pans. The protest on this July 11 was the largest since the massive protest of July 2021.

The week leading up to those demonstrations included two national blackouts. Human Rights Watch estimates that 800 political prisoners dating from 2021 still have not been freed, despite having completed their sentences.

800 pharmacists in Southern California vote to strike

Some 800 pharmacists throughout Southern California voted overwhelmingly July 16 to authorize a strike against several grocery chains over insufficient staffing and low wages. Members of the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) work for Albertsons, Ralphs, Vons and Pavilions, and have been without a contract for almost five months, since March 1.

The union has asserted that supermarket pharmacists make 11 percent less than pharmacists at CVS. When the grocery chains offered a $3.50 an hour hike in wages back in April, the UFCW responded that the increase “does not come close to addressing the issues pharmacists are facing every day.”

The union has also filed unfair labor practices alleging the chains unilaterally made changes without consulting the union. They also charge the supermarkets with unlawful surveillance of workers involved in bargaining.

The UFCW has made an issue of the chains cross-training clerks rather than hiring dedicated pharmacists, making collaboration more difficult for pharmacists and customers.

Ohio library workers authorize strike action

Workers in the Cleveland Public Library system voted by a 97 percent margin July 12 to authorize a strike after eight months of bargaining have failed to resolve issues involving wages, staffing improvements and safety issues. The contract for 400 members of Service Employees International Union (SEIU) District 1199 expired last January.

A union representative warned, “Their wage proposal doesn’t provide for a living wage for a fair number of people.” The SEIU has not issued a strike notice to library management, but revealed a target date of August 24 unless negotiations progress.

Both sides agreed to mediation back at the end of April. The SEIU issued an economic package on July 10.

Nurses at Cleveland Clinic authorize strike as demands go unaddressed

The union representing nurses at Cleveland Clinic Lutheran Hospital voted “overwhelmingly” to grant strike action after “months of negotiations” and the filing of more than three dozen unfair labor practice charges. Members of Service Employees International Union District 1199 are focused on wages and short staffing that endangers both caregivers and patients.

Workers have described staffing levels as “skeleton crews.” Back in April, SEIU representative Artheta Peters revealed to WOIO that nurses “often care for as many as 26 patients at a time. Nurses want a fraction of that… You know, two to three to that 26.”

According to the union, Cleveland Clinic reported a $2.3 billion surplus in 2025. Cleveland Clinic is just one of the 124 community hospitals operated by Lutheran Hospital nationwide.

Strike mandate by WestJet cabin crews

Last week, some 4,400 flight attendants at WestJet, Canada’s second largest airline, overwhelmingly voted for strike action in pursuit of a new contract that ends the airline’s practice of imposing unpaid work on its cabin crews and addresses the inflation-driven erosion of wages over the life of the last contract. The workers, members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), voted by 99.4 percent for a strike mandate should an acceptable agreement not soon be reached. After a government imposed “cooling off period,” the earliest date that a strike (or lockout) can begin is August 2.

The policy of only paying flight attendants for the time they spend airborne has roiled the airline industry in recent years. Workers are not compensated for the hours spent assisting passengers with boarding and deplaning, not to mention the time spent sitting on tarmacs during lengthy delays. Many airlines, including WestJet, do not pay their flight attendants for these services.

A recent study by the union shows flight attendants on average put in 35 unpaid hours a month performing such duties. The study, based on typical schedules over several months, showed that WestJet flight attendants would earn less than the federal minimum wage of $18.15 per hour if their time spent on the ground was calculated as part of their shifts.

At Air Canada, over 10,000 flight attendants staged a militant three-day strike in August 2025 to protest unpaid labor and falling real wages. The struggle was suppressed when the federal government ordered workers back to work through binding arbitration. That dispute also revolved around workers’ demands to end unpaid work before departure and after landing, alongside calls for substantial wage increases.

Members highlighted that junior staff faced poverty wages. However, the government stepped in by violating constitutionally protected right-to strike provisions and invoked a disputed section of the Canada Labour Code to force the flight attendants back to work.

Workers initially defied the government’s order but soon after union officials announced that a “settlement” had been reached. In a strong indication that the terms of the agreement were a sellout, the union barred the workers from voting on the majority of its provisions. To ensure that the vote of the rank and file was essentially meaningless, CUPE agreed that in the event flight attendants voted down the deal, all outstanding questions in the agreement would be subject to binding arbitration after a token three-day period of mediation.

In the eventual “vote” on the deal, workers voted “no” by a whopping 99 percent. The settlement was nonetheless accepted by the union leadership. That deal enshrined a meager 50 percent rate for pre-flight work and nothing for post-flight work.