Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Workers, students, retirees protest Argentine President Milei's visit to the Port of Iguazu

On Saturday, September 5, scores of workers, teachers, students and retirees and small farmers protested the visit of President Javier Milei to the Port of Iguazu in the northeastern Misiones Province, which borders with Brazil and Paraguay.

Anticipating the protests, security forces blocked all major roads into the city and occupied the airport. The demonstrators, marching from various towns in the province, managed to reach the vicinity of the city where they rallied in protest, denouncing the fascist president.

A protesting teacher described the miserable conditions that workers and small farmers face in the province as a result of the Milei administration's attacks on wages and jobs, pointing out that many are now being evicted, unable to pay rent, and others are forced to cross the border into Brazil in search of work.

President Milei was visiting the city to participate in a conference of finance executives.

Welfare workers mobilize against job cuts in Mexico City

On Wednesday September 2, workers employed by the Integral Family Development Agency (DIF) rallied in Mexico City over the elimination of 248 jobs and the attacks on part-timers. Initially, the Union that represents DIF workers had announced that only 25 positions would be cut. A later announcement raised the number to 248 due to a DIF budget crisis.

Among the sacked are health workers, nurses, therapists, technicians and social workers; all are essential to provide services to the poor. Most of these workers, while working full time for several years, have never been formally given permanent status, making layoffs and wage cuts routine over the last decade.

The DIF, established in 1977 is a welfare agency to assist families and children in poverty with cash and social and medical services. It also aims to provide alternatives to child labor.

High school and university students protest in Santiago, Chile against repressive legislation

On September 7, thousands marched onto Santiago's National Cemetery to mark the 1973 overthrow and murder of Chilean President Allende in a US-backed military coup and to denounce President Kast and Argentine President Milei. They were blocked by police.

It followed a September 3 rally by hundreds of high school and university students in Santiago, Chile's capital, against repressive legislation by right-wing President José Antonio Kast that criminalizes popular discontent, "legalizing dictatorship," according to his critics.

The protesters also condemned the Fifth Madrid Forum, that brought together extreme right-wing South American and Spanish politicians in Santiago. The demonstrators also denounced Argentine fascist President Milei, who at the Madrid Forum, openly applauded the 1973 coup that overthrew elected President Allende and applauded the murderous Pinochet dictatorship (1973-1980).

The protesters also denounced legislation that favors big business and the oligarchy, by cutting taxes. As they marched, many students chanted, "The same as Pinochet!" comparing Kast to the ex-dictator.

During the march the students were attacked by police with water-cannons and tear gas to prevent them from reaching Chile's Government House.

Workers at Tufts University Medford, Massachusetts campus authorize strike action

The 100 workers at Tufts University campus in Medford, Massachusetts, voted overwhelmingly to grant strike authorization September 3 after months of negotiations have failed to resolve issues around wages and benefits. Members of the Service Employees International Union Local 32BJ comprise groundskeepers, maintenance and trades workers who have been working without a contract since July 1.

"We should not have to choose between paying the bills and buying groceries," Jackson Francois, a maintenance mechanic told The Somerville Times during a campus rally. "Then there's healthcare. We pay more for our healthcare benefits than workers at other universities — including some other SEIU members. So we're getting hit twice: Tufts won't pay us enough, and our healthcare costs take even more from our paychecks."

The union is seeking to close the gap between the highest paid and lowest paid workers in the bargaining unit and bring down the high cost of healthcare. Facilities workers at Tufts' Boston campus voted earlier in the week to also authorize strike action. Workers are aware that Tufts currently is running a $29 million budget surplus.

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Cleveland Orchestra musicians authorize strike; will walk out September 23 if negotiations fail

The union representing musicians of the Cleveland Orchestra announced September 3 that members of the Cleveland Federation of Musicians Local 4 had voted unanimously to authorize a strike unless a new agreement is reached by September 23 when their contract extension expires. The union declared that negotiations, which commenced last July, retain a wide gap over workers' demands for competitive wages that keep pace with inflation, work rules to help prevent tendinitis and a say in the hiring process.

The union charges that the current proposals by management will result in lower compensation in the coming year.

"I'm astonished that our management believes that the Cleveland Orchestra can attract and retain the world's best, and stay in the top tier of American orchestras without paying the musicians a wage, which, at a minimum, even keeps up with inflation," said Kathleen Collins, a member of the negotiating committee. "Our compensation has lagged behind inflation since 2018, and we are rapidly falling further behind our peer orchestras."

Elayna Duitman, a violinist and chair of the negotiating committee, said, "The Cleveland Orchestra is considered one of the Big Five American orchestras, alongside the New York Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra and Boston Symphony." And "is in danger of losing its status as a Big Five orchestra, thanks to years of falling behind our peer orchestras in terms of pay and benefits."

Teamsters call off strike action after school bus contractor agrees to resume negotiations

The union representing 75 school bus workers called off a strike on September 3 after negotiators representing eight school districts under the Rhode Island Department of Education agreed to resume bargaining. Earlier this year, workers had overwhelmingly voted to strike First Student, the North American bus service contractor that employs over 50,000 workers in 38 states and seven Canadian provinces.

Teamsters Local 251, which represents the workers, had indicated that strike action could have begun as early as September 2. Democratic Governor Daniel McKee revealed he had been in "direct contact" with both sides as negotiations broke down and called for a "swift resolution."

The districts that would be affected by a strike are Providence, Pawtucket, Central Falls, West Warwick, Smithfield, Lincoln, Barrington, Bristol/Warren, Portsmouth and the Statewide RIDE service.

University of Toronto workers vote to strike

More than 6,100 administrative and technical workers at the University of Toronto will be in a strike position on September 8 —the first day of classes for the semester—after voting by 96 percent for strike action in pursuit of a new contract.

The workers, members of U of T Staff-Appointed Unit (UTSA) of the United Steelworkers (USW) Local 1998, are employed as undergraduate and graduate program coordinators, academic advisers, IT specialists, lab assistants and many other job descriptions. In a very high turnout for the vote, over 75 percent of the membership voted for the strike mandate.

The workers are demanding job security and workload protections after university management announced that it plans to achieve $20 million in savings next year by not replacing workers who leave their employment. Workers are also pursuing improvements in wages, healthcare benefits and working conditions around the issues of remote work and artificial intelligence.

Despite the strong mandate for strike action, USW officials announced that they will continue to bargain until talks break down. A union press release stated that a strike may not necessarily occur on September 8. "If contract negotiations with the employer continue to be productive, your elected negotiating committee may agree to continue bargaining past the strike deadline."

The USW further advised members that "Unless and until you hear otherwise from USW Local 1998, Tuesday, September 8th is a regular workday. Remember, a strike deadline only means that we are in a legal strike position; it does not mean that we are on strike."

Jazz Aviation flight attendants vote to strike

Over 1,000 members of the Canadian Flight Attendants Union employed at Halifax-based Jazz Aviation voted by 99 percent to give their union a strike mandate. Jazz Aviation, owned by Chorus Aviation, operates its flights under the Air Canada Express brand. The flight attendants have been without a contract since January 1. They are demanding payment for work performed on the ground before and after actual flight time as part of an improved compensation package.

Although negotiations involving a mediator have come to an impasse, airline management is seeking a new round of talks with a conciliator. Union officials have yet to set a strike deadline.

The contract dispute at Jazz follows on from flight attendant strikes at Air Canada in 2025 and at WestJet this past summer. On each occasion, the strikes were quickly ended after federal strikebreaking actions against the Air Canada workers and threats of imminent strikebreaking orders against the WestJet workers. As a result, new contracts eventually pushed through by the Canadian Union of Public Employees only partially realized flight attendant demands for full compensation for work performed on the ground.

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