

Workers Struggles: The Americas

Chile government workers strike over seniority rights; Overwhelming vote to strike by 3,600 Unifor members at CN Rail

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

Public employees hold one-day strike in Chile

On Thursday November 28, members of the National Government Workers Group (*Agrupación Nacional de Empleados Fiscales – ANEF*) carried out a one-day strike against new measures attacking seniority rights for government workers.

On November 8, the Gabriel Boric administration had announced that seniority rights for government workers would be substantially reduced. The new rules, imposed by Boric’s newly appointed General Controller of the Republic, Dorothy Pérez, state that new public employees can only claim seniority rights after five years employment. Previous to the change, government workers obtained seniority rights after two years on the job.

The measure particularly imperils those government workers hired on a contingent or temporary status.

The strike included a march by thousands of government workers and their supporters through downtown Santiago. Protests also took place in other Chilean cities.

The ANEF bureaucracy has not explained why it took 20 days for the action to take place despite ANEF president José Pérez’ statement that it was an “ethical imperative” for the union leaders to “unfurl” necessary acts to turn things around.

Pérez assured the government that, coupled with a 40-hour week, going back to the old standard would make government workers more productive—currently government workers work 45 hours per week. Government workers are specifically excluded from a 2023 law instituting a 40-hour workweek gradually over a five-year period. In addition to its belated stand on seniority rights, ANEF is demanding a paltry 3 percent increase in real wages.

Military police suppress protest by indigenous peasants in Brazil

On Wednesday, November 27, Provincial Military Police forces invaded the village of Jaguapiri in the Mato Grosso do Sul, south of the Amazon region and bordering Bolivia. The village is located in the Dourados Indigenous Reserve.

The savage act of repression took place during a peaceful protest by indigenous peasants demanding access to clean water. Chronic water shortages are now common on the Dourado reservation, depriving the

indigenous people the most basic thing needed to live, essential not only for drinking and cooking, but health and hygiene as well.

Claiming that it was freeing-up blocked roads the military used live ammunition at random. The violence included shooting at a school, using pepper spray and bombing several homes in the village to disperse the demonstrators. The police brutally arrested two demonstrators and wounded 20 others. Demonstrators were hospitalized suffering pepper-spray caused breathing problems. In addition, two women and a child were hospitalized with bullet wounds. Demonstrators said that police had also blocked the movement of rescue ambulances.

A reporting team from the Indigenous Missionary Council (*Conselho Indigenista Missionário -CIMI*) was able to collect 65 videos documenting the excessive force used by the military police against defenseless demonstrators.

Getúlio Guarani Kaiowá, one of several religious observers at the protest, was targeted by the police and he became ill from the pepper. He was only carrying his *mbaraká*, a musical instrument.

“How can our people go to a violent protest with a healer? It was to show the authorities our discontent. We are going thirsty; children are not studying due to lack of water. That was it. The police were cowards once again,” declared an indigenous woman in a video released by the community.

Reacting to the repression indigenous leaders vowed to extend their protests to villages across the region.

Mexico City rally in solidarity with Palestine

Thousands of workers, students and intellectuals rallied on November 30, Palestine Solidarity Day, across from the Israeli embassy in downtown Mexico City.

The protest began at a rally across from the US Embassy, where the demonstrators condemned US financial support for the Israeli army, demanded a cease fire in Gaza and the Middle East. The demonstrators also demanded that the Sheinbaum administration break diplomatic relations between Mexico and Israel and declare the Israeli occupation of Gaza a genocide. The protest at the Israeli Embassy concluded with a mass die-in; with protesters lying on the ground as if dead.

The march continued on to the Foreign Secretariat, with the same demands. Waving Palestinian flags, protesters chanted: “It’s not war, It’s genocide!” and demanded that President Claudia Sheinbaum break relations with the Israeli government of Benjamin Netanyahu.

In a parallel demonstration, educators and students rallied at the headquarters of the National Humanities, Science and Technologies Council (*Consejo Nacional de Humanidades, Ciencias y Tecnologías –*

CONACIT) demanding that it break with Israeli universities that participate in the occupation and apartheid of Palestine.

United States

Las Vegas casino workers strike over wages

Some 700 workers at the Virgin Hotels Las Vegas have been on an open-ended strike since November 13 over wages. The Culinary Union, which represents housekeepers, porters, bellhops and food servers, said the two sides are “miles apart” over the wage issue, which involves a five-year proposal. Union officials claimed that management had offered only a \$ 0.30 raise over the life of the contract, far short of the \$4 raise workers at other hotels have received.

Bartender Michael Renick told the Associated Press that he lives paycheck to paycheck. “I’m ready to go for as long as I need to, and I’m pretty sure that’s how everyone else is feeling too.”

The walkout comes after the old agreement expired in June and a two-day limited strike that failed to move negotiations forward. The Virgin Hotels is situated off the Las Vegas strip. It was not part of last year’s negotiations that involved 40,000 members of the Culinary Union.

It has been 22 years since the union last called an open-ended strike.

Rhode Island healthcare workers vote to strike December 12 over wages and understaffing

Over 2,000 nurses, dietary and clerical workers at Women & Infants Hospital in Providence, Rhode Island voted by a 90 percent margin to carrying out a one-day strike December 12 over staffing shortages and wages. The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) 1199 called the strike charging a number of unfair labor practices, including, “Intimidating, threatening, and in the most extreme cases – engaging in ‘impermissible physical acts’ against members in the union for testifying against the hospital in a federal unfair labor practice trial.”

Care New England, which operates the facility, says it is offering a 5.5 percent wage increase over a three-year contract. But the union countered that when healthcare costs are factored in the hospital’s proposal will amount to a mere 1 percent rise.

Care New England has contracted with a strike-breaking company to provide temporary workers at a cost of \$9 million.

Service employees union holds picket at Los Angeles International Airport to push living wage ordinance

About 100 Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) workers held an informational picket November 25 to call attention to substandard wages and working conditions. The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) used the protest as a means to pressure the Los Angeles City Council to upgrade a “Living Wage Ordinance” that would immediately raise all LAX workers’ wages to \$25 and increase it again to \$30 an hour by 2028 and also improve healthcare benefits.

The picket coincided with a one-day strike by hundreds of workers at Charlotte Douglas International Airport (CLT) in North Carolina. The workers were protesting poverty wages and for better working conditions.

The strikers work for airline contractors ABM Industries and Prospect, which services American Airlines.

The living wage ordinance was introduced about two years ago, but the Los Angeles City Council tabled the resolution back on November 20. It will be reconsidered on December 11.

The measure would affect baggage handlers, plane cleaners and other workers who provide assistance to passengers, such as those who require wheelchairs.

Temporary layoff of 400 at Lion Electric in Illinois as company struggles with creditors

Lion Electric, a company that manufactures electric buses, said it is temporarily laying off 400 employees and shutting down production at its Illinois plant. This follows a two week extension from its creditors.

The company based in St-Jérôme, Que. said it had secured an extension to December 16 for a loan and a credit agreement with its lenders following a Sunday deadline.

Lion Electric has already carried out three other rounds of layoffs in 2024, involving nearly 520 jobs.

Albany, Oregon teachers continue strike

A strike by teachers in this Willamette Valley city will continue after talks with the district broke down early Monday. An agreement had reportedly been near, but details could not be finalized.

The strike began November 12 over smaller class sizes and improved resources for students with individual behavioral needs. It is the first walkout by teachers in Albany in 40 years.

Canada

Overwhelming vote to strike by 3,600 Unifor members at CN Rail; CPKC rail workers to follow

Last week rail workers in two Unifor bargaining units both voted overwhelmingly for strike action at Canadian National (CN) Rail—the largest rail transportation company in the country. Organized in Unifor Local 100, the 2,100 workers including mechanics, technicians, electricians and heavy equipment operators voted by 96 percent to take strike action should a new contract not be reached. At the same time, 1,500 administrators and customer support staff organized in Unifor Council 4000 at CN voted by 97 percent to authorize strike action. Both units could be in a strike position as early as January 1.

Meanwhile, another 1,200 mechanics, labourers, diesel service attendants, heritage train mechanics and mechanical support workers in Unifor will vote later this month for a mandate to strike Canadian Pacific Kansas City (CPKC)—Canada’s second largest railway company.

After years of inferior contracts, the rail workers are demanding improvements to their pension plan, a significant wage increase, improved safety conditions and stronger job security provisions.

The contract disputes follow on from a bitter fight by 9,300 railway workers organized in the Teamsters union that resulted in a lockout last August at both CN Rail and CPKC. After the two railroads locked out

those workers, the government announced later in the day it would impose binding arbitration, robbing workers of their rights to bargain the terms of their contract and take strike action.

In that dispute, Labour Minister Steven MacKinnon ordered the railroads to resume service and invoked Section 107 of the Canada Labour Code, which allows the government to order the unelected Canadian Industrial Relations Board (CIRB) to dictate the terms of new collective agreements. The CIRB was also authorized to arbitrarily extend the previous agreements until new contracts are finalized.

The action against the Teamster railway workers in August was reproduced in last month's weaponizing of the Canadian Industrial Relations Board to end bitter contract disputes on the West Coast and in Montreal and Quebec that forced longshoremen into the pro-company binding arbitration process.

The threat of government intervention in the brewing contract fight on the railways and the currently strike-bound 55,000 CUPW mail carriers and sorters at Canada Post is a clear threat to workers' constitutional right to strike and a major escalation in the assault on workers' standards and working conditions.



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