

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Protestors in Argentina demand distribution of food amid soaring price rises

On Friday August 23 there were 100 pots and pan rallies in 11 cities in Argentina called to protest government austerity policies that have created widespread hunger and criminalized the poor. In the nation's capital, Buenos Aires, demonstrators rallied at the Ministry of Human Capital, demanding the immediate distribution of food to feeding centers across the country, increases in social entitlements to make up for increases in the cost of food, and freedom for Daniela Claraco and Roberto, arrested for protesting Milei's austerity legislation.

Two thousand soup kitchens have been left without government food supplies. A declaration by the organizers of the protests pointed out that in eight months the government has "erased the rights of children, grandparents workers and youth." It also denounces the wave of layoffs across the nation by thousands of firms in crisis. According to *Telesur* magazine, "recent reports indicate that government warehouses have many tons of food and storage while soup kitchens have little food to hand out."

Sao Paulo police assault protesting bank employees

On August 22 Sao Paulo military police joined with a bank private security firm in the City of Sao Paulo, Brazil to assault a rally of Bank of Santander employees against the policies that have eliminated permanent jobs, replacing them with contingent workers. The workers were attacked with Tasers, pepper spray and batons. Scores of workers had surrounded the Santander offices in the Santa Amaro district of the city protesting the attack on full time jobs and demanding better working conditions and higher wages.

HCA nurses at Mission Hospital in North Carolina taking strike vote

Nurses at the Mission Hospital in Asheville, North Carolina began a strike vote August 25 as negotiations on a new contract have failed to meet demands over staffing ratios, wages, paid time off and workplace violence. The 1,600 nurses, members of the National Nurses Organizing Committee, are dissatisfied with the old agreement, which expired on July 2.

The under-staffing, which undermines patients care, has also made it difficult for nurses to take meals and bathroom breaks. A posting on the nurses Facebook page stated, "We often can't pee or eat at work because we are caring for our patients."

Doctors have resigned from the facility and HCA Healthcare, which purchased Mission Hospital in 2019, has been the target of allegations of patient deaths due to under-staffing and lawsuits, including one by the North Carolina Attorney General's office. HCA was accused of violating its purchase agreement by failing to maintain specified levels of care in the hospital's emergency services and cancer care units.

The strike vote will conclude on August 29. National Nurses United said that if a strike is called it will be a one-day work stoppage. Negotiations were to resume August 27.

New York state nursing home workers picket over low pay

About 375 nursing home workers at five facilities owned by Centers Health Care in the surrounding Albany, New York, region carried out picketing August 15 to demand higher wages and seniority recognition. The workers, members of 1199SEIU, charge the company's \$15.50 an hour lowest pay creates a revolving door in relation to employment and compromises both workers and the nursing home's residents.

"You literally can go to Burger King and make the same or more than here," Patrick Nelson, a veteran worker at the Schenectady Center for Rehabilitation and Nursing, told *The Daily Gazette*. "Health care runs 24/7, 365, so if we don't have people that are willing to work for such low wages, we don't have staff, and oftentimes we run short because people just can't afford to work in a place that doesn't pay adequately."

Besides the Schenectady facility, workers also picketed at the Glens Falls Center for Rehabilitation and Nursing, Troy Center for Rehabilitation and Nursing, New Paltz Center for Rehabilitation and Nursing, and Onondaga Center for Rehabilitation and Nursing.

Owner Kenneth Rozenberg, who operates 35 nursing homes in New York state, was the target of a June 2023 lawsuit filed by the New York Attorney General. He, along with co-owner Daryl Hagler, are accused of personally enriching themselves by appropriating \$83 million in Medicare and Medicaid funds slated for the nursing homes.

Sun Country flight attendants overwhelmingly pass strike vote

The 558 flight attendants at Minnesota-based Sun Country Airlines voted by 99 percent to grant strike authorization to Teamsters Local 120. Tanya DeVito, a flight attendant and member of the union's bargaining committee stated in a release, "We voted to strike for one simple reason — Sun Country is dragging out the negotiation process and we are fed up."

Flight attendants are angered that in eight years their pay scale has not changed. The Teamsters and Sun Country will begin contract talks under the National Mediation Board in September.

Airlines and railroads take full advantage of restrictive labor laws that hamstring workers to delay granting raises and frustrate strike action. Under the Railway Labor Act, negotiations must reach an impasse and undergo a 30-day cooling off period before the setting of a strike date. It is also possible for the parties to enter arbitration.

Air Canada pilots vote to strike

Last week pilots at Canada's biggest air carrier voted by 98 percent to take strike action should a new contract not be settled in the coming weeks. The 5,400 pilots at Air Canada could walk off the job as early as September 17. Members of the Air Canada Pilots Association, the workers have been without a new contract since June 2023.

As a result of these miserable agreements air crews at the four largest U.S. airlines currently earn about twice the compensation of pilots at Air Canada, who also labour under significantly less favourable work scheduling arrangements.

Pilots have been hamstrung over previous months with the interminable obstacles inherent in the federal collective

bargaining process. Since the expiration of the previous contract and a subsequent deadlock in negotiations, pilots association officials entered into a lengthy bargaining process with a federally appointed conciliator. With that required process wrapping up on August 26, the workers now must undergo a 21 day "cooling off" period before any legal strike action can begin.

Of course, pilots at Air Canada are aware of the ongoing moves by both federal and provincial governments across the country to steadily strip workers in key sectors of industry and public service of their right to strike. They have seen back to work threats and/or actual back to work legislation consistently used by governments in concert with employers at St. Lawrence Seaway and Pacific ports, the national railways and in the airline industry itself.

Only last month, 680 striking mechanics at WestJet, the country's second largest airline, were forced into an inferior contract after a brief strike was scuttled by federal intervention. With negotiations stalled since the mid-June contract rejection by an overwhelming majority of the mechanics, then federal Liberal Labor Minister Seamus O'Regan attempted to end a looming strike threat by ordering WestJet management and the union into binding arbitration.

With reports that both management and the union had agreed to such arbitration, workers nonetheless went ahead with their planned strike, arguing that O'Regan's order failed to impose any legally sanctioned requirement outlawing strike activity. With WestJet management viciously smearing the strikers and calling on O'Regan to urgently clarify his intentions, the labor minister signaled he would move to ensure that an anti-strike mandate would be organized if the union and management failed to bring the dispute to a quick resolution. Shortly thereafter, union officials ended the job action and ensured the ratification of a company friendly contract.

The brewing dispute at Air Canada occurs just after the Liberal government of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau imposed binding arbitration on over 9,000 railway workers employed at Canadian National (CN) railways and Canadian Pacific Kansas City (CPKC) rail, blocking threatened strike action.



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