

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

## Retired workers march in Lima, Peru

On Monday August 26, retired workers marched and rallied in Lima demanding increases in their hunger pensions. Pensions for retirees oscillate between \$US55 and \$US135, an amount not sufficient to cover basic cost of living rises.

President Dilma Rousseff did approve an increase of \$US25 last year but tied it to pension reforms. The proposed ‘reforms’ were not even discussed by the legislature until recently, but have been rejected by the retired workers organizations since they weaken the country’s social security system and favor private insurance oligopolies

About half the senior citizens in Peru, 2 million people, lack pensions altogether.

## Anti-Genocide protest in Santiago, Chile calls for arms embargo to Israel

On August 27, protesters in Santiago demand a total embargo on arms to Israel to end the genocides in Gaza and the West Bank.

The protest, organized by BDS Chile (boycott, divestment, sanctions) and the Committee for Palestine (Coordinadora por Palestina) whose representatives handed an open letter petitioning Chilean President Gabriel Boric and Defense Minister Maya Fernandez, asking to impose a military embargo to terminate all contracts with Israel, and prevent the presence of Israeli firms at industrial fairs linked to the armament industry.

Scores of demonstrators marched in Santiago with their eyes bandaged and rallied at the Defense Ministry. At the rally names of children victims of the Genocide in Gaza were read aloud by demonstrators dressed in black.

## Argentina retirees and supporters oppose Milei administration veto of pension raises

The Tele-Communications union (SUTEL) carried out a one-day protest strike across Uruguay against recently approved legislation that will privatize the government internet company Antel.

The strikers rallied in Montevideo, carrying signs that read “they are killing Antel!” and “No to the new communications law!” They pointed out that the privatization violates international standards for freedom of expression.

Antel would be taken over by a consortium of three private companies.

Workers also denounced the hasty and stealthy means used to approve the new law by a government whose term in office is about to end.

## New Hampshire school bus drivers threaten strike over lack of pension

About 800 school bus drivers and support workers in six southern New Hampshire school districts are threatening to go on strike over the lack of a pension offer from First Student, the contractor that provides busing services. The school districts involved in the negotiations are Derry, Plaistow, Nashua, North Hampton, Rochester and Swanzey and could affect 20,000 students.

Teamsters Local 633, which represents the workers, issued a press release stating, “After several months of contract negotiations for the six open agreements, First Student has repeatedly refused to offer Teamsters a contract that includes a pension out of a matter of ‘principal,’ even though Teamsters’ pension proposals would not increase First Student costs nor expose it to additional liability.”

First Student spokesman Frank MacMahon claims it is advocating for the Teamsters’ Savings and Investment Plan 401(k) over the union pension fund “because it offers a more secure and beneficial path forward.”

Teamsters school bus drivers at other New England school districts have indicated they are prepared to launch solidarity

strikes on behalf of the six New Hampshire school district drivers. First Student contracts with school districts in 38 states and 7 Canadian provinces. All drivers who are Teamsters are covered by a national master agreement that allows them to honor picket lines.

“It’s possible picket lines could get extended to the First Student bus yards later on,” said Teamsters spokesman Matt McQuaid. “We have bargaining set with the company next month however we just have to wait and see how it plays out.”

Negotiations will resume on September 10 and 11.

### **Workers at Airgas plant in Maryland out on indefinite strike**

Over 40 drivers and plant workers at Airgas in Hyattsville, Maryland, have been on strike since August 21. Teamsters Local 639, which represents the workers, says despite months of negotiations, the company has failed to move towards a settlement and charges Airgas with unfair labor practices.

Airgas, a subsidiary of the French multinational Air Liquide, is the largest distributor of industrial, medical and specialty gases in the United States. Air Liquide acquired Airgas in 2016 for \$10.3 billion.

The Teamsters represent some 600 of Airgas’ 11,000-member US workforce. In 2016, workers in Sharonville, Ohio, struck. In 2017, workers at the East Greenwich, Rhode Island, facility walked out. And in 2019, workers went on strike at six facilities in California.

Last year Airgas had revenues of over \$30.6 billion. Teamsters Local 639 President William Davis stated in a press release, “We’re prepared to stay out as long as it takes.”

### **Hotel workers in Quebec stage 5th one-day walkout**

Hotel workers in Quebec City, Montreal and Sherbrooke staged another 24-hour strike on August 30. It was the second one-day strike in the month of August by all workers in the three city bargaining unit. Three other strikes have taken place by workers in various individual hotels.

Overall, the walkout is the fifth job action since negotiations for a new contract started this past April and then quickly stalled. The workers had voted by more than 90 percent for a mandate to strike for 120 hours spread out over both all-out lightning actions as well as smaller, targeted walkouts.

In the last two all-out one-day strikes, workers shutdown service at 22 hotels in Montreal, Quebec City and Sherbrooke to press their demands for a 36 percent pay increase over four

years and a ban on the use of workers from outside agencies. The workers are affiliated with the Fédération du commerce (FC-CSN).

The hotels are increasingly using agency workers to circumvent collective bargaining agreements. That the strike was only intended to let off steam was indicated by the fact that hotels were able to continue operations using management personnel.

### **Quebec health care workers plan overtime ban**

Some 80,000 Quebec nurses, therapists and technicians, who have been without a new contract since March 31, 2023, are moving towards an overtime ban that would begin on September 19 should the provincial government fail to withdraw their demands. Management wants the health workers to make themselves available for transfers to other facilities and to posts that do not meet their particular expertise.

Last week, the workers’ union, the Federation interprofessionnelle de la sante du Quebec (FIQ), dismissed the government’s latest contract offer due to its refusal to address the mobility issues.

The FIQ is the last remaining major block of workers who remain without a new deal. Last year, hundreds of thousands of healthcare workers and teachers launched a militant strike to defend education, healthcare and other vital public and social services.

All of those had been ravaged by decades of austerity and the ruling class’s ruinous profits-before-lives response to the pandemic.

Despite the militancy of the rank and file throughout the public sector, the immense popular support, and widespread opposition to the union-negotiated agreements, the bureaucratic apparatuses of the various unions in concert with the right-wing government of Francois Legault pushed through sub-standard five year collective agreements that included wages well below the real-terms increase in the cost-of-living, no improvement in intolerable working conditions and unsatisfactory plans for government investment in the social services network.



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