

Workers Struggles: The Americas

23 September 2024

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

Latin America

Argentina pensioners stage weekly protests for raises

On Wednesday, September 18 in Buenos Aires, organizations representing pensioners carried out their now weekly protest, marching and rallying at the Congress building demanding increases in their pensions.

Recently the Senate approved monthly increases in pensions for 5 million retirees to make up for the hyperinflation that is affecting the country. Since the beginning of 2024, the buying power of retirees has fallen by 30 percent. The Milei administration promptly vetoed the increase and the legislature refused to overturn the veto.

The weekly protests in Buenos Aires and other cities are now routinely met with police repression, including the use of tear gas and billy clubs.

The day before this week's protest, Argentine president Javier Milei brought together all those legislators that had supported his veto to an enormous barbecue party in the presidential mansion. At the event, Milei denounced the protesters and called for the formation of a legislative alliance to block any attempt to "destabilize" the economy.

Paraguayan workers' protest in defense of their labor rights

Led by the social democratic Paraguay-Pyahura Party, scores of workers and peasants marched on Monday, September 16 in Asuncion, Paraguay against a government labor plan that allows firms to fire at will workers with less than ten years seniority (84 percent of the current labor force). Paraguay's neo-liberal president Santiago Peña claims that this measure is meant to "modernize the economy."

United States

Massachusetts nursing home workers demand safe staffing and wage increases

Workers at two Massachusetts nursing homes—Carvalho Grove in Fall River and Country Gardens in

Swansea—held simultaneous informational pickets September 18 to protest low wages and a lack of staffing. The staffing problems have forced workers to put in double shifts in order to maintain coverage. At the same time, workers have found overtime necessary to provide adequate income to cover expenses.

The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) 1199, which represents the 120 workers at both facilities, has been negotiating for the past three months with Alpha Healthcare but no progress has been reported.

Registered Nurse Dawn Nunes told ABC 6 News, "As soon as Alpha Healthcare bought our facility, we experienced all sorts of problems with payroll—paychecks were late or bounced and those issues are still happening almost one year later. We are still chronically understaffed and are being mandated to cover vacancies that have existed since the pandemic."

Food service workers at Connecticut hospital grant strike authorization

The union representing food service workers at Norwalk Hospital in Norwalk, Connecticut, announced workers had voted unanimously September 17 to grant strike authorization after a year of fruitless negotiations over wages, benefits and working conditions. The immediate issue triggering the vote was a decision by Morrison Healthcare, the contractor that provides food services to Norwalk Hospital, to renege on an agreement to reinstate annual evaluations and pay raises.

Workers voted by a 45 to 3 margin last year to unionize with the Connecticut Health Care Associates District 1199. At the time, workers were paid a mere \$15 an hour. Back in July, workers reported that the company had offered a 25-cent wage increase. Workers also complain that temperatures in the kitchen can rise above 100 degrees Fahrenheit.

University of Texas employees rally for higher wages

Over 50 workers at the University of Texas (UT) rallied on the campus mall in Austin, Texas, September 13, to demand a \$10,000 across-the-board annual wage increase. The demonstration came in the wake of a return-to-office

mandate which now imposes the additional costs of commuting to workers expenses.

During the pandemic, many workers moved away from the campus to find more affordable housing.

Greg Bosley, a member of the Texas State Employees Union and a software developer for UT, told the *Daily Texan*, “Coming into campus unnecessarily is a strain when we’re having to live farther and farther away from campus. And prices for housing are going up, prices for gas are unstable and public transit isn’t what it needs to be here in Texas.”

Workers demonstrated in March of this year to no avail. University of Texas employees are barred by law from collective bargaining.

Canada

Pilots union chief at Air Canada threatens to resign if tentative deal is rejected

In a sign that the recently negotiated tentative contract between Air Canada and the Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA) is facing rank and file opposition in the run-up to the upcoming ratification vote, Charlene Hudy, the chair of the Air Canada ALPA Master Executive Council, has threatened to resign if the 5,200 pilots vote down the proposed agreement. The vote is expected to take place at staggered times over the next several weeks due to the complex flight schedules of the cockpit staff.

In Hudy’s initial on-line address, meant to introduce the tentative deal to the membership, she remarked, ‘If the membership votes no to this [tentative agreement], it would clearly indicate to the public, media, government and company that I no longer speak on your behalf.’ In that case, she continued, “I will have no choice but to resign.” Hudy’s remarks came as posts by rank and file participants in the on-line meeting disparaged the deal and called for a “No” vote at contract ratification.

Hudy’s statement comes amidst reports of unrest in the membership over important inadequacies in the settlement struck with management 9 days ago. The tentative contract came just minutes before 72-hour strike and/or lockout notices could have started the clock ticking on a complete shutdown of the airline as early as September 18.

Hailed as a generous offer by union officials and management alike, specific details of the agreement were quickly leaked to the *Globe and Mail* newspaper. The deal would provide a 42 percent wage increase over 4 years that would cost the company \$1.9 billion in additional expenditures. Liberal government officials, who had exerted behind the scenes pressure on the union

to resolve the dispute under the threat of the criminalization of any work stoppage and the imposition of binding arbitration, also praised the contract settlement.

But many workers now informed of the fine print of the tentative deal are calling for a rejection of the contract, describing it as a “captains’ deal” that seeks to split the membership between the more highly paid senior pilots and the under-paid junior pilots. In recent years, Air Canada has been forced to hire a large number of new recruits, estimated at about 2,000 of the 5,200 union membership. These newer aviators, paid significantly below scale for highly skilled and responsible jobs, have pushed back on union claims of so-called big wage gains for the entire membership.

Dissident pilots have pointed out that assuming an average month’s work of 75 hours, newer recruits earn between \$75,700 and \$134,000 over the first 4 years of their employment, and do not reach \$187,000 until year five. In contrast, senior captains flying wide-body Boeing airplanes already earn about \$367,000. In addition, the new contract fails to address the numerous scheduling and “quality of life” issues faced by commercial aviators.

The Air Canada aviators have been without a new contract since June 2023. Their previous contract was a miserable nine-year deal negotiated in 2014. It came on the heels of the Conservative Harper government using an anti-strike law to illegalize impending strikes by Air Canada pilots, mechanics and other ground crew in 2012. As a result of the rotten agreement finally forced through in 2014, pilots at Air Canada earned about half the compensation of air crews at the four largest US-based airlines. They also have less favourable pension plans and work scheduling arrangements.



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