

Montreal longshore workers continue job actions; Pilots at Las Vegas-based Allegiant Air to vote on strike

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Popular demonstrations continue against French austerity policies in Martinique and Guadeloupe

On Monday October 21 protests returned in Martinique. Early in the morning, workers set up barricades, interrupting trucking and public transit in the capital, Fort-de-France.

The mass protests that began several weeks ago are in opposition to the high cost of living imposed by the French government that rules over Martinique (population 350,000), a source of bananas, pineapples, sugar cane and other agricultural exports. Martinique imports a high proportion of its fuels, and consumer and household goods from France. Prices for those goods in Martinique, Guadeloupe, St. Martin, French Guiana and other French possessions in the Lesser Antilles are between 25 and 40 percent higher than in Paris, according to demonstrators, while workers' wages are far below those of French workers.

Protests and strikes have also taken place in Guadeloupe (population 380,000), including a strike last Friday by electricity workers, who are being blamed for electricity blackouts across the Island.

The protests followed an October 19 rally attended by hundreds of people where participants voted in favor of the October 21 protest.

Both protests were a popular response to a government memorandum that included a partial roll-back in consumer prices, a move considered not enough by protesters, who are demanding substantial price decreases in all consumer goods.

More protests are expected this week.

Protests follow Cuba blackouts

The Reuters Press Agency reported that on Monday October 21 protests broke out in Havana following three days of total blackout caused by the collapse of Cuba's power grid on October 18. Demonstrators marched and rallied while banging pots and pans and set up barricades in the dark streets of the Cuban capital, demanding power, food and water.

Reuters spoke with seven demonstrators: "Most described the prolonged blackouts as the 'last straw.'"

"Housewife Ramona Martinez said she could not afford to feed her four children on the 2,600-peso monthly stipend (\$8 based on Cuba's widely used unofficial rate) she received from the government. Prices have soared

in Cuba over the past three years, while wages and benefits have barely budged."

Reacting to the protests, Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel described the demonstrators as 'drunkards' violating the laws of the Revolution, and warned of police repression.

The October 18 blackout, the worst since Hurricane Ian hit the Island in 2022, adds to a seemingly never-ending power crisis, largely the result of continuing US sanctions. This year households in working-class Havana neighborhoods have spent up to 8 hours a day without power.

Protests continue against Argentine President Milei

On October 22, thousands of university students and professional employees protested in downtown Buenos Aires, marching from the Federal Congress to the Government House (Casa Rosada), repudiating the savage austerity policies being carried out by the administration of President Milei.

The university workers also denounced attacks on their wages by the Milei regime.

The march was headed by health workers from the public hospitals of Posadas, Bonaparte and Garrahan, which the government is shutting down and privatizing. Also marching were striking university workers and students, protesting the budget cuts to education imposed by Milei with the support of the National Legislature.

Throughout the march, record numbers of Buenos Aires police officers corralled and threatened the demonstrators to enforce draconian restrictions on protests imposed by the municipal and federal administrations.

The march concluded in a rally that included a demonstration of first aid procedure in defense of public health.

Thousands protest in Mexico City over murder of activist priest

On Thursday October 24 in Mexico City against the murder of Marcelo Perez, a religious community activist in the southern state of Chiapas, by members of a criminal cartel engaged in the expropriation of Indian lands.

The march was led by the Zapatista Collective Movement, which stands for the defense of the rights of native people in Chiapas. It went from the "Anti-monumento +43" in Reforma Avenue and ended in the historic Constitution Square, also known as Zocalo Square. Joining the Zapatistas were students and workers. The +43 Anti-monumento honors the 43

Ayotzinapa teaching college students disappeared by the Mexican armed forces, in collaboration with a criminal cartel, in September 2014, who have yet to be accounted for.

Marcelo Perez, a priest belonging to the Tzotzil tribe, was gunned down and killed on October 20 in San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas State.

In addition to being a priest, Perez was a defender of human rights, involved in the defense of peasant lands, who had been warned by the Interamerican Human Rights Commission (CIDH) that his life was in danger.

Protesters denounced the government for ignoring the “de facto” civil war that is taking place in Chiapas State under conditions of military occupation. Demonstrators also condemned government “mega-projects” that are being implemented on native lands with the collaboration of corrupt Chiapas capitalists.

Pilots at Allegiant Air begin strike authorization vote after eight years without a wage increase

The 1,300 pilots at Allegiant Air began voting October 25 whether to authorize a strike against the budget airline based out of Las Vegas, Nevada. The workers, members of Teamsters Local 2118, have been negotiating for nearly four years. The old agreement dates from 2016, and their last increase was in 2016.

Pilots are demanding what they call a market-based contract. According to the union, their pay lags by 40-45 percent behind the industry.

Allegiant captain Aaron Adrian warned the airline, “The legacy airlines are getting ready to hire. I’m confident that we will lose a lot of pilots. At one point, we were losing two to three pilots per day to other airlines.”

Allegiant claims to have offered pilots an immediate wage increase of 50 percent and future increases of 70 percent—but spread out over 5 years. Besides wages, pilots are dissatisfied with schedules. The Teamsters warned that pilots will not “compromise on getting the improved working conditions.”

At this stage, the union is in mediated negotiations with Allegiant and had six sessions scheduled for October.

Workers hold rally over threats to close three New Jersey hospitals

Healthcare workers rallied in Hoboken, New Jersey, October 22 demanding that Bayonne Medical Center, Hoboken University Medical Center and Christ Hospitals remain open to serve Hudson County residents. In September CarePoint Health, which operates the hospitals, filed notice with the state that it planned to lay off 2,600 healthcare workers at the three New Jersey facilities. According to unions, some have already been jettisoned.

CarePoint, whose financial situation is dire and who faces dozens of lawsuits from creditors, is considering Chapter 11 bankruptcy or a merger. One lawsuit is on behalf of Hudson Regional Hospital in Secaucus, which accuses CarePoint of having breached a merger pact.

District 1199J, which represents workers at Hoboken and Christ hospitals, directed its appeals to Democratic Governor Philip Murphy “to take all measures to ensure the continued operation and long-term stability of Hoboken and Christ Hospitals...” Murphy has responded that there’s “no crisp answer” to the crisis.

Massachusetts nurses register near-unanimous strike vote in battle over health insurance with management

Some 1,500 nurses at Newton-Wellesley Hospital in Newton, Massachusetts voted by 99 percent to authorize a one-day strike as management seeks to impose a greater burden of health insurance costs on the backs of nurses. The insurance plan is owned and administered by Mass General Brigham, which operates the Newton-Wellesley facility and whose CEO Anne Klibanski’s salary in 2023 was \$5,942,832.

The Massachusetts Nurses Association (MNA) has been in negotiations with management since March of this year, and after 15 bargaining sessions nurses have delivered a near unanimous vote to strike. The MNA warns that Mass General Brigham’s contract proposal “will worsen their health care access.”

The MNA must first give a 10-day strike notice before a strike can begin.

Port of Montreal longshore workers continue industrial action

This past Sunday, October 27, workers at the Port of Montreal—the country’s second largest port—staged a 24-hour strike in pursuit of their contract demands for higher wages, better safety processes and significantly less onerous shift scheduling practices. The action follows from an open-ended overtime ban on the docks and a partial three-day strike at the port last month. The 1,150 longshoremen have been without a contract since December 31, 2023.

Due to a July decision of the Canadian Industrial Relations Board, any industrial action at the port cannot interfere with grain shipments or cargo destined for the island province of Newfoundland.

Just as has been done at the Pacific ports, longshore workers on the St. Lawrence Seaway have had their contract struggles hamstrung by anti-worker federal government edicts designed to enforce the brutal contract demands of the shipping and logistics companies.

A five-day strike in 2021 at the Port of Montreal was criminalized by the trade union-backed Trudeau Liberal government, with workers forced into pro-company binding arbitration. A bitter 12-day strike in August 2020 preceded another government-imposed strike ban. In each circumstance, Canadian Union of Public Employees officials have bowed to the attacks of the government and the employers.

Alberta government blocks Edmonton public school workers strike

On October 22, just two days before a legal strike was set to begin by about 3,000 public school education workers, the hard right government of United Conservative Premier Danielle Smith introduced a little used provision of the provincial Labour Code to stop any strike action for at least another 30 days. Although a long period of contract conciliation and then mediation failed to break a logjam on negotiations for a new contract, the Alberta government at the last minute conjured up a “dispute inquiry board” to write yet another summation of the contract impasse.

About 1,700 educational assistants, along with another 1,000 clerks, administrative assistants, librarians, food preparation staff, licensed practical nurses and technicians, were set to launch their first-ever strike on October 24 in pursuit of a significant wage increase. The education workers have seen their wages drastically eroded by the recent years of

inflationary pressure. Currently, they earn an average of only \$27,000 to \$30,000 per year.

The Smith government has capped school boards from providing wage increases higher than 2.75 percent spread out over 4 years. The insulting offer given to the Edmonton workers would provide zero wage increases in the first 2 years. In the third year, they would receive 1.25 percent and then another 1.5 percent in the final year of the offer.

In the wake of the government action, 950 public school custodians in Edmonton, who also are in a legal strike position, saw their own CUPE union officials postpone any issuing of the obligatory 72-hour strike notice to fight against a similar miserable wage package in their contract dispute.



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