

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

Signal operators on Canadian National Railways set to strike; Alaska Air flight attendants union threatens members as it seeks to ram through second tentative agreement

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

## Protests against Argentina Shell oil refinery layoffs

On Wednesday and Friday, January 22 and 24, hundreds of retirees and workers protested layoffs by Shell Oil in its Buenos Aires' Dock Sud refinery. Ten full-time and long-time workers were sacked by the refinery with no explanation as part of the company's policy, approved by the oil workers union (UOCRA), of replacing permanent workers with contingent temps.

The ten sacked workers had been active in the fight for improved working conditions at the refinery, and had no connection with the trade union bureaucracy.

One of the fired workers, Fernando Luna, referred to last-week's demonstrations as the beginning of a big struggle: "... Today is the beginning of a big transformation. We will not remain still. We will not accept that corporations friendly to the government do whatever they wish with the lives of workers."

## Government employees protest in Mexico City

This Wednesday, January 22, hundreds of public employees marched in Central Mexico City fighting for workers' rights and working conditions. The march ended in a mass rally at Mexico City's central Zocalo Square.

Hundreds of demonstrators, members of the city workers' Coordinating Committee, together with rural and forestry workers, transit workers, and other state workers, demanded the rehiring of recently sacked workers, the equalization of wages, the recognition of seniority rights, and retirement pensions in line with those of workers in the private sector. Many demonstrators carried signs demanding the "Universal Right to health, education, and dignified working conditions."

Scores of municipal firefighters at the march carried signs demanding up-to-date firefighting and safety equipment. In December four workers died at a fire in a crowded workshop in the Benito Juarez neighborhood, in part due to underequipped firefighters who were not able to arrive on time.

About half of Mexico City's municipal workforce is poorly paid and in contingent status, many of them working on zero-hours temporary contracts.

## Jamaican dockworkers reject contract settlement

On January 23, contract workers at Jamaica's main ports protested and rejected a sell-out agreement between their union and management for a 13 percent wage increase to cover delayed increases for the period between 2020 and 2025 (4 percent in 2020, 0.5 percent for 2021, 1 percent for 2022, 2 percent for 2023, 5.5 percent for 2024-25). The increases are to be paid only to workers that pass a phony company "evaluation." In addition, the sell-out deal leaves out workers that have been unfairly dismissed, including workers on medical leave that were never allowed back.

The contract have formed the kftidisgruntled employees committee independent of their union and are appealing to all Jamaican dock workers.

The contract workers are being denied allowances for working night shift (workers are forced to work 3 nights a week), as well as for high risk, (when they are made to work at extreme heights, or when mandated to 'hop' from ship to ship).

The Kingston daily *The Gleaner* quoted workers who referred to the agreement as "modern day slavery."

The agreement between Kingston Freeport Terminal Limited the Trades Union Congress was presented to the contract workers as a done deal in an email to the dockers.

## Workers protest planned elimination of Paraguay minimum wage law

On Monday January 20, scores of union members, supporters of the group Corriente Sindical Clasista, rallied at the Industry and Commerce building to protest attacks on the nation's minimum wage.

The protest came in response to the minister of Industry and Commerce's public attack on workers' rights and the minimum wage, in the name of instituting "flexible" labor legislation.

Workers dared the minister to live at the minimum wage.

The right-wing Paraguayan government is also privatizing the public pension system.

## Alaska Air flight attendants union threatens members as it seeks to ram through second tentative agreement

After two years of negotiations, the Association of Flight Attendants (AFA) has submitted a new contract proposal to Alaska Airlines flight attendants for ratification, with the warning that a rejection will result in a collapse in negotiations and the maintenance of the old agreement. In a statement, the AFA told attendants that the National Mediation Board “would be unlikely to devote further resources to mediating a ‘TA3.’ Management also indicated they will allocate their bargaining resources toward merger considerations and JCBA negotiations.”

The AFA bureaucracy, headed by Democratic Socialists of America leader Sara Nelson, concluded with its own invidious threat, “The choice before us is clear; your vote will either solidify the enhancements secured in TA2 or it will indicate your desire to retain our current contract without any improvements in pay and working conditions until the end of JCBA negotiations, which is likely to take years.”

Back in August of 2024, Alaska Airlines flight attendants voted down the first AFA-backed proposal (TA1) by a two-thirds margin. The current proposal (TA2) offers, according to the AFA, a 32 percent wage increase. Voting on TA2 will commence February 28.

The AFA apparatus wants to conclude bargaining on terms acceptable to Alaska Airlines in light of their determination to avoid any conflict with incoming Trump administration and so as not to endanger Alaska’s merger discussions with Hawaiian Airlines. The merger will bring together Alaska’s 7,000 flight attendants with Hawaiian’s 2,200 attendants.

Alaska Airlines made a net profit of \$395 million in 2024 in what CEO Ben Minicucci called an “outstanding financial performance.”

### **Colorado ski resort lift maintenance workers authorize strike in wake of Utah ski patrol walkout**

Lift maintenance workers at Crested Butte Mountain Resort in Colorado, granted strike authorization after a year of negotiations, have failed to come to an agreement on wages, gear allowances and benefits. The twelve members of the Crested Butte Lift Maintenance (CBLM) union, a part of the Communications Workers of America Local 7781, charge that the ski resort conglomerate Vail Resorts have simply offered them their old wages as the workers seek their first union contract.

As at other mountain ski resorts in the western US, the cost of living in Gunnison Valley has left resort workers struggling to sustain themselves. “We are deeply passionate about our mountain and take great pride in the work we do here...” Thomas Pearman, a lift mechanic and president of the CBLM Union, told FOX 13 News. “We have the most beautiful office anyone could ask for. But we can’t pay our bills with sunsets.”

The union revealed that their team has suffered 50 percent turnover as Vail Resorts slow-walks negotiations. Management has declared they will recruit strikebreakers should workers walk off the job.

The activity at Crested Butte Mountain Resort comes on the heels of a twelve-day strike by ski patrol workers at Park City Resort in Utah. Besides the lift maintenance workers at Crested Butte Mountain, there is also a separate unit of unionized ski patrol workers.

According to the Communications Workers of America, there are two unionized lift maintenance teams and over a dozen unionized ski patrol unions in the industry. But the CWA has not sought to forge any unity among resort workers against the corporations in a concerted battle.

### **Flight attendants union files for mediation in Horizon Air contract struggle**

The flight attendants union at Horizon Air has filed for federal mediation January 17 as negotiations have stalled. The Association of Flight Attendants (AFA) says it is seeking wage parity for Horizon Air attendants with their co-worker attendants at Alaska Airlines, which owns Horizon Air.

The essence of the relationship between attendants at Alaska and Horizon is management’s ability to maintain a two-tier wage structure that super-exploits Horizon Air attendants.

The federal government’s National Mediation Board (NMB) will now step in to oversee negotiations which can go on indefinitely for months and years as a way of blocking strikes and wearing down the workforce to accept substandard contract terms. The two parties can subsequently submit to binding arbitration, or be relieved from mediation followed by a 30-day cooling off period before the union can call a strike.

### **Signal operators on Canadian National Railways set to strike**

The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) has given Canadian National Railway a 72-hour strike notice. The 750 signal and communications workers voted last autumn by 95 percent for industrial action should the union and company fail to reach a contract agreement. The workers install and maintain railway crossings, train signals and train inspection equipment for CN Rail.

A strike could begin as early as January 28. Workers are demanding a significant wage increase and more work-life balance protections in a new contract. These same workers struck for two weeks during their last contract battle in the summer of 2022. However, union officials soon notified management that they would accept their offer of binding arbitration, which resulted in a paltry 3 percent per year wage increase in the throes of the post-lockdown inflationary spiral.

### **Toronto inside municipal workers vote to strike**

City of Toronto inside workers have turned out the highest strike vote in the history of their bargaining unit. The 30,000 public health, planning, operations, employment and social services officers, cleaners, court services, ambulance dispatch, child carers, 311 responders, recreation programmers, shelter attendants, water & food inspectors, and long-term care workers are organized under the Canadian Union of Public Employees. In double the previous turnout, workers voted by 90 percent last week to authorize strike action should a satisfactory contract not be reached.

Current pay rates are so alarmingly low that vacancies in various departments continue to grow, most notably in long-term care, “where vacancies have ballooned 700 per cent since the pandemic” according to CUPE. Overall, the vacancy rate amongst municipal inside workers stands at 65 percent.

In one of the most expensive cities in Canada, almost half the workers in key departments servicing children, the elderly and the poor, earn only the provincial minimum wage. A strike date has yet to be set as negotiations continue.





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