Workers struggles around the world

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The Americas

America West Flight Attendants vote to strike

Members of the Association of Flight Attendants voted overwhelming to strike Phoenix-based America West Airlines November 2 after four years without a contract. If, as a result of the announcement America West does not make concessions, the AFA will seek federal permission to launch strikes in target cities, which could begin after a 30-day cooling-off period.

AFA flight attendants are paid an average $22,000 a year compared to the $40,000 at other comparable airlines. Entry-level positions pay $12,852, the worst in the industry. The AFA is seeking an increase to $32,700, an average of the 10 top airlines. Flight attendants have been without increases since the 1991-94 period when America West went through Chapter 11 bankruptcy. The AFA is also negotiating for pension benefits, additional sick days and the shortening of the contract from five years to two.

Meanwhile, flight attendants at US Airways Shuttle held informational pickets Friday at La Guardia Airport in New York City. The AFA members at US Airways have been negotiating a contract since the current agreement became amendable in December 1996. The shuttle was purchased by US Airways in the fall of 1997. Shuttle flight attendants currently make about 35 percent less than AFA members who work for the mainline operation. They are seeking parity pay and improvements in vacation and retirement benefits.

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Layoff threat escalated in Kaiser strike

Kaiser Aluminum Corporation announced October 30 it will need to slash its work force by 20 to 30 percent in order to insure profitability. The decision increases the cut of 10 to 15 percent, or 400 jobs, originally proposed before the United Steelworkers struck five Kaiser plants on September 30. Kaiser continues to run its strikebound plants with management and strikebreakers.

Union agrees to low paid temporary workers at Fedders

A three-week strike at Fedders Corporation in Effingham, Illinois was concluded November 2 after union officials agreed to a contract that allows the company to hire temporary workers. The agreement allows Fedder, which manufactures air conditioners, to add a third shift based on temporary cheap labor during summer months when demand is at its peak.

Fedders had threatened to transfer production from the Illinois plant to operations in Tennessee or Southeast Asia after 1,100 members of the Stove, Furnace, Energy and Appliance Workers of North America struck the company on October 12.

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Pennsylvania nurses unit strikes

Over 200 nurses struck Lower Bucks Hospital of Trevose, Pennsylvania, October 30 after 14 months of fruitless contract negotiations. The nurses are represented by the Nurses Association of Lower Bucks Hospital, an affiliate of PSEA Health Care.

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NLRB rules against Peterbilt in lockout

The National Labor Relations Board issued an unfair labor practice complaint against Peterbilt Motors at the end of October for bad-faith bargaining and unlawfully locking out members of UAW Local 1832 at the company's Nashville, Tennessee plant.

UAW officials have hailed the decision as a vindication for their unconditional surrender of the 16-week strike last summer. The case will be taken up by an administrative law judge sometime next year. According to the UAW the NLRB may order the company to reinstate the locked-out workers with back pay originating from the September 10 date that the UAW offered an unconditional return to work. Previous to that date Local 1832 had struck the plant over the company's refusal to negotiate a healthcare plan for retirees and other benefits. Peterbilt responded by hiring strikebreakers, bringing in Vance Security guards and posting surveillance cameras around the company's heavy truck manufacturing complex.

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University of Puerto Rico workers strike over representation of nonunion workers

University of Puerto Rico employees struck 13 college campuses demanding that all non-teaching employees be allowed to join the

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Brotherhood of Exempt Non-Faculty Employees union.

The 3,200 strikers blocked campus entrances with cars and chained themselves to doors shutting down campuses and bringing hurricane repair work to a halt. The union says that a successful resolution of the issue would add 1,200 additional dues-paying members to the union.

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Nurses vote to strike Columbus hospital

Registered nurses at Ashtabula County Medical Center in Columbus, Ohio voted to launch a strike November 19 to protest overtime and staffing policies that ultimately affect the quality of hospital care. ACMC is also seeking to restrict the choice of providers under the healthcare plan. The nurses are members of the Ohio Nurses Association.

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FedEx pilots to vote on strike

The FedEx pilots association has mailed out strike ballots to 3,500 pilots who fly for the package service company. Negotiations for the first-ever contract have broken down despite efforts by the National Mediation Board to restart them. Pilots have already voted to refuse overtime beginning next Monday, and the threat of strike action during the peak holiday season is aimed a pressuring management for an agreement. Pilots are seeking wage increases of 19 percent over four years.

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Alberta health care workers ordered not to strike

Aspen Health Authority and the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees resumed talks November 4 after the union was ordered not to threaten or call a strike. About 60 support staff at hospitals in Mayerthorpe, Boyle and Swan Hills want back the 5 percent pay cut they took in September 1993 and another 2.25 percent cut they took a year later. A judge ruled that hospital employees perform essential services and are forbidden to strike or even to threaten strike action. Seventy support staff at the three rural hospitals have threatened to carry out an illegal strike.

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Nova Scotia nursing homes hit by strike

Hundreds of workers went on strike November 2 at three Nova Scotia nursing homes in a dispute over wages. The first to go were at least 200 employees at Northwood Manor in Halifax, the largest nursing home in the province.

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Asia

Philippine business and unions sign "social accord"

Philippine employers signed an agreement Tuesday with unions to limit layoffs in exchange for preventing strikes. The "social accord," effective for a year, was signed at the presidential palace by the Employers' Confederation of the Philippines and labor groups headed by the right-wing Trade Union Congress of the Philippines and the Labor Advisory and Consultative Council.

ECOP President Miguel Varela said the agreement, witnessed by President Joseph Estrada, allows management and labor to share "sacrifices for the common objective of sustaining the viability of business and at the same time protecting the jobs of workers during these trying times." Estrada said the accord is the first of its kind in the Philippines and will encourage more foreign investment in the country.

Alberto Fenix, president of the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said the agreement represents the "changing mind set of employers and a less confrontational labor."

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Filipino garment workers lose bargaining rights

A four-month-long strike in the Philippines involving 391 garment workers employed by the Hong Kong-based Fantastic Garments ended October 30 when the unions agreed to suspend all collective bargaining rights for the next five years. The dispute erupted in July following a breakdown in negotiations over wages and after the company refused to reach a settlement for a new Collective Bargaining Agreement. The unions capitulated when management threatened to close the factory.

The garment union accepted a six pesos a day increase, or about 15 US cents, for the five-year period. At the same time the monthly wage of supervisors at the company will increase by 500 pesos. A precedent was set earlier this year when the airline unions struck a deal with Philippine Airlines to drop bargaining rights and effectively freeze the wages and conditions of workers for 10 years.

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Chinese hotel workers protest sackings

Over 30 retrenched workers at the Minzu state-owned hotel in Beijing staged a protest this week over the loss of wages and healthcare benefits. The demonstration was held on the front steps of the hotel that is used by many top government officials. More than a dozen plainclothes police were present at the protest, even though it was peaceful.

Chen Gonghui, a 40-year-old janitor who has worked at the Minzu for nine years, said he was protesting because his family did not have food to eat. "We want them to give us back the rest of our lives--a wage and medical care," he said. Another worker said, "This is not unusual, people are being laid off all the time."

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Teenage workers protest hazardous conditions in Indonesian factory

Young workers from PT Yudia Wangi, a biscuit factory in Tangerang (West Java), reported the company for unsafe conditions to the National Commission of Child Protection in Jakarta last Wednesday. The parents of the workers, whose ages range between 14 and 16 years old, also work at the same factory. The workers are angered because they have never received financial compensation for illnesses and injuries caused by poor working conditions. They cited cases of two of their coworkers who died from typhus. These young workers receive even less than their parents, about US$2 per week for nine hours of work per day.

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Africa

Moroccan bank workers strike over layoffs

Over 1,900 staff employed at the branches of Morocco's leading mortgage bank, Credit Immobilier et Hotelier, voted on Monday to continue their strike in protest against plans to lay off 300 workers. The strike, which began on the previous Friday, is also for an increase in wages and an improvement in other benefits. A union spokesman said that the workers were determined to maintain the industrial action until their demands were met.

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Zambian farm workers protest harsh treatment

Hundreds of farmworkers employed by Dumela Farms in the Mukonchi area in Zambia have lodged a complaint with the government's Central Province Human Rights Commission (PHRC) concerning the harsh treatment they receive at the hands of the company.

Many of the workers said that management treated them like animals. The written complaint said that the farm laborers were forced to work abnormally long hours, sometimes toiling nonstop from 6 a.m. until 7 p.m., and only paid for an eight hour day. Friends and family visiting the workers were subjected to stringent security checks and were not allowed to stay on the property longer than two days.

The majority of workers were paid less than 35,000 kwatcha per month and had more than 10,000 kwatcha deducted from their pay for the maize meal provided by the farm management. They were not allowed to purchase food from other sources or to seek extra work outside the farm to supplement their incomes.

Dumela Farms is one of the many overseas agricultural companies that have set up in the poverty stricken rural regions of Zambia to obtain cheap labor.

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Zimbabwean protests over gasoline prices

Soldiers and riot police sent by President Robert Mugabe attacked crowds in Harare Wednesday who were protesting against a 67 percent rise in the price of gasoline. Mugabe ordered the price rise after the Zimbabwean dollar slid 80 percent against the US dollar over the last year.

Europe and Russia

Romanian teachers end strike following pay deal

A two-day strike by Romanian teachers ended on October 2 following a government agreement to link teachers' pay to inflation and the granting of the equivalent of a one month's bonus pay. The government has allotted 40 trillion lei ($4.2 billion) for the education budget next year. Education Minister Andrei Marga said that this was nearly four times the amount given to education in the 1998 budget. Teachers had struck for better pay and against the appalling state of the schools in the country, many of which are in an advanced stage of disrepair

Spanish airport workers vote to strike

Ground staff at the Spanish airline Iberia are to take strike action at Barcelona Airport on November 17, 19, 24 and 26. The action was called by the UGT general workers union following demands by workers for an increase in the number of employees. The grievance stems from the constant disruptions to employees' working hours that are caused by delayed departures and arrivals at the airport. The UGT met the company for talks on October 29. A spokesman for the union said, "We hope to reach an agreement today. But, if not, we will probably go on strike."

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Spanish Ford workers union demands vote on company deal

The UGT trade union has recommended that 8,000 Ford workers at the Almusafes plant in Valencia, Spain accept an agreement to end their protracted dispute. The union said on November 2 that the deal will be put to a ballot and has the support of the UGT. According to Ford Spain, 90 percent of the demands of the workers' committee at the factory have been met in the agreement. While Ford has agreed to make a retroactive payment for Saturday work, the UGT has agreed to start Saturday work from now until the end of the year. The dispute began at the beginning of the year and led to a number of strikes in September and October. The factory produces 1,560 cars a day. In September the company shifted the production of 310 cars a day to its plant in Saarlouis, Germany, and threatened to shift all production if the dispute continued.

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Russian schoolteachers in hunger strike for unpaid wages

Schoolteachers in Siberia have begun a hunger strike in protest against unpaid wages. The action began last week at a secondary school in the Topchikha district, in Siberia's Altai territory. The dispute arose from the series of strikes and demonstrations across Russia this school term to demand millions of rubles in pay arrears. In the Altai territory alone around 3,500 teachers in 126 schools began strike action two weeks ago. A union leader in the region said that teachers in 18 schools are set to boycott the beginning of next term if the wages are not paid. Teachers in the region were offered bottles of vodka instead of a wage payment last month.

Teachers in the Chita region of Siberia began strike action last week at 31 schools. These teachers have not received full pay since February and the Education and Science Workers Union claims the workers are now owed 100 million rubles (4.1 million). Other teachers in the Primorye region on the eastern coast of Russia have threatened to start an indefinite strike from November 11 if back wages are not paid. A similar threat has been made by teachers to the education authorities in the Kavalerovo area of the country.

The Kavalerovo teachers recently ended a two-week strike on the basis that back pay will begin to be paid within a two-week period. Teachers in the region have not been paid a full wage for two years and are owed 260million rubles (10.7million).

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French Eiffel tower workers, librarians, high school students strike

Workers at the Eiffel Tower in Paris began a strike on October 30 in protest over manning levels. The workers, mainly hosts and hostesses, have demanded the authorities employ more staff at the monument, the most visited location in the city. The strike closed the monument over the All Saints Day holiday weekend, when 35,000 people would normally visit. By the fifth day of the dispute, the attraction had lost $365,000 in revenues, according to a company spokesman.

Workers are also taking strike action at the National Library in Paris. The strike began on October 20 after the new computer system at the library failed on a number of occasions, disrupting working conditions. The library had been fully operational for just 11 days when the strike began. Librarians have complained about the design of the library and are also demanding it be closed on Mondays. The government is insisting that the latter demand will not be implemented. The new computer system has prevented researchers from leaving through automated exits in the library, indicating they still possess books that have been returned. A trade union spokesman at the library said, "The library's management wants to reintroduce working methods designed in the nineteenth century for a twenty-first century library."

On Thursday thousands of high school students demonstrated in Paris as part of their continuing protests against teacher shortages and other problems in the public education system.

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French transport strikes continue

Further transport strikes took place in France last week. The strikes are the latest in the ongoing disputes over physical attacks on transport workers over the last month. On November 1, bus drivers in Marseille went on strike after a worker was tied up at gunpoint and an administrative office robbed by two masked men. The previous Friday, Marseille bus drivers struck for several hours after a passenger attacked a bus driver and hospitalized him. Transit workers in Paris held a 24-hour strike on November 2 and closed one out of three subway lines at rush hour. Commuters on some of the city's high-speed lines faced a reduced service. The bus service in the city was less affected by the strike.

The government has responded to the strikes by hiring extra police and security guards at transit and bus depots. These have been most prominent in the impoverished areas around Paris and other large cities. The government has stated that those convicted of violence against transport workers will be dealt with harshly. On the same day as the Paris strike two men were sentenced to three months in jail, and three others for one month, for assaulting a train driver in Yvelines to the west of Paris in September.

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Irish teachers strike for extra staff

Teachers at five schools in the Dungarvan area of the Irish Republic struck November 4 to demand the appointment of a remedial teacher. The schools are Garranbane National School, Cul na Smear, Kilbrien NS, SN Baile Mhic Airt and Scoil Gharbhain. Staff at the schools have been campaigning for almost five years for such a teacher and say that it is increasingly difficult to provide a quality education to pupils requiring specific help.

The strike was the first of four being planned this week and next. They are being organized by the Irish National Teachers Organisation. INTO have said that Minister for Education Michael Martin has not taken the views of staff and parents at the school on board. Other schools to be affected by the strike are Scoil Naomh Brid, Redhills in County Cavan and Scoil Naomh Mhuire, County Waterford. These schools have 125 pupils, which entitles them to an additional teacher.

The law states that schools cannot be granted extra staff until September

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1999. Staffs at the CBS school in Dundalk and Courtenay NS are also to take strike action.

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British firefighters pay increase to be funded by service cuts

Firefighters in Britain awarded a pay rise of 5.6 percent for next year were warned by the chairman of the Fire Authority Employers, Lawrence Conlon, that the pay rise will mean cuts in services. Conlon said, "We will honor the increase because it is a long-standing formula. But the settlement is 13 million more than we can afford. To meet the extra costs, authorities will either have to make cuts, even more efficiency savings, cut other local authority services to finance firefighters' wages or do all three." The pay deal is based on a formula that links the pay of firefighters to the annual pay of manual workers. The new agreement will add 48 million to the annual firefighters' pay of 868 million. The chairman of the Local Government Association's Fire Committee, Tony Ritchie, said he would be having discussions with Fire Brigades Union officials to look at ways of cutting costs and making savings in the fire budget. An FBU spokesman said, "We welcome the 5.6 percent pay rise because we are committed to the pay formula."

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Turkish auto union joins in victimization of militant Renault workers

A group of trade unionists have been sacked at the Renault factory in Turkey at the request of the official Turk Metal trade union. The incident took place on the outskirts of Istanbul at the Bursa factory, 51 percent owned by Renault and 49 percent by the Turkish group Oyak. On September 24 Renault head Louis Schweitzer officially opened the new assembly line accompanied by the Turkish president Demirel.

A few days previously 20 trade union members were kicked out of the factory, accused of organizing an illegal strike and setting up a dissident trade union, after Turk Metal accepted a wage deal which left the workers with an increase of just half the rate of inflation (90 percent). Turkish law is quite clear--any attempt by the workers to strike is limited by strict regulations and only one trade union can represent workers in a factory. Turk Metal had the monopoly at Oyak-Renault. As a consequence 20 "ringleaders," denounced by Turk Metal officials, were sacked and 1,600 workers who had ripped apart their union card and joined the more left-wing Disk union were advised under pressure to rejoin their old union.

At the Paris Renault factory the sackings were brushed aside with comments that the Turkish subsidiary obviously had to comply with Turkish law.

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