

Strike by Colombian pilots continues, negotiations restart

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

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On September 20, airline pilots employed by Colombia-based Avianca began the strike they had authorized the week before to press their demands for better pay and working conditions. Some 700 pilots walked out, affecting over 530 flights as of September 22.

In negotiations, the pilots' union, Acdac, had called for pay parity with Avianca pilots in other countries, pointing out that the airline's Colombian aviators earn between 30 and 70 percent less than their non-Colombian colleagues. Acdac had also demanded a 40-hour work reduction per month. The company refused both demands.

Since then, according to *El Espectador*, "Acdac has already ceded in some of its proposals, on at least nine points," but "it is not clear how long the strike will last." Avianca "finds itself studying the possibility of bringing [scab] pilots from other countries," noted the daily.

On September 23, the Labor Minister called the parties to take part in negotiations. The strike, however, remained in effect.

Haitian transportation drivers strike against new taxes

Drivers of taxis, motorcycle taxis and "tap taps" (brightly painted vans and trucks used for transporting passengers) in cities across Haiti held a one-day strike September 18 over requirements regarding driver's

licenses, fuel, fees and taxes in the new budget promoted by president Jovenel Moise.

Schools were closed, and most government offices were at best partially operating because most government workers get to work by means of transport. The strike followed last week's anti-budget protests, which in some cases were scenes of violent confrontations between police and protesters.

Taxes on a number of items—cigarettes, alcoholic beverages and passports, et al.—have already hit the Haitian working class and poor hard. Despite the rationalizations of politicians that the taxes will benefit them in the long run, the Haitian masses know that they will only make their lives more difficult.

Union leaders called the action a "warning strike" and announced a two-day general strike September 25 and 26 if Moise does not rescind the measures. Moise had already announced that he intended to publish the budget, which was overwhelmingly approved by both houses of Parliament, in the official newspaper *Le Moniteur*.

Bolivian highway construction workers strike over labor abuses

Workers on a 500-mile highway construction project in Bolivia protested against maltreatment by management and supervisors September 20. The workers, contracted by China Railway Construction Corporation, began an indefinite strike and blockaded a road that connects Riberalta, a municipality in the northern department of Beni, with other regional cities.

Since the beginning of operations in May, 2016, the workers have lodged complaints against a number of abuses, such as lack of proper clothing and tools, deductions from the meal allowance and overtime pay,

and premature firings without any explanation. The contracted workforce is 90 percent Chinese and 10 percent Bolivian.

Workers have reported abuses to the police and the Labor Ministry, but have gotten no response. On September 23, the ministry's regional directorate announced the signing of an agreement between the workers and China Railway to improve labor conditions. "However," reported noticiasfides.com, "a total advance in respect to the petition was not achieved," since an altercation between a heavy equipment operator and a Chinese technician reignited the conflict.

Argentine sugar workers extend strike for pay, conditions

Workers for the Argentine sugar firm Ledesma voted in assembly September 21 to extend for 96 hours their strike to press their demands for higher pay and better working conditions. The walkout began as a 96-hour action September 14, and was extended by another vote on the 17th.

Ledesma is Argentina's largest sugar, alcohol and biofuels production firm. It is well known for its intransigent attitude toward its workers. As the original assembly was taking place, it was already accusing the Ledesma Sugar Workers Syndicate (SOEAIL) of instigating sabotage, intimidation and vandalism, and declared that it would not negotiate until the strike was called off. It has appealed to the government to order the workers to return to their jobs.

While Ledesma asserts that most workers have not heeded the strike call, SOEAIL claims 90 percent adherence to the strike, as well as community support.

Arbitration agreement ends Pennsylvania teachers strike

Teachers of the Methacton School District in Pennsylvania ended their three-day strike on September 20 after the school board and the union representing 400 teachers agreed to a non-binding arbitration of differences. Teachers are opposed to the board's current

demands to shift a greater share of health care costs onto their backs.

The Methacton Education Association is seeking to obtain a higher wage increase to assuage the opposition of teachers to the school board but so far they have been unable to reach an agreement palatable to teachers.

According to the school board premiums would increase over the next three years by 13 percent, 17 percent and another 17 percent in the final year. The union has also raised contract issues related to class size and student-to-teacher ratios.

The strike by teachers affected seven schools and halted classes for 5,000 students. According to the union salaries for Methacton teachers fall into the lower quadrant in a national comparison, while the burden of health care costs for Methacton teachers falls into the upper tier.

Strike looms for Ontario college teachers

Over 12,000 college teachers across the province of Ontario at 24 colleges could be facing a strike or lock-out in the coming weeks after voting in favor of strike action by just over a two-thirds majority.

The existing contract for community college teachers, counselors and librarians bargaining under the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) is set to expire at the end of the week. According to the union the employer has been stonewalling negotiations with concession demands on key issues while union leaders are seeking controversial faculty input on school management in a new contract.

No strike date has yet been set but OPSEU has requested a no-board report from the Ministry of Labour, which will begin a countdown to a possible work-stoppage.



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