Workers at Airbus' Montreal facility repudiate union-backed, concessionary contract

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Workers at Airbus' Montreal facility repudiate union-backed, concessionary contract

Seventy-three percent of the 1,000 Airbus (formerly Bombardier) employees assigned to the construction of the A220 medium-range jet voted on April 27 to reject a tentative contract settlement. Subsequently, they voted by 98.6 percent in favour of giving the International Association of Machinists (IAM) a strike mandate.

The union backed the company's offer on the claim that it provided "job security." It included a derisory 2 percent wage increase per year for 3 years, the loss of two out of six sick days, increased drug insurance premiums for workers and would have opened the door to outsourcing. The pension plan remained unchanged, but with no new indexation.

Explaining what lay behind their dissatisfaction, several employees interviewed by the Canadian press noted that Bombardier had demanded many sacrifices from workers over the years to save the C Series (of which the A220 is part) while senior management was rewarded with massive bonuses. Bombardier transferred control of the C Series to Airbus in June 2018.

As a result, the Bombardier/Airbus workforce, which had previously formed one group, were split into two units: Bombardier workers and those of a new partnership comprised of Airbus, Bombardier and the Government of Quebec. The two groups of workers work in the same facilities but no longer have the same conditions. Airbus management deplored the workers' decision to vote down its offer, but pledged to work "in close collaboration" with its union "partners" to "find a solution."

Saskatchewan public workers rally ahead of strike deadline

Hundreds of members of the Unifor union rallied at Wascana Park In Regina over the weekend as the deadline for legal strike action approaches for workers employed at Saskatchewan public utilities. Some 5,000 workers at SaskTel, SaskEnergy, SaskPower, SaskWater, the Saskatchewan Water Authority, Directwest and SecurTek are working with expired contracts.

Unifor has accused the province of offering an insulting wage increase. The conservative government of Saskatchewan has maintained wage freezes in the public sector for years. Despite bluster by Unifor about a province-wide strike, negotiations have dragged on without any progress since January. Latin America

Mexican teachers and students protest education reforms

Teachers and students marched to the local Congress building in Chilpancingo, Guerrero, Mexico May 2 to protest the education reforms being pursued by successive governments.

The teachers, members of the Guerrero State Education Workers Coordinator (CETEG), were joined by teacher-training students in a two-day strike and protest actions called by the National Education Workers Coordinator. On arrival at the Congress, the protesters forced their way through the entrance and denounced legislators for not calling for the abrogation of the pro-business, anti-teacher reforms.

Government officials and the media sermonized about the need for "constructive dialogue," i.e. more talk and temporizing while the measures go forward. CETEG and CNTE spokespeople stated that the strike and protests were decided on at a recent national CNTE congress and that another strike is scheduled for May 15 and 16.

Truck drivers in Dominican Republic poised to strike over regulations

On May 3, the Dominican Transport Federation (FENATRADO) announced that its affiliated truck drivers are set to go on indefinite strike today, May 7. The strike was called to protest new regulations issued by the General Directorate of Transit and Ground Transport (DIGESETT), one of which will impose fines for tires determined by DIGESETT agents to be in poor condition.

FENATRADO president Ricardo de Los Santos, denouncing the "persecution and arbitrariness" of the agency, told reporters that the standard of thickness of tire tread by which DIGESETT will fine the truckers—4.5 mm—is much higher than the 2.5 mm international standard. In addition to demanding that the international standard be used, truckers will also call for transparency in the setting of the price of fuel.

Jamaican academic staff strike over non-implementation of salary increase

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Around 500 members of the academic staff at the University of Technology (UTech) in Kingston, Jamaica walked off the job April 30. The workers are members of the UTech Academic Staff Union (UTASU), which called the walkout to protest the non-implementation of a raise agreed in the 2015/2017 Heads of Agreement.

UTASU head Lebert Langley told rjrnewsonline.com reporters that the workers would stay out until they get "a settlement of the item related to their salary adjustment and a clear timetable and a schedule that will indicate when these objectives will be met."

The UTech administration and the Finance Minister have proposed ending the strike and holding a meeting, supposedly to resolve the issue. So far, the striking workers have held to their decision to remain out until their demand is met.

Antiguan airport workers stage go-slow and sit-in over back pay, salaries

Workers for the Antigua and Barbuda Airport Authority (ABAA) staged a go-slow on April 30 followed by a sit-in the next day to press their demands for payment of overdue wages and a salary increase. The ABAA has been dragging its feet in the release of an audit to the workers' union, the Antigua and Barbuda Workers Union (ABWU), and on the other issues.

These actions slowed operations at the V.C. Bird International Airport northeast of the capital St John's. The ABWU has complained of ABAA management delaying action on the demands, yet on May 1 the union ordered the workers back on the job, with ABWU general secretary David Massiah saying, "The Board acceded to our concerns and they expressed a number of issues which we will meet again to discuss." Massiah did not elaborate on the issues that were according to him resolved and the ones remaining to be addressed.

Uruguayan anesthesiologists announce new three-day strike action over representation demands

The Surgical Anesthesiologist Syndicate (SAQ) in Uruguay announced on May 2 that it would carry out a three-day nationwide strike beginning May 7. The main demand is the same as the previous four-day strike last month: that the SAQ be granted the right to represent itself and not under the umbrella of the Medical Syndicate of Uruguay (SMU), which they claim does not fight for their interests.

The SAQ claims that their salaries have been cut 10 percent due to the SMU's negotiations with the national Salary Council. As is usually the case with medical professional strikes, surgeries will be suspended during the strike days except for emergency and oncology interventions.

New York City Pre-k strike cancelled

A strike scheduled for May 2 by New York City early childhood educators who work for community-based organizations (CBO) and Head Start programs was suddenly canceled by AFSCME District Council 1707. The Pre-Kindergarten teachers were demanding wage parity with Pre-K teachers working in public schools under the Department of Education and are members of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT).

Although the wage parity demand had been raised for years, the strike authorizations were made in the hope that increased opportunity existed to pressure the city government for funds because of the extension planned by Mayor de Blasio of free Universal Pre-Kindergarten availability from four-year olds to three year-olds, along with concurrent City Council annual budget negotiations.

DC 1707 had only planned a one-day strike rally at City Hall and then instructed only the Head Start teachers in Local 95, who work in Head Start, to stay out while telling the larger group of Local 205 members, who work for CBO's, to remain at work because they would be violating the labor contract with Day Care Council of New York, representing the daycare centers, that runs to 2020. With no guarantee of funding for wage increases, DC 1707 accepted the offer of the de Blasio Administration to begin negotiations with employer representatives.

The lower wages among the non-public Pre-K schools has created a large turnover of its teachers to jobs in the public schools. The use of public funding of private sourcing for public services in New York City has similarly resulted in low-pay for school bus drivers and attendants that has resulted in large turnover, resulting in worker shortages, inexperienced drivers, more children late to school, and less safe transportation.

Illinois plant workers strike over company spying and intimidation

Workers at the U.S. Silica plant in Utica, Illinois walked off the job over company attempts to intimidate workers who discussed contract negotiations. The International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE) Local 150 called the unfair labor practices strike and filed charges alleging that the 26 workers "were unlawfully interrogated and surveilled while participating in federally protected union activity."

The IUOE is currently in contract talks with U.S. Silica and has been without a contract since January 1 of this year. Negotiations are ongoing.

U.S. Silica is considered a premier provider of silica sand for a wide variety of uses including oil and gas, chemicals, foundry and industrial filtration. It was ranked by *Fortune* magazine as number 43 among the top 50 fastest-growing companies based on a three-year period of profit, revenue and stock growth.

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