Brazilian aerospace workers take strike vote; Ontario nursing home workers launch rotating strikes

Workers Struggles: The Americas

8 September 2020

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

Brazilian aerospace workers union calls strike vote over job cuts

The Metallurgy Workers Union at Brazilian-based aerospace company Embraer called for a strike vote to be held virtually on September 4 following the announcement of 900 job cuts by management. As of September 5, the results had not been tabulated. Embraer has requested government intervention.

On September 3, Embraer announce the firing of 900 workers, claiming that it needed to "assure sustainability" due to "the impact caused by COVID-19 in the global economy and the cancellation of the agreement with US [firm] Boeing," referring to a merger deal that fell through—amid mutual recriminations—in late April.

The most recently fired workers represent 4.5 percent of Embraer's workforce. The company, based in São José dos Campos, had already shed 1,600 workers by means of a "voluntary" exit plan earlier this year.

Municipal workers union in Argentina calls three-day strike over wages, conditions

The Santa Fe Province Argentina Municipal Workers Syndicate Federation (Festram), in a September 3 plenary session of general secretaries, resolved to call a 72-hour strike to begin September 8. The vote was held following the decision of the Work Risk Insurers (ART), self-described as "private enterprises contracted by employers to advise them in means of prevention and repair of damages in cases of work accidents or professional illnesses," not to classify COVID-19 as a "professional illness."

According to a communiqué, Festram "resolved to decree a Work Safety State of Emergency, demanding that extreme preventive measures be taken and avoiding the participation of municipal or communal personnel in sectors of risk that do not have guarantees of compliance with protocols." Another demand is the updating of the family allowance.

Festram suspended a planned 48-hour strike last week, thinking that the municipalities would come up with a salary proposal for consideration, but instead insisted on fixed "nonremunerative and nonredeemable" sums (for September, October and November) that had already been rejected. Moreover, the proposal would not cover retired, temporary or contract workers. Another demand is the updating of the family allowance.

The statement declared Festram "open to dialogue" when and if the municipality comes up with "a proposal that takes us to modify this situation." Minimum security personnel will remain on the job in sensitive sectors.

Partial strike by Argentine hospital staff to protest working conditions

Workers at the Cutural Hospital in Plaza Huincul, a city in Argentina's Neuquén province, protested their working conditions August 31. The workers, including cleaning, kitchen and security crews, carried out a partial strike, with minimum guards staying at their posts in emergency areas, operating rooms and admissions.

The workers pointed to irregularities regarding provision of proper clothing, safety measures, and supplies in the midst of the pandemic as the spark for their protest. They also denounced the recent firing of four coworkers.

Argentine research workers hold one-day strike over pay, parity talks

Workers at Argentina's National Scientific and Technical Research Council (CONICET) stopped work for 24 hours September 3. The temporary walkout was called to underline two demands: a salary "recomposition" and parity talks to draw up a collective contract.

Protesters in front of CONICET's headquarters noted that with the COVID-19 pandemic still raging, scientific research is more important than ever, and that it should be reflected in their compensation. However, in the midst of the pandemic, there have been delays and freezing of salaries, leaving workers in a state of uncertainty.

The CONICET chapter of the State Workers Association is calling for parity talks.

© World Socialist Web Site

Colombian coal miners begin strike over wages, working conditions, benefits

Mineworkers at Colombia's gigantic Cerrejón open-pit coal mine began an indefinite strike on the afternoon of August 31. The workers had voted August 20 by over 99 percent to down their tools after months of negotiations in which management and the Sintracarbón union failed to reach an agreement on a new contract.

Cerrejón has remained intransigent over a whole range of issues, demanding an end to transportation subsidies, aid for pensioners and their children, contributions to therapeutic centers, Consumer Price Index adjustments, and conversion of contract workers to permanent status. It wants to reduce holiday bonuses, signing bonuses, early retirement bonuses and productivity raises.

The company's proposals also include freezes on scholarships and other educational aid and benefits, health insurance, a variety of loans and assistance to culture, sports and recreation clubs.

Another equally important demand of the workers is the revocation of the company's attempt to impose a new shift pattern on the workers, more grueling and dangerous than the present one. Because it would require three crews instead of four, the result of what workers call "the Death Shift" would be around 1,200 layoffs.

Negotiations continued after the strike vote, but to no avail. In a statement on the first day of the walkout, Sintracarbón denounced the "arrogant and imperative attitude of Cerrejón" that "provoked the failure of today's meeting despite the mediation of the Labor Ministry." It concluded that although it would be "a painful strike in which we all will lose," nonetheless, "Not to strike is to give ourselves up to modern slavery in which the employer orders and the worker only obeys without opposition."

Minnesota medical technicians vote to carry out two-day strike

Some 200 Allina Health medical tech workers and therapists have voted to carry out a two-day strike September 14 at the company's Minneapolis, Minnesota Abbott Northwestern Hospital and the St. Francis Hospital located in the suburb of Savage. The strike was endorsed by over 90 percent of the total votes cast.

According to Service Employees International Union Healthcare Minnesota, the strike will be an unfair labor practices strike motivated by a refusal of the company to address health and safety demands in the current ongoing negotiations.

Unlike other Allina healthcare workers who can continue to receive pay and benefits should they contract COVID-19 or have to quarantine, SEIU workers only have a temporary agreement that grants them one-time compensation. After that, should they be compelled to quarantine, they would be forced to use sick days and many workers in the past month are experiencing their second quarantine resulting in an erosion of sick days.

Allina reacted sharply to SEIU's request for contract improvements. "The SEIU's proposal for a 13 percent wage increase over the life of the contract, among other economic enhancement proposals, is simply unrealistic in this current environment." The company has proposed a meager 2.25 percent wage increase.

Quebec home day care workers begin rotating strikes

Ten thousand home day care workers began a series of rotating strikes last week against poverty wages. The workers, who provide child care services out of their own homes are paid a stipend by the provincial government. Their union, the Federation des intervenantes en petite enfance, has estimated that the government payment works out to only $12.42 (CDN) per hour. Workers are demanding a payment increase that would equate to $16.75 per hour. Hundreds of workers have already left the industry due to the abysmal compensation and fears about coronavirus infection.

The home sector of the day care industry in Quebec services about 60,000 families. The first strike last Tuesday in the Quebec City area involved 1,400 workers and closed services for 9,000 families. This was followed by strike action along the southeastern border with Ontario. A strike in the metropolitan Montreal region is slated for September 11. Should no agreement be reached by September 21, workers are demanding that the rotating strikes be transformed into an all-out strike.

In addition to the wage demands, workers are concerned with the once-again spiking COVID-19 cases in the province. The right-wing government of Premier Francois Legault is spearheading a premature back to work drive in order to boost the flagging profits of Quebec corporations that has flown in the face of public health best practices. Schools opened last week, and remain open, despite at least 47 schools already reporting new cases and outbreaks. One hundred and fifty doctors and scientists have released an open letter pointing out that schools are not properly prepared for a re-opening and warning of dire consequences. In addition, Legault has given assurances to big business that, should COVID cases continue to spike, he has no intention of ordering the day care sector to close once again.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site