

Mexican flight attendants and transit workers set to strike; union shuts down strike by Rio Tinto workers in British Columbia

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Mexican flight attendants strike over unpaid wages, bonuses

Flight attendants at Aeromar airlines of Mexico voted October 5 in a national assembly to strike to demand delayed wages, bonuses and benefits. In a statement, the Aviation Attendants Syndical Association (ASSA) emphasized that the attendants “have supported [Aeromar], in an important manner, sacrificing their incomes so that the business continues functioning,” adding, “The agreements that have permitted the continuity of operation should be complied with completely.”

The attendants demand the full payment of the 2020-2021 savings fund up to October 7 of this year, as well as reimbursement of the mortgage contributions system, known as Infonavit, including interest, the payment of legal expenses caused by the delays, life insurance, union dues and the FONACOT lending fund.

This is the second strike that Aeromar employees have engaged in. In March, ASSA and the ASPA pilots’ union walked out over the same demands. Aeromar saved over 50 million pesos (US\$2.4 million) through pay cuts agreed by ASPA during the first year of the pandemic. With the company recuperating, the workers want Aeromar to live up to its side of the bargain.

Mexican metro workers to stop work for wage increase, equipment

A strike at one of Mexico City’s main Metro system lines, Line 12, will take place October 14 if the Mass Transit System board of directors does not accede to the demands of the National Union of Workers of the Collective Transport System (SNTSTC).

The SNTSTC has advanced a number of demands, most prominently a wage increase. Other demands include the provision of work clothes, tools and spare parts for trains and installations, safety equipment, improvements in medical services and the supply of medicines.

Of the 14,250 workers in the Mexico City public transportation system, some 90.8 percent, or nearly 13,000, are in the SNTSTC.

Trinidadian teachers stage “blackout” over salaries, conditions and other issues

Teachers in Trinidad and Tobago held a “blackout” on October 5 over various demands and complaints. It was a repetition of a similar action, called by the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers Association (TTUTA), on September 30. Teachers stayed at home and shut off cell phones, computers and other devices for “Blackout the Sequel,” as it was labeled.

TTUTA president Antonia Tehka-De Freitas listed some of the unaddressed issues that teachers have with the Ministry of Education in an interview with *Loop News*. Those include non-settlement of negotiations; delays—of up to 15 years—in granting permanent positions; delays in upgrades dating back to 2010; delays in payment of raises; filling of vacancies; unsafe conditions.

In addition to these longstanding sticking points, others have been created or exacerbated by the pandemic, including lack of proper equipment for online teaching, connectivity issues—especially among poorer families—and school boards’ plans to return to face-to-face classes without consulting the TTUTA. The rising cost of living is also adding stress to teachers’ lives, since they have not received a raise since 2013. Finally, De Freitas slammed the fact that teachers are “regarded as babysitters” and are shown no respect.

The absentee rate for the September 30 action was about 56 percent. TTUTA claimed 72 percent for October 5, partly because it was World Teachers’ Day and was couched as a day of “meaningful contemplation,” and partly because teachers at denominational schools joined the blackout this time.

Paraguayan national student union declares support for striking teachers

The National Union of Student Centers of Paraguay (Unepy) announced October 8 that it supports and has joined the strike by teachers in the Education Workers Organization of Paraguay, National Educators Union, National Educators Federation and others.

The teachers went on strike October 1 to demand a 16 percent raise as well as a greater budgetary commitment to education by the Finance Ministry. The ministry had announced a unilateral 8 percent raise. The unions agreed to put the strike on hold and to negotiate

October 5, but the ministry only raised the salary hike to 10 percent. The teachers went back on strike. On October 8, the authorities offered 11 percent; it was rejected by the teachers and the strike continued.

An Unepy statement denounced the “injustices and lies of the government” and declared, “The authorities say that because of the pandemic we are not in the best moment to give “raises” to the teachers, but is it a good moment to raise the salaries of congresspeople and senators? Congresspeople and senators who instead of legislat(ing), the only thing they do is seat warming..”

The statement concluded, “Our teachers deserve the 16 percent, so that their work is dignified and much more.”

Tentative agreement reached one day after stagehands shut down Massachusetts theater production of “Mamma Mia!”

The union representing stagehands at the North Shore Music Theatre in Beverly, Massachusetts, reached a tentative agreement with owner Bill Hanney October 7, one day after workers shut down the company’s opening performance of “Mamma Mia!”

The stagehands, who joined the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) Local 11 during the pandemic, voted for strike authorization the previous week. Hanney responded contemptuously, “I’m going to do the show tonight if it’s a cappella. ... This theater is not going to close because of one bunch of people who don’t understand where they are.”

But when musicians and actors walked out in solidarity with stagehands, Hanney was forced to cancel the performance 25 minutes before the scheduled start.

Workers charged they were receiving wage compensation that was 60 percent under the industry standard. IATSE had been bargaining for a wage of \$22 an hour. The tentative settlement was rumored to set a \$18 an hour wage.

Nurses picket Tenet hospital in Modesto, California over unsafe staffing ratios

Nurses at the Doctors Medical Center in Modesto, California held a picket October 5 to call attention to the ongoing problem of insufficient staffing. The California Nurses Association charges that the hospital is not in compliance with the state’s mandated nurse-to-patient staffing ratios and the staffing crisis, combined with the pandemic, has resulted in high levels of stress.

Doctors Medical Center is owned by Tenet Healthcare, which is currently stonewalling Massachusetts St. Vincent nurses over the same issue in a seven-month strike, is the nation’s second largest hospital chain.

In a statement, Shiloh Garcia, a critical care nurse, charged, “Ultimately, there is no nursing shortage. Tenet is prioritizing profits over patients, and decisions being made by management, including their conscious decision to not provide better incentives to recruit and retain registered nurses, as well as not increasing their budget for travel nurses, make that clear.”

Erie, Pennsylvania equipment manufacturing workers strike for increased wages and benefits

Workers at the Erie Strayer Company plant in Erie, Pennsylvania, walked off the job October 4 after the company failed to respond to their demands for increased wages and a first-time dental plan. The 42 workers, members of Iron Workers Regional Shop Local Union 851, have been pressing the company for the past 15 years for a dental plan, without any success.

After four months of fruitless bargaining and having endured the pandemic classified as essential workers, the strikers are determined to win their demands.

Strike ends at Rio Tinto aluminum smelter in Kitimat, B.C.

Last week Unifor, the union organizing some 950 workers at Rio Tinto’s Kitimat aluminum smelter and the Kemano power plant in northwest British Columbia, announced the end of a two-month strike against concessions after workers voted by 70 percent to accept a new deal.

Clearly unsettled by the 30 percent opposition to the agreement, the union took almost four days to announce the result of the vote and have to date withheld most details of the contract including, tellingly, any mention whatsoever of the wage settlement under conditions where price inflation is rapidly rising across the country.

The deal was highly touted by Rio Tinto management, which had provoked the strike in a determined effort to wring concessions from the smelter workers. “We welcome this vote from employees in support of the new agreement and our shared vision of a strong, sustainable future for BC Works,” said Rio Tinto BC Works General Manager Affonso Bizon. Ominously, both the company and Unifor have referred to a new “Memorandum of Agreement” that appears to commit the union to even closer collusion with management.

Soon after the strike began, Rio Tinto reduced aluminum production to only 25 percent of capacity. A subsequent statement from Bizon suggested that restarting the company’s mothballed pots would take between 12 to 16 months to complete. It is expected that hundreds of workers will be subjected to a long layoff period despite the contract settlement.

Rio Tinto recently announced a blockbuster dividend payout to its shareholders. The company will reward investors with \$9.1 billion at \$7.60 per share, which more than triples previous payouts. Industry analysts predict that such stockholder windfalls will continue throughout the decade, as prices for metals remain high.



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