

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Argentine drivers' union announces two-day strike over wage hike demand

On October 5, Argentina's Automotive Tramway Union (UTA) announced a 48-hour strike throughout the country's interior by public transportation workers set for October 12 and 13. A statement by the union claimed that the UTA had "exhausted all instances of negotiation in pursuit of social peace," and added that "We transport 9,000,000 users daily and interior workers cannot collect our salary increase" due to a dispute between the national and provincial governments "over who is in charge of the salary agreement."

The statement pointed out, "The Executive promised to transfer to the companies of the interior, during this year, \$46 billion [US\$308 million] into the Compensation Fund, so that they can meet the labor charges, but so far only about \$38 billion [US\$254 million] has been deposited."

Chilean pharmacy workers vote for strike over salaries, bonuses, security

Members of Chile's National Federation of Pharmacy Workers (Fenatrafar) voted last week by almost 90 percent in favor of a strike if negotiations with pharmacy chains do not bring improvements. On its Facebook page, Fenatrafar listed among the most important issues "base salary, locomotion, food, bonus readjustment and security."

The union pointed out the workers face "abusive and risky work overload," due to "polyfunctionality" in which they have to "be in charge of ten functions at the same time" and under such pressure, "making a mistake in the sale of medicines can trigger a tragedy."

Fenatrafar claimed that two companies, Farmacias Salcobrand and Farmacias Ahumada, "are violating the Law of Drugs, encouraging sales in a perverse way with unattainable goals." The union warned that if offers did not improve at the two chains, they could go on strike this week. Fenatrafar called on the Ministries of Health and Labor to intervene.

Ecuadorian teachers protest education law regulations

Teachers in Ecuador's National Union of Educators (UNE) held a sit-in protest in the capital Quito October 6 in front of the Education Ministry. Similar protests, which included road closures and burning tires, were

reported in other cities around the country. Students joined in the protests, which were directed against the draft of a document titled Regulations for the Organic Law on Intercultural Education (LOEI).

The UNE denounced the draft LOEI regulations, which the government of right-wing President Guillermo Lasso plans to present to the legislature, as unconstitutional and created without consultation. The UNE claimed that it infringes on teachers' rights and does nothing to improve promised wage raises. The LOEI, in the meantime, was provisionally suspended by the country's Constitutional Court.

Lasso, an ex-banker and free-market advocate, began his term in May 2021 and has overseen tax cuts, privatizations, easing of labor laws and obedience to IMF dictates. His initially high popularity rating has plunged and protests against his policies have often met with violent repression.

Uruguayan construction workers to strike for one day over deteriorating living standards

Uruguay's Single National Union of Construction and Attachments (Sunca) announced October 5 that it will call a national strike for October 20. The walkout will include a march to the Legislative Palace, where protesters will demonstrate against deteriorating conditions for workers and the poor. Sunca stated that over 100 buses will bring workers from around the country to join in the mobilization.

The slogan for the action will be "in defense of the conquests" and will draw attention to the increase of poverty, hunger, unemployment and the skyrocketing cost of living as wages and pensions stagnate. The statement denounced the government's shirking of its promise to invest in sanitation, housing and other public projects.

One demand specific to construction workers will be for the creation of a Specialized Prosecutor's Office and the strengthening of the Legal Department of the MTSS [Ministry of Labor and Social Security], which would improve the investigation of labor.

Bahamian flight attendants hold sickout over pay, insurance

Flight attendants for Bahamasair, the flagship airline for the Bahamas staged a sickout on October 2. According to Bahamasair, 80 percent of the attendants participated in the industrial action. Flights to the United States as well as locations within the island chain were canceled or delayed.

The protest action was directed at two primary issues that have not been resolved in negotiations between the airline and the Airport Airline Allied Workers Union (AAAWU): pay adjustments and insurance. The action was not called by the AAAWU but was taken by the flight attendants on their own initiative. An anonymous airline industry source told Tribune 242, "This is an action on the part of the stewardesses. The stewardesses themselves have taken action, and the union is trying to get them back in."

The Airport Authority in the Bahamas experienced a similar industrial action in July, when several hundred workers, members of the Bahamas Public Services Union, held a sickout to demand a resolution to issues, including outstanding payments, that were delaying the signing of an agreement. The Supreme Court issued an injunction ordering the workers back on the job.

Elkhart, Indiana manufacturer hires replacement workers as strike heads toward one-month mark

Elkhart Products Corporation began hiring replacement workers as more than 100 members of the International Association of Machinists (IAM) Local 2018 enter their fourth week on strike at the Elkhart, Indiana, facility that manufactures metal fittings. Workers launched their strike after rejecting a tentative offer that combined a mere 50 cent hourly raise along with a hike in insurance premiums that would ultimately reduce weekly paychecks by \$70.

Strikers are also incensed that replacement workers are getting a \$1,000 signing bonus. “If they can give out a thousand-dollar bonus to these new people, why can’t they give us a better raise to where we can pay our insurance and not have to struggle,” striker Michele Crise told WNDU news.

The company’s rigid stance comes as a slap in the face after workers maintained operations through the pandemic. Thomas King, a welder, told ABC57, “These people have been here, they’ve bled for them. A lot of us have gotten hurt over the years and been through workman’s comp for them. And they’re going to take us and treat us like this after all this time?”

IAM negotiators opened the door to the company’s attack on health care. Local 2018 union representative David Gault admitted, “We started negotiations on the premise that we would pay a portion of the insurance, but we want raises to cover that cost.”

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette workers strike after owner cancels health care coverage plan

Some 80 workers at the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* went on strike October 6 after the paper’s owner, Block Communications, canceled their health care plan. The strike encompasses workers involved in design, production, distribution and advertising and are members of the Communications Workers of America, Teamsters and the Pressmen’s Union.

The workers have been without a contract since 2017 and have gone without a raise for 16 years. In current negotiations Block Communications wants to force workers to accept a high deductible plan and pay 30 percent of the total premium that could amount to more than \$14,400 a year for a family.

In a joint statement over wages, the unions stated, “The *Post-Gazette* proposes to provide an ‘alleged increase in compensation’ of 7% or 9%, but at the same time, the *Post-Gazette* keeps the 8% of the employees’ wages that they are currently contributing for good health care. The bottom line – the 7%/9% is either a 1% wage cut, or 1% increase.”

Janitors for Facebook and Instagram parent Meta Platforms, strike

Bay Area sites

About 250 janitors at Meta Platforms, parent of Facebook and Instagram, went on strike this week at San Francisco Bay Area sites protesting layoffs and other unfair labor practices. The workers are members of the Service Employees International Union and work for contract company SBM Management Service.

SBM took over Meta’s janitorial services last summer and laid off 40 percent of janitors, security guards and other personnel. The layoffs have created impossible pressure on the remaining workforce.

On October 4, 60 janitors based in San Francisco walked out and they were reinforced the next day by 200 janitors in Menlo Park and Burlingame who joined them in solidarity.

The strike comes as Meta is looking to cut costs, with CEO Mark Zuckerberg saying the company is facing one of its worst downturns in history.

Public sector workers in Newfoundland presented with concessions contracts

About 650 workers in three separate bargaining units of the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Public and Private Employees (NAPE) rejected a concessions contract presented to them last week. Prison corrections officers, air ambulance and forest fire water bombers as well as ferry boat crews rejected a deal that would see a significant real wage cut in the face of a continuing inflationary spiral.

The proposed deal provided for only a 2 percent wage increase in each of four years under conditions where the inflation rate reached 8.2 percent this past summer and still hovers above 6.4 percent as we enter the autumn months. Many workers remarked that the proposed 8 percent wage increase staggered over four years and backdated to April 1 of this year would actually be eaten up by inflation by the beginning of the second year of the contract.

The proposed settlement was accepted by other NAPE bargaining units including Marine Institute workers; Memorial University custodians, maintenance and campus enforcement workers; Newfoundland Labrador Liquor Corp. workers and College of the North Atlantic faculty and support staff. Workers, however, were not enthusiastic about the contracts, with only 72 percent of the memberships voting to accept the agreements.

Union officials for NAPE trumpeted the new contract, sidestepping the miserable wages deal and instead citing “substantial language improvements” highlighted, they crowed, by the introduction of gender-neutral language in the printed contract.



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