

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Audi Mexico autoworkers walk out

On January 24, 4,159 workers went on strike at the Audi Mexico plant in Jose Chiapas, Puebla State, south of Mexico City. The Independent Union of Audi Workers (SITAUDI), which called the strike, has been negotiating with the firms since last October, when it began demanding a 17 percent wage increase, a 2 percent bonus and a 50 percent increase in vacation payments, plus increases in travel allowances and school utensils for workers' children.

At the time of the walkout the SITAUDI bureaucracy had reduced their demand to a 10 percent wage increase and 5 percent in benefits, more than two times the latest Audi offer of 6.5 percent in wages and benefits for this year, 1.5 percent over last year's inflation of 7.8 percent

This is the first strike by autoworkers since current president Lopez Obrador assumed the presidency in December 2018.

El Salvador teachers rally over wages

Last Friday hundreds of teachers from different cities in El Salvador marched in the capital city of San Salvador and rallied at the Education Ministry, demanding the payment of wage increases that were due a year ago.

According to Salvadorian law, educators' wages are to be adjusted upwards every three years. More than four years have gone by without any wage increase, however, and the Education Ministry has ignored repeated demands for a wage increase. A spokesperson of the teachers pointed out that "we are tired of waiting" and the ministry is "seven months, and seven days behind."

Salvadorian teachers have been demanding wage increases since October 2022. At the time, the ministry responded that there was no money for raises.

Workers strike against the privatization of Peru's historic Machu Picchu site

Last Thursday Peruvian police used tear gas to repress striking

workers that blocked rail lines linking the Incan ruins of Machu Picchu with the city of Ollantaytambo. The rail line ceased operations in reaction to the protests. Most visitors reach Machu Picchu via rail. Bus service has also been shut down by the protests.

The demonstrators are demanding that the privatization of ticket sales to this archeological site be stopped. Last week's protests have blocked hundreds of tourists on their way to visiting the site.

Following the decision to privatize, the administration of Dina Boluarte contracted out ticket sales to a private firm, Join-Us. Protesters immediately took to the streets of Lima chanting "Machu Picchu is not for sale," while in the province of Cuzco, where Machu Picchu is located, several groups initiated a strike. Join-Us began selling tickets online on January 20.

At last Thursday's demonstration, protesters indicated that the police were firing tear gas at close range, resulting in the cranial injury of demonstrators and other injuries.

In response to the police repression, more unions joined the strikes and protests on Friday. Local authorities indicated that the decision to contract the private entity was done in an "irregular manner" and behind people's backs.

Peru transit workers and riders protest rise in fares

Transit workers and travelers protested in Lima, Peru against increases in fares by the municipal transit company Rutas de Lima, which contributes to the rising cost of living and most directly affects the poor. Fares were raised last week from 6.50 to 7.50 soles. Rutas de Lima, for its part, insists that the increases are a response to accumulated inflation.

Retired oil workers protest Brazil pension cuts

On January 24, hundreds of retirees from the Petrobras system from all over Brazil rallied at the Petrobras headquarters in Rio de Janeiro. The protesters denounced the brutal cuts to pensions and health insurance.

Under former President Bolsonaro, and now under President Lula, Petrobras has been allowed to cut pension and health benefits with impunity.

The oil giant Petrobras claims that it must cut retirement and health benefits because its pension and health care funds are losing money.

Southwest Airlines flight attendants vote to strike

Flight attendants at Southwest Airlines voted by a 98 percent margin January 23 to authorize strike action. The 19,000 flight attendants, members of Transport Workers Union (TWU) Local 556, have been without a contract for five years.

A TWU statement said, “After five long years of negotiations, which have included both pay cuts and furloughs ... the flight attendants of Southwest Airlines have made it clear that this proposed contract is not going to heal the hurt.”

Last month the attendants voted to reject a company offer for an immediate 20 percent pay increase followed by a 36 percent hike spread out over a five-year contract. Flight attendants are also seeking appropriate rest between shifts, control over their schedules and access to food and a safe place to rest when traveling.

The heightened mood for a strike by attendants was said to have been further fueled by the announcement the day before that Southwest pilots approved a new contract granting a 50 percent total wage raise for a four-year contract along with other terms.

The TWU, however, has not requested a 30-day cooling off agreement as the next step in freeing flight attendants to strike. It has only indicated that if an agreement is not reached it might initiate the request.

Phoenix airport concession workers strike again

Food service workers at Sky Harbor International Airport in Phoenix, Arizona, walked off the job on January 23 over continued poor working conditions and now late paychecks. This was the second time in recent months that the 400 members of Unite Here Local 11 have staged a walkout, with the previous one back in November.

Workers have been plagued by poverty wages, unsafe equipment, under-staffing, discrimination, unlawful surveillance and illegal disciplinary actions. The target of the workers protests is SSP America, which contracts with Sky Harbor and employs the cashiers, cooks, baristas, bartenders and other food service workers at the airport’s concessions.

Recently, SSP America unilaterally instituted a new delayed pay process that has caused problems for the airport workers who live paycheck to paycheck. Cynthia Reyes told Cronkite News the change caused her to be late on her rent payment and her landlord docked her with an additional \$150 penalty.

“It’s devastating because it’s scary that my landlord could go to court and get an eviction notice because I was late,” said Reyes. “It’s my first check of the year, and it’s hard to express to someone that I’m struggling and I work a full-time job. ... I work so hard, and I can barely fend for myself.”

Sporadic job actions broaden on Vancouver Transit as CUPE blocks all-out fight

Despite entering into a legal strike position earlier this month,

Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) officials organizing 180 bus transit supervisors, engineers and maintenance workers in British Columbia’s Lower Mainland have once again reined in an all-out offensive for a new contract.

The workers are employed by the Coast Mountain Bus Company (CMBC). The company is a subsidiary of TransLink, the transit authority for Metro Vancouver. Workers have been without a new contract since October 2022. They are demanding that should the dispute not be settled promptly a full-on strike must be organized. Contract demands involve a significant wage increase and the ending of onerous workloads that can result in workers labouring for as much as 70 hours per week due to extremely low staffing levels.

This past December the workers voted by 100 percent for strike action. Instead, on January 6, CUPE initiated an overtime ban instead of an all-out strike. Reports confirmed that the action had negligible impact on the daily transit service.

Then last week, under increased pressure from the membership, the union announced a two-day strike. Workers immediately set up pickets at many of the local depots where bus drivers, who are not part of the dispute, gathered to start their shifts. Most drivers refused to cross the picket lines of the supervisors and engineers, despite losing two day’s pay. The solidarity action caused widespread disruption of the transit service. Hundreds of thousands of commuters across the region were impacted, including those who took the SeaBus to and from North Vancouver.

With the strike action then pulled back again, the union has agreed with a proposal from the provincial government to appoint mediator Vince Ready to move the now re-started negotiations with CMBC management forward. The mediator has been instructed that if a tentative deal is not reached by January 30, Ready is to present his non-binding recommendations to both parties on February 2.

Provincial New Democratic Party Labour Minister Harry Bains announced that both the union and management will then be given until February 7 to accept (or reject) Ready’s proposals. Bains’ choice of dates is meant to provide an escape door for the union leadership which has threatened to call a three-day strike on February 3 if a deal has not been reached.

CUPE will also meet with the British Columbia Labour Relations Board on January 31 to argue for legal permission for future picketing on Vancouver’s SkyTrain network, the SeaBus connection and other TransLink networks extending beyond Vancouver into the Fraser Valley.



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