

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 pilots strike

Members of the Argentine pilots' union walked off the job for nine hours September 6 to protest the refusal of Argentine airline Aerolineas Argentinas, the publicly owned national carrier, to negotiate wage increases that keep up with inflation. Currently, prices are increasing at a rate of 120 percent per year. The protest strike at both Buenos Aires airports affected 150 flights and about 15,000 passengers.

Due to the refusal of AA management to offer anything more than token wage increases for pilots and flight crews and the refusal of their unions to fight, the pilots resorted to direct action.

Truck drivers in Colombia state protests over fuel prices

From Monday September 2 through September 5, striking Colombian truck drivers and owner-operators blocked main highways, to protest increases in diesel fuel prices. The job action impacted and caused shortages in agriculture, commerce and manufacturing.

In an attempt to divide workers from owner-operators, who drive their own trucks, Colombian President Gustavo Petro denounced the strike as a "business strike."

Mexican VW workers reject "historic contract" backed by their union

On August 31 Volkswagen workers in Mexico rejected a contract proposal from their union, the Independent Union of Mexico's VW workers (SITIAVW), that called for a 7 percent wage increase and a 3.95 percent increase in benefits.

Earlier this year workers at the VW-owned Audi plant in Puebla, Mexico went on strike against a very similar proposal.

Maintenance technicians for United Airlines stage protest over stalled negotiations over pay demands

The 10,000 Aircraft Maintenance Technicians (AMTs) for United Airlines held protest pickets at airports across the country August 30 to demand better pay, safety standards and improved healthcare. The Teamsters union, which represents the workers, is accusing United of "slow walking" the negotiations.

According to the Teamsters, the temper of the workers is not just for partial improvements, but an industry-leading contract. Some of the airports affected by the protests include Boston, Chicago, Denver, Washington D.C., Houston, Los Angeles, Newark, San Francisco, Orlando and Tampa.

Like United flight attendants, who are also involved in negotiations with the company, the AMTs are upset that despite huge corporate profits, they are not seeing significant improvement in their compensation. In 2023, United CEO Scott Kirby's total compensation nearly doubled from \$9.8 million to \$18.6 million.

Idaho crane operators protest substandard pay

Crane operators for Inland Crane company working on the \$15 billion expansion to Micron Technology's campus in Boise, Idaho, are accusing the company of not paying prevailing construction wages. Members of the Operating Engineers Local 302 have been picketing and leafletting to call attention to the question of substandard pay.

Inland Crane management issued a statement saying the complaint arose from a former employee and "not everyone has the attitude or work ethic to fit" the company's culture.

Back in January, workers for Inland Crane working on the Boise Airport Jackson Jet Center hangar tried to call attention to a number of structural issues, such as bending beams and

snapped cables a day before the hanger collapsed. Three people were killed and nine injured in the accident.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration cited Inland Crane, not for the collapse, but for exposing their workers to unsafe conditions.

Tufts University accused of hiring contractors with history of wage theft

Members of the North Atlantic States Regional Council of Carpenters (NASRCC) held a protest on the campus of Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts, charging the institution with using construction contractors who pay substandard wages and engage in wage theft.

Raheem Shepard, president of the NASRCC, in a statement to the *Tufts Daily*, wrote, “The general contractors for these projects relied on subcontractors that do not pay their workers the wages and benefits that are prevailing in the area, so they violate community standards. There’s a deeper issue, and that is that many of the subcontractors that appear on these jobs have a history of engaging in the violation of labor and tax laws by misclassifying their workers...”

Tufts University avoided any commitment to address the problem, saying, “questions pertaining to compensation or subcontractors on construction projects should be directed to the relevant general contractor.”

British Columbia port foremen vote second time for strike

Dockworkers at British Columbia ports voted once again last week by an overwhelming 96 percent for strike action to resolve a contract dispute that has been festering since the last contract expired in March 2023. The 730 port foremen, members of Local 514 of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) are fighting to turn back demands to lower existing staffing levels. That demand has been insisted upon by one of the several cargo-handling companies under the umbrella of the BC Maritime Employers Association. The largest of the companies, DP World, seeks to force automation changes that would threaten union jobs.

Despite the strike vote, the union has not issued the required 72-hour strike notice for an industry-wide strike. Local 514 President Frank Morena said in a statement, “We do not want a lockout or strike—we want a fair new contract.”

But workers have been clamoring for strike action since an initial strike vote was taken this past June. When a 72-hour strike notice was issued in early July to bring operations at DP

World to a halt, the employers association threatened to lock out all port foremen across the industry if workers took strike action against DP World.

However, after an intervention by the federal labour minister just days before the strike was to begin, the Canadian Industrial Relations Board (CIRB) announced that they had determined the 99 percent June strike vote was an “unfair labour practice” and therefore illegal because, they claimed, not all union foremen had the opportunity to vote. In reality, the ILWU had no dispute with the other companies operating on the docks and therefore had only held the strike vote to include foremen working at DP World.

Appeals against the CIRB ruling dragged out any action on the docks for another month before a second vote could be organized. The 96 percent vote to strike, announced last week, was mandated by all union foremen voting across the entire industry.

With the entire cargo-handling operation along the Pacific Coast now threatened with a work stoppage, the employer has calculated that the federal government will more easily cite the supposed “dire threats to the Canadian economy” to legalize further action.

Both business leaders as well as government officials have been clamoring for a declaration outlawing all strikes at ports and railways in the wake of militant job actions amongst infrastructure workers over the past several years.

Last year, a 13-day strike by other British Columbia port workers was scuttled after ILWU leaders buckled to federal pressure to end the strike. More recently, in July, the government intervened in a WestJet airline mechanics strike to end the action and finalize a contract before binding arbitration could be imposed. And only last month, the federal Liberal government and the Canadian Industrial Relations Board intervened to end a lockout/strike on the two major Canadian railway networks and force workers into the always company-friendly binding arbitration process.



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