

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Aerolineas Argentinas pilots hold 24-hour protest strike

On September 13, pilots employed by Aerolineas Argentinas (government-owned Argentine Airlines) carried out a 24-hour protest strike against layoffs and the privatization of the airline by the Milei administration. The walkout impacted some 37,000 passengers and disrupted flights.

Pilots and airline personnel also protested delays in payment of wages and demanded an increase of 70 percent to begin catching up with inflation. Pilots denounced the Milei administration's policy of punishing airline workers who raise their voices in protests, using tactics that include intimidation, physical aggression, ill treatment, and threats, which have created a "hostile environment" for all airline employees.

Milei's secretary of transportation warned that airline workers that did not adhere to government rules imposed last Thursday would be punished.

Thousands protest gang violence in Chiapas state, Mexico

On Friday September 13, over ten thousand teachers, retirees, transit workers and members of human rights and church groups marched in Chiapas state demanding that the government intervene against the wave of gang violence affecting the region.

According to a catholic official, "Chiapas is a time bomb. Many have been disappeared by organized crime."

The marchers carried signs demanding "Peace for Chiapas." They also demanded an end to government projects that occupy peasant land and violate human rights.

Panamanian workers denounce the appointment of right wing Social Security director

On Wednesday, September 11, scores of construction workers protested across from offices of the National Legislature against the appointment of Dino Mon, as Social Security director.

Mon, former CEO of a private insurance firm, was responsible in 2005 for "reforming" and privatization of government pension plans, lowering retirement pay and raising workers' age of retirement.

Nurses locked out at hospital in Honolulu, Hawaii, after striking to protest unsafe staffing ratios

The 600 nurses at the Kapi'olani Medical Center for Women & Children in Honolulu, Hawaii, were indefinitely locked out of their jobs September 14, one day after the Hawaii Nurses Association (HNA) concluded a one-day strike to demand safe staffing ratios. Kapi'olani's CEO David Underriner declared, "If HNA does not unconditionally accept our offer, HNA nurses shall not report to work tomorrow and will not be allowed to enter the hospital for the purpose of working."

For more than a year, the two sides have been negotiating a new contract that has deadlocked over details of a staffing matrix that would manage the ratio of nurses to patients. The old agreement expired December of last year. Back in January of this year, the HNA conducted a week-long strike that failed to resolve the issue.

Rosalee Agas-Yuu has responded, "We're happy we have some sort of matrix to work on, but now it's just trying to make sure that the numbers that we talk about are numbers that we could live with over the next three years. I think the sticking point right now [revolves around] a committee that's going to follow it. How are we going to make sure that whatever numbers we decide on are followed?"

Nurses have been filling out forms to record unsafe staffing problems and the union charges that hospital management has engaged in bullying tactics against these nurses.

Massachusetts nurses to issue one-day strike notice

The Massachusetts Nurses Association (MNA) was slated to issue a one-day strike notice September 16 to Brigham and Women's Faulkner Hospital in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts, unless negotiations provided a breakthrough. The announcement begins a ten-day countdown before a strike can be launched by the 600 nurses at the hospital, who voted by 99.7 percent to grant strike authorization after management failed to give Faulkner nurses wage parity with other Mass General Brigham (MGB) nurses.

The lack of parity has created a longstanding unsafe staffing environment at the hospital. "It is time that MGB invests equally in Faulkner nurses to stem the staff losses that lead to chronic under-staffing and patient safety concerns," said Kathy Glennon, a Faulkner RN and co-chair of the MNA Bargaining Committee.

MGB garnered \$579 million system-wide in profits during the fiscal period ending December 31, 2023, and Faulkner Hospital brought in \$9.5 million in profits. MGB president and CEO Anne Klibanski received a salary increase just under 25 percent during the 2020-2021 period and now makes over \$5 million in compensation.

Tentative contract reached in Air Canada pilots dispute

Early Sunday morning, Air Canada, the country's largest air carrier, announced it had reached a tentative agreement on a new four-year contract with the 5,200 members of the Airline Pilots Association. The settlement has yet to be ratified. Balloting will take place over the next month. The tentative contract came only minutes before 72-hour strike and/or lockout notices could have started the clock ticking on a complete shutdown of the airline as early as Wednesday, September 18.

Air Canada management announced that it would begin winding down its operations beginning this past Friday, putting a de facto lockout into gradual effect over the coming days to increase the pressure on the government to take action to force binding arbitration on the pilots should an agreement not be reached.

Big business was hoping that the federal Liberal government would use the threat of sweeping arbitrary powers through the unelected Canada Industrial Relations Board (CIRB) to keep pilots on the job and impose binding arbitration, as they did with rail workers at Canadian National and Canadian Pacific Kansas City last month, and similarly turned to the CIRB to force through a concessions contract on striking BC dockworkers last year after they voted twice to reject the deal.

The pilots have been without a new contract since June 2023. Their previous contract was a miserable nine-year deal negotiated in 2014. It came on the heels of the Conservative

government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper using an anti-strike law to illegalize impending strikes by Air Canada pilots, mechanics and other ground crew in 2012, and sanctioning harsh penalties for pilots who participated in an unsanctioned April 2012 "sickout" that the Canada Industrial Relations Board (CIRB) deemed a "wildcat strike." Air Canada pilots have not carried out an official, union-sanctioned strike since a two-week work stoppage in 1998.

As a result of the extremely lengthy and inadequate agreement adopted in 2014, pilots at Air Canada have earned about half the compensation of air crews at the four largest US-based airlines. They also have significantly less favourable pension plans and work scheduling arrangements. According to reporters from the *Globe and Mail* newspaper who saw the proposed new contract, the pilots would be awarded a 26 percent raise retroactive to September 2023, and then 4 percent raises in 2024, 2025 and 2026.

Further, "In the second year of the deal, which begins on Sept. 30, 2024, a Boeing 737 captain, the most senior crew member, would be paid \$280 to \$312 an hour, depending on how many years they have been in that position. A first officer on the same plane would start at \$87 an hour, increasing to \$207 if they have 12 years' seniority. The new agreement would start hourly pay for a relief pilot, the most junior, on a wide-body plane at \$87 an hour. The hourly pay for captains on wide-body planes would range from \$317 to \$424, depending on the model of aircraft." Paid hours are only counted when the plane is actually moving and does not include pre-boarding time spent on the aircraft or in airports.

Vancouver HandyDART transit drivers enter third week of strike

Talks broke down again over the weekend between municipal transit officials and the Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1724 after agreement could not be reached on bringing the 600 workers into wage parity with other similar groups of para-transit operators. The drivers provide door-to-door transit service for people who are unable to navigate the mass transit system. The strike has interrupted service for all but those with essential medical appointments.



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