

Workers Struggles: The Americas

Anti-austerity actions in Argentina; Canadian Air Transat pilots set to strike

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took power, denounced Milei's labor reform project that limits bargaining rights and raised the retirement age to 70.

Buenos Aires bus drivers strike

Thousands of bus drivers in Buenos Aires and other cities went on strike on Friday December 5 against those lines that still owe drivers 50 percent of their November wages.

Strikers denounced the privately-owned companies for delaying the payment of wages in order to pressure the Argentine government to increase subsidies. Anticipating the strike, the Milei administration had raised subsidies to city bus lines by 15 percent for November and December, with the intention of preventing the walkout. However, the drivers have indicated that until their wages get paid, the walkout will continue. Buenos Aires and other cities have also approved fare increases.

City bus managers have declared that workers would not get paid until the government money is in their pockets. In the words of one striker: "Many drivers end up having to use their credit cards, which means that that 50 percent owed to us has already been eaten up by high interest rates."

The strike is affecting hundreds of thousands of Buenos Aires public transportation users.

Protests by pensioners and people with disabilities in Argentina

On December 3, International Day of Persons with Disabilities, workers and retirees and people with disabilities marched and rallied in Buenos Aires protesting the Milei administration's brutal attacks on the rights and living conditions of those suffering from physical impairments.

The protesters rejected President Javier Milei's veto of emergency legislation to protect disabled people. Though the veto was overturned by a vote of the national legislature, the Milei administration has yet to implement the law, let alone appropriate the necessary funds.

Joining the protest was the Garrahan Pediatric Hospital's Association of Professionals and Technicians (APyT).

Pensioners, who have been protesting every Wednesday since Milei

La Paz, Bolivia police attack protesting park workers

On December 3, park and "green zones" workers employed by the city of La Paz rallied at the municipal tax office building demanding the three months back pay they are owed. City authorities responded by sending the police to disband the protest and attack the peaceful demonstrators, accusing the workers of "violence."

The workers are employed by the Emaverde company, a municipally owned corporation, that funnels government funds to temp agencies and private businesses.

Across Bolivia, government workers are owed back pay as a result of the economic implosion afflicting the country. Even when agreements are negotiated, municipalities routinely break them, as was the case with municipal garbage employees several months ago.

Following the protest, government authorities appear to have agreed to make up only half of the wage arrears.

Humacao, Puerto Rico Hope Medical Center workers' protest

Scores of health workers at the Hope Medical Center in rallied in the city of Humacao, on Puerto Rico's southeastern coast, demanding back pay. The peaceful demonstration at the city's central square was surrounded by police.

One day before the protest, the hospital's board of directors had declared that the hospital would suspend all medical services, and surprisingly laid off all its 168 workers. Management is not responding to workers' demands. The demonstrators appealed for support from doctors and nurses from across the Island, and called for strike action.

One of the demonstrators, interviewed by the Noticentro TV news program declared that she is owed two weeks' pay: "We demand that they speak to us; we are going through a difficult season. As mothers and fathers, we cannot tell our children to wait to do our shopping, or tell our creditors to stop and wait until our checks show up."

In addition, workers are being denied unemployment benefits due to

the manner in which they were placed on “temporarily” layoff.

Two years ago, Brock Pierce, a wealthy and corrupt crypto coin speculator, bought Hope Medical Center together with a group of Puerto Rican medical doctors who also bought HIMA San Pablo, Hope Medical Center’s parent company, which had declared bankruptcy, for \$5.3 million. The bankruptcy has yet to be resolved, as Pierce is suspected of tax evasion.

Tentative agreement in Moses Lake, Washington week-long teachers strike

The union representing striking teachers and negotiators for the Moses Lake School District in Moses Lake, Washington, announced a tentative agreement after five days of picketing that began on December 1 and closed schools for 8,000 students. Members of the Moses Lake Educators Association (MLEA) have yet to ratify the latest contract proposal.

On December 5, district negotiators claimed a new proposal restored all elements of the 2022-2025 contracts. But MLEA president Heather Whittall disagreed, charging that proposal simply “repackages previous proposals” and contained “harmful takebacks.”

Teachers were opposed to any concessions in the current round of bargaining after they suffered cuts last year due to a \$20 million budget shortfall.

Megan Cox, a teacher for the Groff Elementary school, told Apple Valley News Now that teachers went on strike to preserve their old agreement and bar any cuts. “Last year during the financial crisis we had, we gave up a lot to help the district with their financial crisis, and we just want to make sure we get those things back.”

Teamsters announce strike authorizations at three dairy plants in southwestern Wisconsin

Teamsters Local 120 announced December 4 that some 150 workers at three dairy processing facilities in southwestern Wisconsin voted to grant strike authorization under the threat of cuts in healthcare, pensions, picket-line protections, and maintenance-of-standards language. The affected plants are the Actus Nutrition facility in Sparta and two others owned by Foremost Farms in Lancaster and Richland Center.

The Sparta facility was previously owned by Foremost Farms. Teamsters Local 120 settled a four-year contract with Foremost Farms management back in March of this year. Thirty days later, Foremost sold the plant to Actus Nutrition, who refused to honor the previous contract terms, instead seeking cuts.

Meanwhile, the Foremost Farms plants in Lancaster and Richland Center are now seeking similar cuts contained in the “last, best and final offer” by Actus to the Sparta workers. The union believes management for Foremost Farms may eventually sell these two facilities to Actus as well. The Teamsters have filed a ten-day strike notice for workers at the Sparta plant.

Canadian Air Transat pilots set to strike

The Air Line Pilots Association issued a 72-hour notice to strike on Sunday that could see all 43 Air Transat planes grounded as early as Wednesday, December 10 if no deal is reached. The association organizes some 750 pilots at the international airline based in Montreal.

Air Transat provides both scheduled and charter flights to 40 destinations in 33 countries. It schedules about 500 flights per week. To logistically prepare for a Wednesday shutdown the company began suspending flights on Monday and planned to cancel all remaining flights through Tuesday.

The strike threat comes following the end of a 10-year contract that expired earlier this year. Pilots are fighting for current industry-standard pay, benefits, work rules and job security to replace the 2015 agreement. The office of Patty Hajdu, the Minister of Jobs and Families which oversees labour relations, said the minister “is monitoring the situation closely” and urges both sides to reach an agreement.

Such words are the standard phrases dispensed by Canadian labour ministers just prior to invoking threats of government anti-strike interventions. Workers in key industries on the railroads, on the docks, at Canada Post and in the airline industry have experienced government interventions to force inferior contracts. Last year, 5,200 Air Canada pilots had their strike called off only hours before it was to begin when threats of government intervention against any work stoppage forced a last-minute settlement.

This past summer 10,500 Air Canada flight attendants courageously defied a government strikebreaking order in a fight over unpaid labour and unbearable workloads. The flight attendants were then arbitrarily denied the right to vote on large parts of the “agreement” cooked up by CUPE and Air Canada, and even those elements that were put to a vote were immediately turned over to binding arbitration by the union bureaucracy after a 99 percent “No” vote by the rank and file. And earlier in 2024, 680 striking mechanics at WestJet, the country’s second largest airline, were forced into an inferior contract after a brief strike was scuttled by federal intervention and the connivance of union officials.



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