

## Ontario community college staff continue strike

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

### Ontario community college staff continue strike

Twelve thousand Ontario community college professors, instructors, consultants and librarians are in the second week of a strike to redress the spread of precarious work contracts in the provincial college system. The strike has idled 24 colleges affecting half a million students. The Ontario Public Service Employees Union estimates that 80 percent of staff are on finite contracts with a full 70 percent on part-time agreements. Contract faculty receive less compensation than a full-time, permanent instructor. Part-time instructors receive no health or pension benefits.

The issue is not just confined to Ontario colleges. Since 2000 there has been a 200 percent growth in contract faculty hiring in Canada. It is estimated that one-third of all current Canadian professors are on contract. The Ontario strike highlights the drive across all industries to casualize work, destroy benefits, end any semblance of job security and atomize the workforce.

The abysmal conditions in the community colleges also reduce the quality of a student's education. Contract employees, who are not assigned office space, are required to teach hundreds of students, prepare new courses sometimes with only a few days notice and teach curriculum overseen by the industries and corporate sponsors associated with the various subjects.

### Ontario transit workers set to strike

Bus drivers and other transit workers in the city of Peterborough, Ontario east of Toronto, are set to go on strike by the end of the week after voting overwhelmingly in favor of strike action in August.

The 107 members of the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) are fighting for improvements in wages and benefits in a new contract but union negotiators say there are also issues around health and safety that management has refused to address. Contract talks are ongoing according to management and the union says they are hopeful a deal can be reached before the strike deadline of October 29th.

### University of Toronto profs move to strike

2,500 part-time professors at the University of Toronto have voted 92 per-cent in favor of strike action which could come as early as October 30 if a new deal is not reached before then.

Job action would include sessional lecturers and contract profs in music, language as well as some Health Sciences faculty who are members of the Association of Part-Time Professors of the University of Ottawa (APTPUO). Issues in dispute include job security and salaries for the part-time staff who collectively teach more than half the courses at the University.

This comes in the midst of an ongoing strike by the province's 12,000 college instructors who have been off the job since October 16.

### Dominican Republic: Doctors hold three-day strike to demand fulfillment of agreement

Doctors in the Dominican Republic's public health sector completed a three-day strike on October 19. The doctors, members of the Dominican Medical College (CMD), carried out the action to demand that the Public Health Ministry come through on an agreement that included a salary increase and improvements in the pension system.

In November 2016, after nearly six months of strikes and negotiations, the ministry agreed to a raise of 25 percent and access to pensions for 1,800 people, as well as other unspecified benefits. CMD has already called three limited strikes this month—one for 24 hours and one for 48. CMD announced plans to march to the Public Health Ministry October 24 and a 72-hour strike to begin October 25.

Although the health minister claims that the ministry has always been "disposed to converse" with the doctors, CMD president Waldo Ariel Suero said that "dialogue doesn't interest her," but that she is waiting for the coming union elections in November, which may result in the election of a more accommodating candidate.

### Colombian airline's war of attrition against striking pilots continues

The strike by the Colombian Civil Aviators Association (Acadac) against Colombian airline Avianca is in its fifth week as the firm continues its attempts to undermine the walkout. After the union called the strike following the firm's inadequate wage and conditions offers, Avianca lawyers filed a petition with the Superior Tribunal of Bogota (STB) to declare the strike illegal due to its "essentiality."

When the STB ruled in Avianca's favor, Acadac filed an appeal to the Supreme Court, delaying implementation of the tribunal's back-to-work decree. Since then, Avianca has hired strikebreakers from other countries

and fired nine pilots who it asserted were of pension age. Acdac denounced the firings, since the pilots were still under contract, and only those of pension age who were on strike were sacked.

Business groups have rallied behind Avianca, expressing “concern” over the impact of the strike on the economy and calling for government intervention. Avianca continues to contact individual pilots and so far has induced 105 of the 700 strikers to return to work using a combination of promises of no reprisals with threats that it will take all disciplinary measures against those who remain on strike.

### **Honduran nurses strike over nonpayment of wages**

Nurses in the College of Nursing Professionals of Honduras began a “progressive strike,” holding “informative assemblies” from 7:00 am to 12:00 noon on October 18 to demand the payment of overdue wages. The nurses demanded the timely payment of salaries and dialogue with the health minister regarding nurses who have worked for over five years without reassignment.

The next day, as the nurses held informational assemblies at the national level, Karla Belinda Gomez, a member of the Colegio, told reporters, “We ask the authorities to please listen to us; we are the backbone of the health system and it is not fair that they make us wait,” and added that they would suspend the assemblies “as soon as we are called and sign an agreement and they tell us that all is taken care of.”

Later that day, union president Leda Mejia called the nurses back to work, saying that she had signed an agreement with the Health Minister Delia Rivas. Rivas told reporters, “We have already established in the accord an immediate solution in some things and in others we will continue in dialogue because it is a budget question.”

### **Honduran civil registry workers strike to demand overdue pay**

Contract workers at the National Registry of Persons (RNP) in Honduras began an indefinite strike and occupation of the agency’s headquarters in Tegucigalpa October 16. The workers demanded that they be paid the over four months arrears owed them.

Following a strike last month, the Finance Secretariat and RNP reps held meetings in which the authorities promised to resolve wage issues. Nothing came of the promises—Finance claimed that it had not received the payroll from the government—compelling the workers to resort to the current walkout.

The RNP subdirector, Gerardo Martinez, announced on October 22 that Finance had found funds to pay the workers for two of the four months, but under the condition that they return to work. He warned that if the workers did not return to their posts, the RNP would seek other measures, including dislodging the striking workers, to resume operations. So far, the workers have remained on strike.

### **California school district attempts to break teachers’ strike**

School officials in Calaveras County, California were to reopen elementary schools October 23 with replacement teachers as members of the California Teachers Association closed schools for two days last week

to protest wages and class-size ratios. The school district is stubbornly insisting on a meager two percent pay raise in the face of an independent fact-finder’s proposal that the district could afford to lower class sizes and give teachers raises of four percent and 2.5 percent over two years.

Teachers struck the district October 19 after 20 months of negotiations failed to bring about an agreement. Teachers spent time last week canvassing neighborhoods and have significant parent backing.

Small business have also lent support. The Pizza Factory is bundling flyers in support of teachers on its pizza boxes and a restaurant has declared it will offer half-price meals to teachers.

### **One-day strike by Pennsylvania hospital workers**

Some 150 workers at First Hospital in Kingston, Pennsylvania held a one-day strike October 20 to protest the breakdown of negotiations between management and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). Service, clerical and mental health technicians are demanding higher wages in an effort to put an end to dramatic turnover at the opioid addiction treatment and mental health facility.

“Our base pay starts at \$10.40,” a striker told the *Times Leader*. “We’re not fast food workers, we’re mental health personnel.”

The SEIU has been in negotiations with management since January of this year. The for-profit First Hospital is owned by Commonwealth Health which comprises the largest network of hospitals in Northeastern Pennsylvania.

### **Strike vote by Seattle school bus drivers**

Negotiations between the Teamsters and private school bus operator First Student are continuing in the wake of a strike authorization vote by drivers.

The main issues for the 400 drivers are health care and pensions. Only 26 of the drivers, who earn about \$18 an hour for 25 to 30 hours a week, can afford health care under the plan offered by First Student.

The Teamsters have not set a strike deadline. First Student is in the first year of a three-year contract with the district.

### **Plainfield, Illinois teachers in contract talks**

Negotiations are continuing in Plainfield, Illinois between teachers and the local board of education one week after educators took a strike vote.

The last contract offer by the board of education was for a five-year deal containing a 5.2 percent pay increase the first year and a 3.2 percent rise the second year followed 2.7 percent in the third year. Teachers have been working without a contract since August.

### **Migrant farmworkers continue walkout in Kentucky**

Migrant workers at a tobacco farm in Kentucky are continuing a strike they began three weeks ago. They are protesting the fact that they are

being paid wages lower than the standard set by the H2-A Visa program.

Seasonal workers are supposed to be guaranteed \$10.82 an hour by law, however many report receiving only \$8.00. Some complain of not receiving basic safety equipment, such as gloves.

The Farmworkers Organizing Committee is behind an effort to organize migrant workers. It is part of a broader campaign to organize migrant workers in the South and Southwest.

### **Public workers strike in Lane County, Oregon**

Some 550 members of the American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees are continuing a strike in Lane County in west central Oregon over terms of a new contract. The strike is entering its second week.

According to reports, AFSCME and the county are some \$20 million apart on contract proposals. Under terms of management's offer workers would receive a three percent wage increase in the first year of the contract while being asked to pay \$240 to \$840 a year toward their health insurance premiums. Workers are seeking a higher pay increase and no rise in medical costs.

The county workers include nurses and general workers, such as veterans services and land management.



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