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Workers Struggles: The Americas

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Canada

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Three striking Ontario faculty members were hit by vehicles in two separate incidents while picketing during the now two-week-old strike by 12,000 Ontario college teachers.

Two striking workers at St. Lawrence College in Kingston, Ontario were hit by a pickup truck while picketing last Thursday when the driver refused to stop. No charges have yet been laid, but the Ontario Provincial Police say they are gathering evidence from witnesses. Police are also investigating an incident that took place last Thursday in Kirkland Lake where a striking Northern College worker was hit by a driver who entered and left the property unimpeded.

The strike shows no sign of ending and numerous rallies have been held across the province with many students coming out to show support for the staff.

Quebec childcare workers take job action

Workers in 400 early childhood centers (ECC) in the province of Quebec held a one-day strike on Monday after voting overwhelmingly to give their union, the Confederation of National Trade Unions (CNTU) a mandate for a six-day strike.

The 11,000 workers affected include educators, secretaries and administrators across the province are fighting against rollbacks in pensions and insurance as well as for improvements in wages. The majority of the funding for ECCs come from the provincial government, which has implemented an austerity funding formula that reduces jobs. The vast majority of workers in these jobs are women who are low-waged and non-union.

Their last contract expired in March of 2015 and negotiations between the union and the Family Ministry collapsed last week and no new talks are currently scheduled. The union has said that more strike days are possible depending on government actions.

Merchant marine officers on strike

Engineers and navigation officers employed by Algoma Tankers Limited, which is based in St. Catherine Ontario, have been on strike since October 21 and are embroiled in a fight against replacement workers during their job action.

The 54 striking officers have been without a contract since at least July of 2016 and the company has brought in replacements under the Temporary Foreign Workers program, which is deemed illegal during a strike. They are charged by union leaders with doing the work of members of the Seafarers' International Union of Canada (SIU) who have been laid off as a result of the strike.

Algoma Tankers is a subsidiary of Algoma Central Corporation shipping company which has the largest fleet of dry-bulk carriers and product tankers operating on the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Waterway.

One day strike by California county workers

Hundreds of county workers walked off the job for a single day, October 24, to highlight opposition to a contract offer by negotiators for Solano County, California. The strike by 1,800 members of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 10121 coincided with a supervisors' meeting being held in Fairfield.

Strikers contrasted the \$10,400 salary increase received by the county's top administrator to the meager a four percent wage increase spread over two years by negotiators. Workers also taunted supervisors over perquisites including car allowances and professional benefits and raised their demand for the county to pick up the cost of the family insurance stipend.

The SEIU also raised the fact that the county has saved \$14 million in savings by not filling vacant positions in various departments with the majority previously held by members of local 1021.

The SEIU has a long record of calling limited strikes as a means of diffusing worker anger while it carries out behind the scenes maneuvers with management.

Pennsylvania nursing home strike enters second week

Nurses at Cedar Haven Healthcare Center in Lebanon, Pennsylvania are entering their second week on strike against concessions. Some 300 members of the American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 2732 walked off the job on October 20 after the nursing home's parent company, Stone Barn Holdings sought to impose cuts in personal time off and increased health care costs in a final offer. One striker pointed out she would be paying a \$900 premium and a

\$5,000 deductible under the proposed contract.

The nursing home was privatized in 2014 when Stone Barn Holdings purchased the facility from Lebanon County for \$25.5 million. Now the new owners claim the home is losing money. The current concessions come a year after nurses narrowly ratified an agreement in October of 2016 that also included cuts in paid time off and increased healthcare costs.

Management has contracted with the strikebreaking firm U.S. Nursing Corporation to provide replacement nurses and security.

Uruguayan judicial workers to hold 24-hour strike for overdue pay

Last week, the Judicial Functionaries Association of Uruguay (AFJU) called a strike and assembly for November 1. The actions were called to pressure the government to pay an estimated US\$70 million owed to 3,600 judicial workers since 2010. The original amount was US\$50 million, but a 2016 Supreme Court ruling raised the amount in view of inflation.

In response, the Ministry of the Economy has declared that provisions in budget law allow it to delay the payment of any amount over US\$10 million, due to lack of funds, and that the workers should wait for the legislature to approve the payment next year.

Judicial branch workers have seen their salaries steadily eroded over the last eight years due to budget declines, with shrinkage of their personnel and overwork as a consequence. The assembly will vote on extending the strike.

The judicial workers will not be the only sector to stop work on November 1. Interdepartmental transport workers will also walk off the job for one day to protest a series of firings at a number of enterprises. The drivers' union claims that workers are being persecuted and driven into debt while retired workers have to work to keep their heads above water.

Guyanese teachers set to strike following failed wage talks

The Guyana Teachers Union (GTU) announced October 26 that its members will go on nationwide strike November 2 and 3 after talks with the Minister of Education, Nicolette Henry, broke down. If the minister does not address their salary and other demands, the teachers will continue the Thursday-Friday walkouts every week.

During its 2015 election campaign, the coalition of A Partnership for Unity and the Alliance for Change (ANPU+AFC) parties promised that it would "immediately review and correct the existing deficiencies in the remuneration and conditions of service of teachers." Since it took power, it ignored the GTU's request for discussions of a multiyear (2016-2020) agreement until recently.

When the parties finally met, Henry told them that the government would only grant them a sliding-scale raise equivalent to that of other public sector workers: 8 percent for those earning GYD\$55,000 (US\$266) and half a percent for those earning GYD\$1 million (US\$4,834) per month. The GTU reps walked out after her announcement.

The GTU is calling for a 40 percent hike. Other issues include "debunching" (whereby teachers' pay would be determined according to qualifications and experience, not simply by category); clothing allowances; travel allocations; "duty-free concessions" on vehicle purchases; and the Housing Revolving Fund, a housing loan project for

teachers that has been in the pipeline since 2006.

Jamaican taxi and bus drivers strike, set up blockades to demand improvements to roads

Drivers of buses and taxis in Clarendon Parish, Jamaica stopped work and blocked roads with rocks, limbs and other debris October 23. Students and commuters were unable to get to their destinations.

The drivers have complained before about the potholes, cracks and other problems on the roadways, having written to political representatives without receiving any response. The drivers said that they would continue their protest if they got no results.

Later that day, Parliamentarian Rudy Spencer spoke with the president of the Vere Taxi Association and, with a promise that work would begin next month, the drivers were called back to work. Tractors were called in to clear the blockades.

Two-day strike by doctors in Dominican Republic over salary demands

Doctors at public hospitals in the Dominican Republic returned to work in the early morning of October 27 after a 48-hour strike over their salary demand. It was the latest in a series of limited walkouts in the last five weeks, and its result was the same: the government refused to discuss the agreement that it had signed with the Dominican Medical College (CMD) to improve wages, pensions and benefits, and upon which it has reneged.

The strike was preceded by a march on October 24 from the Salvador B. Gautier Hospital in Santo Domingo to the Public Health Ministry. The CMD will likely call for another limited strike this week.

Protest against exploitative bank practices in Bahamas

On October 27, a group called Citizens Against Bank Exploitation (CABE) held a peaceful protest in front of two banks in Nassau, Bahamas. The protest, called a "flash lunchtime protest," lasted from 12:30 to 2:30.

A CABE spokesperson, Dr. Denotrah Archer-Cartwright, told reporters that banks, many based in Canada, have been steadily raising fees in the last few years, in addition to charging exorbitant interest rates on loans. "The service is terrible, but they don't seem to care because they have moved onto wealth management; they don't seem to care for the everyday Bahamian," she said. She noted that fees have gone up 187 percent in recent years.

One protester, Celi Moss, denounced the incessant demands of shareholders, noting, "A lot of people go to bed hungry every night in the Bahamas. We have over 40,000 Bahamians living under the poverty line," and with businesses transferring fee increases to consumers, "that guy that can afford only one tin of tuna, now he can't afford any, what is he going to do..."

The protesters, however, couched their complaints and demands in nationalistic terms, with Archer-Cartwright expressing faith that if legislation transferred more business into the hands of Bahamian banks, customers would get a fair shake.



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