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Workers Struggles: The Americas

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The Ontario Liberal government passed legislation Sunday ordering an end to the five-week-old strike by 12,000 professors, counselors and librarians at 24 colleges across the province.

Bill 178 was passed by a vote of 37-18 on Sunday after the government called an emergency weekend session to push through the legislation. The NDP, who voted against the bill, had stalled quick passage of back-to-work legislation by one-day by asking that discussion be held prior to a vote on Friday, but party leader Andrea Horwath gave assurances that faculty would still be back on the job by Monday.

The government of Kathleen Wynne moved to legislate an end to the strike after faculty overwhelmingly turned down the latest contract in a forced vote last week that the union, the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU), called a bully move by colleges. According to union negotiators, while they are fighting a range of concession demands, the most important issue remaining in dispute is academic freedom.

As for the NDP's professed opposition, it amounted to little more than a charade. The NDP made no move to prevent a debate and vote on the bill over the weekend and has insisted that faculty bow to the strikebreaking order.

Nova Scotia University faculty set to strike

Three hundred thirty-one faculty at Acadia University in Wolfville, Nova Scotia are set to go on strike November 27 after recent negotiations broke down and union members voted 81 percent in favor of strike action.

The Acadia University Faculty Association (AUFA) has been in negotiations with the school since March of this year, but talks have stalled over pay equity issues, salaries, and full-time staffing levels. The University says they do not have funding adequate to address all of the financial issues, which they say could lead to unacceptable deficits.

A third round of conciliated talks is scheduled for this week, but if those fail, faculty at the school could be on the picket lines for the third time since 2004.

Mexican university workers strike over sackings

Members of the Autonomous University of Guerrero Workers Syndicate (STAUAG) held a 48-hour strike November 16-17 at the university's Law Faculty Department's Southern University City (CUS) in

Chilpancingo. The strike was called to protest the removal of eight full-time professors—all STAUAG members—and their replacement with *bolsa de trabajo*, or job pool workers. STAUAG contends that the UAG director ordered the removals unilaterally, without any documentation of their reasons and without the approval of the union.

Students demonstrated at the CUS with signs in support of the professors, blocking traffic for about an hour.

STAUAG is calling for an academic audit, an administrative audit and a financial audit over alleged irregularities in the director's job performance.

Salvadoran firefighters, postal workers strike over inadequate equipment

Members of the Fire Department of El Salvador's Ministry of Government downed their tools November 16 to protest the lack of response by the minister, Aristides Valencia, to their demands. The firefighters joined a walkout already in effect by other government workers, including postal workers and government printing office workers.

The firefighters, according to *diariolibresv.com*, "demand a just collective contract and the purchase of work equipment, since they show that [their current equipment] is in a bad state and its useful life has ended." Among their complaints are nonfunctioning fire trucks. The union says that it will only deal with "structural and forest fires on a national level" until its demands are addressed.

The firefighters are demanding the replacement of Valencia, citing his refusal to meet and negotiate seriously with them.

Honduran doctors strike for pay raise

Public hospital doctors in Honduras began an indefinite strike November 11 to press their salary demands. The striking doctors, who according to Suyapa Figueroa, president of the Honduras Medical College (CMH), number over 2,000, resolved to attend only emergency and critical cases.

CMH representatives had met with Labor Ministry and hospital negotiators, and proposed a 23 percent raise, while the government proposed 4.5 percent. CMH asserts that the doctors have been requesting a raise for the last five years and that the government owes them a debt. Figueroa said that the strike "will continue until the government calls us and makes a better proposal."

The Labor Minister called the demand "quite excessive" and declared

“we cannot carry it out.” He threatened sanctions against the doctors if they did not immediately return to their posts.

On November 18, a CMH rep said that they would accept an advance of 12 percent, that they were open to dialog in the interest of “social peace” and criticized “the authorities who govern us and in an irresponsible manner don’t respect the law that they themselves published.” He expressed fears over the privatization of health services “that have to be public and free.”

Figueroa proposed three points to be discussed at negotiations. (1) That the government recognizes it owes a debt to the doctors; (2) that it define a timeline for payments; and (3) that it integrate a CMH member into the Financial Control Board of the Honduran Social Security Institute.

Guyanese city workers strike, protest chronic late payment of wages

Chanting “No money, no work,” “We want money now,” and other slogans, about 100 workers connected to the Mayor and City Council (M&CC) walked off the job and picketed outside the City Hall in Guyana’s capital, Georgetown, on November 16. One of the slogans, “We’re fed up with the same thing over and over,” referred to chronically late wages.

The city workers have held several protests, most recently on October 3. The M&CC have tried a number of measures to deal with the city’s fiscal crisis, one of which, a 100 percent amnesty on overdue taxes, brought in some funds, but not enough to cover shortfalls. Another, the installation of parking meters in the capital, brought on angry protests, and a group called the Movement Against Parking Meters still holds weekly vigils in the capital.

The M&CC are now considering another measure—laying off staff.

One-day strike by Argentine television workers over wage demand

Members of the Argentine Television, Telecommunications, Audiovisual and Data Services Syndicate (SATSAID), stopped work for 24 hours starting at midnight, November 16. Several programs, including ShowMatch, one of the nation’s highest rated, were not broadcast.

The impetus for the short strike was the refusal of the Argentine Television and Radio Broadcasters Association (ATA) and the Argentine Independent Television Producers Chamber (CAPIT) to budge from their wage raise offer. The Labor Ministry had decreed binding arbitration talks, in which SATSAID brought a 29 percent proposal and a one-time bonus of 15,000 pesos (US\$859) to the table.

Talks ended November 14 without an agreement. According to SATSAID, the union called the walkout because “inflation greatly outstrips the 20 percent that they are offering,” and it denounced the “irresponsible and insensitive manner” that ATA/CAPIT were “trying to play with the needs of the workers.”

Chilean port workers end strike over pension demand after 10 days

Port workers in Chile’s central Bio Bío region voted to strike beginning November 7 at 11 ports. The action was taken to press the Port Workers Union demand that port retirees be granted a pensión de gracia, which is

for workers who are not part of a regular private or public sector system.

The main sectors affected by the strike were fishing and timber, which rely on the terminals to export their products.

On November 17, the union called off the strike after accepting a government proposal granting the pension for workers who retire in 2018 and afterwards.

Strike by Illinois food workers over job security

The strike by 96 workers at the Bay Valley Foods production facility in Pecatonica, Illinois is into its second week over job security, wages, pensions and health care. The company has rejected any contract language offered by Teamsters Local 754 that will prevent it from relocating production to Iowa.

The workers have been without a contract since May and the company rejected a proposal by the Teamsters back in September. The Teamsters and Bay Valley have negotiated concessions contracts over the past eight years. In the last negotiations Bay Valley refused to continue contributions to the workers 401(k) plan.

The company is attempting to bring in replacement workers and on the second day of the strike a truck hit a worker picketing outside the plant. Police have not committed to filing charges over the incident.

Attorney who led vendetta against air traffic controllers confirmed as new NLRB legal counsel

The US Senate confirmed Peter Robb to the post of General Counsel for the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). The board oversees the enforcement of US labor law and has the power to investigate employee and employer complaints.

Robb is best known as the lawyer who represented the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) during the 1981 air traffic controller’s strike. The Reagan administration fired and blacklisted the striking air traffic controllers in an action that inaugurated an unprecedented assault on US workers that continues to this day.

Trump nominated Robb to replace Richard Griffith Jr., whose term expired October 31. The general counsel post is extremely powerful and has the final and unreviewable decision-making power in investigations and can determine whether a case will be dismissed or go forward.

Instacart workers stage protest

A group of workers for grocery delivery service Instacart staged a two-day protest November 19 and 20 over low pay. The San Francisco-based company relies largely on part-time workers and contractors to operate its business, which offers customers in-home delivery of grocery items. It operates in 154 US cities.

Workers involved in the protest, who are attempting to remain anonymous, signed up for shifts and then declined orders. There is no data available on the impact of the action.

Instacart has been sued multiple times in recent years over inadequate wages. A large part of employee income is reliant on tips, which can vary widely. The company has agreed to several million in settlements, which

amount to at best a couple hundred dollars per employee.

One complaint of Instacart workers is low pay for bulky orders. The company pays \$.40 per item. That can include large and heavy items such as cases of bottled water, which shoppers must pick up at the store and then deliver to customer homes.

Nassau County New York school bus strike ends

A strike by more than 300 school bus drivers at four districts in Nassau County on Long Island ended November 16 after Transport Workers Union Local 252 called off the action. A vote on a new contract proposal will not be held until November 28.

Few details of the agreement have been released. The union acknowledges it agreed to unspecified concessions. According to press reports, the deal includes a 2 percent wage increase in each of three years, increased pay for charter school runs and additional 401(k) contributions.

The strike involved drivers, monitors and mechanics for Baumann & Sons Buses. Some of the districts involved in the strike say they will issue formal requests for proposals for new bus company contracts. It is not clear what impact this will have on the terms of any agreement signed by the TWU with Baumann.

Fresno teachers await factfinders report

In the wake of a strike vote last month, teachers in the Fresno California public schools are still awaiting a factfinders report after talks with management reached an impasse. According to provisions of California state law, a factfinder must make a recommendation on a contract before teachers will be in a legal strike position. Talks with the district have dragged on the better part of a year.

Meanwhile, Fresno State University said it would remove its 200 student teachers from the Fresno Schools if a strike takes place. It said it would “highly discourage” student teachers from working as scab substitutes if a walkout occurs. The university said it was not taking sides in the dispute, but issued the policy recommendation out of concern for the welfare of student teachers.



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