

Oakland, California city workers strike reaches one-week mark

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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A strike by 3,000 city workers in Oakland, California continued over the weekend and marched towards the end of its first week as the unions and city negotiators prepared for a Monday, December 11 mediated session. Last Friday, the city declared an impasse as the union rejected its last offer, which called for a four percent raise in the first year of a new contract followed by a one percent raise in year two that is linked to the city meeting certain revenue goals.

The strike involves various city workers including librarians, parking enforcement officers, sewer workers and street cleaners comprising a total of some 2,000 workers represented by the Service Employees International Union Local 1021 and another 1,000 technical and administrative workers who are members of the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers Local 21. Meanwhile, another 1,000 members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers are honoring picket lines.

The unions and city are agreed upon the first year four percent salary hike, but not on the contract's second year wage proposal. Workers are also protesting on behalf of part-time workers who receive no benefits under conditions where some have been working for up to 20 years with the city. As one worker told *Bay Area News Group*, "The rent is going up but the pay isn't. More buildings are going up but we can't afford to live in any of them."

The city has defended its hard line stand, citing a projected \$100 million budget shortfall for Oakland's 2019-20 fiscal year.

Washington state home healthcare workers strike over wages and staffing

Healthcare workers at Providence Hospice and Home Care in Everett, Washington ended a three-day strike December 8 and returned to work without a contract. Some 230 nurses, physical therapists and home health aides who care for 900 patients have been in negotiations for over a year seeking higher wages, lower caseloads and better working conditions.

The union reports that Providence pays lower wages than other healthcare organizations, which is reflected in the fact that 50 workers have quit the home care company in the past twelve months. Workers want to reduce the 24/7 on-call hours and improve staffing levels. One worker cited a situation where a patient saw six different nurses over a

two-week period.

Protests by state workers in Argentina over government labor policies

State workers, pensioners and social organizations held protest actions across Argentina on December 6. The mobilization, called by the State Workers Association (ATE) and the Workers Central of Argentina (CTA) in coordination with a 24-hour strike, protested a number of labor laws being promoted by the administration of Mauricio Macri and being debated in the national legislature.

Chief among these are the raising of the retirement age, the cutting of the end-of-year bonus, privatization of state services and the erosion of full-time permanent labor through "flexibilization" of labor laws, which also makes organizing efforts more difficult. Already, 108,000 state workers have been laid off since Macri took office in 2015.

In addition, according to a *telsurtv.net* report, "The administration eliminated energy and gas subsidies, resulting in a 500 percent price increase for electricity and a 300 percent jump for natural gas. Public transportation costs are up 100 percent in some areas."

In the city of Paraná, marchers stopped at the Social Security office, the headquarters of the Municipality of Paraná and the House of Government to denounce the policies. In Buenos Aires, protesters marched from the Congress to the Plaza de Mayo, the site of vigils held by mothers of young activists "disappeared" during the 1976-1981 Videla dictatorship. At the various gatherings, union officials fostered illusions that the conservative congress would be swayed by the protests to reject the anti-worker legislation.

Students, teachers protest layoffs at Brazilian private college

Students and teachers in Sao Paulo held protests last week against Brazilian private college operator Estacio Participacoes following the company's December 6 report of its plans to fire around 1,200 professors. The firm, which employs over 10,000 academic professionals, claims that the soon-to-be-sacked professors are being paid above market rates. As for the timing, it says that Brazilian law requires that firings "occur only within a very restricted window."

So far, Estacio has filed layoff paperwork for close to 500 teachers in Sao Paulo, Ribeirao Preto and Belo Horizonte. The CSB union counters that layoffs have to be negotiated with the union. CSB lawyers unsuccessfully filed a motion in a Brasilia court December 7 to stop the firings.

Job security and salaries in the teaching profession in both the public

and private sectors in Brazil have been steadily eroded in recent years, with salaries paid in installments at some public universities and intermittent scheduling at private institutions.

The Rio de Janeiro teachers union called for protests on December 8 and 11, and is considering a strike for the beginning of the year.

Bolivian doctors remain on strike after talks break down

Doctors in Bolivia continued the strike they began November 23 following the failure of the sixth in a series of talks with Health Ministry representatives on December 7. The doctors had walked out to protest the enactment of Supreme Decree 3385, which created the Social Security Investigation and Control Authority, and Article 205 of the Penal Code System, governing malpractice penalties.

Health Ministry officials claim that the investigative powers are necessary to protect patients and that the strike is being prolonged by “radicals,” who are putting their patients at risk. The Ombudsman of Bolivia, Juan Carlos Balliván, announced that he would present a legal complaint against the doctors to restrict their right to strike. “We believe that life must be safeguarded, the health of the citizenry; all are called to guarantee the right to life,” he told reporters.

In response to criticisms, the doctors announced that they would treat emergency cases during the strike. La Paz Medical College president Luis Larrea noted that municipalities and departmental governments already have investigative and disciplinary measures in effect, and added that the doctors are still open to dialogue.

On December 6, private sector anesthesiologists in Tarija held a 24-hour strike in support of the doctors, with a spokesperson declaring, “There’s no interest on the part of the government in resolving these laws that are detrimental to doctors, so nothing remains other than to radicalize the pressure measures.” The next day, medical workers at the Rengel Women’s Clinic and the Child Jesus Clinic in La Paz announced that they were joining the strike.

Colombian firefighters strike to demand overdue pay and to protest deficient equipment

Firefighters at the Puerto Berrio Station in the Colombian department of Antioquia held a meeting last week and determined to go on strike until their demands are met. On December 7, they stuck a sign on the outside of the station that read: “In case of fire, call the mayor.”

The firefighters have not been paid for four months, since “the present municipal administration has not transferred the resources that by law it should transfer to the institution,” firefighters commander Nelson Boada told reporters. In addition, “There are three vehicles but we can’t use them because they are in a bad state and none of them has up-to-date documents; to attend to an emergency like that would be irresponsible.”

In recent emergencies, the smoke eaters have had to depend on police to help them. Volunteers have had to ride their own motorcycles to get to the fires. Boada concluded that “at this moment we demand that the administration comes because we already have gone to them lots of times and we haven’t been listened to.”

Honduran doctors, nurses strike over salary, contract issues

Doctors at hospitals and clinics in the Honduran public health system, a part of the Honduran Social Security Institute (IHSS) remain on the strike they began November 20 over salary demands, as well as for better benefits for retired doctors and mechanisms for bidding on positions. Emergency and critical services have remained in operation.

The doctors have waited over five years for a promised raise without receiving it. Nonetheless, authorities claim that the demand of from 9,000 to 10,000 lempiras (US\$382 to 425) is excessive. The Secretary of Labor and Social Security has threatened to fire the doctors if they continue their strike.

In Tegucigalpa, IHSS doctors and nurses in the Abajo barrio struck on December 7 to demand compliance with their collective contract. Nurses who have worked for over a decade have not obtained official designations or appointments. The walkout followed one at an IHSS facility in La Granja in Comayagüela, next to Tegucigalpa, also over delayed payments of salaries and a raise.

Talks underway between Unifor and First Student

Negotiations are underway between Unifor and First Student on a contract covering school bus drivers in Bowmanville, Kincardine, Port Elgin, Warton and Owen Sound regions.

The drivers were in a legal strike position as of December 10, but there is no sign that Unifor plans a walkout. The union and management have set bargaining dates extending into January 2018. There has been no strike notice given, nor has Unifor conducted a strike vote.

Unifor called off a threatened strike by 260 school bus drivers in the Scarborough and Durham Region outside Toronto after the union reached a last minute deal with First Student on November 30. A walkout could have potentially impacted 10,000 students at 28 schools.

The main issue was unpaid hours drivers must work travelling from home to the first pickup point or for performing maintenance. According to Unifor when unpaid work time is factored in, school bus drivers earn less than the minimum wage.



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