

Brazilian metro workers hold one-day strike over privatization plans

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Brazilian metro workers hold one-day strike over privatization plans

Workers for five of the Brazilian city of São Paulo's six subway lines stopped work for 24 hours on Thursday, January 18. The strike, approved the night before, was called to protest the state government's privatization plans for two of the lines, with bidding to take place on January 19. The privatization would last for 20 years.

Although a labor court had ruled that 60 percent of the lines had to remain running, the actual figure was more like 20 percent. Only one line, which was already privatized, continued running. Automobile traffic—with lines of traffic stretching for miles—was slowed to a crawl, while bus lines were unable to compensate, leaving many morning commuters stranded.

Later in the day, a city court issued an injunction suspending, though not canceling, the auction. One city judge criticized the plan, calling it “a privatization funded with public resources.” The judge “considered the minimum established amount to be paid by the winner of the auction, approximately R\$180 million [US\$56 million], low in relation to the costs of the construction of the two metro lines of R\$7 billion [US\$2.2 billion],” reported riotimesonline.com.

São Paulo Metro said that it would dock the pay of the 90 percent of workers who walked out.

Twelve-hour strike by Mexican university workers to press demands

The Benito Juárez Autonomous University of Oaxaca Workers Syndicate (STEUABJO) held a 12-hour strike on January 17. Around 2,000 members at campuses in the capital Oaxaca, as well as in Huajuapán de León, Santo Domingo Tehuantepec and Puerto Escondido, took part in the action.

The strike was called to put pressure on the administration to respond to STEUABJO's list of contract demands. The contract is subject to annual revision. Among the demands are a 50 percent salary raise, the dismissal of people hired without the union's knowledge, the redress of violations of the contract, and various promised benefits.

The strike took place two days before the fourth set of tripartite talks at the Local Conciliation and Arbitration Board, which have not resulted in an agreement.

Dominican health workers' union calls strike over noncompliance with agreement

On January 16, the union representing workers at the Dominican Social Security Institute (IDSS) announced a 48-hour strike at 128 hospitals that were transferred last year to the National Health Service (SNS) Health Network. The main demand of the strike is complete compliance with the agreement signed between the IDSS National Health Providers and the SNS in 2016.

A statement from the Autonomous Classist Syndical Federation (CASC) press secretary complained that the accord established that all IDSS hospital workers would receive a seniority incentive, but “It was applied to doctors, nurses, bioanalysts and orthodontists but, in a discriminatory manner; administrative personnel and health technicians were left out.”

In addition, shortages of equipment, lack of timely repairs and closings of some hospitals are issues as well. CASC is calling for more investment in hospitals and policlinics, and has asked president Danilo Medina to intervene.

Tobago health workers protest weeks of nonpayment of wages

Workers for Trinidad and Tobago's Division of Health, Wellness and Family protested delays in the payment of their wages January 16. Over eighty daily paid workers who gathered at the Habib Building in western Tobago have not been paid for six weeks.

National Union of Government and Federated Workers (NUGFW) negotiator Kenneth Thomas told newsday.com.tt that the division's explanations for the delay are unacceptable, and “What they are asking us to do is to postpone our hunger.” He added, “Not only are we demanding our pay today, we are also demanding that the division pay whatever fees that might have built up.”

Panamanian ship registry workers strike for overdue bonus

Workers at the Panama Maritime Authority (AMP), which registers international merchant vessels, declared an indefinite strike starting January 19 to press their demand for a bonus established with the enactment of Law 50 of 2017. The striking functionaries accused the nation's comptroller of not signing the document for handing over the payment in accordance with the law.

Law 50, which went into effect on December 29, “created a special legal regimen for operations of financing of the local and international maritime

sector and fiscal, labor and migratory incentives for businesses that carry out such operations from the Republic of Panama and for the projects financed by them and other arrangements,” according to a critica.com.pa report. The minister of the presidency, Álvaro Alemán, claimed that a “juridical discrepancy” exists between the comptroller and AMP with respect to the law that authorizes the AMP board of directors to approve the payment of the bonus.

AMP workers held protests at several ports and vowed to continue the strike until they get a positive answer from the authorities.

Chilean medical workers strike to press for meeting with morgue director

Medical workers at Santiago, Chile’s Medical Legal Service (SML) began a strike January 12, refusing to perform autopsies until SML national director Gabriel Zamora agreed to discuss their grievances. The main demand of the morgue workers is the dismissal of the chief of the SML cabinet, who they accuse of poor management.

Director of the National Association of SML Functionaries Viviana Uribe told reporters January 18, “We are doing everything humanly possible to end this crisis; nonetheless we have met not only with a very negative response, but with threats.”

Zamora claimed that autopsies are proceeding in various hospitals and other SML sites, and alleged that those striking are mostly administrative and technical personnel. He also restated his refusal to meet with them as long as the strike is in effect.

New Jersey nursing home workers hold one-day strike to protest destruction of labor agreement

About 140 healthcare workers held a one-day strike to protest the destruction of benefits and working conditions after the takeover of the Delaire nursing home in Linden, New Jersey by a corporate chain. AristaCare Health Services, which owns nursing homes in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, bought Delaire last summer and scrapped the contract covering members of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). They imposed terms cutting sick pay by half, substituting an unaffordable healthcare plan and cutting retirement.

Sandra Lopez, a certified nursing assistant, told tapinto.net, “How can I afford \$1,000 a month for healthcare for my family when I earn only \$12.89 an hour?” Some workers earn as little as \$10 an hour.

Vernicka Brown, who has worked at Delaire for 29 years, declared, “Staffing levels have also been getting worse and there’s been a lot of turnover since AristaCare took over. Skilled staff are leaving because the workload is growing while our compensation is going in the other direction.”

Patients have voiced their support for the nursing home workers. One woman who wheeled herself onto the picket line declared, “AristaCare doesn’t care.”

Talks resume over Dayton, Ohio transit contract

Negotiations have restarted between the Amalgamated Transit Union

and the Greater Dayton Regional Transit Authority (RTA) over a new contract covering some 400 drivers and mechanics.

The ATU filed an intent to strike notice in later December setting a January 1 strike date; however, the strike did not take place. Workers previously walked off the job in January 2017 over the issue of health care payments. RTA is reportedly now proposing that workers pay 20 percent of the total cost of their health care plan. The settlement of the 2017 strike involved a company agreement that workers contribute 15 percent of total health care costs.

The ATU has asked that the terms of the 2017 agreement be maintained.

B.C. transit workers set to strike

Workers employed by First Canada ULC at handyDART transit in Victoria, British Columbia, members of Unifor, could be on strike this week after a deadline for Monday was postponed due to a revised application by the employer for essential service designation.

Workers at handyDART, which provides transit facilities for people with disabilities in the region, had previously voted 97 percent in favor of strike action. The main obstacle in contract negotiations according to union negotiators is the denial of full-time status for a growing number of workers.

The union says they are still hopeful a deal can be reached without a strike, but warned that transit service would be very limited if one is called.

Ontario university food workers facing strike/lockout

Over 100 food service workers at Compass Group of Canada’s Chartwell division at Trent University in Peterborough, east of Toronto, will be in a strike/lockout position as of January 31.

A protest rally was staged by their union, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) at the main entrance of the school this week. Union negotiators say that Compass has cut the number of full-time jobs in half since it took over in 2014, leaving dozens of workers with precarious work schedules and no employee benefits.

Company representatives say that the latest contract offer includes wage increases and that staffing levels must “reflect the ebb and flow of business”.



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