

Ontario Tories to block power workers strike; Mexican teachers strike to demand bonus

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Mexican teachers strike to demand year-end bonus, differential to retirees

Thousands of preschool, elementary and secondary teachers of the Education Workers National Syndicate (SNTE) Section 37 in the northwestern Mexican state of Baja California were joined in their weeklong strike last week by their colleagues in SNTE Section 2 on December 13 and 14 to demand the payment of their end-of-year bonus, or aguinaldo. They also demanded the payment of pensions for retired educators.

The strike followed a December 12 march by thousands of teachers and administrative staff to demand the delayed payments. Section 2, which consists of federalized professors, added the demand that the 2019 budget include a retirement differential and humanitarian aid to its retirees.

Although the federal government announced a commitment to advance the resources, it has not established a specific date. About 8,000 retirees and 17,000 active teachers have not received their payments.

State workers in other branches, including judicial, legal, electoral, human rights and public security, have already held strikes and protests in Baja California, with protesters carrying signs denouncing the governor, Francisco Vega, and demanding his resignation. Protesters claim that after receiving 1,702,000,000 pesos (US\$84,100,000) in October, that there are enough funds to resolve the crisis.

Meanwhile, in the southern state of Tabasco, over 7,500 members of Section 48 of the National Health Secretariat Workers Syndicate (SNTSSA) in the Mexican state of Tabasco went on strike at 12:01 pm December 14, the deadline for promised payments of bonuses and part of their aguinaldo that were not delivered.

Jamaican medical technologists strike over mistreatment by director

Members of Jamaica's Union of Technical, Administrative and Supervisory Personnel (UTASP) in Kingston, Jamaica walked off the job on December 10. The medical technologists, employed at Kingston public hospitals, have complained to the health and labor ministries for four years regarding mistreatment by their director, Michelle Hamilton, to no avail. Hamilton was recently appointed to the post of National Laboratory Services director.

The UTASP issued a statement saying, "The appointment of Dr Hamilton to the post of director of laboratory services without the resolution of one of the several complaints has prompted the medical technologists to embark on protest action... The medical technologists are demanding that the MOH resolve the plethora of issues involving Dr Hamilton before consideration be given to her installation to the post of director of laboratory services."

On December 11, medical technologists in three other cities—St. Mary, St. Catherine and St. James—joined their Kingston colleagues. They included workers at the National Public Health Library, the Victoria Jubilee Hospital and the Blood Bank.

The same day, however, the Ministry of Labour and Social Security called a meeting with the UTASP, in which none of the issues concerning the director were resolved, but according to the *Jamaica Observer*, "it was agreed that continued discussion will take place at the local level and normality will be restored."

Paraguayan taxi drivers protest against Uber

Taxi drivers in cities across Paraguay held protest actions against the planned introduction of app-driven ride companies like Uber and MUV on December 14. In the capital Asunción,

several hundred cabbies converged to demonstrate in front of the Palace of Justice, blocking traffic. Municipal bus drivers joined them there and in some other cities. They then marched several times around the Palace and chanted, “Uber out, MUV out!”

Leaders of taxi drivers’ unions claim that the arrival of the businesses will eliminate tens of thousands of jobs. They are demanding an injunction against them and demanding “that both the Paraguayan government and the Asunción municipality sit down at a table to debate the conditions that the new transport companies must submit to,” according to an EFE report.

The president of the APTA taxi drivers’ union, Aristides Morales, accused Uber of “deceptive propaganda,” and claimed that it is illegal since it is “not an application to transport persons, it’s an application of communication, and it doesn’t meet the requirements” that taxi drivers must fulfill.

Uruguayan surgical anesthesiologists’ union calls 48-hour strike for separate recognition

The Surgical Anesthetic Syndicate (SAQ) in Uruguay decided December 12 to carry out a nationwide strike on December 18 and 19 to press their demand for separate recognition and negotiation rights. A SAQ communiqué stated, “This union measure, just like the previous ones, is adopted in the framework of our struggle for representation of our union, which is systematically unrecognized by the Executive Power.”

The SAQ has held a number of protest actions and short strikes over the issue, most recently on November 5, 6 and 7 and December 6 and 7.

Strike by California county workers ends without contract resolution

The union representing some 1,700 county workers in San Louis Obispo, California, ended a four-day strike December 14 with no resolution of the demands by workers for better wages and health care benefits. The members of the San Louis Obispo County Employees’ Association (SLOCEA) found the county’s offer of a mere 1/2 percent raise deeply insulting.

At a County Board of Supervisors meeting December 12, workers told of how they have to rely on low-cost state insurance and section 8 housing, if they can get it, because of the high cost of living in San Louis Obispo County. “If my wages were fair living wages,” said Cassandra DeSpain, “there is absolutely no reason I should qualify for those programs. I

should be able to afford those things with the pay that you guys give me. It is absolutely not enough.”

In response, Chief Administrative Officer Wade Horton told the media, “We have to provide services in a manner that’s fiscally sustainable.”

When the union and the county met in November 2017, it was revealed that San Louis Obispo County workers make an average 17.9 percent less than workers in surrounding counties. When the union brought back a contract that offered a 1/2 percent raise in the first year followed by a 2 percent raises in year two, workers soundly defeated it. The county then unilaterally implemented the 1/2 percent first-year raise along with a 1.9 percent increase in health benefits.

Ontario Tories to block power workers strike

In an extraordinary attack on workers’ rights, the Ontario Tory government last week announced the recall of the Ontario legislature to outlaw a possible strike at the Ontario Power Generation (OPG) after workers twice rejected the Crown corporation’s final offer that had been recommended by their union.

The vote obliged the Power Workers’ Union to issue a 21-day strike notice which would have meant that a strike by 6,000 workers would begin in the new year, but the government has promised to pass legislation outlawing any such action before then. The last contract expired at the end of March and a main obstacle to a new deal is OPG’s insistence on maintaining a two-tiered system whereby over 300 “term” workers receive reduced pensions and benefits.

A bill to outlaw strike action at OPG, which provides over half of the province’s electricity, could be passed by the end of the week.



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