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# Workers Struggles: The Americas

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The Fecode teachers' federation in Colombia called a one-day national strike February 14, with over 300,000 educators stopping work. The goal of the stoppage was to protest the policies of the nation's right-wing president, Iván Duque, who has promoted the National Development Plan, a set of measures that Fecode claims are designed to destroy public education and facilitate privatization.

Protesting teachers gathered in front of the Education Ministry in the capital Bogotá to demand that the government comply with provisions agreed to over the years, in the first place health care, which have been denied to many teachers. They also advocated for free public education from preschool to university.

Another issue raised by teachers is the long record of violence against teachers, union members and social activists, many of whom have been threatened and killed by paramilitary death squads. Another object of the protests was Duque's collaboration with US imperialism in the regime-change operation in Venezuela being organized by the Trump administration in the United States.

### Mexican university workers still on strike over wage demand

Workers at the Autonomous Metropolitan University (UAM) in Mexico City are continuing a strike that they voted for on February 1 while the SITUAM union continues negotiations. The main sticking point is the SITUAM demand for a 20 percent raise, though the union's president has said that he is not "married" to it. Meanwhile, university authorities have refused to budge from the 3.35 percent offer they made after their 3 percent offer was refused.

The workers are also demanding full-time status for temporary workers and equalization of pay levels.

The Federal Office for the Defense of Workers scheduled a February 15 meeting between UAM and SITUAM reps, at which the Secretariats of Labor and Social Security moderated. It was the fourth time that the parties had met. SITUAM has accused UAM

of the mismanagement of its funding through superfluous expenses and overspending on unnecessary speculation. The union says it wants an end to pay disparities between academic and administrative staff.

### Dominican Republic: Professors protest unpaid wages, unfinished construction

The Dominican Professors Association (ADP) in Cabral, a municipality in the Dominican Republic's Barahona province, held a protest February 14 to demand the delivery of retroactive pay, the unification of courses, the completion of work on an educational center and the expansion of others.

The educators marched to the school district offices and demanded the dismissal of its director, Elaine Pujol Rojas, whom they accuse of maltreatment of teachers. They gave school authorities a five-day deadline in which to respond to their demands, after which they said they would continue the protests.

In anticipation of their action, a police contingent was sent to the site to prevent the protesters from entering the facility. It was the second protest in less than three months, according to the ADP sectional president.

### Antiguan hospital workers protest, strike over deplorable condition of work environment

On February 7, workers at two health treatment facilities in St. John, Antigua—one a senior treatment institute and the other a psychiatric hospital—renewed their protests, which they have sporadically held for years over the scandalous condition of the buildings. Photos of the buildings show cracked floor tiles, shutters off their hinges, walls falling in, leaky roofs, filthy bathrooms and other problems.

After years of neglecting their complaints, the Minister of Public Works announced that workers and residents at one of the hospitals, the Fiennes Institute, would be temporarily relocated a

short distance away to Nurse's Hostel while improvements are carried out.

At the other location, Clarevue Psychiatric Hospital, where, according to an Antigua and Barbuda Public Service Association official, there is no light in the bathrooms and the same refrigerator is used for employees' food and for storing urine samples, employees walked out and protested for five days last week. They said that they would "continue their protest action until immediate steps are taken to improve the conditions for residents and staff," according to a one news report.

The union's general secretary accompanied Ministry of Works officials on a visit to the facility. They will submit a report to the agency's minister, who was absent at the time.

### **Argentine public transportation drivers to strike over pay demand**

On February 15, the Motor Transportation Union (UTA) of Catamarca, Argentina announced a one-day strike for short- and medium-distance drivers on February 20. The reason for the job action is the failure of the enterprises employing the drivers to pay arrears owed from January.

UTA noted that the deadline for the payment was "totally expired" and added that if the companies did not comply, the drivers would intensify their actions and extend the next walkout to 48 hours.

### **Colorado transit workers reject contract, authorize strike**

Transit workers who serve the greater Grand Junction, Colorado area voted unanimously February 12 to authorize a strike after rejecting the latest offer by Grand Valley Transit. The 32 members of Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 1776, who currently make a mere \$11.25 to \$13.60 an hour, are demanding a new starting wage of \$16 an hour.

The demand by workers has upset Mesa County Regional Transportation Planning Office Director Todd Hallenbeck, who complained that the office locked in funding for transportation back in December and called the workers' demands for additional wages a "disconnect." Hallenbeck has vowed that if workers strike, Transdev, the contractor that operates the system for Grand Valley Transit, will seek to break the strike and keep the system running.

It is significant that workers voted unanimously to strike as Denver teachers, a bit farther east on the interstate highway, launched their struggle. However, ATU did not see fit to attempt link the struggle of transit workers with Denver teachers and other workers.

Contractor Transdev, the entity that profits from the poverty wages imposed on transit workers, is a global corporation based in

France and operating in 20 countries. In 2017, Transdev had revenues of \$7.5 billion.

### **Teamster drivers authorize strike action against Seattle-area trucking company**

Braving the worst weather conditions in 50 years, nearly all the 33 truck drivers and dispatchers employed by Nelson Trucking in Seattle drove to the International Brotherhood of Teamsters Local 174 hall on February 10 to unanimously authorize the union to engage in strike action.

The drivers, working with no significant wage increase in the last six years and absolutely no wage hike in the last four years in the high-priced Seattle area, are fighting against Nelson's attempt to introduce contract language empowering management to determine job assignments for the drivers.

The Teamsters regard the proposed changes to the contract as an attempt to overturn seniority. A new management team at Nelson is also demanding more takeaways from the drivers, who are highly skilled in the operation of flatbed trucks and the driving of large vehicles on city streets and roads.

### **Union calls off strike by Northwest Territory government workers**

A proposed one-day strike by 4,000 workers employed by the government of the Northwest Territories set for last week was called off at the last minute even though no deal was reached to justify the reversal by their union, the Union of Northern Workers.

Workers employed in various government departments and agencies gave their union a mandate to strike in a vote almost a year ago and have been without a contract since 2016, yet this is the first time strike notice was actually served. The reason that union negotiators gave for calling off the strike was an agreement reached with management for "binding recommendations" from a mediator under a media blackout by both parties. The agreement effectively removes the right to strike regardless of the mediator's decision, which could take up to a month.

The central issues in dispute include the use of relief workers by the Territorial government as well as wages, with the government demanding a two-year wage freeze and subsequent increases below the rate of inflation in a five-year deal.



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