

Teamsters warn of possible strike at CN Rail

## Workers Struggles: The Americas

29 October 2019

### Teamsters warn of possible strike at CN Rail

The Teamsters union said its members could strike as early as November 19 if progress is not made in ongoing talks with Canadian National Railways (CN). The union said that over 99 percent of 3,000 conductors, trainpersons and yardpersons voted to grant strike authorization.

A government mandated mediation period ended on October 25. The Teamsters and CN Rail management have been in negotiations over the last six months and had been under government mediation for the previous four months. The next round of talks is set for November 12.

The union has refused to release details of its discussion with CN. The union is the bargaining agent for 16,000 rail workers in Canada. The previous contract expired July 25.

Most of the affected workers are located in major urban centers across Canada. Management has cut its projected profit pointing to a decrease in demand for freight and an overall slowdown in the economy.

### Powerful march in Valparaiso Chile

In Defiance of the government attempts to pacify the Chilean class struggle, on Sunday, October 28, tens of thousands of workers and youth marched from the city of Viña del Mar to the city of Valparaiso. Columns of marchers, converging on this port city from several directions shouted “Down with Piñera” and “We will not negotiate over dead bodies.”

During the protest, at various points the protesters

were attacked by police forces (the notorious Carabineros) with tear gas and water cannons at several points in the march.

In an attempt at conciliation the Piñera administration lifted a state of siege and curfew. The lifting of the state of siege went into effect on Sunday. This gesture did nothing to stop the assault on the Valparaiso marchers. Smaller protest demonstrations also took place across Chile. In the mining region of Antofagasta, copper miners voted to continue strike action against Piñera.

### Brazilian oil workers’ strike

Oil workers went on strike in Brazil on October 26 to protest the proposed Collective Bargaining Act (Acordo Coletivo de Trabalho, ACT). The legislation attacks workers’ rights and paves the way for further privatizations in the oil industry.

The strike takes place less than ten days after a massive oil spill along the coast of Brazil, which has affected scores of coastal cities in Northeastern Brazil.

### Coal miners in Argentina declare their support for protests in Chile

Striking miners in Río Turbio, Santa Cruz province, on the border with Chile, declared their solidarity with the struggle of Chilean workers now confronting the Piñera administration in Chile.

The workers mobilized on Wednesday last week to declare themselves on strike over unsafe working

conditions, and to also declare their support for the Chilean anti-government demonstrations.

At the same time across the border, in the Chilean city of Puerto Natales, workers also mobilized to repudiate the Chilean president.

### **Delivery workers protest in Buenos Aires**

Contingent workers, employed by the Pedidos Ya delivery company in Buenos Aires launched strike action on Friday demanding an end to zero-hour contracts and for wage increases to respond to Argentina's price explosion. The strikers are also owed back wages. Wages for delivery workers have not gone up since 2017.

### **Argentine Kimberly Clark workers blockade plant**

Workers at the US-owned Kimberly Clark paper company marched and blocked a major road in the city of Buenos Aires to protest the closure of the plant. The workers' job action was supported by government employees, other paper workers and rail employees.

Management claims that the plant was closed "as part of its Restructuring Project" announced in 2018 to adapt to the global transformation of the industry and because its plant was obsolete, it needed to shut down its factory in Bernal, Buenos Aires. The plant produced toilet paper and kitchen paper towels, which it will now import.

The shutdown of the plant leaves 200 workers without jobs.

### **Tentative agreement ends strike by Dedham, Massachusetts teachers**

Negotiators for the Dedham, Massachusetts School Committee and the Dedham Education Association

(DEA) reached a tentative contract October 27 over wages, benefits and other issues and the union called for an end to the strike. Dedham teachers voted 258 – 2 on October 24 to strike after two years of fruitless negotiations and the following day, Friday, launched the first Massachusetts teachers strike in twelve years.

The Massachusetts Commonwealth Employment Relations Board ordered the union to "immediately cease and desist from engaging or threatening to engage in a strike or work stoppage, slowdown, or other withholding of services." The chair of the union's negotiating team, Rachel Dudley, acknowledged the strike was illegal, but "not criminal."

Negotiators for the school offered wage increases up to 12.3 percent for teachers with more than 12 years while lower seniority teachers would receive 9.2 percent. The DEA wants wage increases of 15 percent for the top rank of teachers and 12 percent for the lower rank. The DEA charges that the School Committee has rigged increases in health benefits that would result in a pay cut of \$4,000 a year for teachers on the family plan and \$2,000 for individuals.

School officials were particularly hostile to a demand by teachers to make two issues subject to the grievance procedure—cell phones and sexual harassment. When students are spotted using cell phones in class, teachers found that they were docked later during their evaluations.

Concerning sexual harassment, the *Boston Globe* reported, "the current policy puts all of the power in the hands of the administrative officials, who might themselves be the subject of a complaint."

When teachers last struck for four days in Quincy, Massachusetts, the union was fined \$100,000.



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