

Ontario elementary teachers return big majority for strike authorization

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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Ontario elementary teachers authorize strike

Members of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario have turned in an overwhelming strike authorization vote. The 83,000 elementary teachers and other education professionals voted 98 percent in favor of strike should talks with the province fail. Negotiations are ongoing and center on the question of class sizes and related issues.

The Ontario government of Premier Doug Ford has moved to increase class sizes for grade 4 and higher and substitute more online courses for traditional classroom instruction combined with a reduction in per pupil funding.

Education Minister Stephen Lecce denounced the strike vote declaring, "ETFO has taken another escalating step toward a strike, which will disproportionately hurt our kids."

High school teachers in the English Catholic school system are also holding strike votes and results are expected in a few weeks. No strike deadline for elementary teachers has been set.

Antigovernment protests, and violence against protesters, continue in Haiti

Haiti's workers and poor have continued protesting against government corruption and austerity and for the removal of president Jovenel Moïses. On October 30, workers in the health sector—doctors, nurses, pharmacists and others—gathered in front of the Hospital Estatal in Port au Prince to demand that Moïse step down.

The health sector workers denounced shortages of medicine, supplies and equipment, low pay and terrible working conditions in their chants and speeches. The mobilization

followed a protest a few days before by textile workers, teachers and students.

Moïses has steadfastly refused to step down, instead calling for "dialogue" that will lead to "a political accord to achieve a government of national unity." Meanwhile, government police and security forces, as well as unknown attackers, have killed at least 42 protesters and wounded nearly 90 others. Amnesty International has accused the government of using "excessive force."

Protest organizations say that they will continue the protests, which began in mid-September against fuel shortages, rising expenses, corruption and other complaints, until Moïses is out of office.

Jamaican technical university staff members strike for overdue pay

Some classes at the University of Technology (UTECH) in St. Andrew, Jamaica came to a standstill as over 500 academic staff members walked off the job to demand the payment of promised retroactive pay. The payment in four installments of the overdue money, which comes out to over 4 billion Jamaican dollars (US\$29.2 million), was agreed upon after years of negotiations between UTECH administration and the UTECH Jamaica Academic Staff Union.

The first tranche was paid in July and the second was supposed to have been delivered in October, which came and went without it showing on paychecks. UTECH administration claims that the government has not provided the money to the university. The workers have said that they will not return to their posts until the latest installment is delivered.

Argentine taxi drivers' union calls protests over Uber and Cabify

The Taxi Workers Syndicate (SPT) of Buenos Aires called protest actions October 31 against the presence of Uber, Cabify and other app-based ride services in the city. The protests involved blockages at eight intersections around the city.

SPT has repeatedly called protests against Uber et. al.—the latest being on October 22—and accuses them of not having proper authorization and permits, as well as leading to the loss of over 10,000 taxi jobs and “the bankruptcy of 90 related family businesses,” according to SPT head Omar Viviani. He added, “These illegal applications violate the National Transit Law and evade current labor, tax and social laws to the detriment of the jobs and salaries of taxi drivers.”

Hospital workers in Neuquén, Argentina hold one-day strike

Workers at the Castro Rendón Hospital in Neuquén, Argentina struck for 24 hours on October 30. The action included a march to the city’s Administrative Ministerial Center (CAM).

The strikers, members of the State Workers Association (ATE), took four main demands to the CAM: the purchase of supplies and provisions for security with the approval of the security and hygiene committee; proportional pay for guards; a bidding process for filling posts left vacant by retirement, of which there are now 50; completion of infrastructure additions and improvements.

Castro Rendón is the main hospital in Neuquén and one of the most important in Patagonia, and its workers’ complaints apply to other hospitals in the region. An ATE delegate told reporters that if their demands are not addressed, the workers do not discount the possibility of a 48-hour walkout.

Strikebreaking threat in Northern Virginia transit walkout provokes opposition

Metrobus, the government regional transit agency for Fairfax County in Northern Virginia, backed off a plan to use Fairfax Connector bus drivers to take over routes that are being struck by Metrobus workers. Some 130 drivers, mechanics and utility workers of Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 689 went on strike after months of fruitless negotiations.

At the heart of the dispute is a two-tiered system that Metro created when it built the Cinder Bed Road transit garage two years ago and then awarded the contract to run the facility to the French transnational company Transdev. The move was aimed at saving \$15 million over five years that largely resulted

from a two-tier system where Transdev workers at Cinder Bed Road make \$20 an hour whereas other Metrobus drivers working for the government make \$33 an hour.

Fairfax County has also outsourced operations to Transdev for the Fairfax Connector and its members launched information pickets last week as the ATU and Transdev begin negotiations. Behind the decision to back off from launching strikebreaking operations against the Metrobus workers was the fear of inflaming negotiations with Fairfax Connector workers and perhaps also igniting a broader regional action by transit workers.

John A. Costa, international president of the Amalgamated Transit Union, told the Washington Post, “My fear is that this is escalating to a point where we have the workers in [the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority] and Fairfax seeking to do some kind of action now.”

New York social aid workers strike against non-profit agency

Over 100 staff for Housing Works, the New York non-profit agency which provides aid to homeless workers, walked off the job October 29 protesting low pay, long hours and marginal benefits. The walkout was triggered after Housing Works CEO Charles King began to harass workers seeking to organize a union and a complaint was filed with the National Labor Relations Board.

The strike involves workers at 35 Housing Works locations across Queens, Manhattan and Brooklyn. Workers, who are only paid on average \$16 an hour and can work up to 16 hours a day and six day weeks, suffer from a 30 percent employee turnover rate due to burnout on the job.

Workers are also forced to use accrued vacation to cover national holidays when the organization closes its offices. “Housing Works mission should not come at the expense of my well being and the well-being of my coworkers”, striking worker Rebecca Mitnik told Patch.com.



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