

## Strike looms at Canadian National Railway

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

19 November 2019

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Some 3,000 workers at Canadian National Railway (CN) were set to strike Tuesday after negotiations between the Teamsters and management hit an apparent impasse. Management has responded with a call for binding arbitration. Meanwhile the office of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau sent Labor Minister Patty Hajdu and Transportation Minister Marc Garneau to meet union and management officials in Montreal.

Teamsters officials indicated a strike was a last resort and pleaded with management to come to a compromise they could sell to the membership. Major outstanding issues for the conductors, trainpersons and yard workers are management demands for longer hours and new policies making it more difficult for workers to take time off. Teamsters officials emphasized that the dispute was not over wages, indicating they plan to collaborate in the further lowering of workers' living standards.

For its part CN says it is planning to eliminate jobs of both management and hourly employees in the face of declining rail shipments related to a gathering economic downturn. A strike could have a broad economic impact as the CN system is critical for the moving of agricultural products for export. It also handles some petroleum shipments.

### Call for national strike and protest in Colombia against privatizations, labor and pension law changes and violence

An estimated 150 labor unions, social organizations, student, indigenous, and LGBT groups and others have called for a one-day national strike and protest march in

Bogotá on November 21. Several well-known entertainers have promised to participate as well.

The mobilizations will protest the policies of the right-wing government of Iván Duque: proposed labor and pension “reforms”; privatizations of state enterprises; attacks on workers’ rights and public education; minimal response to continuing violence against teachers, protesters, labor leaders and social activists and others.

The organizers sent a message to all participants to refrain from violence, but the demonstrations have experienced attacks by right-wing armed groups, provocateurs and police forces. Predictably, Duque, after meeting with representatives from two labor confederations, declared “respect for the constitutional right to peaceful protest” while he claimed to “roundly reject the use of violence and incitement to it as a mechanism of protest.”

### Strike by Colombian civil registry workers over labor insecurity, violations of rights ends

Workers for Colombia’s Notary and Registry Superintendency began an indefinite strike on October 29. The workers stopped work over several issues, including: the increasing use of temporary contract workers, a practice that spells job insecurity for full-time staff; and moves toward privatization in state-operated enterprises; violations of labor rights. Workers also complained of understaffing and supply shortages.

Around 2,400 employees went on strike, and nearly 200 civil registry offices were reported closed. However, Superintendency head Jorge Enrique Vélez García denied that services were seriously affected, since there are over 870 offices in the country. He also threatened to ask the government to declare the walkout illegal. In addition,

people in need of some services were urged to go online. Nonetheless, there was a significant reduction of transactions, especially in the real estate sector.

On November 16, the Labor Ministry announced that an agreement had been reached with Fedelonjas, the workers' union, and that they would return to their posts on November 18. Fedelonjas head Daniel Vásquez Franco did not mention any details apart from saying that the "Superintendent has shown an interest and disposition in achieving an effective and efficient modernization" of the system and expressed hope that "all will be resolved to the benefit of all the national economy."

### **Argentine taxi drivers repeat protest actions against Uber and Cabify**

The Taxi Drivers Syndicate (SPT) in Buenos Aires issued another call for protests against Uber, Cabify and other app-based ride services for November 14. It was the tenth protest called by the SPT against the "illegal transport" since the beginning of October. The protest announcement called for blockages of traffic at eight locations in the city from 10 am to noon.

Buenos Aires SPT head Omar Viviani repeated his denunciations that the services "violate the existing rules and are not subject to technical controls and enabling documentation," and declared the actions to be "in defense of sources of work and salaries and so that the possibility to maintain families with dignity exists."

He also mentioned that he had received a call from the government to open discussions and that they would meet this week.

### **Many Indiana schools to close as teachers rally Tuesday at state capitol**

Thousands of teachers are expected to rally in Indianapolis Tuesday to protest over wages and for more support for education. The protest is expected to impact classes across the state, with as many as 100 districts planning to close or switch to e-learning for the day.

The so-called Red for Ed rally is set to coincide with the state legislature's "Organization Day" when Senate and

House members will be at the Statehouse in advance of their 2020 session. Teachers unions called the protest over salaries as well as opposition to stricter teacher evaluation process and new professional development requirements. Among the demands being raised are for a statewide average \$60,000 teacher salary, still far lower than many states.

The unions are encouraging teachers and parents to deliver letters and postcards to legislators in support of more education funding. The aim is to divert teacher anger and militancy in the wake of a continuing movement by teachers against the decades long assault on public education.

### **Sonoma County California teachers ratify contract**

About 110 teachers and support staff in Sonoma County, California ended a three-day strike Friday after the union accepted a three-year contract. The deal reportedly include a 12 percent pay increase over three years with the pay increase in the final year contingent on the approval by voters of a property tax increase on the March 2020 ballot. The pay increase still leaves teachers well behind average educators salaries in California. Meanwhile, the district threatened to make unspecified cuts to offset its increased costs.

The wage increase will be offset by a five percent increase in health care costs, which would only go into effect if the tax increase passes. The strike had a significant impact, with 85 percent of students absent each day. The contract has to be ratified by teachers and the school board.



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