

5,000 Vancouver bus drivers set to strike

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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Canada

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A three-day strike by Coastal Mountain bus drivers and mechanics and SeaBus operators, all organized by Unifor, has been announced. The job action will take place Wednesday, Thursday and Friday of this week. The transit workers have been without a contract since March and have implemented a rotating overtime ban since November 1. The strike will be the first shutdown of the transit system in Vancouver since a bitter four-month strike in 2001. About half a million commuters per day use public transport in the region.

At issue in the dispute are wages and working conditions. Workers have demanded that their wages be commensurate with those of bus drivers in Toronto, Canada's largest city. Also under negotiation is break time scheduling. Currently drivers, due to traffic and other delays, may not receive their rightful scheduled time off the road. The maximum hourly wage for drivers stands at about \$32 per hour (CDN). Management has offered wage increases that would leave Vancouver workers \$3 per hour short of city drivers in Toronto.

Transit management has claimed that worker demands for a 9.6 percent wage increase over four years would leave a \$150 million shortfall in company budgets. However, they have preferred to gloss over the recent massive salary increases granted to corporate executives based on their own comparisons with Toronto management salaries. Coastal Mountain CEO Michael McDaniel accepted an 18 percent raise boosting his salary to \$372,513 per year. At TransLink, which oversees the entire area transit system, CEO Kevin Desmond accepted a 25 percent raise and now earns over \$517,000.

As bus drivers prepare for their strike, 900 Vancouver SkyTrain workers organized by the Canadian Union of Public Employees voted by 96.8 percent to strike should upcoming

negotiations fail to reach an agreement.

Latin America

Mexican university academic staff strike over unpaid salaries

Some 5,500 academic and administrative staff at the Autonomous University of Nayarit (UAN), Mexico went on strike November 20 to demand the payment of overdue salaries. The UAN Academic Personnel Syndicate (SPAUAN) called the strike on November 20 when UAN failed to pay for the first of its twice-a-month payments (quincenas) for November. UAN administration, which had already failed to pay for the second half of October, blames underfunding for a financial crisis at the university.

Not only current academic and support staff are affected by the non-payment, but retired UAN workers as well. Adding the unpaid salaries to 550 million pesos (US\$28 million) of wages owed to debts from 2018 and 2019, as well as lack of deposits into retirement, housing, health and other benefit accounts brings the total debt to somewhere between 2 and 5 billion pesos (US\$103-258 million).

On November 21, the governor of Nayarit announced a four-point agreement between the government and UAN authorities. The governor listed the points: "1. Once the strike at the university is lifted, a process of review of the profound structural problems that generate the financial crisis should be initiated. 2. The necessary changes to give viability to the university should be undertaken; 3. When the changes to give viability exist, the government of Mexico provide the additional economic resources for the university; 4 the process of gratuity of education at UAN for students, with the aid of the government of Mexico, will begin."

None of these promises, conditioned on an end to the strike, would deliver a peso to the workers. However, on November 22, UAN announced that it would pay the second quincena for October. As of that date, PAUAN had not responded to the

announcement, and the workers remained on strike.

Costa Rican cabbies' union calls another protest of app-based rides services

Costa Rica's CI Taxi Alliance issued a call November 21 for drivers to hold protest action November 26 against the presence of Uber and other app-based ride services. The Alliance is a breakaway from the main taxi drivers' union, the UTC. It has organized other protest actions before, but has had little effect.

The cabbies, including formal (red car) drivers, airport drivers and special service carriers, were called to assemble in their vehicles in downtown San José and slow or obstruct traffic. The demands of the drivers include an end to the government's "permissive" attitude toward Uber and others, respect for legality and indemnification for the economic damage done to traditional drivers, who call themselves "real" taxi drivers. The Alliance claims that the losses for the taxistas amounts to over 20 million colones (US\$35,000).

Trinidadian "maxi taxi" drivers protest nonpayment of fares

Drivers of maxi taxi, private owner-operated minibuses in Port of Spain's City Gate transport hub disrupted their service briefly on the morning of November 22. The drivers, members of the Maxi Taxi Association, disrupted traffic in City Gate over infrastructure issues and nonpayment by the Education Ministry of money owed them for transporting school children.

The infrastructure issue mainly concerns the lack of road repairs, especially potholes, and uncleaned roadways. As for the delayed pay, about 10 million Trinidad dollars (US\$1.48 million) is owed to some 300 drivers. An Education Ministry spokesman claimed that it is processing invoices and that "we are working assiduously to effect payments to the service providers," though they may not get them until this week.

Rotating strike by Argentine metro workers over asbestos in coaches

The Subte and Premetro Workers Association of Buenos Aires (AGTSyP), which represents workers in the city's subways, called for a rotating strike November 20 to demand that studies related to the effects of the presence of asbestos on

workers in the underground system's cars be carried out more thoroughly and the results be made public. Three lines were opened three hours later than usual that morning and three others, as well as Premetro, the only aboveground line, were closed two hours early that night.

AGTSyP demands that both the state-owned Buenos Aires Underground (Sbase) system and the private concessionaire Metrovías stop dragging their feet on clinical studies of the employees and publication of their findings. So far, 180 workers for the northern B Line have been evaluated and at least 13 have been diagnosed with pleural plaques, the most common lung disease related to exposure to asbestos.

Sbase purchased 36 cars from Metro de Madrid in 2011 and 2012. In 2013 it bought another three from Japan. Asbestos was discovered in the cars' electrical components. Two Metro de Madrid workers so far have died from exposure to asbestos.

AGTSyP is calling for the state Workplace Risk Insurance studies on workers for all the lines in the system to be expanded and published and for "a concrete date on which they are going to buy the new fleet, starting with Line B." The union announced that it has brought a lawsuit before the Buenos Aires courts.

United States

Pennsylvania law requires immigration checks

A new law enacted by the state of Pennsylvania at the behest of building trades unions now requires all construction companies in the state to run immigration checks on workers through the federal E-Verify.

Immigrant rights advocates say the new law will hurt all workers by making employers less likely to hire immigrants and would intensify the "culture of fear" being promoted by the Trump administration. The passage of the law comes at time of a shortage of construction workers.

The unions' support for the bill underscores their reactionary nationalist orientation, aimed at pitting American workers against immigrant workers. Such divide and conquer tactics serve to undermine any struggle for the defense of wages and working conditions for immigrant and native-born workers alike.



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