

Ontario teachers plan new work stoppage

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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After conducting a province-wide one-day strike last week, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation (OSSTF) designated nine school boards to conduct a second one-day strike on December 11. Included in the list is the Toronto district.

Over 60,000 Ontario public high school teachers and school support staff conducted the first province-wide teachers' strike in over two decades. The strike, directed against a sweeping assault on public education by Ontario's Doug Ford-led Conservative government, won widespread support from parents and students.

The OSSTF teachers had, thus far, been implementing a limited "administrative" work-to-rule action. Eighty-one thousand public elementary school teachers have also begun a similar work-to-rule campaign.

Teachers in the Ontario English Catholic elementary and high school system filed with the government conciliator a "no board report," which will place the 45,000 teachers in a legal strike position 17 days after the report is processed. The report comes as a result of an impasse in a months long negotiating period.

Last month Catholic teachers voted by 97 percent for strike action should their contract dispute with the Ontario government over class sizes, job security, working conditions and wages not be resolved.

Teachers in both the Catholic and public school systems are fighting against the right-wing Conservative government of premier Doug Ford's attempt to impose significant cuts on the province's education system that would result in more layoffs, more onerous working conditions, increased class sizes and a wage rise below the rate of inflation.

One-day strike by Argentine dairy products workers over wage offer

In a December 5 base assembly, members of the Dairy Industry Workers Association of Argentina (Atilra) voted unanimously to reject the latest wage "update" offer by the Dairy Industry Center (CIL) and hold a "24-hour total stoppage of activities" on December 7.

CIL issued a statement claiming that its negotiators "showed, from the beginning of the negotiations, the best predisposition to dialogue" and "with the greatest effort and responsibility, a proposal that implies a salary recomposition of 61 percent between April 2019 and March 2020 with the payment of 5,000 pesos [US\$83.65]" in accord with the

agreement reached in August.

However, Atilra sources countered that "since the cost of dairy products has risen more than 100 percent in the basic [food] basket, inflation [for 2019] will close out more than 50 percent and the industry's proposal is 23 percent," necessitating the strike action as the first stage of a "struggle plan" that will continue until wages catch up with inflation.

Unannounced strike by airline personnel over salaries ended with arbitration decree

Cabin and ground crew personnel at Chile-based Latam Airlines affiliates in Argentina began a surprise strike in the early morning on December 6 to press their salary demands. The walkout was called by the Aerocommercial Enterprises Personnel Union (UPSA) and the Aeronautic Personnel Association (APA).

The unions claim that inflation had climbed 55 percent in the last year and that they had proposed incremental increases to Latam to compensate for their eroding purchasing power. Latam refused to sit down to talks, so "having exhausted all requests for dialogue," the unions called the strike.

About three dozen flights at the Ezeiza and Aeroparque airports in Buenos Aires were canceled by noon, at which time the Labor Secretariat decreed obligatory conciliation, i.e., binding arbitration, which demands that UPSA and APA call off strike action for 15 days while tripartite negotiations take place. By 4:00 the workers were back on the job.

Guyanese municipal workers strike to demand increased wages and benefits

Workers for the Linden Mayor and Town Council (LMTC) in Guyana walked off the job last week over monetary demands. Employees in the Constabulary, Solid Waste and Engineering departments were among the strikers.

The principal demand of the workers, members of the Guyana Labour Union (GLU), is for their pay to be raised to at least the legal minimum wage. Another complaint of workers is that the LMTC has not been making monthly contributions to the National Insurance Scheme (NIS), which includes a number of benefits like sickness, old age, injury, maternity and funeral expenses. One worker told the

Guyana Chronicle that her account has not received contributions for four years. The LMTC workers are demanding that all the retroactive payments be made good.

The Linden mayor claims that the LMTC does not have enough money to pay the wages and contributions, since it inherited a debt of 200 million Guyanese dollars (US\$952,500). In addition, 60 percent of those registered to pay rates and taxes are in arrears for over 9 million Guyanese dollars (US\$43,000). The LMTC has asked the national government to bail it out.

Three meetings between GLU and LMTC representatives have been held; according to Carvil Duncan, GLU general secretary, they were all “a waste of time.” The Department of Labour “advised” the union to order workers to end the strike, but they did not.

Guyanese sugar workers strike for pay raise

Workers at three sugar estates in Guyana—Albion, Blairmont and Uitvulgt—went on strike December 3. The workers, members of the GAWU and NAACIE unions, picketed outside the Ministry of the Presidency to ask the government to approve a pay raise by the state-owned Guyana Sugar Corporation, commonly known as GuySuCo.

The workers have not had a raise in four years, with the GuySuCo board of directors and government officials each claiming that approval of a raise is the responsibility of the other. Meanwhile, the workers and their families continue to lose ground to inflation.

The strike is the latest of several actions that the workers have carried out this year. They have held vigils and protests and have signed a petition to the president, who has not responded.

Trinidad and Tobago: Housing maintenance workers protest over pay

Around 60 employees of Trinidad and Tobago’s Housing Development Corporation (HDC) picketed the HDC’s office in South Quay on December 4. The protesters were housing maintenance workers demanding that the agency’s officials meet with National Union of Government and Federated Workers (NUGFW) reps to settle outstanding issues in salary negotiations.

Some of the pickets held signs declaring, “2012 salary but paying 2019 bills,” referring to the last time the workers have had a raise. Since then, inflation has eaten away at their living standards. NUGFW president James Lambert, who was at the demonstration, told the protesters, “The management of HDC is very disrespectful as it relates to the plight of the workers.” He added that the union has sent letters to management but has had no response.

In addition to the poor pay, the workers, who perform routine maintenance as well as repairs on government-subsidized housing, often lack the tools and materials to do their job effectively.

Lambert did not mention the possibility of a strike, instead saying, “We will start with a small amount today and, as the time goes by, we will do it until we get some sort of resolutions. What is left for the union to do is to take them to the court.”

California sanitation workers march to demand better wages and benefits

Over 100 sanitation workers and their supporters held a protest march in Beverly Hills, California, November 29 to protest low wages and the high cost of healthcare. Workers charge Athens Environmental Services pays drivers \$18 an hour and helpers a mere \$13, compared to other waste management companies that pay \$25 an hour and \$18 an hour, respectively.

Athens Environmental Services is also being investigated by the National Labor Relations Board on charges it disciplines and fires workers for union activity. The company and Teamsters Local 369, which represents about 20 workers, have been in negotiations for the past two years.

Airline catering workers protest low pay, high cost of benefits at 18 airports

Airline catering workers and their supporters held protests and sit-ins at 18 airports across the country November 26 as the National Mediation Board held talks with Unite Here and the two largest international catering subcontractors—LSG Sky Chefs and Gate Gourmet. Catering workers labor under poverty wages with one in four making less than \$12 an hour and many who opt out of their current healthcare plans, unable to pay the \$500 monthly premiums.

The protests were not declared a strike, as the National Mediation Board has not released the union from bargaining, a legal constriction aimed at frustrating and wearing down workers. In June, 11,000 Unite Here Local 11 catering workers voted at 33 airports to strike.



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