

## Ontario Teachers plan third one-day strike; Mexican housing agency workers strike

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

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The World Socialist Web Site invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

### Ontario teachers plan third one-day strike

High school teachers at ten district school boards across the province will stage another partial one-day strike this Wednesday against the right-wing Ontario government's draconian concession contract demands and education policies. The job action comes on the heels of a partial one-day strike last week that involved nine other district boards. On December 4 all 60,000 provincial teachers organized in the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation (OSSTF) struck to begin a campaign of strike actions launched by the union.

The strike campaign, which began with the first province-wide full walkout by Ontario high school teachers in 22 years, is indicative of teachers' determination to resist increased class sizes, the slashing of support staff, the introduction of mandatory e-learning courses as well as real wage cuts. In a November vote, the teachers, who have been working without a contract since August 31, voted 95.5 percent in favour of strike action.

OSSTF President Harvey Bischof announced last week that the union and the government will re-start negotiations through a mediator for a two-day period prior to the Wednesday strike and has left open the possibility that should sufficient progress be made, the planned job action may be withdrawn.

In a related development, the OSSTF and three other teacher unions (representing elementary, Catholic and French school members) who are also moving toward strike positions, announced last week that they will launch a challenge to the Conservative government's wage suppression legislation in court. The government of Premier Doug Ford has passed legislation limiting all provincial public sector workers to a one percent per year wage rise. The OSSTF is seeking a two percent per year wage rise to keep pace with inflation. The teachers' court challenge stipulates that the government's wage cap legislation is a violation of their constitutional right to free and unhindered collective bargaining.

### Strike by British Columbia forestry workers in its sixth month

More than 3,000 coastal forestry workers in British Columbia, employed by Western Forest Products, remain on strike after walking out July 1 when contract talks between the company and the United Steelworkers

Workers (USW) union broke down. Renewed bargaining in November failed to reach a settlement. Last week Western Forest Products CEO Don Demens' request that the New Democratic Party government intervene in the dispute was rejected by Premier John Horgan.

The company is justifying its demand for concessions in disability benefits, shift flexibility and job security by pointing to a weaker market in the US due to bad weather and slower than usual construction, which has led to a 50 percent decline in lumber prices over the last year. A company demand for a draconian restructuring of the pension program was withdrawn during the November talks.

Workers voted overwhelmingly by 98 percent to strike last June after management rejected union proposals during talks. The company is Vancouver Island's largest forestry business, with sales of almost C\$1.2 billion, net income of C\$69.2 million, and a total liquidity of C\$250.4 million for 2018. The USW is also trying to starve the strikers into submission. While the union claims to have a C\$500 million strike fund, it began doling out a miserly C\$20 a day in strike pay in late July.

### Mexican housing agency workers strike for more personnel, equipment

Workers at the Institute of the National Housing Fund for Workers (INFONAVIT) mortgage financing agency headquarters in Mexico City struck December 13 to protest the policies carried out under its current director. The SNTINFONAVIT union accused the director, Carlos Martínez Velázquez, of using contract workers instead of hiring full-time workers, causing the deterioration of services and threatening the jobs of its employees.

INFONAVIT has "over 5 million mortgages on its books and a new one added every 53 seconds," according to Wikipedia. It is financed by a 5 percent charge on the salaries of all formal workers.

Demonstrations at INFONAVIT offices nationwide took place, with protesters denouncing shortages of qualified personnel and the lack of equipment, especially computers, needed to carry out their duties. Another demand is for reliable information systems.

Several hundred protesters at the Mexico City headquarters were told by SNTINFONAVIT secretary general Rafael Riva Palacio that the protests would continue until their demands were met.

### El Salvador: University workers and students protest for larger budget

Traffic along major streets near the University of El Salvador (UES) was snarled by protests by the institution's workers and students December 10 as they gathered for a march to the Legislative Assembly to demand a bigger budget for the university.

Last October, the UES rector announced that there would be no increase in the university's budget. This year the UES budget was US\$102.9 million (Salvadoran currency was "dollarized" in 2001), of which \$91.7 million comes from the national government.

The SETUES university union issued a statement denouncing the government's broken promise to increase the UES budget in 2020. They noted that the government had budgeted \$25 million "for the Army and state propaganda."

The SETUES communiqué added: "The university community demands a \$20 million increase to cover necessities like total gratuity for education, investment in infrastructure and technology, university pay scale and labor commitments such as the payment of pensions."

### **Puerto Rican sewer system workers strike for 24 hours over privatization plans**

Members of the Independent Authentic Union (UIA) of Puerto Rico's Aqueduct and Sewer System Authority (AAA) struck and marched to La Fortaleza, the governor's mansion in San Juan, December 10. The workers carried out the action to protest against privatization of the public corporation.

Upon arrival, the marchers encountered fences and a deployment of police. According to an El Vocero report, "The directors of the UIA were invited to a meeting at Fortaleza, but not with Governor Wanda Vázquez, but with one of her advisors." During the meeting, the officials insisted on meeting with the governor, but without success.

The UIA is opposed to the automation of meters and some customer services, which they believe will lead to privatization of the AAA.

### **Uruguayan fuel workers strike for one day over sanctioning of supervisor**

Workers at the ANCAP La Tablada combustibles distribution plant in Montevideo, Uruguay walked off the job December 12 upon hearing of an unjust sanction of a supervisor. ANCAP is a state-owned combustibles, alcohol and Portland cement production and distribution company.

According to the workers' union, FANCAP, a fuel truck arrived at 2:00 that morning. The driver had been on the road for over 15 hours, so the supervisor held up the discharge and refilling of the truck until 6:00 while the former rested. The plant manager suspended the supervisor for five days, prompting an assembly of the workers, who decided to strike for the rest of the workday, starting at 11:00am.

FANCAP president Gerardo Rodríguez told El País reporters that "this situation has happened on other occasions" without the punishment or "any indication that they shouldn't proceed in this form." The union denounced the manager's action as harassment and persecution, noting that relations between ANCAP and FANCAP have become "each time colder."

ANCAP management gave no indication of willingness to discuss the issue. In a December 12 assembly, the workers voted for a 24-hour strike on the 16th. The union also resolved to "entrust the juridical area to denounce the plant manager" before the Labor Ministry.

### **Argentine interurban transport workers strike for 24 hours over salary negotiations**

The Automotive Transport Industry Workers Association (Aoita) of Córdoba, the capital of the central Argentine province of the same name, called a strike for December 13 after tripartite negotiations fell through. The bargaining sessions—with representatives of the Fetap employers association and the Transport Secretariat—failed to produce an adequate agreement on a wage hike to counteract inflation.

According to Aoita chief Emiliano Gramajo, the negotiations have been going on for six months. Fetap's last offer of 25 percent in three installments—December (9 percent), January (9 percent), and February (7 percent)—was rejected as insufficient and bringing the call for the one-day walkout.

Gramajo claimed 100 percent adherence to the strike and added "we're hoping for a call from the empresarios and the government entity."

### **California gas workers strike over victimizations**

Workers at six Airgas facilities in California went on strike beginning December 10 over what Teamsters Local 848 called "violations of federal laws that protect workers' rights." The strike began at sites in Pomona and San Diego and the following day pickets were set up at facilities in Burbank, Lynwood and Ventura, California. According to the Teamsters, Airgas fired four workers after a similar unfair labor practices strike back in October at four Airgas locations in California.

Airgas was one of the largest U.S. suppliers of industrial and medical gases when it purchased in 2015 by the French company Air Liquide, which is the largest global supplier of industrial gases. Airgas employs 18,000 workers in the United States and the Teamsters have been targeting facilities in California and New England with short strikes while peddling the false illusion that the National Labor Relations Board will facilitate the achievement of better wages and working conditions.

In the current strike, the Teamsters have gone one better, fostering illusions that the French government under President Emmanuel Macron will aid their struggle, oblivious to the ongoing attacks by the Macron government against the yellow vest movement and the working class in general. "Under France's Corporate Vigilance Law, Air Liquide could be sanctioned for its human rights violations in America," the union claimed.

### **Workers strike Fort Wayne, Indiana grocery warehouse distributor**

The Teamsters union called an unfair labor practices strike December 12 against Fort Wayne United Natural Foods, Inc. (UNFI), in Indiana. A Teamsters press release indicated the company was exhibiting "abusive behavior" towards the 158 drivers, warehouse workers and maintenance crew while UNFI charged the strike was "illegal" and "reckless".

The old agreement expired back on September 14 and the two sides have been negotiating for months. UNFI became the second largest grocery wholesaler in North America after acquiring SuperValu. Amazon's Whole Foods is now one of its largest customers, accounting for 21 percent of its total revenue.

Previously it had been the largest wholesale distributor to natural and organic retailers in the United States and Canada and highly resistant to unionization. The merger with SuperValu has brought 5,000 members of the Teamsters into its logistics operations.



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