

# Ontario teachers broaden strike actions; Brazilian oil 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.

and the creation of a bank to extend credit to workers.

### Mexican teachers work under protest over unpaid wages

Teachers at the Ángel Martínez Villareal Técnica 31 Secondary School in Nadadores, Coahuila, Mexico have been working under protest since January 15. At least five of the teachers have been working since September without being paid. The teachers are members of the National Education Workers Syndicate (SNTE), Section 5.

SNTE Section 5 placed a banner near the entrance to the school saying, “We are laboring under protest because of the failure on the part of the Public Education Secretariat [SEP] to pay our colleagues.” According to Section 5 head Victor Méndez, the SEP has 45 days to resolve the issue, but “since September there is no response, the judgment comes from Mexico City, in a situation that applies at the national level.”

Méndez claimed that “we cannot take more drastic measures like close the school, because that would be affecting the students... All we want to do is expose the situation and that the community understands.”

### Salvadoran public and private sector workers protest pension system

Several hundred workers in public and private sector unions in El Salvador joined a march to the Legislative Assembly in the capital San Salvador on January 31. The mobilization was called to protest changes to the nation’s Pension Savings System (SAP) Law and advocate the establishment of a new system without the participation of the Pension Fund Administrators (AFP). The protesters are part of the “No + AFP” (No More AFP) organization.

No + AFP is calling for the “creation of a national system of welfare and social security that breaks totally with the SAP Law that gave life to the AFP,” Roswal Solórsorno, head of the SITTOJ judicial worker, told the crowd. No + AFP demands the nationalization of the system.

According to Solórsorno, the categorization of the present system is highly unjust, with some retirees receiving up to 120 percent of their pay while the majority get around 30 percent. No + AFP is calling for an 80 percent minimum payment for all retired workers. It also proposes the creation of a National Autonomous Social Security Institute (INAP), described in a kaosenlared report as “a tripartite entity with majority participation of work

ers, private enterprise and government that will be charged with administering the workers’ funds.” The unions are also calling for the integration of housing funds, social security and pensions into the INAP,

### Honduran nurses’ union suspends strike over salaries, labor rights

The Auxiliary Nurses Association of Honduras (Aneeah), which covers 5,800 nurses nationwide, called a strike January 27 in opposition to the salary “readjustment” proposed by the Health Secretariat (Sesal) for the years 2020 and 2021. Aneeah accused the government of ignoring its proposals at meetings and criticized its lack of good faith in negotiations.

The monthly salary raises demanded by Aneeah would be 1,100 lempiras (US\$44) in 2020 and 900 lempiras (US\$36) in 2021. The union also slammed Sesal for violations of labor rights and harassment of auxiliary nurses. The government’s readjustment was nonetheless approved by the president and put into effect.

When Aneeah called the strike, the Health Secretariat, employing rhetoric about “guaranteeing health services to those who need them,” threatened to employ 3,000 contract nurses as scabs and carry out mass firings. Meetings between Aneeah and Sesal continued while the strike was in effect.

On January 30, Aneeah and the government announced a “preliminary agreement.” The strike was suspended while negotiations with Sesal and the National Human Rights Commission continue. Aneeah director Luis Cerrato promised to inform members of developments in the ongoing meetings, but no details have been released yet.

### Brazilian oil workers strike over plant closure, firings

Workers at Brazil’s state-run Petrobras oil company went on indefinite strike February 1 to protest its closure of a fertilizer plant, a move that entailed the firing of nearly 400 workers. The Federation of Oil Workers (FUP) called for the walkout in nine states.

The shutdown of the plant is one of a number of moves in reaction to the privatization drive by the Bolsonaro administration, which will continue to impact heavily upon the working class.

FUP declared at the beginning that it would not call for disruptions in fuel supplies. Petrobras claims that the strike is illegal, and that operations have been unaffected.

### Protests, and casualties, continue in Chile

Protests against the policies of the Piñera government in Chile have continued, and the number of casualties has grown apace.

On January 28, a football fan (known as an “hinja”) was run over by a truck driven by a member of the Carabineros national police and died from his injuries. A group of hincas joined a massive demonstration in Santiago January 31 and protested his killing, denouncing the nation’s president with the chant, “Piñera, same as Pinochet.” In a confrontation with the police, one man was struck by a projectile and was sent to the hospital, where he died two days later.

Supermarkets, where prices for basic foodstuffs continue to rise, have been broken into, looted and set aflame. In one such incident, firefighters found a man who died of carbon monoxide poisoning. So far, at least 20 people have died, while over 2,500 have been wounded. Carabineros and other repressive forces have used water cannons, armored vehicles, tear gas, rubber bullets and live ammunition against protesters, who have fought back and injured dozens of police.

Piñera’s attempts to quell the protests have included, in addition to repression, inducements like suspending the October bus fare hikes—which sparked the first protests—raising pensions and promising a plebiscite over rewriting the Pinochet-era constitution, but many protesters are skeptical. They see no relief from inequality, the rising cost of living, repression and other depredations of capitalism under the current regime, new constitution or no. More protests are planned for the remainder of February and March.

### **Kansas City high school students walk out on strike in defense of teachers**

Hundreds of high school students in the Shawnee Mission school district of Kansas City, Kansas walked out on strike January 31 to support their teachers’ demand for smaller class sizes. The students marched onto the school’s football field chanting that the district’s superintendent, Mike Fulton, should be fired.

One day earlier, the school board voted to impose a unilateral contract that undercut the demand for hiring new teachers to ease class sizes. Kansas law bars teachers from striking and the board’s actions left educators with only three choices: accept the agreement, continue working under the old agreement, or resign.

In the aftermath of the 2008-2009 banking crisis, the school district asked teachers to agree to increase their daily class load from five hours to six. Thinking it would be a temporary measure, teachers agreed. But more than a decade later, the school board has refused to accept any alterations and eight months of contract talks finally reached an impasse.

At a teacher protest back in November, middle school teacher Heather Mayfield told the Kansas City Star, “It’s not about money... I don’t have time to plan. I don’t have time to give my students the attention they need. To spend one-on-one time with all of my 160 to 175 students, that would be hours and hours of my time to provide adequate feedback to each student.”

### **New Jersey warehouse workers strike against IKEA**

Warehouse workers at IKEA’s distribution center in Westampton, New Jersey began picketing January 20 after voting down the Netherlands-based company’s last, best and final offer two days earlier. The 187 members of the International Association of Machinists are demanding

higher pay and oppose the slow incremental wage escalators that require workers to work more than 15 years to reach the highest wage category.

Currently, new hires make a meager \$13.35 an hour starting wage, which is even less than the \$15 that Amazon pays at its new fulfillment center in nearby Burlington City. Workers also want a hike in the pay maximum of \$24.46 an hour.

IKEA also wants to shred contract language that requires them to fill new positions with bargaining unit members within 30 days of the job vacancy. The company instead wants the right to use temporary workers to fill job vacancies.

The Westampton facility was IKEA’s first distribution center in the United States and supplies its operations in the eastern USA. IKEA is the world’s largest furniture retailer with operations in 52 countries and its founder, Swedish-born Ingvar Kamprad, was ranked the eighth richest person in the world in 2018.

### **Ontario teachers broaden strike actions**

A one-day province-wide strike by 83,000 members of the Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario (ETFO) is set for February 6. The all-out action will be supplemented this week by on-going regional walkouts that have been rotating across the province for several weeks. ETFO returned briefly to the bargaining table with negotiators for the right-wing Conservative government but talks again broke down quickly.

In addition, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation, comprised of 60,000 members, continues its rotating strike action on February 4, targeting a dozen regional school boards. That same day, 45,000 members of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers’ Association will hold their second one-day province-wide strike. The fourth union in the public education system—the French language teachers—has held a strike vote garnering 97 percent support from the membership. The 12,000 teachers are currently engaged in a work-to-rule campaign.

Overall, 200,000 teachers across the province, organized in four separate unions, are taking job actions against the government’s drive to slash education budgets. Proposed government cuts would result in increased class sizes, the slashing of support staff jobs, the introduction of mandatory e-learning courses in the high schools as well as real wage cuts.

### **Montreal airport refuelers end one-month strike**

About 100 refueling personnel, mechanics, dispatchers and maintenance staff organized by the International Association of Machinists voted to accept a new three year contract that largely reflected Swissport management’s initial December offer. Due to incessant “contract flipping” by various service companies that bid on the airport contracts, wages and benefits are continually undermined as new companies take over bargaining rights.

The workers at Pierre-Elliott Trudeau and Mirabel airports—the two major air-hubs in Montreal—went on strike December 31 demanding a wage increase and less onerous shift scheduling. Currently, many workers earn a meager \$16 (CDN) per hour, barely enough to make basic ends meet in the city.

Swissport, the lone supplier of fuel to the two airports, used management personnel and scabs to drastically reduce the effectiveness of the strike. The workers, despite anti-scab provisions in Quebec’s labour

laws, fall under the jurisdiction of the federal government, which provides no similar protections in the Canada Labour Code.



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