

Strike by Mexican Autonomous University staff in Oaxaca

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Mexican university workers strike over pay, retirement and other issues

Workers at the Benito Juárez Autonomous University at Oaxaca (UABJO) began a strike February 1 over the administration's insufficient response to demands by their union, the UABJO Workers and Employees Syndicate (STEUABJO). Among the issues that STEUABJO has broached are a 20 percent pay increase, tabulation of salaries, contract violations, status of union vis-à-vis nonunion employees, authorization of retirement and payment of overdue wages dating back to 2018. The strike involves about 2,500 workers and some 25,000 preparatory, undergraduate and graduate students have been affected. The UABJO rector claims that the resources do not exist for a 20 percent raise. After a week of the strike, STEUABJO and the administration set up a joint commission to discuss the issues. Proposals will be presented for analysis at general assemblies. Meanwhile, the administration has made an appeal to the Local Conciliation and Arbitration Board to have the strike declared nonexistent and illegal.

Argentine interurban transport drivers strike for delivery of wages

Members of the Automotor Transport Industry Workers Association (Aoita) in Argentina's northern inland Córdoba province went on strike beginning midnight February 7. The drivers stopped work to press the businesses in the Transport Enterprises Federation (Fetap) to pay in full all wages owed. Earlier, Fetap had claimed that they were able to pay the wages fully and on time, but said that they were in the process of depositing them. This was not the first delay in drivers' wages, which are partly funded with a government subsidy. Aoita head Gustavo Mira said that they receive communications about the delays from Fetap regularly and that the "extortion that we live through every month must stop, we are not going to consent, nor tolerate that they violate our rights." Some businesses have made partial and full payments, but Aoita said that the workers would go back to work at each enterprise when the full wages were in every worker's account. Meanwhile, tripartite talks took place at the

provincial Labor Ministry office while the stoppage was in effect.

Guyanese sugar workers protest nonfulfillment of promised raise

Workers from three sugar estates—Uitvlugt, Blairmont and Albion—that are run by the state-owned Guyana Sugar Corporation, held another in a series of protests outside the President's office in the nation's capital Georgetown February 4. The protesters converged there to repeat their demand that they be given the raise promised in 2015, when the AFC/APNU (A Force For Change/A Partnership for National Unity) coalition took office. Workers carried signs saying, "2014 wages with 2020 prices can't work," "Government shifting blame, end wage freeze now," "Mr. [President David] Granger, what happened to our petition?" and chanted, "Wage increase, no money, no work." Seepaul Narine, General Secretary of the Guyana Agricultural and General Workers Union (GAWU), which had supported the election of the "left" AFC/APNU, provided some figures to reporters regarding the crunch faced by the sugar workers: inflation that has risen 18 percent since the last raise in 2014 while wages have remained at 2040 Guyanese dollars (US\$9.79) per day; water bills increasing from 742 to 1,950 Guyanese dollars (US\$3.56 to 9.36); and public transportation fares rising 25 percent. These conditions, "coupled with disregarding of longstanding benefits, have caused the workers' lot to deteriorate," he summarized. "Narine said GAWU being aware of what is occurring at this time must admit that it has little hope for improved performance in the upcoming crop," reported the Guyana Chronicle. He blamed the "procrastination" of the administration for leaving the sugar industries "hamstrung."

Venezuelan electrical workers protest wages, elimination of benefits

Workers for the state power firm Corpoelec in Barquisimeto, northwestern Venezuela, held a protest February 4 against low wages and the elimination of benefits that had been framed in the collective contract. The protesters held picket signs on a main street and, though they did not obstruct traffic, got the attention of drivers. Union officials said that they would maintain the protests and call for actions at the national level. "They are soliciting the company authorities to listen to them and elevate their pleas to the national government representatives," reported laprensalar.com.

Protest in Bermuda opposes healthcare system overhaul

Several hundred Bermudans held a protest at a park in Hamilton, the capital of Bermuda, on February 7. The protest, organized by a group called Patients 1st, was called to voice opposition to a wholesale overhaul of the island's healthcare system. Speakers included doctors, dentists and the director of a family intervention center. The main criticisms were directed at the government's push for a single-payer scheme that, one dentist put it, "not only doesn't help to make us healthier, but also takes away our choices and carries the potential of limiting access to healthcare that people may need." She added that she had backed healthcare reform, but "felt 'bullied' into a healthcare system that focused more on money than its patients," according to a Royal Gazette report. A doctor told reporters that under the new system, the 10 percent of the population that has no coverage would not be helped. Another doctor said, "Most unified healthcare plans have preventive care and emergency care, nothing more. All other procedures are paid out of pocket by patients, or through expensive supplemental insurance. This type of system requires large sums of money to fund to success, which means heavy taxation." While the medical professionals complained of not being consulted regarding the new scheme, there was no reporting on the actual experiences and opinions of patients and their families in their own words. A health ministry spokesperson, however, claimed to be pleased by broad support for the proposals, and said that the government "is committed to achieving access to healthcare for all and bringing down the costs of healthcare in Bermuda, which are unsustainable."

United States

Illinois Navistar workers on strike as company unveils job cuts and buyout

Some 85 workers at a Navistar plant in Joliet, Illinois walked out on strike February 3 over wages, benefits and working conditions. According to United Steelworkers (USW) District 7 director Mike Millsap, Navistar management has proposed a new contract that will deny workers a wage increase for as many as 12 years. Millsap, in a press release last week, begged Navistar to settle the contract. But Navistar has announced it will slash jobs company-wide by 10 percent, including those of workers at the Escobedo, Mexico plant. Meanwhile, Navistar is currently entertaining a \$2.9 billion buyout by Volkswagen. Volkswagen's move to establish operations in the North American heavy-truck market, which is considered the most lucrative in the world, comes at a time when business journals are predicting a contraction in the market. Among the investors in Navistar contemplating the Volkswagen deal is Carl Icahn, who holds the third largest stake in the company. Given the coming jobs massacre being unveiled at Navistar, the USW is carrying out a typical betrayal by limiting a strike to the 85 workers at Joliet. Nothing was done to unit Navistar workers with the strikes of Mack and GM workers in the latter part of 2019.

Canada

Toronto city workers near possible strike or lockout

Municipal officials issued a 'No Board Report' last week after negotiations with the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 416 stalled. The union, organizing 5,000 outside employees including garbage collectors, parking officers and parks, recreation and housing workers, is facing city proposals to create two-tier job security provisions as a step towards privatization and the contracting out of jobs. In 2009, a bitter six-week strike in the city was defeated, opening the door to the eventual privatization of garbage collection in the west side of Toronto in 2011. Municipal authorities are now moving to extend that privatization, with its attendant wage and benefits cuts, throughout the city. The report starts the clock ticking on a possible strike or lockout that could begin as early as February 27. In the meantime, 20,000 Toronto inside workers, members of CUPE Local 79 have also reached a contract negotiation impasse and have voted to strike if no deal is reached at their bargaining table.

Faculty and librarians strike at New Brunswick's Mount Allison University

Classes have been suspended for 2,200 students as 200 full and part-time faculty members and librarians began a strike last week for a wage increase and improved job security protections, particularly for part-time employees. As in all other universities and colleges across the country, full-time teaching positions have steadily been reduced as more part-time workers are hired on inferior and precarious contracts. Similarly, the library staff has been cut by one-third over the past 15 years. The strike at Mount Allison is the second job action in six years.



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