

## British Columbia, Canada forestry workers betrayed

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

18 February 2020

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

### **Eight-month Vancouver Island forestry strike ends**

Three thousand forestry workers organized by the United Steelworkers, as well as independent contractors, ratified new five-year contracts last week after a bitter eight-month strike on Canada's west coast. Central to the dispute was Western Forest Products' demand to impose a grueling alternate shift schedule, which raised important safety concerns amongst the workers, given the hazardous nature of their work. In the end, the contract imposed the alternate shift schedule but also contained vague language stipulating that "operational trials" of safer scheduling practices could be considered in the future.

The protracted strike caused significant hardship for the forestry workers and the communities in which they live. Bankruptcies both among strikers and small businesses spiked. Contractors were forced to sell their equipment to keep their families afloat.

### **Province-wide protests by Alberta nurses against Conservative healthcare cuts**

Nurses, doctors and other healthcare workers staged demonstrations at 33 locations in 25 Alberta cities and towns against the plans by the Premier Jason Kenney's Conservative government to reduce the provincial healthcare budget by up to \$2 billion. A recent government report recommended privatizations and a massive restructuring of healthcare delivery processes that would severely reduce the quality of healthcare in the province. A four-year wage freeze and job cuts have also been proposed.

### **Mexican worker training instructors strike over unjust deductions in pay**

Teachers and administrative workers at branches of the Veracruz Institute for Worker Training (Icatver) in Veracruz, Mexico began a strike February 10 to protest unjust deductions from their pay applied for income tax. The striking workers claim that the tax, known as the Impost Regarding Rent (ISR), is arbitrary and excessive. They also accused Icatver management of disparities in its application, implying either

ineptitude or favoritism.

The strike was called for 18 campuses throughout the state, involving about 600 teachers. It followed fruitless meetings between their union and the administration the week before in the Icatver office in Xalapa.

Throughout 2019, the administration made numerous errors in the calculation of salaries, causing hardship for the workers' families, who were hit with unexpected ISR assessments. The workers had previously marched and held one-hour stoppages but have received no response from the Labor and Social Security Secretariat. They are now calling on the state governor to intervene, sack the incompetent officials and replace them.

### **Strike by university workers in southern Mexico completes second week**

Striking workers at the Benito Juárez Autonomous University in Oaxaca (UABJO) were still on strike February 14 with the likelihood that the walkout would remain in force this week. The workers' union, STEUABJO, has sent a petition with a list of demands to the UABJO administration, but has not received a response.

The demands include a 20 percent salary hike; application of a system to tabulate pay scales and retirement payments; remedies of contract violations; the granting of 105 positions; payments of from two to eight months for 20, 25, 30 and 40 years of service; and the maintenance of the quality and efficiency program, estimated at costing 11,500,000 pesos (US\$620,000), among others.

### **Bahamian water and sewerage workers strike over contract**

Workers for the Water and Sewerage Corporation (WSC) in the Bahamas went on strike to press the corporation's president to sign an industrial agreement. The workers are members of two unions, the Water and Sewerage Management Union and the Bahamas Utilities Services and Allied Workers Union (BUSAWU).

Labour Minister Dion Foulkes, claiming that the strike "threatened the public interest," referred the dispute to the Industrial Tribunal and asserted that the workers had to return to work in the meantime. To further intimidate the workers, he sent armed Royal Bahamas Defence Force officers to WSC sites to guard against "acts of sabotage."

The workers nonetheless continued on strike. A lawyer for the BUSAWU contradicted Foulkes and called his order "pure, pure, absolute nonsense" while union president Dwayne Woods denounced the order as a "blatant attack on our civic rights as workers in this country."

Meanwhile, WSC president Adrian Gibson told reporters that the strike was illegal and that striking workers' pay would be docked. He also said that the corporation was applying for a court injunction to force them back to work.

The strike was called after repeated attempts to get Gibson to sign the industrial agreement presented by the unions failed. The unions are calling for the Gibson's firing for creating "chaos" and "discord" in the unions. They have appealed to the prime minister to settle the conflict.

### **Colombian teachers union calls for strike as another teacher is murdered, dozens more receive death threats**

Following the assassination of Sandra Mayerly Baquero, a teacher in the northeast Colombian province of Arauca on February 7, at least 40 other Colombian teachers have received death threats. In addition, a teacher and a representative of the Fecode educators' union survived an attempt on their lives in central Tolima province.

Killings of teachers, union representatives and social activists are frequent occurrences in Colombia. Fecode, noting that 1,579 teachers have been murdered in the last 60 years, slammed the inaction of the far-right government of President Iván Duque, a staunch US ally who has done nothing to curb the violence against teachers. At the same time, members of his Centro Democrático (CD) party—founded by death squad-connected former president Álvaro Uribe—advocate the destruction of Fecode, which one CD member called "that nest of communists that ruin the young people of Colombia."

On February 10, Fecode announced a strike later this month against the continued violence and said that it will appeal to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and other international bodies for support.

### **Former airplane factory workers in Argentina protest firings, demand rehiring**

Workers who were fired from the Argentine Airplane Factory (Fadema) in the province of Córdoba during the administration of Mauricio Macri (2015-2019) protested in front of the firm's headquarters on February 13. The mobilization was organized by the State Workers Association (ATE), which created a Commission of Survey and Reincorporation of State Employees Fired During the Macri Era (Corredma). Corredma's goal, as ATE secretary general Federico Giuliani told *La Nueva Mañana*, is to "recuperate the productive apparatus from dismantling."

At least 160 Fadema workers were fired without cause from 2016 to 2019. Former workers from other state industries in Córdoba—including the National Food Safety and Quality Service, the Subsecretariat of Family Agriculture, transport regulation, public health and social insurance agencies, the Labor Ministry, the National Civil Aviation Administration, the National Atomic Energy Commission, the National Communication Services, and the National Industrial Technology Institute—suffered job losses during that time-span as well.

The protest is a response to a recent national decree that delays the rehiring of fired workers for 180 days. ATE is asking for a meeting with Fadema management to negotiate rehiring. A union delegate said, "We have information that work is coming to the factory; therefore, we see the possibility of rehiring as positive."

### **New Orleans firefighters launch sickout over staffing levels**

New Orleans firefighters carried out a sick-out February 11 as the fire department's staffing level declined to its lowest point in its 128 years of existence. Some 47 of the 140 scheduled firefighters called in sick Tuesday leading the city's Fire Department Superintendent Tim McConnell to accuse Fighters Association Local 632 of "extortion" as the department was only able to man trucks with two people.

Local 632 union claims the department's call volume increased by 150 percent over the past 10 years while the firefighter rolls have dropped by 25 percent to 480. On February 10 the union called for a boycott to all department requests for overtime. Democratic Mayor LaToya Cantrell responded by canceling scheduled vacations for firefighters, igniting the sickout the following day.

### **Airline catering workers demonstrate after year of fruitless contract negotiations**

Airline catering workers held demonstrations at 15 airports throughout the United States February 15 to call attention to the poverty-level wages and benefits they receive. In San Francisco, about 200 workers took part and 31 were arrested for staging a civil disobedience action outside the American Airlines terminal. In Honolulu, Hawaii, dozens of workers protested outside of the United Air Lines departure terminal.

In 2018, Unite Here was able to unionize thousands of catering workers who are employed by subcontractors for the major airlines. But despite nearly a year of negotiations, there has been no breakthrough. New negotiations under the National Mediation Board will resume at the end of March.

A survey conducted by Unite Here of workers employed by LSG Sky Chefs at the Minneapolis-St. Paul International airport in Minnesota revealed 47 percent of the workers go without insurance. Delta Airlines is preparing to unveil, with great fanfare, a \$1.6 billion profit-sharing payout to employees. But subcontracted workers would not be eligible for the benefit.



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