

Brazilian postal workers take strike vote; Salt Lake City teachers rally at Utah capitol

## Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

### Brazilian Postal workers prepare strike

The National Federation of Post Office Workers (FENTECT), affiliated with the United Workers Central (CUT) is carrying out a strike authorization vote nationwide in anticipation to a potential strike Tuesday. Workers are protesting plans of the far-right Jair Bolsonaro administration to privatize the Brazilian Post Office (ECT), as well as a ruling by the Labor Courts that workers must pay 50 percent more for their health care plan. Last September, more than 120,000 workers affiliated with FENTECT and its competitor in the Maoist CTM union federation carried out the largest postal strike since 1985, which was isolated and shut down after a week by the trade union bureaucracy.

### Teachers refuse to begin classes in five Argentine provinces

Public schools in the provinces of Santa Fe, Santa Cruz, Chubut, Jujuy and Neuquén did not begin the academic year on Monday, with teachers striking to protest miserable wage offers by the provincial governments. In the province of Tucuman, the local trade unions cited a binding arbitration order issued by the governor to cancel the planned strike. The wage increases offered fall well below recent annual inflation, which reached 56 percent this February. For instance, the Santa Fe and Santa Cruz authorities offer a 3 percent and 17 percent increase respectively for the first semester of 2020. Such limited 48-hour actions, especially as classes begin, have been used traditionally by the trade unions to release steam and contain social unrest. Currently, the union bureaucracy across the country is struggling to suppress social opposition to the new

Alberto Fernandez administration and its Peronist allies, which include the governors of Santa Fe, Santa Cruz, Chubut and Tucumán.

### Renewed roadblocks and demonstrations across Chile

Hundreds of demonstrators gathered in the main boulevard in downtown Santiago on Friday afternoon. This follows a two-month respite after the mass demonstrations and strikes that began in October 2019 to protest social inequality. On Friday, the Sebastián Piñera government responded again with brutal repression, deploying the militarized Carabineros police to attack the protesters. Another protest on Sunday saw thousands of cyclists taking to the streets. Several protest groups, including the Social Unity Roundtable controlled by the Stalinist Communist Party and the pseudo-left Broad Front, called for a “Super Monday” on March 2. The day began with mass evasions of the subway turnstiles, barricades and demonstrations involving hundreds in Santiago, Antofagasta, Valparaiso and other towns. Piñera responded with more repression, threatening to re-impose a state of emergency. Other actions are being planned for the rest of the month, including a general strike on March 9 to commemorate the International Women’s Day.

### Notimex workers vote to continue one-week strike in Mexico

In a failed attempt to end the ongoing strike, the SutNotimex trade union carried out a vote on February 28, in which 81 against 60 voted in favor of continuing the strike, which began on February 20 to protest the firing of 241 of the 300 workers at Notimex, the official state news agency. Several of those fired had worked there for more than 30 years. The firings have been

carried out as part of the austerity plan being implemented by president Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who installed political ally Sanjuana Martínez as head of Notimex to cut down and reshuffle the workforce.

### **Striking taxi drivers protesting insecurity gassed by Honduran police**

Hundreds of taxi drivers struck Monday to protest the levels of insecurity they face after a recent report by the National Observatory of Violence placed them among the top homicide victims in general, with 26 murders of bus and taxi drivers so far this year. The strike, which included roadblocks, paralyzed the main streets of several cities, including Tegucigalpa, Choluteca, Intibucá, La Lima, San Pedro Sula and Siguatepeque. Police responded to the strike in Tegucigalpa by deploying tear gas and riot police against the taxi drivers.

### **Salt Lake City teachers rally to demand greater funding for Utah schools**

Nearly 2,000 Salt Lake City teachers walked out of school early Friday to rally at the Utah State capitol to demand increased funding for the state's public schools. Utah is currently last among the nation's 50 states, and the request by the Utah Education Association for a 6 percent increase would still find Utah in last place. One teacher has calculated that to bring Utah up to meet the national average for per pupil spending would require a 70 percent increase. Currently there are 95 positions open for staff and 392 unfilled substitute teacher positions. Another teacher reported that her request for time off to attend her mother's cancer appointments was denied – not because she didn't have sick days available, but because there was nobody available to fill her position. The Salt Lake City district school board has been wracked by controversy. The superintendent, no ally of teachers, was recently forced by a majority on the board to step down. Among the issues that enraged the majority was her refusal to fire 16 principals. One principal who did resign under pressure last fall was Ford White, who served as a US Marine Corps tank commander during the Gulf War. White has written, "my dream was to work in an inner city school somewhere in America." The action that is believed to have triggered the campaign against him was his decision to drive troubled students home that he discovered drinking on school grounds instead of calling police. Students launched a walkout in defense of White.

### **22,000 Toronto municipal inside workers threaten strike**

With negotiations reaching an impasse, 22,000 members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) are set to strike should no agreement be reached by mid-March. The union delivered a "No Board" report to the province on February 21, which begins a countdown to a legal strike or lockout position expected to be on or around March 18. Wages, parental leave and, most centrally, job security are the contract issues in dispute. In a related development, 5,000 CUPE outside workers in Toronto are voting this week on a tentative contract that limits job security provisions.

### **Scabs deployed in New Brunswick landfill lockout**

Twenty-three landfill waste management workers are in the third week of a lockout in the Northern New Brunswick town of Allardville. The workers, members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), have been without a contract since December 2017. The workers are resisting attempts by the Chaleur Regional Services Commission's (CRSC) to impose restrictions on unpaid leave, sick time and vacation days. One week into the lockout the CRSC, which is composed of mayors from the region's towns and villages, brought in scabs to perform the work of the union members. When workers repelled the scabs, the CRSC was granted a court injunction limiting picketing to only six, allowing scabs to easily breach picket lines. The use of scab labour has become an increasingly common occurrence in Canadian labour disputes. The CRSC has employed the services of AFIMAC, a global firm specializing in recruiting scab labour and security personnel. Earlier this month, the City of Fredericton—the capital of New Brunswick—contracted AFIMAC to recruit scab labour in a brief lockout of outside workers. In previous years, AFIMAC has also been deployed against strikes at the University of New Brunswick and at Halifax Water in nearby Nova Scotia.



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