

Ten thousand Quebec home daycare workers strike; Mexican professors demand back wages

Workers Struggles: The Americas

22 September 2020

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

Mexican professors strike for overdue benefits

Members of the State of Zacatecas Teachers and Administrative Personnel Syndicate (Supdacobaez) began a strike at the state's 43 Bachelors College campuses on September 17. The union called the walkout due to the nonpayment of four bonuses that were not deposited on September 15, their due date.

The unpaid bonuses, owed to 1,500 administrative and education workers, were for school equipment, academic achievement, retroactive food allowance and teaching material. Together they add up to over 11 million pesos (US\$520,300).

Union Secretary General Gerardo García Murillo told reporters that the college director acknowledged the debts but claimed that the college lacked the resources to pay them. She promised to pay some of the bonuses at the end of September and others on October 15. Supdacobaez rejected the offer.

Health care workers in Argentina protest, announce three-day strike over wage demands

Public health workers in southern Argentina's Chubut province held a vigil in front of the Health Ministry in the city of Rawson. The demonstrators, members of the SiSaP public health workers union, announced that health care workers will strike for 72 hours beginning Wednesday, September 23. The strike will include a protest gathering in front of the Government Building.

The workers held a three-day strike in August over the same issues, primarily overdue wages. According to one doctor at that protest, there are workers who "do not have sufficient money to pay for transportation and they're in a critical situation." The economics minister, according to workers, has "chatted" with them but done nothing to alleviate their plight.

Workers have not received their pay, as well as bonuses, since July. The workers' demand that the minister immediately meet with them and explain how he is going to arrange the payment of overdue wages and benefits.

Argentine public transport workers strike for 24 hours to demand unpaid wages

Public transport workers in the city of La Plata, capital of Argentina's Buenos Aires province, struck for one day on September 16 to demand the payment of salaries and bonuses for some 50 workers. The UTA transportation workers union called the strike against several lines run by Unión Platense S.A.

The company has not paid wages for August and September to the workers, who operate long-distance minibuses. Shortly after the coronavirus pandemic struck the region, the micros were taken out of operation, but in the last few months following relaxation of restrictions, public transportation has experienced a strong rise. Nonetheless, the workers and their families suffered greatly from the loss of income, and they are demanding at least partial payment for the period of inactivity.

The walkout had been planned for the week before, but the Transport Ministry intervened to order "dialogue" negotiations, which were fruitless. Transportation companies receive subsidies from the government, as well as funds from an emergency assistance program called ATP, that was established following the COVID-19 outbreak. Workers have found it difficult to get relief through the ATP.

UTA has denounced Unión Platense and threatened more militant action, but at the same time, dissident elements have criticized the union for its "abandonment" of them during the pandemic. On September 4, some dissident workers held a wildcat strike in Mar del Plata over the UTA's opposition.

Ecuadorian police attack workers, students, indigenous people protesting government's economic policies

Protesters marched to Ecuador's Social Security Fund office in the capital Quito on the afternoon of September 16. The action, called by the Workers Unitary Front (FUT), included members of labor, student and indigenous organizations.

Protesters marched through pouring rain to gather in front of the Fund building, where speakers denounced the policies of right-wing President Lenín Moreno, which have brought on firings, cuts to education and other programs and attacks on workers' rights and living standards. They also denounced the "indolent government" for its poor response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has devastated the working class and led to bodies piling up in hospitals, homes and even on the streets.

As protesters marched toward the Government Palace, units of the police arrived and used water cannons and tear gas to disperse them.

Ecuadorian medical postgraduates protest for pay

About 250 postgraduate doctors, carrying picket signs and blowing whistles, held a protest outside the University of Guayaquil, in Ecuador's Guayas province, on September 15 to demand payment for their labors. The protesters cited the recently passed Humanitarian Law, which established the pay of postgraduates as equal to that of general practitioners, US\$1,600 monthly.

El Universo cited one protester who said that there are currently 1,200 postgraduates working in five hospitals in Guayaquil, 70 percent of whom finance their own college careers, but "they have not received a cent for their labors, despite having worked during the emergency."

However, by the next day García Murillo, stating that the college had agreed to deliver the overdue bonuses over the next three 15-day pay periods, called off the strike.

Haitian hospital workers strike to demand improved working conditions, equipment, pay

Workers at the State University of Haiti Hospital (HUEH) in Port-au-Prince went on indefinite strike September 15. Surgeries have been halted and a skeleton crew handles emergencies.

The striking workers' demands include: repair of two autoclaves (used to sterilize surgical instruments) as well as the provision of a new high-capacity one; provision of a 150-kilowatt generator; an ambulance and a service vehicle in good condition; plumbing repairs; proper protective equipment; and a pay increase for all employees in the hospital system.

The striking workers say that they will not lift the strike until these demands are met.

Sickout by Bahamian teachers to protest inadequate health measures

Citing teachers concerned about the rise in COVID-19 cases and the unpreparedness of Bahama's school system, the 4,000-member Bahamas Union of Teachers (BUT) called on its members to stage a sickout on September 14. The Ministry of Education (MOE) urged teachers not to be swayed by the "antagonistic pronouncements" of BUT President Belinda Wilson.

Claiming that the schools were safe and all protocols had been followed, the ministry accused the BUT of trying to deprive children of education and "create public panic among teachers, students and parents in pursuit of the BUT president's selfish goal of derailing the national examinations ... to be held from Monday, 14th September—Friday, 2nd October, due to her personal opposition to them." The MOE further intoned that the sickout call was "regrettable" when "we should all be pulling together as a country to advance national development in the midst of the worldwide COVID crisis." The national exams had been scheduled to begin September 7, but were delayed for a week due to concerns about the pandemic.

Wilson responded with a number of assertions: teachers crammed together in classrooms with five sharing one computer without social distancing protocols; suspected positive cases in several schools among

peers who were unaware; lack of testing for teachers and students; classrooms not cleaned; janitorial staff without PPE or proper training.

The MOE and BUT disagreed widely over the number of sickouts. While education director Marcellus Taylor told *tribune242.com* that "the numbers were not huge" and that the examinations "went well," Wilson claimed that about 1,000 teachers stayed home. Classes are set to resume on October 5.

Nursing home workers in New York state carry out two-day strike

Health care workers at the Highland Park Rehabilitation & Nursing Center in Wellsville, New York went on a two-day strike September 17 after months of fruitless bargaining failed to produce a contract. Members of the Service Employees International Union Local 1199 first unionized in 2018 in an effort to obtain safe staffing, higher wages, benefits and hazard pay as a result of the pandemic.

Maggie Phillips, a certified nursing assistant, told the *Spectator*, "In 2018 we voted to join the union because we felt we were being mistreated and believed that if we could have a voice at work they wouldn't be able to keep treating us like garbage. But after 25 months of bargaining we are still dealing with daily threats, harassment and our coworkers getting suspended. What we want is simple—more money to take care of our families and affordable health insurance so that we can take care of ourselves and our residents. With all that is going on, refusing good health care to nursing workers is absolutely inhumane!"

Another nurse, Cindy Costello, said the facility has been understaffed for the last two years with five nurses per shift being compelled to attend to 75 to 80 residents. "It's never been this bad before. People are sick of working shorthanded. People can't afford to work here, and we've had several people quit. The owners don't seem to care."

Highland Park Rehabilitation & Nursing Center is part of a chain of facilities owned by Excelsior Care Group, LLC.

Coffeehouse workers in Minnesota hold one-day strike to protest unsafe working conditions

Nearly 40 workers at five Spyhouse Coffee locations in Minneapolis, Minnesota held a one-day unfair labor practices strike September 19 to broadcast their disenchantment over safety conditions in coffeehouses in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. Back in August, workers announced their intent to organize under Unite Here Local 17.

Maev Collins told the media at a press conference, "Working at Spyhouse during COVID has not only been taxing but confusing. We've had little communication on safety protocol, how to enforce it, and what happens when there is a positive case."

Workers complained of extended hours and an unclear policy toward customers who don't wear masks. In addition, they cited a lack of enforced social distancing, a lack of cleaning supplies and tables that aren't socially distanced.

10,000 Quebec daycare workers begin unlimited strike

After three weeks of rotating strikes across the province, 10,000 Quebec

home daycare workers began an all-out unlimited strike Monday against a miserable compensation package offered by the right-wing government of Premier Francois Legault. Negotiations broke down Sunday after the province's Family Ministry presented an "insulting" pay offer to the workers, members of the Federation des intervenantes en petite enfance du Quebec.

The workers, who provide childcare services out of their own homes, are paid a stipend by the provincial government in addition to fees collected from parents using their services. Their union has estimated that overall payment works out to only \$12.42 (CDN) per hour. Workers are demanding a payment increase that would equate to \$16.75 per hour. In Quebec's home daycare system, parents pay \$8.35 per child per day, with providers receiving \$7 with the remainder of compensation paid through a government top-up.

The home sector of the daycare industry in Quebec services about 60,000 families. Since March 2019, 40 negotiation sessions with the government have not produced an agreement. Hundreds of workers have already left the industry due to the abysmal compensation and fears about coronavirus infection.

In addition to their compensation demands, workers are concerned with the once-again spiking COVID-19 cases in the province. The Legault government is spearheading a premature back-to-work drive that has flown in the face of public health best practices in order to boost the flagging profits of Quebec corporations. Schools opened in late August and remain open, despite school boards in every region of the province reporting unrelenting outbreaks that began immediately after the reopenings.

One hundred fifty doctors and scientists have released an open letter pointing out that schools are not properly prepared and warning of dire consequences. In addition, Legault has given assurances to big business that should COVID cases continue to spike, he has no intention of ordering the daycare sector to close once again.



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