

## Teachers continue protests in Mexico; Zinc miners strike in British Columbia

# 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 police attack student teachers protesting arrests, violence against colleagues**

A June 1 protest by teacher trainees (*normalistas*) at the Carmen Serdán Rural Normal School in Teteles, Puebla, Mexico, was violently attacked by police with tear gas and clubs. The action was one of several mobilizations called by *normalistas* over the arrest and maltreatment of their colleagues at a demonstration in Chiapas on May 20. On that date, about 95 protesters were arrested.

Since then, there have been protests by normal school students and supporters in several locations around Mexico, including Mexico City and Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas, one of the poorest areas in the country. The governors of both Chiapas and Puebla are members of Andrés Manuel López Obrador's ruling Morena party.

The protesters in Teteles began a sit-in in front of the Ministry of the Interior to request a hearing to discuss their demands. Those demands include the nonreduction of the entry quota, maintenance of food rations, and improvements in infrastructure and equipment, as well as the release of all those in custody and full transparency regarding deaths, disappearances and arrests of protesters.

Instead, more than 100 officers from the Grenadier Corps attacked the protesters and arrested at least 32 of them. In Mexico City, over 20 protesters were arrested. The overwhelming majority of *normalistas* are women, and protesters complain of sexual assaults as part of the overall violence directed against them.

### **Mexican distance-learning teachers protest for completion of agreement**

At the end of a press conference given by President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, teachers for Telebachillerato Comunitario,

a distance-learning platform that was set up in 2018, held a demonstration in Mexico City. The teachers had come to demand that the government meet with them and deliver on the agreement the federal government had signed.

Demands included the granting of official status for their profession, which is currently not recognized by the government, and the establishment of facilities for holding their classes, which serve 10,000 students.

The teachers came from Querétaro, Hidalgo, Chiapas and Sinaloa and congregated in front of the National Palace in the city's Historic Center. They set a tire and some cardboard on fire and removed some of the barriers set up around the building.

### **Belizean teachers' union calls off strike action opposing pay cut**

The Belize National Teachers Union (BNTU) released an announcement May 31 that it has suspended strike actions against the 10 percent pay cut for public service workers that was approved by the House of Representatives the week before. On June 4, the Senate finalized the pay cut, to be applied from June 1 onward.

The BNTU, Public Services Union and other state-sector unions had been holding protests and strikes against the cut since mid-April, when it was proposed by the government of Prime Minister Johnny Briceño supposedly as a means of getting the country's fiscal house in order.

The BNTU couched its protest actions as a crusade against corruption and waste and for "good governance." The government retaliated against the strike actions by deducting the pay of striking teachers.

The union's statement accepted the claims that cuts were necessary and added that the BNTU is ready and willing to meet with the government. The BNTU said that it would engage in a court battle, as well as future protests.

### **Jamaican taxi drivers protest rising food and fuel prices**

In the early morning of June 2, taxi drivers in Hope Bay, Portland Parish, Jamaica, staged a protest against rising prices at the market as well as at the pump. The cabbies called for a rollback in gas prices and price controls on basic foods like flour, rice and chicken, which have more than doubled in price recently.

The pandemic has made times harder for the drivers, with fewer passengers hailing their services. Some taxi drivers told reporters that the minimum wage should be higher, but that fare increases would make life difficult for working people, hence the call for price controls.

### **Hospitality workers in Baltimore, Maryland, rally against cut-off of federal pandemic aid**

Laid-off hospitality workers rallied June 4 in downtown Baltimore to protest the decision of Republican Governor Larry Hogan to halt federal unemployment benefits to some 250,000 workers starting July 3. The decision will axe \$300 a week in additional payments to workers laid off due to the pandemic in a broad nationwide campaign to force workers to return to unsafe conditions.

Andre Eldridge, who works at the Baltimore Marriott Waterfront, told the rally he was laid off in March 2020. Last month, he was called back to work for a single day. “Right now, the work is just not guaranteed.” He called the slander campaign that workers receiving benefits simply don’t want to work “very disrespectful.” Hospitality commerce has hardly revived, and business travel will never recover its pre-pandemic level.

Unite Here Local 7 sponsored the demonstration and invited Democratic party officials to address the rally, seeking to channel anger against the Republicans at a time when the Biden administration is pressing ahead to reopen the economy while abandoning any worker protections against the pandemic. Democratic members of the Maryland General Assembly have done nothing more than voice verbal opposition to the cutoff of the supplement to this point.

### **Parents and teacher’s supporters march to support Kennebunk, Maine, teachers in contract negotiations**

Residents of the community of Kennebunk, Maine, staged a rally June 4 to back teachers as their union and the RSU 21 school board negotiate a new three-year contract before the old agreement expires this coming August. The contract being negotiated by the Kennebunkport Education Association covers teachers as well as nurses and instructional personnel.

Alysson Homa, a parent, told *News Center Maine*, “They’re heroes—like they got us through that year. The way they were able to pivot the last minute as everything changed literally every day and they showed up every day and made sure that our kids had the

most positive experience that they could.”

The school board has warned that its contract must be tailored to “a cost that is financially responsible to the taxpayers. The board has designated teachers’ health care as a “concern,” citing its \$6 million annual cost.

### **Zinc miners strike in British Columbia**

Three hundred and twelve miners at the Nyrstar Myra Falls zinc, lead and copper mine near Campbell River on Vancouver Island are in the first week of a strike to reverse concessions surrendered in two previous contracts. The workers, members of Unifor, are demanding restoration of wage concessions given to Nyrstar when the company negotiated a closure agreement in 2014 that saw operations temporarily shut down the following year.

The town of Campbell River had been decimated by the global economic collapse of 2009 and soon saw mines, logging concerns and the large pulp and paper mill shut down with ensuing closures of many small businesses in the area.

With ore prices slowly recovering, a new three-year contract negotiated in 2017 saw Nyrstar and Unifor agree to further wage cuts in order to supposedly make the mine more attractive to prospective buyers. However, after the cuts were rammed through, Nyrstar announced that now, having secured such favourable terms, they would keep the mine and ramp up production themselves.

When that contract expired in 2020, new negotiations stalemated and the Myra Falls miners continued to labour under the terms of the 2017 deal. But later that year, Trafigura Mining Group—a significant player in the ore market—acquired the Myra Falls operation. A global corporation with extensive interests in Cuba, Jamaica, Europe and South America, Trafigura management has refused to address worker demands to restore their previous wage levels after years of austerity.



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