

Mexican construction workers clash with police in Tabasco; Quebec nurses refuse mandatory overtime

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 construction workers clash with police outside PEMEX refinery

About 5,000 workers at a PEMEX refinery construction site in Dos Bocas, in the southern Mexican state of Tabasco, went on strike October 12. The workers are employed by construction company ICA Fluor, which they denounce for poor pay and conditions. In addition to the pay being low, they do not receive extra pay for overtime.

Other demands are better security, personal protective equipment and benefits. Moreover, the workers complain of the company union, which extorts kickbacks from them under threat of firing.

Strikebreakers, military units and police attacked the striking workers with tear gas and rubber bullets, injuring at least three and workers hold the company union responsible for the shooting death of one worker. Videos of clashes between security forces and workers have circulated on social media.

The refinery, part of Petroleros Mexicanos (Pemex), is a pet project of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, aka AMLO, who has touted it as a means to reach energy self-sufficiency. Pemex is notorious for its corruption and inefficiency. Originally scheduled to open in 2022, the project has been plagued by cost overruns, delays and environmental problems. AMLO has pushed for work to continue during the pandemic.

Dominican Republic app-based drivers protest spike in fuel prices

Members of the Application Taxi Drivers Association in the city of Santiago de los Caballeros in the Dominican Republic held a protest October 11 against the rise in fuel prices. The protesters, about 500 strong, gathered at the esplanade of a famous monument downtown, then held a caravan parade down various streets in the city.

Drivers not only have to deal with the rise in fuel prices. Uber drivers complain that their pay is discounted by their employers by up to 45 percent. One driver told reporters at the protest that just to pay for the gas for a day's work, he must serve 10 riders.

Paraguayan teachers continue strike for raise

Members of the Federation of Educators of Paraguay (FEP) are continuing the strike they began October 1 to press their demand for a 16 percent salary increase. The teachers walked out in rejection of the unilateral 8 percent raise announced by the Finance Ministry.

Since then, the ministry has raised its offer to 11 percent, but teachers are adamant that they get the 16 percent raise, especially amid a surge in prices for the basic food basket and fuels. The National Union of Student Centers of Paraguay (Unepy) declared itself in solidarity with the teachers and has joined it in mobilizations, including marches and roadblocks.

The FEP called a meeting of delegates of the unions

for October 16 to discuss the strike and decide on the direction to take.

Argentine bus drivers strike for overdue pay

Drivers for the El Cacique bus company in Rosario, in Argentina's Santa Fe province, struck October 13. Service on ten routes was affected.

The UTA transportation workers union said in a statement that the walkout, which began at noon, would continue "until the enterprise gives a response to the union demand and pays the salaries of 30 workers to whom it ignores their licenses [i.e., medical leave] for duly justified infirmities."

The strike was a short one. At around 3:00 p.m., a local UTA official told reporters that EL Cacique had offered a partial payment of the debt, but that the union did not accept the offer "because they demand a solution for all and not just for some. An hour and a half later their positions got closer, and they arrived at an agreement," reported radio.unr.edu.ar. Service was restored shortly afterward.

Contract extension for Rhode Island school bus drivers puts off strike for a week

The union representing school bus drivers and monitors for Warwick, Rhode Island schools refused to call a walkout October 15, after some 200 union members voted to strike the previous night. Instead, Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 618 agreed to a contract extension through October 22.

First Student, the largest provider of school bus services in the United States, says it is offering a 30 percent wage increase, but clearly the issues separating the workers and the company run deeper.

Starting wages for bus drivers are \$16 an hour and wage increases are no doubt an issue. But the ATU revealed that workers are insisting on a guaranteed workweek of 20 hours.

ATU business agent Nick DeCristofaro admitted that

back in September, First Student "offered school bus drivers five cents." At a September 27 demonstration, one sign held up by a worker berated First Student, saying, "50 cents is not a raise." Another sign raised the issue of the pandemic, saying, "Packed buses? What about COVID?" and "200 workers, 2 bathrooms."

On October 1, a small number of bus drivers called in sick and the school district recalled all buses for the day.

Quebec nurses refuse mandatory overtime

More than 30,000 nurses, organized in the Fédération interprofessionnelle de la santé du Québec (FIQ), refused forced overtime this past weekend in the province's hospitals and health care centers. Citing total exhaustion from 18 months at the front lines of the response to the coronavirus pandemic and pointing to an "abusive and inhumane" system of constant understaffing that affects not only nurses but patient care, the FIQ appealed to health officials in the government's workplace safety board and human rights commission.

With little action taken by the rightwing government of Premier Francois Legault, nurses sent formal notice that they would be refusing mandatory overtime over the weekend. Health authorities also received formal notice that unless the practice of assigning compulsory overtime was discontinued by November 15, nurses would take further action.



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