

Uruguay teachers vote to strike; Toronto teachers continue protest

Workers Struggles: The Americas

15 November 2021

Latin America

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

Uruguayan private school teachers vote for 24-hour strike over salary negotiations

The National Private Education Workers Syndicate (SINTEP) of Uruguay held a general assembly on November 10 and resolved to strike for 24 hours. The one-day walkout would include teachers from colleges, technical education institutes, Child and Family Attention Centers and others.

SINTEP issued a statement saying that its affiliates will make “a collective evaluation of the state of the situation of negotiations” over salaries, currently in their ninth round. The union has proposed a salary adjustment for inflation every six months, as opposed to the government’s proposal of once every two years.

Another issue of concern is a law regarding online instruction recently presented in the Senate that SINTEP claims would erode labor rights and working conditions.

Tourist bus drivers in Argentina protest expiration of licenses due to pandemic

Drivers of tourist buses in Buenos Aires held a protest on November 10 to demand the extension of the operating lives of their vehicles. The drivers briefly blocked traffic at the historic Plaza de Mayo and moved to other areas of the city.

A spokesman for the drivers told reporters that the drivers were unemployed for close to two years because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and that their buses were stored in

sheds during that time. They want their bus permits to be extended for two years instead of being expired in a few months. “We do not need credits or subsidies; we only want to work with exceptions in the authorization to transport,” he said.

The organizers of the protest say that they will remain in their buses until government officials agree to meet with them.

Uruguayan social ministry workers protest policy changes

Workers at the Social Development Agency of Uruguay (MIDES) gathered in front of the ministry’s headquarters in Montevideo on November 10 to denounce recent policy changes. A MIDES Workers Union (UTMIDES) member told reporters that the protest was held to “ensure social policies.” They were joined by members of the Unique Syndicate of Union Institutions.

The protest featured coffins with the letters “MIDES” on them and a banner saying, “Don’t let social policies die.” The protesters, some dressed in black, held black picket signs on which the names of some of the programs that “this ministry closed or transformed” were printed.

The protesters denounced the closing and redesign of some programs that help poor families. MIDES has cut back on resources and laid off workers as well. The UTMIDES member said that MIDES has moved to a policy of “handing out baskets and cards, but not to work [with] the family and in inclusion so that they can overcome poverty.”

Ecuadoran bus drivers hold partial strike to protest rising costs

Bus drivers in Guayaquil, Ecuador protested the rising costs of operating their vehicles on November 9. Drivers parked their buses along a major highway and refused to drive them. However, the strike was only partial, with 50 percent of buses remaining in operation.

The drivers are complaining of the rising price of diesel fuel, as well as the cost of tires, oil changes and other repairs and maintenance. There has also been a decrease in ridership due to the pandemic. The drivers demanded that either fares be increased or the price of diesel fuel be lowered or subsidized.

The municipality's Traffic and Mobility Agency announced that meetings with drivers were scheduled to begin on November 10.

United States

St. Louis nursing home workers strike over low wages and atrocious conditions

Nursing home workers at Blue Circle Rehab and Nursing went on an unfair labor practice strike on November 5 to protest a litany of gross problems in the management of the company's facilities in St. Louis. At the same time, workers at Blue Circle joined the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) a decade ago and are still without a first contract.

Dietary and housekeeping staff make only \$10.30 an hour, Missouri's minimum wage. After prolonged stalling, management has agreed to raise wages to \$11.15 an hour in January, which happens to coincide with new Missouri legislation to raise the wage to \$11.15 at that time as well. Workers are also demanding better health care benefits.

Workers tell of crippling understaffing and high turnover rates and the abominable conditions it leaves residents in. Nursing home patients are left unattended sitting in feces and urine, suffering from bedsores and without assistance to take showers. Management no longer has a designated staff member assigned to the front desk, and at-risk residents are known to have wandered outside.

Blue Circle is just one of three nursing homes in the St. Louis area operated by the same owners. The other two, Chestnut Rehab and Big Bend Woods Healthcare Center, also have problems. These facilities suffer from innumerable deficiencies and have been cited by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. An October 2020 inspection found 31 deficiencies, issued a \$23,595 fine, and Medicare

payments for new residents were withheld.

Lemarr Young, a 20-year veteran at Blue Circle, told the *Missouri Independent* that when the new owners took over in 2019, "they did increase on residents, but they cut down on staff. ... As long as that monthly bill is getting paid from these residents, that's all it seems they're concerned about."

Canada

Toronto teachers deepen job action

Four thousand Toronto Elementary Catholic Teachers (TECT) are refusing to do parent-teacher night conferences and written commentaries on report cards, as part of a work-to-rule job action that began last spring with a withdrawal of participation in all extra-curricular activities. The teachers have been without a collective agreement since February. In April teachers voted by 91 percent for strike action should the dispute not reach a resolution. Union officials, however, have not issued a strike notice to press the membership's demands for the renewal of a status quo contract.

Central to the dispute is the local school board's insistence that teachers surrender their current absent-from-work protocols and provide a medical document after only a one-day absence. In previous contracts, a medical note was not required until a five-day absence. In addition, the school board seeks to limit teachers' representation by a union official during meetings with the administration. Finally, the board is demanding that any civic infraction by a teacher, including such things as traffic tickets, be reported to the board within 48 hours.

The issue extends beyond basic issues of privacy and long-standing rights around sick day procedures. Under conditions where teachers have been driven back into the schools even as COVID-19 continues to spread, the school board seeks to further restrict teachers' ability to protect themselves from infection and/or excessive stress by absenting themselves when dangerous situations arise.



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