

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

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## Mexican parents protest to demand that teachers get paid

Parents of students in schools in the northwestern Mexican state of Baja California demonstrated in Tijuana February 4 to demand that the state government pay wages owed to teachers. The mothers and fathers, who already have had to endure the difficulties of the pandemic, are urging dialogue to get teachers back to work, either online or in-person.

Conflicts over nonpayment of wages are recurrent in Mexico. In August 2019, over 36,000 educators walked out and held marches and other protests. Some of the 3,000 substitute and interim teachers had not been paid since 2016. It was not until February 2020 that they received their pay.

The current dispute has been ongoing since November 2021, and 1,700 public schools in the state have been closed since then. The teachers' union claims that their members are owed over 500 million pesos, or US\$25 million.

Baja California Governor Marina del Pilar Ávila's claim that the teachers' salaries have all been paid is contradicted by Secretary of Education Gerardo Solís Benavides, who says that only 120 million pesos (US\$6 million) have been paid so far.

## Puerto Rican teachers protest over salaries, conditions, retirement

More than 5,000 teachers marched and protested in Viejo San Juan, a historic residential district in Puerto Rico's capital San Juan, February 4. The march began at the capitol building and progressed to Calle de la Fortaleza, where the Governor's Mansion is located.

The Federation of Teachers of Puerto Rico and the Broad Front in Defense of Public Education were among the organizers of the mobilization. Teachers in other cities like Mayagüez and Aguada also held protests. Schools across the island shut down.

At one point in the march, protesters convened an impromptu assembly in which two demands were approved: an increase of at least US\$1,000 in the monthly base salary for all teachers—permanent and temporary—and a 75 percent pension at the end of 30 years of service.

The teachers' representatives are demanding to meet with Governor Pedro Pieluisi, who has sent officials from the Department of Education with proposals that have been rejected. They say that they will escalate their actions, with the possibility of an indefinite strike if they get no satisfaction.

## Antigua and Barbuda: Public service workers picket for overtime pay

Workers from the Fiennes Institute, a nursing home run by Antigua and Barbuda's Ministry of Health & the Environment, picketed in front of the Treasury Building in St John's to demand the payment of overtime dating back to 2019. The nursing home workers are members of the Antigua and Barbuda Public Service Association (ABPSA).

ABPSA has repeatedly asked the Treasury Department for a timetable of payment for the overdue monies but has received no definite answer. Quarry workers, people attached to the Public Works Department, and Customs officers are also owed overtime.

Picketers chanted, "No money, no work!" and "It's my money and I want it now!" and noted the increased cost of living has made their situation more acute. Other complaints cited by ABPSA lack of sanitizers and other basic hygiene items.

## Paraguayan truckers issue strike call over fuel prices

Last Friday, The Federation of Truckers of Paraguay (Fedecap) called for a strike of its 36,000 members beginning February 7. The impetus for the strike call is the spike in fuel prices, tolls and other expenses in the industry.

Drought, low agricultural production, the reduction in the

amount of freight and a 30 percent decrease in the price of freight have put the squeeze on the sector in the last year. Fedecap wants a restoration of the freight price, while at the same time it is calling for a reduction of the value-added tax to relieve the pinch. Other demands include refinancing of debts and price controls.

### **California nurses vote for one-day strike over lack of safe staffing**

Nurses at the Tri-City Medical Center in Oceanside, California, voted overwhelmingly on February 3 to authorize a one-day strike over safe staffing ratios. The 700 members of the California Nurses Association (CNA) have held several demonstrations to call attention to the loss of 300 nurses in the last year due to a punitive work environment and high turnover rate.

Sara Gurling, who is leading negotiations for the CNA, told the *San Diego Union Tribune*, “It’s like a revolving door. Some people come, stay for a little bit, and then they leave. The Tri-City board has passed an enormous budget for travel and registry nurses when so many veteran nurses have left.”

The union has reported some 40 percent of nurses in telemetry and ICU wards leaving Tri-City due to the stress of missing meals and rest breaks due to insufficient staff. The union has yet to schedule the one-day strike which will require a ten-day strike notice to hospital management.

### **Sycamore, Illinois teachers’ union files strike notice as negotiations stall on wages and healthcare**

The union representing 280 teachers in the Sycamore, Illinois school district filed an intent-to-strike notice January 13, setting the stage for a strike as early as February 14. The Sycamore Education Association (SEA) and negotiators for the district have been unable after nine months of negotiations to agree on wages, health insurance and other issues. Sycamore, population 17,000, is about 70 miles west of Chicago, just north of De Kalb, Illinois.

The board has offered teachers a series of annual step increases that start from 3.5 percent for the 2021-22 school year and descend in lesser amounts to 2.5 percent in 2025-26. The SEA bargaining unit is calling for a 4.85 percent wage increase in the first year followed by a 4.58 percent wage increase in year two.

Teachers have pointed out that Illinois State Board of Education statistics show average teacher salaries during the

five-year period 2016-2021 have increased by 8.8 percent, while Sycamore teachers have only decreased by 0.5 percent. In addition, the school board has been more generous with central administrative salaries, which have risen during the same five-year period by 6 percent.

While the SEA has filed an intent to strike, teachers have yet to take a strike vote. Negotiations are ongoing and a federal mediator has been present since August of last year.

### **Toronto hospital workers organize counterprotest against right-wing truckers**

About 200 health care workers attended a counterdemonstration to a far-right “Freedom Convoy” protest in Toronto this past Saturday. The right-wing protest was part of several demonstrations launched in major Canadian cities aimed at dismantling public health measures instituted to fight the COVID-19 pandemic and its current Omicron wave of infections.

The health care workers stood in Toronto’s hospital row wearing their hospital garb before marching to the nearby provincial legislature. Last September anti-vaccination protesters assembled on hospital row to harass, denounce and block workers and patients from entering several hospitals on the street. More recently anti-vaccination protesters have picketed vaccination centers, causing delays and cancellations. In the days before the current “Freedom Convoy” demonstrations, hospital and union officials sent advice to workers to avoid wearing their uniforms to work and to refrain from taking their much-needed breaks outside in the fresh air.

Refusing to buckle to such terms, workers organized an unofficial counterprotest to highlight the importance of public health measures. After health care workers announced their plans for the counterprotest, the United Nurses of Ontario issued a miserable statement telling its members not to participate. The union bureaucrats were joined by the Director of the University Hospital Network, which oversees the hospital row facilities.

The action to suppress worker opposition was not limited to Toronto. In Ottawa, the Public Service Alliance of Canada—the largest union in the city—intervened to sabotage a counterprotest that was winning widespread support.



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