

Bolivian teachers holds one-day strike; Rolls-Royce workers locked out in Quebec, Canada

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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Latin America

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

Bolivian teachers strike for one day to demand larger budget for education

Public school teachers in Bolivia struck and protested nationwide on March 18 to demand a larger education budget. Protests called by the National Confederation of Urban Teachers were held in multiple cities, and teachers in the capital La Paz marched to the Education Ministry. The strike and protests were the culmination of a week of actions. At least five departments in the country were partially blocked. In La Paz, police attacked teachers with tear gas.

The strike had a strong showing, though it was blunted somewhat by the signing of an agreement by rural teachers' unions. The urban teachers' unions agreed to consider an invitation to meet with Education Minister Edgar Pary, but proceeded with the mobilization anyway. The protest included a list of 10,000 items that the teachers demand to supply the resource-starved school system, though the union said that the demands are negotiable.

The Deputy Minister of Regular Education, Bartolomé Puma, announced that "teachers who do not show up at their source of employment will be discounted. Those who do not work are not paid."

On March 19, the Confederation announced that an agreement had been reached under which the government would deliver 3,300 of the items. Other demands, including salary equalization, working conditions and hours, remain to be discussed, and the confederation has held out the possibility of further "more radical" measures if issues are not resolved.

Trinidad and Tobago taxi drivers warn of hikes in fares, protests if fuel subsidy is scrapped

Following an announcement by Prime Minister Keith Rowley that the government will likely end fuel subsidies, Trinidad and Tobago Taxi Drivers Association president Adrian Acosta warned that fares would jump and protests by cabbies would result. Rowley declared March 8 that the rise in the cost of oil due to the sanctions leveled against Russia made the cost of the maintenance of the subsidy prohibitive.

Acosta told reporters that the drivers have already suffered serious losses due to the pandemic, and the prime minister's move "will be very

detrimental to us and we want to say today that if that move is made, we as taxi drivers will have no choice but to do some adjustment to our fares. We will not—at no point in time—be taking that burden on our shoulders."

While Acosta said that the cabbies would "take a stand," at the same time he pleaded with Rowley to "think wisely" and find more ways to generate revenues, though he did not specify how.

Transport drivers on other Caribbean islands are feeling the squeeze as well. For example, in Dominica, prices for gasoline, diesel, kerosene and liquefied petroleum gas have gone up about 7, 8, 13 and 3 percent respectively. Taxi and bus drivers are calling for fare increases, which are set by the Dominica Transport Board, whose acting superintendent has told bus drivers that they must make a formal request.

According to a dominicanewsline.com report, "While discussions continue among the bus drivers, the police say they have received no formal request for an increase in fare and such action would be unlawful."

Haitian public transport and health workers strike to protest kidnappings, violence

Strikes against rampant violence in Haiti have continued during the nation's ongoing crises. On March 16, the Haitian Owners and Drivers Association announced a strike in the south to protest kidnappings and insecurity. The walkout was called for March 17 to 20 to demand action from the state to stop the extortion, thefts of vehicles, attacks on drivers and kidnappings.

Prensa Latina reported March 16 that eight buses were robbed in two days by armed gangs. The union secretary said that if nothing is done, the strike will go national.

Doctors, nurses, and other health workers began a three-day nationwide strike on March 17 against an increase of gang-related kidnappings. Hospitals and clinics were shut down and striking workers blocked roads and burned tires to highlight their complaints.

Although professionals like doctors have been prime targets, a report by the United Nations Security Council said, "No social group was spared; among the victims were labourers, traders, religious leaders, professors, medical doctors, journalists, human-rights defenders and foreign citizens." In the last year, reported kidnappings have increased 180 percent to 655, though the number is much higher, since many go unreported. Killings of civilians are a not uncommon occurrence.

The health workers also protested the lack of funds for security personnel, basic services and supplies.

Salvadoran families of medical personnel killed by pandemic demand compensation

About 50 members of families of health care and medical workers who died from COVID-19 gathered at the capital of El Salvador, San Salvador, on March 18 to demand payment of a benefit established in a law passed in 2020. According to the protesters, some 88 families have yet to receive the benefit. Over 230 health system employees have fallen victim to the pandemic.

Protesters complained of bureaucratic obstacles to the delivery of the funds, and the government refuses to engage in dialogue with the families. A statement said, “Despite the Salvadoran government discourse, where political marketing is prioritized, the front-line health personnel are passing from heroes to martyrs.”

The families called on the president, Nayib Bukele, to instruct the bureaucrats to respond to their demands. They said that if their needs were not addressed, they would seek “other forms to be heard.”

Over 4,100 people have died from COVID-19 in El Salvador, during three previous waves of the virus. On one recent day, 972 cases, the highest during the entire two years of the pandemic, were reported.

Mexican journalists protest assassinations of colleagues

Following the assassination of Mexican journalist Armando Linares López on March 15, reporters held a protest at the state legislature in the Morelia, the state capital of Michoacán, demanding an end to murders and threats against them. Protesters held signs saying, “The truth is not killed,” “Press, do not shoot,” and “For narcos, hugs, for journalists, bullets” (A los narcos abrazos, a los periodistas balazos.)

Linares López was the director of news website Monitor Michoacán, which has published investigative reports accusing the government of corruption and collusion with narco traffickers. Monitor Michoacán personnel have received frequent death threats, and cameraman Roberto Toledo, a friend and colleague of Linares López, was killed January 31.

Linares López was shot at least eight times in front of his home in Zitácuaro on March 15. His killing made him the eighth journalist murdered in 2022, already surpassing last year’s total. There have been 28 murders of journalists during the term of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, aka AMLO. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, Mexico is the most dangerous country for the press in the Western Hemisphere.

In a statement to the press, AMLO sent pro forma condolences to the family and colleagues of López Linares, but also used the occasion to repeat his frequent denunciations of journalists for supposedly lying and being “mercenary.” He also said that López Linares had been offered protection but had but refused. In response, Magdalena Alonso, owner of the Zitácuaro Air Newscast, told reporters, “In Mexico, protection takes effect for three days and then they forget about it.”

United States

Contra Costa, California teachers authorize strike action

Teachers and staff rallied in front of the Mt. Diablo Unified School District offices in Contra Costa, California, March 16 after 92 percent of the union voted to strike over wages, class sizes and other issues related to

student learning. The 1,500 members of the Mt. Diablo Education Association (MDEA) include teachers, librarians, nurses, counselors and a variety of specialists.

The school district has offered a seven percent wage increase over the course of a three-year contract, plus a three percent bonus, while the MDEA is asking for a cumulative 12.5 percent wage hike. Predictably, the district has responded that the money is not available. “We are facing a structural deficit that’s at the foundation of our problems,” said superintendent Adam Clark.

Teachers and staff have been working without a contract since June 30 of last year and, more outrageously, they have not had a wage increase since 2017. The pandemic added to stresses when teachers resisted a return to in-person instruction during the winter of 2020-2021.

Other supporters of the teachers joined last week’s rally to protest the school board’s February decision to slash fourth-grade music programs to align with the district’s austerity budget.

Currently no negotiations are taking place as both sides await the release by the state’s Public Employment Relations Board of a non-binding fact-finding report, which is expected on March 24. A new round of negotiations is expected to delay any strike action.

Pennsylvania brewery workers strike over excessive overtime

Workers from two unions at the City Brewing plant in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, launched an unfair labor practice strike March 15. About 40 members of IUE-CWA Local 20 who work in the brewery operations and another 145 members of IUE-CWA Local 144 who labor in the packaging division took part in the strike.

Workers have been subjected to 12-hour shifts seven days a week. Further aggravating workers are instances when the company forces them to work additional hours outside of their shifts.

The union has also complained about company attempts to skirt seniority rights contained in previous contract proposals. “They’ve tried to take seniority rights away—where you can pick your shift,” said Local 22 President Bill Palmer told TribLive.com.

City Brewery, which has a warehouse and distribution center in La Crosse, Wisconsin, is preparing to open another warehouse and distribution site at East Huntingdon, Pennsylvania.

Canada

Rolls-Royce workers locked out in Quebec

Last week Rolls-Royce Canada locked out 530 workers at Montreal’s Côte-de-Liesse aircraft engine maintenance factory. The workers had been attending a general meeting to discuss the status of negotiations when management moved to shut down contract talks and carry out a lockout.

The workers have been without a contract since March 2020. Earlier they had voted by 94 percent in favour of a strike should negotiations become deadlocked. Upon hearing of management’s lockout diktat at their mass meeting, the workers immediately called their strike.

The strikers are members of the IndustriALL Global Union affiliate the Syndicat des travailleuses et des travailleurs de Rolls-Royce Canada (CSN). Workers are demanding increased wages, better working conditions and improvement to pension and group insurance plans.



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