

Woburn Massachusetts teachers strike; Protests and blockades by Colombian taxi drivers continue

Workers Struggles: The Americas

30 January 2023

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

Latin America

Protests and blockades by Colombian taxi drivers continue

Taxi drivers in various locations in Colombia have gone on strike and blocked highways to press their demands. In Bogotá, after paralyzing traffic the week before, the taxi drivers union accepted an offer of a “dialogue table” with the mayor and the Transportation and Mobility Ministries and called off a planned blockade of the city’s main roads January 23. The cabbies, who held sit-ins and blockades on January 16, object to being ticketed and towed in what they claim are abuses of city ordinances by traffic agents.

Since January 26, in the northern Santander region, taxi drivers blocked a major highway to protest the shortage of gasoline. The situation has been complicated by citizens protesting the presence of “United Self-Defense Forces” (AUCs), paramilitary groups who terrorize locals under cover of fighting guerrilla forces. Transport of food, gasoline, medicine and other necessities—as well as people—has been delayed amid AUC threats of burning of vehicles and obstruction of traffic.

Members of the Norte de Santander Taxi Drivers Union (Astans) struck in the city of Cúcuta, which borders Venezuela, on January 26, blocking at least a dozen strategic points in the city. Astans announced that “the protests will last throughout the day,” but would “give way for 10 minutes every two hours, until the mayor complies with the list of requests.”

Argentine taxi drivers strike against digital transport drivers

Taxi drivers in Mar de Plata, Argentina began a strike January 24 against unauthorized app-based transport platforms. Several hundred taxistas lined up side by side on Avenida Colón, a main tourist route, and drove en masse to various popular spots around the city, snarling traffic. It was the second such protest action in a week.

The cabbies protested the recent initiative by a city councilor to expand the use of app-based transport. In 2019, the drivers had protested the loosening of requirements for authorization of

the app drivers, resulting in an ordinance that would supposedly impose fines on unauthorized vehicles. However, according to the taxi and bus drivers, the city has been lax in enforcing the ordinance.

Two months ago, in anticipation of the summer growth of tourism, Cabify and other digital services began aggressive recruitment of drivers, including distribution of brochures and aerial advertising along the beaches. Some 1,500 service providers have been registered in Mar de Plata since then.

Argentine subway workers union suspends strike over salaries

The Subway and Premetro Workers Union Association (AGTSyP - Metrodelegados), which had called for strike action beginning in the afternoon of January 26, suspended the “self-defense measure” after receiving a new salary proposal from Emova, which runs the city’s subway lines, that morning.

In a January 25 statement, the strike call was made after months of negotiations and “several postponed or unsuccessful hearings.” The AGTSyP had demanded an “extraordinary gratification” in the framework of salary parity. The parties were scheduled to meet at the Buenos Aires Labor Subsecretariat. The union will arrange a plenary session to discuss the offer.

Chilean hospital workers union ends strike after 25 days

Workers at the Guillermo Grant Benavente and Traumatológico hospitals in Concepción, Chile were called back to work by the Bío Bío regional division of the Fenats health workers union on January 28.

The workers had walked out over the hospitals refusal to continue providing shuttle service for health workers, a measure it had instituted at an earlier stage of the COVID-19 pandemic and discontinued on December 31. They had also demanded increased security measures.

In a press statement, the Concepción Health Service (SSC) announced the end of the stoppage “after extensive talks” between the authorities and the national and regional leaders of Fenats. As for the shuttle service, the SSC statement said that the parties “agreed to explore alternative ways to address this demand, through private financing, since there is no legal norm that allows health services to finance this mobilization.”

United States

Woburn Massachusetts teachers strike in defiance of state law

Teachers in Woburn, Massachusetts, struck Monday after voting by a 99 percent margin to stop work unless the mayor and school board meets teachers demands. The exact status of negotiations is not clear. But the Woburn Teachers Association (WTA) has indicated that among its demands are a living wage for paraprofessionals and smaller class sizes.

The Woburn School Committee and Mayor Scott Galvin issued a joint statement declaring that a strike would be “illegal, disruptive and unnecessary.” Under Massachusetts law, teachers are barred from striking.

According to the School Committee, the Massachusetts Commonwealth Employment Relations Board ruled on the heels of the strike vote that the WTA, its officers and teachers are “about to engage in a strike in violation of state law, and that the aforementioned parties are inducing, encouraging and condoning such action in violation of state law.”

WTA president Barbara Locke declared that “we have exhausted all other options... In fact, there is no other path forward.” But Locke has also indicated that the strike vote was only employed as a token gesture to achieve a compromise on remaining issues.

Some 24 local presidents of teachers’ unions issued a statement in support of a strike by Woburn teachers. And earlier this month the Massachusetts Teachers Association began belatedly to appeal for the legalization of teacher strikes. But these appeals are focused on pressuring the Democratic Party and not to mobilize the working class as a whole against the attacks on education.

San Diego County janitors strike, home care workers rally for better pay and working conditions

San Diego County janitors, who work for the contractor Nova, suspended their strike January 24 after one day on the picket line at the behest of County Board Chair Nora Vargas. Vargas asked for a two-week cooling-off period to supposedly investigate poor working conditions and pay for the janitors.

The strike was motivated in part by Nova’s firing of four janitors for advocating unionization with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). Previously, janitors worked directly for the county. Nova was awarded a \$22 million contract based on payment of cheap wages to the 300 janitors.

The county and the unions are seeking to keep various sections of workers separated in the current round of negotiations. The SEIU called a protest by janitors the day after the strike while at the same time, in a separate event, county home care workers rallied to demand a one dollar an hour pay increase and improved health care coverage.

Strike by Iowa Ingredion workers ends after 175 days

Workers at the Ingredion food products plant in Cedar Rapids, Iowa ratified a new contract January 22 after 175 days

on the picket line. The 120 workers struck Ingredion back on August 1 after the company demanded a host of concessions, including the right to unilaterally increase health care costs; cuts in vacation and seniority rights; plans by management to outsource the company’s laboratory department; and plans to maintain a two-tier wage system.

According to the Local 100-G president Mike Moore of the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco and Grain Millers (BCTGM) the vote to ratify was “a very close margin.” Moore admitted to Starting Line, “It’s not a great contract, but it’s a good contract... It’s 100 times better than what they gave us August 1.”

The new agreement retained five workers whose jobs would have been outsourced; a wage increase of 15 percent over four years; elimination of the two-tiered wage system by 2026; maintenance of seniority in promotions and overtime; and retention of the current vacation structure and health insurance plan through 2024.

Despite wide support for the strike within the working class, the BCTGM took no action to integrate the Ingredion strike into a broader movement of workers. Instead, it touted hollow statements of support from union officials and Democratic Senator Bernie Sanders.

The strike was marked by management provocations. On September 2022 Ingredion brought armed security guards into a negotiating session. At another point, a driver crossing the picket line hit a worker and allegedly pulled a gun.

Canada

Sit-in staged by nurses in Quebec’s Arctic Nunavik Region

Overworked and exhausted nurses servicing about 7,000 residents in the isolated communities of the province’s High Arctic staged a sit-in last week demanding that the local health authority address a dire situation which, according to the nurses, makes “it no longer possible to provide quality and safe care.” The system requires 30 nurses to be on staff across the region, which has a majority native population. However, employment levels at the network of health care centers have fallen to as low as 13.

The sit-ins were coordinated over all seven communities where health care is provided. Instead of addressing issues of severe and chronic staff shortages, deteriorating health care and the plight of the nurses, the Health Authority reported the nurses to the government’s Labour Administrative Tribunal to force an end to the protest. The nurses are now mobilizing to defend against retribution from the Labour Administration.



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