

CN Rail workers advance toward possible strike; Jamaican teachers strike and portest over wage offer

Workers Struggles: The Americas

13 March 2023

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

Jamaican educators protest, strike over government's wage offer

Teachers in Jamaica's public schools have taken various actions—sit-ins, protests and strikes—to express their displeasure over the compensation package recently presented by the Ministry of Finance and Public Service. On March 8, over 300 delegates of the Jamaica Teachers' Association (JTA) voted against the proposed pay deal.

The ministry stated that it has not received formal notice of industrial action, which suggests that teachers are acting independently of the JTA. In a March 10 statement, the union, while saying, "We urge all our colleagues to remain ready, resolved, and resilient as we continue to unite and serve," has appealed to them to go back to work March 10 while negotiations drag on.

The Ministry of Education, meanwhile, warned of deductions and other forms of disciplinary actions if the teachers do not return to their classrooms.

Argentine teachers and educational assistants walk out over wages, equipment, benefits

Teachers, teachers' assistants and differential educators at the Etchegoyen School in Buenos Aires stopped work on March 9 following fruitless negotiations with the Masonic Educational Corporation of Talcahuano, Chile. The striking workers then picketed and chanted outside the school.

The education workers have a list of complaints about the school, first among them the fact that it does not provide the students and teachers with adequate tools and equipment. The school union president, Celeste Zarate, told Resumen reporters that the school "was not fully equipped with the technological resources that we need. The teachers' room is not equipped with computers, we don't have a place to print material, we have to go asking almost please, where we can print, etc."

Other complaints contained in a petition that was presented to the corporation in November include improved salaries and bonuses, the extension of benefits to union members equally and a supplement for education assistants. Zarate called the school administration "oblivious to what happens at the school."

The union is demanding a meeting immediately with the president of the

corporation and the president of the education commission.

Bolivian teachers union announces mobilizations over budget, curriculum

Urban teachers in an advisory council of the Confederation of Urban Education Workers of Bolivia (CTEUB) met on March 10 to discuss measures to take following the failure of protest actions to put a dent in the Ministry of Education's refusal to address around 200 teachers' demands, including a budget increase for education and changes to the curriculum.

The CTEUB submitted the petition containing the demands in February, but according to confederation head Ludwig Salazar, none of the points reached a consensus.

The CTEUB called for two actions this week. The first will be a national mobilization with regional road blockades and a coinciding protest at the government headquarters on March 15. On March 20, there will be a national march with hunger strike pickets in different parts of the country.

Antigua and Barbuda: Government printery workers sit in, strike against working conditions

Workers for the government printing office in St John's, Antigua and Barbuda have been engaged in industrial actions since early March over poor working conditions. The actions have taken the form of sit-ins, refusal to work and chanting slogans like "Enough is enough" over a laundry list of dire conditions in the workplace.

These lamentable conditions, about which they have complained since 2018, and which the higher-ups have ignored, include exposed wires, leaks in the roof, insufficient running water, raw sewage flowing near their offices, rat infestations and chemical odors that have caused health issues for some workers.

The printery workers notified their superintendent that they will not return or accept any new printing jobs until they see actual work being done to alleviate the problems.

California sugar processing workers strike after learning UFCW contract robbed them of pension money

Over 100 workers at the Spreckels Sugar processing plant and warehouse in Brawley, California, launched an unfair labor practices strike March 9 after discovering they will lose tens of thousands of dollars after the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 135 negotiated a contract that permits the company to rollover their pension plan into a 401(k) retirement plan.

The company responded by filing for a temporary injunction to halt the strike. But as of March 10, a federal judge has not yet ruled on the case. UFCW Local 135 Communications Director Brent Beltrán has pledged to “follow whatever decisions the judge makes.”

After negotiating a tentative agreement, the UFCW submitted the contract to workers for ratification. The UFCW claims it was only after ratification that they realized workers would suffer large losses when the pension was rolled over into a 401(k). Attempts by the UFCW to renegotiate the agreement were rebuffed.

For decades corporations have gotten out of pension obligations which have a defined contribution and instead, sought to palm off the inferior 401(k) whose contribution is undefined. That UFCW officials blindly signed off on this agreement, without carefully assessing the rollover, constitutes malfeasance at a minimum. Given the whole record of the UFCW it is just as likely that UFCW actively colluded with management to rob workers.

St. Paul city workers vote to strike as negotiations fail to answer wage demands

City workers in St. Paul, Minnesota granted strike authorization March 8 after working without a contract since the end of December. Few details have been released on bargaining for the 280 workers who work for St. Paul’s Public Works, Parks and Recreation, and the St. Paul Regional Water Services and are represented by the Teamsters, International Union of Operating Engineers and the Laborers’ International Union of North America.

According to the Laborers’ union, the wage offers will lag considerably behind the inflation rate and city administrators want concessions on work rules. In the last three years, workers received a cumulative 2.5 percent increase in wages. Further, city wages lag significantly behind private sector wages as well as those of municipal workers in other cities.

Faculty, staff at Eastern Illinois University vote to strike

Eastern Illinois University faculty and staff voted by a 238 to 7 margin to grant strike authorization after a year of negotiations have not produced a contract. Members of the University Professionals of Illinois chapter are demanding better salaries and reduced workloads. Faculty have faced a relentless increase in their workloads and substandard pay.

Physics professor Dan Pakey told the *Journal Gazette & Times-Courier* he was also troubled by a “sweetheart deal” for EIU President David Glassman that will pay him \$160,000 after retirement for working nine months as an anthropology professor. “Eastern is supposed to be a teaching school,” said Pakey, “but they are going out of their way to make it hard for us to do that.”

3,000 CN railway workers vote for strike

Three thousand railway workers employed by CN Rail are moving toward a legal strike position, which could come as early as March 21. The workers, members of Unifor, voted by 98 percent to strike should the current impasse in negotiations continue. The union has been in discussions with management for a new contract since last October. The Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service has been unable to move negotiations forward.

CN management is attempting to impose significant concessions on the workers that include the gutting of retirement provisions that would see the age for early retirement moved from age 55, with a minimum of 30 years of service, to 65 by the end of this year. In addition, the company has offered what amounts to a large cut in real take-home pay with a proposal for an increase that would be 3.5 percent below the current national inflation rate.

Already, officials with the federal Liberal government’s Ministry of Labour have contacted the union to demand a quick settlement. In a steadily growing confrontation with various sections of rail workers at CN and CP Rail, the government has found that the mere mention of strikebreaking legislation to enforce binding arbitration has been enough to bring the unions to heel.

Last July, a two-week strike at CN by 750 signal and communication workers, organized by the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, was suddenly scuttled by the union even as company operations had been severely affected. The union agreed to binding arbitration that eventually led this past October to a miserly wage increase of 3 percent per year over three years—a settlement well below the inflation rate that peaked at 10 percent in 2022 and stubbornly remains at near 7 percent today.

In a similar occurrence, in late 2019, the Teamsters union shut down an eight-day strike by 3,200 CN workers after reaching a tentative agreement that workers only learned the details of several weeks later. The deal abandoned most if not all of workers’ key demands. The premature shutdown of the strike by the union relieved the trade union-backed federal Liberal government of having to impose back-to-work legislation that would have exposed the rigged “collective bargaining system” and the Trudeau government’s reactionary anti-worker agenda.

At Canadian Pacific rail, CN’s main competitor, a two-day lockout of 3,000 Teamster engineers, conductors and yard workers last March was abruptly ended when the union and management agreed that the dispute be sent to binding arbitration after veiled threats from the Liberal government. The union agreed that the main demands of the workers around scheduling and disciplinary issues need not be addressed by the arbitrator. In August the arbitrator announced he would impose a two-year contract with wage increases of only 3.5 percent in each of 2022 and 2023. As is the case in all binding arbitrations, the workers were not allowed to vote on the contract ruling.



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