

Brazilian dockworkers strike; First Student school bus drivers vote to authorize national strike

## Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Latin America

### **Brazilian dockworkers strike**

Dockworkers at the Port of Santos went on strike on Tuesday, March 25. At issue is legislation that would disallow union-controlled hiring halls. Under the terms of the new legislation, workers would be hired directly by the companies involved.

The right to strike is restricted by the Labor Court, which only allows 12-hour stoppages, as long as the port is not fully shut down. Union officials are following this rule and mandating that workers report to their assigned ships, to avoid a R\$200,000 fine.

Guidelines that limit the right to strike were released by the union president, Bruno José dos Santos, via the organization's social media channels.

The new law, to be discussed by the national legislature beginning on April 10, would reintroduce the "shape-up" system in which workers had to line-up and be appointed every day, at the discretion of management. Shape ups took place in ports across the world. It took mass struggles in the early 20th century, led by anarcho-syndicalists to abolish that system.

The Port of Santos, in Southern Brazil's São-Paulo State, is one of that nation's main ports.

### **Students and workers mark 1964 anniversary of Brazil's military coup, demand justice**

On Sunday March 29, hundreds of students and workers marched and rallied in the streets of São Paulo Brazil observing the 62nd anniversary of the coup that brought on Brazil's bloodiest military dictatorship (1964-1985). The marchers carried candles and flowers, honoring the hundreds that died and disappeared during the dictatorship's "dirty war."

The demonstrators marched from the then torture center of DOI-Codi and ended in the Ibirapuera monument to the victims of the dictatorship.

### **Students protest in Santiago over right wing policies of Kast administration**

Thousands of high school and college students protested in Santiago on March 26 against the right-wing policies of the recently installed José Antonio Kast administration. The students braved police repression. Security forces sought to disperse the protest using water cannons and tear gas.

At issue is proposed budget cuts in education and health. Kast is also taking measures to restrict student loans and eliminate free education for older students. In addition, fuel prices have increased by 60 percent, which will impact the costs of food, transportation and basic services.

Demonstrators also protested against the government's ideological attacks on non-religious education and environmental protection. Calling on all the trade unions to mobilize in defense of social rights.

The Santiago protest was triggered by the administration's emphasis on mining and measures that benefit the oligarchy.

United States

### **First Student school bus drivers vote to authorize**

## **national strike**

Some 17,000 school bus drivers for First Student voted by an 88 percent margin to grant strike authorization as the old contract expiration date of March 31 passes. The master agreement covers 96 Teamsters locals and workers are demanding improved healthcare, retirement benefits, paid time off and guaranteed hours.

Workers want a defined pension benefit instead of the inferior 401(k) plan and implementation of the Teamsters healthcare coverage plan. Also being demanded is a guaranteed six-hour workday instead of the current four-and-a-half hours.

The Teamsters charge that the company has responded by canceling negotiations for March 30th and 31st. The company has also filed a lawsuit in federal court.

First Student is the United States largest provider of school busing covering 1,200 school districts and 43 states. It also provides transportation for seven Canadian provinces.

## **Omaha beverage drivers enter ninth week on strike against company's concession demands**

Delivery drivers for Premier Midwest Beer and Beverage in Omaha, Nebraska are entering their ninth week on strike against management's effort to literally destroy the old labor agreement. Premier has set its sights on concessions dealing with healthcare, seniority, retirement benefits and wages for the members of Teamsters Local 554.

There are indications that broad support for the strike exists as bars are refusing to sell the company's products. Recently, firefighters have joined the picket line and provided food aid to the workers. Premier, however, is showing no sign of backing down.

Canada

## **Quebec post-secondary students take strike action over education cuts**

Over 1,000 post-secondary students walked out of classes this past Friday in Montreal and marched in protest against the right-wing provincial government of Premier Francois Legault's punishing cuts to student financial assistance programs and the slashing of monies budgeted for

community colleges and universities. The march culminated a week of strike action that mobilized 65,000 students across Quebec and has rekindled memories of the massive student strike in 2012.

The Legault government has announced plans to axe \$25 million from student aid programs. It has already raised tuition fees for out-of-province students by 33 percent while it continues to starve higher education institutions of proper funding. During the strike actions, students pinned red felt squares to their chests to reference the 2012 "Maple Spring" in Quebec – a 6-month mass movement that mobilized 300,000 students in strikes, protests, nightly demonstrations and significant social unrest in the streets of Quebec's cities and towns.

The powerful 2012 strike, although triggered by the then provincial Liberal government's announcement of a massive increase in post-secondary tuition fees, was objectively a direct challenge to the entire austerity agenda of the ruling class. At its height, the movement was joined by thousands of workers protesting government austerity policies.

Subsequently, recognizing that the violent state repression it had deployed in the preceding months had not crushed the 2012 strike and restabilized the political situation, the provincial Liberal government, with the collusion of the trade union leaders and pseudo-left student groups, ultimately diffused the mass struggle with calls for a provincial election. In the end, the Liberals were voted out of power and replaced by the nationalist Parti Quebecois, itself no stranger to austerity policies.

In the months following the strike, the Pauline Marois-led PQ government imposed its own post-secondary tuition hikes, as part of a new wave of austerity measures, and launched a virulent anti-Muslim agitation—a pattern that would be followed by a series of right-wing chauvinist governments in Quebec and across Canada.



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