

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Honduran teachers strike over unpaid salaries and other issues

Some 60,000 Honduran teachers, members of the FOMH educators' federation, held a national strike on February 21 over a number of demands. The strike—the second since the school year began—was in effect for all 18 of the nation's departments.

One outstanding issue is the payment of overdue salaries owed to more than 3,000 teachers since last year. Another is the payment of the debt owed by the government to the teachers' retirement fund.

In addition, the teachers denounced the government's plans to shift the responsibility for education to the municipalities. FOMH warns that this will open the door to privatization of education.

Finally, the teachers demanded respect for the Teachers' Statute, which guarantees rights and dignity to education professionals.

In one department, Francisco Morazan, about 30 teachers demonstrated near the department capital courthouse in support of four teachers accused of an illegal demonstration on January 25.

Mexican academic workers strike University of Oaxaca

Members of the Academic Workers Union of the University of Oaxaca (STAUO) walked out of negotiations with the Benito Juárez Autonomous University (UABJO) on the night of February 22 and called a strike. The main sticking points were salary and benefit increases.

STAUO is demanding 3.6 and 2.6 percent increases in salaries and benefits, respectively. An extra 20 pesos (US\$1.65) for working mothers is included in the demands as well.

The strike affects about 26,000 students in the cities

of Oaxaca, Huajuapán de León and Santo Domingo Tehuantepec.

Administration officials have threatened to request the federal courts declare the strike "nonexistent," while STAUO Director Agustín Hernández Monroy has informed the press that the union will request a federal judge to guarantee the union's right to strike.

Costa Rican transport drivers stage protest

Hundreds of *porteadores*—unlicensed taxi drivers—protested in strategic locations throughout San José, Costa Rica against a proposed law that they claim will leave them jobless. The drivers, members of the *porteadores*' national federation, Fenapo, took to the streets on the morning of February 23, driving in slow caravans that aimed to block traffic along key entry points and bridges. In most cases, their efforts were impeded by the police.

The drivers had previously gathered in front of the Presidential House and the Legislative Assembly to demand changes to the law—then being debated in the Congress—regulating private transport.

About 12,000 people are engaged in unlicensed personal transport in Costa Rica, but according to Fenapo president Yuribeth Méndez, the law will only allow for permits for 4,000. Fenapo has asked for a revision of the text of the bill, which had been altered last year during negotiations between the government, the formal taxi sector and another group of *porteadores*.

Bahamas protest against communications company sell-off

Around 800 protesters demonstrated in front of Nassau's Assembly building in Rawson Square on February 23 against the sale of 51 percent of the Bahamas Telecommunications Company (BTC) to British firm Cable and Wireless Communications (CWC).

Protesters chanted and carried signs denouncing

Prime Minister Hubert Ingraham—who required a police escort to enter the House of Assembly—for promoting the proposed sale and called for his resignation. The protesters, members of the BTC union, and their supporters knocked down barricades and fought with police while Ingraham made his mid-year budget statement in the House of Assembly.

According to the *Nassau Guardian*, “Police in riot gear beat back protesters several times. The demonstrators warned that this deal would cause the downfall of the government in the upcoming election.”

Missouri bill proposes removal of restrictions on child labor

Missouri state senator Jane Cunningham has proposed a bill to remove restrictions on child labor, charging that it no longer makes sense as children already perform tasks such as babysitting, mowing lawns and working paper routes. “Right now the present law puts a government official in charge of our children. I think it’s important for us to make sure that parents are in charge,” said Cunningham.

However, others believe the bill seeks to undermine child labor laws, making way for a return to the sweatshop conditions of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Law SB 222 reads: “This act modifies the child labor laws. It eliminates the prohibition on employment of children under age 14. Restrictions on the number of hours and restrictions on when a child may work during the day are also removed. It also repeals the requirement that a child ages 14 or 15 obtain a work certificate or work permit in order to be employed. Children under 16 will also be allowed to work in any capacity in a motel, resort or hotel where sleeping accommodations are furnished.”

Phoenix bus drivers stage sick-out

Bus drivers for Veolia Transportation in Phoenix, Arizona apparently staged a sick-out February 27 during a protest by Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 1433. According to the company some 40 workers called in sick, generating 100 calls to the company from riders who ended up stranded.

ATU Local 1433 has been engaged in contract negotiations for eight months with Veolia management. The company is pushing for a two-tier wage system that will implement a lower wage for new hires. The

company also wants to cap how much sick leave workers can accrue. The ATU says Veolia is also seeking to freeze wages and increase workers’ portion of health care contributions.

ATU president Bob Bean said he did not encourage the sickout. “We don’t want a strike. We don’t want a work stoppage,” Bean told the *Arizona Republic*.

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