

Brazil service workers on strike, Ford workers end job action

## Workers Struggles: the Americas

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### **Service Workers protest strike against the University of São Paulo**

Thirteen thousand service workers who have yet to receive pay for the month of December 2018 are on strike against several campuses of the University of São Paulo. Strikers expect other campuses to join the strike.

Management has promised to make up for the lost wages in two payments, February and May, contingent on the availability of resources. Dissident workers claim that the University is being starved of funds as a step toward its privatization.

### **Brazilian Ford workers strike over layoffs**

Auto workers at the Taubaté Ford plant walked out of the plant last Tuesday in response to the company's layoff of twelve workers. The decision to strike was made in a mass assembly of workers at the plant, last Monday, January 21. The Ford Plant in Taubaté produces engines and transmissions and employs 1,300 workers in two shifts.

Management claims these layoffs were necessary to adjust for a drop in overseas sales, indicating that more sackings would be forthcoming. The company rescinded the layoffs on Thursday, and the workers returned to work under orders from the Metal Workers Union of Taubaté (Sindmetau).

However, the timing of the job cuts appears to be a clear provocation and pressure tactic by Ford to obtain concessions with Sindmetau, with which it is in contract negotiations. Negotiations are expected to conclude by mid-February.

### **Mexican teachers in fight over non-payment of wages**

Teachers in Mexico's Michoacán State are on the third week of the strike over non-payment of wages

owed to them. The strikers have combined mass mobilizations with the blocking of rail lines.

Despite assurances by state Governor Silvano Aureoles that at least part of the money is on its way, part of an advance of federal funds to the state, the teachers point out that the state has yet to deposit in their accounts their December end-of-year bonus and their wages for the first two-weeks of January.

In his weekly Monday press conference, Mexican President Manuel Lopez Obrador denounced the teachers and called on them to end their "capricious" job action and to end the blockades. He called on public opinion to pressure teachers to return to work.

At the same time, he declared that the resolution of the strike had nothing to do with him, since the money is not in the hands of the Michoacán government. Lopez Obrador indicated that a billion pesos (53 million US dollars) was sent to Michoacán, a sum that the CNTE union that represents the teachers declares is woefully short of the teachers demands. The union accuses the state of lack of transparency on how funds are dispersed and demands that the public have access to how the money is allotted.

### **Oklahoma state legislator proposes draconian bill aimed against teacher strikes**

A member of the Oklahoma State House of Representatives has put forward a bill that would dock teachers' wages and revoke their teaching certificates for life should they engage in another similar protest like the nine-day protest in March of 2018. House Bill 2214 would make it "illegal" to "strike or threaten to strike or otherwise close schools or interfere with school operations as a means of resolving differences..."

The bill's author, Republican Todd Russ, sees the bill as closing a loophole that technically allowed

teachers to skirt Oklahoma's ban on striking. Instead of striking, teachers informed administrators they would be absent, with the result that schools had to be closed by district officials due to insufficient staff.

Russ, who is chairman of the House Banking and Financial Services Committee and also serves on the Appropriations and Budget Committee, mentioned the air traffic controllers as an example of how his bill would curb any job actions by teachers. When PATCO, the union representing air traffic controllers, went on strike in 1981, then-President Ronald Reagan fired 11,500 controllers, decertified their union and imposed a lifetime ban barring them from working for the Federal Aviation Administration in their former capacity.

### **California agribusiness firm rescinds wage cut after four-day strike by farm workers**

Farm workers at the Wonderful Company in the California's San Joaquin Valley ended their four-day strike and returned to work January 15 after labor contractors agreed to rescind a pay cut. The 1,800 workers launched their walkout when Wonderful cut the piecemeal pay rate of \$53 for filling a bin of fruit to \$48. According to the United Farm Workers Union, the cut translated into a \$1-\$2 an hour pay cut.

Stewart Resnick, the billionaire chairman and president of The Wonderful Company, which is the largest orchard fruit company in the world, had just announced it would pay its workers \$15 an hour before the strike broke out. "Our dedicated and hard-working employees are our greatest asset, and the reason for our tremendous success as a company," said Resnick. "This move firmly positions The Wonderful Company as the employer of choice in California's Central Valley, and we encourage others in the agriculture industry to follow our lead."

The \$15 an hour wage—a miserly wage given the high cost of living in California—only applied to the 2,000 workers directly hired by Wonderful and did not apply to the 1,800 striking workers who are technically employed by notorious labor contractors who super-exploit farm workers.

Resnick is well known in California politics for backing both Democratic and Republican politicians who do his bidding. He is notorious for his profiting by buying water from the government and then jacking up

the price and selling it back to the public.

### **Manitoba support service workers vote to strike**

Workers at Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation (NCN) Personal Care Home (PCH) in northern Manitoba voted last week in favor of strike action in their fight to win wage parity with other rural care homes in the province.

Their union, the Manitoba Government and General Employee's Union (MGEU), has been without a contract since March of last year and has appealed to both federal and provincial governments to increase funding to adequate levels. Currently workers at the long-term care home make 14 percent less than their counterparts in Manitoba but First Nations PCH's across the north are notoriously underfunded.

Workers at the NCN Personal Care Home went on strike for the same demands in 2016 but were returned to work without gaining wage parity.

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