

Teachers strike wave spreads across five continents

By Eric London
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Across the world, teachers in dozens of countries across five continents are taking part in a strike movement of unprecedented international proportions.

In advanced and underdeveloped countries alike, teachers are fighting for the same cause: the defense of public education. They belong to the same class—the working class—and they confront the same enemies: the governments and corporations who demand privatization and cuts as well as the trade unions who isolate and betray.

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South America

Argentina

Nearly one million teachers struck across the country yesterday in the first day of a 72 hour strike demanding massive wage increases and an end to privatization efforts by the government of President Mauricio Macri. Teachers held a large demonstration yesterday on the Plaza de Mayo in the capital, Buenos Aires.

Eighty percent of teachers make less than the official poverty line, including over 100,000 teachers in the federal district of the capital where the child poverty rate is over 75 percent.

The Macri government has offered paltry wage increases, pledging to increase new-hire salaries from 12,000 to 15,000 pesos. This is far below the inflation rate, which was 47 percent in 2018. The teachers' unions know the Macri government will not agree to meet teachers' demands, but they are limiting the strike to three days to help the government pass its austerity measures.

Brazil

About 100 striking São Paulo teachers occupied São Paulo's regional education offices earlier this week, breaking up a meeting in which the union and the government were conspiring to rob teachers of wages and pension rights.

São Paulo officials are denying striking teachers their pay and threatening to replace them with strikebreakers. São Paulo Mayor Bruno Covas was recently filmed laughing at strikers who had surrounded him demanding their pay. The mayor responded by sending in police to attack the teachers with tear gas.

Colombia

Nearly 300,000 teachers and professors will strike across the country on March 19 and 20 against efforts by the Colombian government of Ivan Duqué to enforce a National Development Plan crafted by the International Monetary Fund that will slash funding for K-12 education, school transportation and in-school nursing and healthcare.

Since 2000, the government has cut per student spending at the

university level in half. For-profit and private universities have proliferated as a result of financing from the World Bank.

Africa

Algeria

Amid growing nationwide demonstrations demanding the resignation of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, Algerian teachers have joined protests at universities and are engaging in wildcat strikes and sit-in protests.

According to *El Watan*, teachers at the University of Mouloud Mammeri in Tizi Ouzou took action “on their own” on Tuesday. “The teachers began their action with a mass meeting on campus before initiating a march with students who had also been observing a sit-in in front of the central library.”

Similar protests occurred at other universities. *El Watan* reported that teachers had issued a public statement earlier in the week “calling on university teachers to hold mass meetings Tuesday at all the university establishments. They will now join the movement launched by the students several weeks earlier.”

Ivory Coast

Tens of thousands of primary and pre-school school teachers refused a back-to-work order by the union and continued a powerful strike now in its seventh week.

Koaci News reported on March 4 that “the order to suspend the strike by the 12 union organizations responsible for the strike of primary and pre-school teachers was not followed” and “did not receive a favorable response among the striking teachers.” The day before, David Bli Blé, spokesman for the union ISEPPCI, had demanded teachers return to work “to give the negotiations with the government a chance.”

Teachers are striking to demand massive wage increases and significant increases in state spending on education in one of the most unequal countries in the world.

Kenya

Over 180,000 Kenyan teachers have repeatedly authorized national strike action across Africa's seventh largest country to oppose forced school transfers of thousands of teachers, to end performance evaluations, and to win 60 percent wage increases. Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT) president Wilson Sossion has called off strikes several times in the last six months.

Last August Sossion told the press, “Teachers were supposed to down their tools at the beginning of this term. However, we have decided to put the strike on hold until the end of September when we will be meeting with the [governmental] Teachers Service Commission to iron out the contentious issues.” The KNUT then called off another

strike scheduled for December and yet another strike called for January.

Mali

Tens of thousands of teachers held demonstrations in cities across the country yesterday in the midst of a strike demanding subsidies for teacher housing, wage increases and funding for schools. *Mali Presse* reported that an ongoing strike has “paralyzed the Malian school system” and threatens to cancel classes for the year.

One striking teacher told *Mali Presse*, “This is a fight that dates from three years back. This time, there is no question of going back to work with crumbs. We are determined.”

South Africa

Teachers across South Africa were blocked from striking this month when multiple trade unions refused to accept the teachers’ plans for a strike. According to *Independent Online News*, the South Africa Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) told teachers the action “would be illegal.” The National Teachers Union called the strike “illegitimate.” Teachers want to strike to demand safer working conditions in poor areas where teachers are murdered at work.

North America

Mexico

A national teachers strike movement is developing against massive cuts to education overseen by the administration of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO). Last week, teachers in Oaxaca shut down 13,400 schools to prevent AMLO from implementing parts of the privatization plan of his predecessor, Enrique Peña Nieto.

Some 30,000 teachers are striking at Colleges of Scientific and Technological Studies and 60,000 more will strike for two days this week at the Bachelors Colleges in 25 states. Teachers are striking against AMLO’s proposal to cut 500 million pesos (US\$25.8 million) from the program in the federal budget.

Teachers are also protesting AMLO’s proposal to cut funding for a day-care program for poor mothers by 46 percent. Teachers also remain on a weeks-long strike at the Autonomous Metropolitan University (UAM) and the Autonomous University of Chapingo (UAC).

Last month, teachers struck in Michoacán and blocked train lines connecting Mexico’s auto belt to a major port on the Pacific coast.

United States

In recent weeks, teachers’ unions have sought to isolate workers by staggering the timing of strikes over common issues and forcing through budget cuts and below-inflation pay raises. Nevertheless, teachers across the country are discussing taking strike action, including in Sacramento, California; Fremont, California; San Ramon, California; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and in the states of Indiana, Oklahoma, Arizona, Alaska, South Carolina and Kentucky. Teachers are demanding raises in Mississippi, Louisiana, Maine, Nevada, North Dakota, Arkansas, Delaware, Georgia and New Mexico.

Europe

Poland

According to the *Gazeta Wyborcza*, teachers from all levels of education will begin a strike of unlimited duration beginning April 8. French media notes that “the strike will begin just before college exams and exams marking the end of primary school.”

United Kingdom

On Monday, teachers in Scotland rejected a government offer of a 9 percent pay raise, making a strike likely for April. The union had

begged teachers to accept the deal and issued a statement saying they wanted to have “the opportunity to avoid industrial action.” Teachers will begin voting on a strike authorization next Monday.

Asia

Iran

Tens or hundreds of thousands of teachers at over 1,000 primary and secondary schools in 100 different cities concluded their third day of an ongoing strike yesterday. Data from Iran’s education ministry shows teachers’ salaries are between 66 percent and 75 percent of the official poverty rate. Inflation in Iran was 40 percent at the end of November 2018, largely due to the impact of US sanctions. Teachers are demanding massive pay increases and the release of teachers who have been arrested for striking. Teachers are also demanding significant budget increases for schools.

Iranian teachers have faced violent attacks from the government, which arrested one teacher and sentenced him to receive lashes. Another teacher was abducted and taken to a psychiatric hospital.

India

Ongoing strikes by university teachers at Delhi University have continued this week as strikers planned a march in the city. In the city of Bhubaneswar in the eastern state of Odisha, teachers are also on strike.

Unemployed teachers are protesting in the city of Patiala, Punjab, near the Pakistani border. A local news report read: “Demanding government jobs, five qualified unemployed youths climbed atop a water tank on Monday. Following no assurance of meeting with the Chief Minister, the protesters decided to stay on top and warned to intensify their protest.”

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Teachers strikes and protests have also taken place during the last three months in Tunisia, France; Zimbabwe, Costa Rica; Guinea Bissau, Portugal; Germany, Belgium, Israel and Venezuela.

Through the process of globalization, the strikes of teachers and other workers in each country are more openly taking on the character of component parts of one world struggle. The task is to make workers conscious of this process and to build rank-and-file committees that link their struggles in a common assault on the capitalist system.

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