

# Uruguayan teachers strike; Saskatchewan teachers begin job action

## Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

### Uruguayan teachers strike for 24 hours over new president's economic blueprint

Teachers across Uruguay held a 24-hour work stoppage on March 11 over the blueprint of a Law of Urgent Consideration (LUC) proposed by newly elected president Luis Lacalle Pou. Presented as a set of measures to stimulate economic growth as well as improve education, the LUC would modify 50 of the 68 articles of the General Education Law, changes that educators' unions say would lead to accelerated privatization, curtailment of labor rights and disempowerment of teachers, while increasing the powers of the state and police.

Members of the Secondary Teachers Association (ADES) of Montevideo congregated at the Alfredo Vázquez Acevedo Institute and held an assembly—"the largest since 2015," according to ADES—in which the LUC was denounced and plans for another one-day strike and other mobilizations were discussed.

Lacalle Pou is the latest right-wing politician to win a presidential election in the wake of the "Pink Tide" in Latin America. A member of the National Party, which had been out of power for 30 years, he defeated Broad Front candidate Daniel Martínez in November 2019 with a 48.8 to 47.3 percent vote. He took office on March 1.

### Mexican university workers end 41-day strike after union signs deal

Workers at the Benito Juárez Autonomous University of Oaxaca (UABJO) ended their strike March 13 and returned to work the next day. Their union, STEUABJO, called the walkout February 1 over pay, job security, retirement, bonuses and other issues.

The UABJO rectory, represented by their general counsel, Hector López Sánchez, had claimed that the demands for a 20 percent increase in salary and benefits were impossible. López Sánchez filed a request with the local arbitration board to have the strike proclaimed "nonexistent"—i.e., illegal—while striking workers picketed and blockaded some main streets. Negotiations, at first stalled, continued during the work stoppage.

In the end, the union accepted the rectory's original wage raise offer of 3.4 percent and a 1.8 percent increase in benefits not tied to salaries. The provision for the *canasta básica*, or cost of basic food items, was raised 80 pesos (US\$3.65) per month. UABJO changed 15 "eventual" or temporary contract workers to permanent status and recognized 36 retirements.

STEUABJO head Ariel Luján Pérez explained to reporters that the union convinced the general assembly to agree to reduce its demands in order to "untangle" the conflict and let students, professors and researchers return to their pursuits. "We are a responsible union," he told reporters. López Sánchez, who had previously tried to have the strike illegalized, thanked the union for its "goodwill."

### Mexican distance-learning instructors strike for overdue pay

Instructors in the Aguascalientes Community Distance Learning system began a sit-down strike March 12 to demand payment of wages delayed for the last two and a half months. The educators showed up at their campuses but refused to work.

There are 275 instructors serving around 4,000 students at 82 distance-learning (known as *telebachillerato*) centers "located in rural communities with higher marginalization and social vulnerability" in the Mexican state of Aguascalientes, according to a *newsweekspanol.com* report. Salaries are set by agreement between the federal and state governments. Currently each teacher is owed from 30,000 to 40,000 pesos (US\$1,366-US\$1,822).

For distance-learning instructors in Aguascalientes there are no benefits, no social security and no vacation pay. Conditions at rented installations are not conducive to learning, and doubling of tasks and overwork are constant complaints. Though they are members of the National Front of Distance Learning Workers, they are not unionized. Attempts to get help from the SNTE teachers' union and from the federal government have not brought results.

The teachers were told March 14 that they would receive half of their salaries on March 16, and they returned to their jobs.

### Belizean stevedores hold another protest against plans to reroute sugar exports

For the second time in as many weeks, stevedores at the Port of Belize terminal held a protest and rally over plans by sugar milling firms to reroute raw sugar for export through the Big Creek Port to the south. The planned rerouting would have a devastating impact on the livelihoods of the residents of the area.

On March 6, the Christian Workers Union (CWU), which represents the stevedores, filed a 21-day notice of intent to strike under the Settlement of Disputes in Essential Services Act. On March 13, the union called for a protest rally not only to denounce the reroute, but to demand negotiations for a new collective bargaining agreement, which has not been renewed since 2004.

### **Argentine municipal workers to strike over failed parity talks**

Representatives of the Federation of Municipal Workers (Festram) and the municipalities of Argentina's Santa Fe province failed to come to an agreement, primarily regarding salaries, in parity talks on March 11. Following the meeting, Festram declared that its members would strike on March 17 and 18 and carry out mobilizations in the cities of Rosario, Santa Fe, Rafaela and San Javier.

As the critical nature of the coronavirus outbreak increased, Festram decided to cancel the mobilizations while granting that "those syndicates that determine to effect mobilizations will do so under their own social, political and legal responsibility."

Festram head Claudio Leoni announced, "The sanitary emergency generated by the coronavirus pandemic and the accelerated transmission of dengue in our province obliges us to have a responsible attitude in the face of the health crisis with an act of solidarity with the totality of the population and with our own labor sector, without downplaying the legitimacy of the grievance." The strike will still be in force with workers refusing to report to their posts, but with minimum groups of workers ready to respond to emergencies.

### **Boston College grad students rally for union recognition, threaten strike**

Boston College graduate students picketed and held a rally March 10 to demand union recognition. The students are threatening strike action if the administration does not recognize them. Students voted to unionize in 2017, but the administration claims the vote was nullified when the United Auto Workers withdrew in 2018 a petition it had made to the National Labor Relations Board to unionize grad students.

One day after the rally, Boston College announced it will suspend classes and move its curriculum to online instruction through the end of the semester due to the coronavirus pandemic.

### **West Virginia factory workers return to work after two days on strike**

Some 480 workers at AHF Products plant in Beverly, West Virginia, were to return to work March 15 after striking over a safety issue two days earlier. The two-day strike appeared to be a move by the Teamsters to release tensions over a deadlock in contract negotiations dealing with health care and pensions.

Back on February 23, members of Teamsters Local 175 voted 369 to 26 to reject a company offer that would have eliminated pensions and increased health care costs by 92 percent. AHF, which fabricates hardwood floors, wanted to substitute the inferior 401(k) retirement plan in place of a defined benefits pension.

Adding to the conflict, workers have been demanding a relaxation of the attendance policy as the coronavirus pandemic intensifies. New negotiations will not resume until March 30.

### **13,000 Saskatchewan teachers begin job actions**

The Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation began a series of limited job actions last week as negotiations with the right-wing provincial government remain deadlocked. On February 24, teachers voted by over 90 percent for a work-to-rule campaign and rotating strikes. The campaign has begun with the withdrawal of voluntary after-school activities, prep time and other non-core teaching activities. Teachers are resisting the governing Saskatchewan Party's intent to increase class sizes and its continued policy that has cut special education resources for behavioral, mental health and English language programs.

The government has refused to address these key issues in the current contract dispute. It has insisted that these matters cannot be addressed in contract negotiations but must be reviewed separately by a government committee. Last Wednesday, the government moved to further circumvent the bargaining process by using school boards to directly mail its derisory contract offer to teachers.

The Saskatchewan dispute occurs as 200,000 Ontario teachers have waged a months-long campaign of one-day general and/or rotating strikes against the Conservative government of Premier Doug Ford. Last week, the Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association (OECTA), which organizes 45,000 provincial teachers, sent a tentative agreement to its membership. Voting will take place over the next two weeks.

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