

Workers Struggles: The Americas

5 February 2019

Strikes by workers in Matamoros impact production at Ford, Oakville, Ontario assembly plant

Canada

Mexican parts workers strikes impact production at Ford, Oakville Assembly plant

As strikes by tens of thousands of Mexican plastics and auto parts workers continue in Matamoros, Mexico, Ford Canada spokeswoman Lauren More announced that parts shortages at the company's Oakville, Ontario assembly plant has forced a three-day shutdown of production at that facility.

The announcement further confirms reports of the parts crisis in Oakville reported by the WSWs *Autoworker Newsletter* last week as a result of notifications from workers in the plant. The shutdown in Canada follows on the heels of a production interruption at Ford's Flat Rock, Michigan assembly plant due to parts shortages there.

A General Motors Canada spokesperson acknowledged that although no shutdowns were imminent in its Canadian facilities, the company was monitoring the situation. GM has slated for closure next year its assembly operations in Oshawa, Ontario. The Matamoros, Mexico parts strikes began as a citywide wildcat action several weeks ago. Workers denounced their corrupt unions and threw union representatives out of their strike meetings.

Latin America

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

Members of the SITUAM union, covering workers at the Autonomous Metropolitan University in Mexico City, voted in favor of a strike February 1. The vote was 127 in favor, and 120 opposed. The strike was set to begin at 11:00 pm that night.

It was the first time in eleven years that UAM workers voted for a walkout. The last one, in 2008, lasted 64 days and was marked by violence against strikers committed by gangs of government- and university-supported students known as *porros* ("goons").

SITUAM's demand is calling for a 20 percent raise while UAM is offering 3.35 percent, with a 4.28 percent rise in food vouchers, offers that SITUAM calls insufficient. The SITUAM and UAM also disagree over the "retabulation" of pay scales for administrative and part-time academic workers.

Colombian teachers' union calls for one-day strike over abysmal health care, attacks on public education

Colombia's Fecode public school teachers' union issued a call January 31 to its members for a 24-hour national strike to take place February 14. The walkout, according to a Fecode communiqué will protest the "abysmal provision of medical services to teachers and their families in the entire country," and will include marches in various cities and a "Seizure of Bogotá."

The communiqué added that health care facilities "keep denying attention to their customers, delaying procedures to patients, such as the unjustified delays in providing medication and many other deficiencies."

The strike will include a petition to the national government to demand support for public education, "from preschool to the public university," and an end to budget cuts.

Mexican university workers vote for strike over pay raise

Bahamian salt processing workers' union warns of

strike over pay parity

Workers at the Morton Salt processing plant in Great Inagua, Bahamas may go on strike next week after months of fruitless negotiations the Bahamas Industrial Manufacturers and Allied Workers Union (BIMAWU) announced on January 24. The workers had already voted overwhelmingly for industrial action in November, but the union and company continued negotiating then took a break during the holidays only resuming talks recently.

The main issue is the wage raise. The company's proposal, dating back to February 2018, was for 1.5 percent in March 2018, 1.5 percent in March 2019 and 1.7 percent in 2020. In response to the union's counterproposal of eight percent over the three years, Morton reps raised the 2020 hike by a paltry .02 percent to 1.72 percent. The [statista.com](https://www.statista.com) website estimates inflation in the Bahamas at 2.54, 2.88 and 2.58 for those three years.

Vacation time and retirement pay are other issues on which Morton has stonewalled.

Though the company claims that it wants to maintain "a positive relationship with our workforce and with the union," BIMAWU president Jennifer Brown accused Morton of "doing nothing" and of discrimination, comparing wages earned by Morton employees in the US and Canada to those in the Bahamas. Nonetheless, [jonesbahamas.com](https://www.jonesbahamas.com) reports, "While the union has given no definitive timeline when it will strike. Ms. Brown promises it will be within the coming weeks."

The United States

Atlanta bus drivers ratify contract following week of sickouts

Bus drivers and other workers voted by an 88 percent margin February 2 to implement a new contract with the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) after a week of sickouts that disrupted transportation and threatened to cast a pall over Sunday's Super Bowl. The Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU), which represents 2,661 of MARTA's 4,368 workers, denounced as "rogue individuals" a group of rank-and-file workers who clearly opposed the paltry terms of the contract and sought to use the Super Bowl to maximize their leverage against management and labor officials.

The ATU ratified a tentative agreement a week earlier on February 27 that called for 3 percent annual raises over the

course of a three-year agreement. Immediately on Monday, reports of as many as 130 workers called in sick. That figure tapered off as the week wore on.

On January 31, MARTA got a superior court judge to sign a consent order that required the ATU to refrain from encouraging the walkouts. Still, on the heels of the court action, MARTA reported 279 workers skipping work over the next three days leading up to the ratification.

A letter circulated by workers leading the sickout called for the walkouts to continue Saturday, Sunday and Monday. Reports indicate that the ATU pledged to MARTA CEO Jeffrey Parker that it would exert itself to get workers back to work and also told the National Football League there would be no disruptions during the Super Bowl. Meanwhile, MARTA has announced it has begun an investigation into the sickouts and "will discipline employees found to have engaged in an illegal job action."

Indiana state senator seeks to abolish labor laws for minors

An Indiana state legislator filed a bill that would scrap work permit requirements and do away with restrictions on the hours workers aged 16 and 17 could work. Republican Senator Chip Perfect, who is also a CEO of a ski resort that employs between 300 and 400 minors, claims that Indiana law that requires permits to be filled out by employers, schools and students, are antiquated.

Perfect's Senate Bill 342 seeks to undo not just permits, but additional legislation that bars 16-year-old students from working past 10 PM or over 30 hours per week when school is in session and not more than 40 hours per week when school is out of session unless they have parental permission. Indiana law also requires employers to allow minors half-hour breaks for every 6 hours worked.

Federal labor law places restrictions on what companies can require of workers under age 16, but for 16- and 17-year-old workers it does little beyond requiring the minimum wages.



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