

## Montreal Airport refuelers on strike

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

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### Montreal Airport refueling workers on strike

Workers at two major airports in Montreal went on strike December 31 demanding a wage increase and less onerous shift scheduling. The strikers, members of the International Association of Machinists, are employed by Swissport, the lone supplier of fuel to aircraft at the city's Pierre-Elliott-Trudeau and Mirabel airports. Currently, many workers earn a meager \$16 (CDN) per hour, barely enough to make basic ends meet in the city.

About 100 workers are covered by the Swissport agreement, including refueling personnel, mechanics, dispatchers and maintenance staff. The union had presented a contract to its members on December 21, but that agreement was overwhelmingly rejected. Some minor delays in flights from the two airports have been recorded but Swissport is presently using management to prevent major disruptions. The Canada Industrial Relations Board has ordered the union to re-start negotiations and talks continue with a federal mediator. The federal Liberal Minister of Labour, Filomena Tassi, has not ruled out back-to-work legislation.

### Winnipeg Tim Horton's workers locked out; scabs deployed

Fifteen workers at a Winnipeg Tim Horton's coffee shop franchise have been locked out in a dispute over poverty-level wages. The outlet is one of a handful of Tim Horton's operations in Canada that have been unionized. The employees, members of the Workers United Canada Council, are demanding a 30 cents per hour wage increase.

Workers currently earn a paltry \$11.75 (CDN) an hour. The minimum wage in the province of Manitoba currently stands at \$11.65. Living Wage Canada has set the minimum for a family of four with two adults working to meet basic needs at \$14.53 per hour. The franchise owner has refused to grant more than a 20-cent-an-hour increase and has deployed replacement workers to keep his operation open.

Despite being in power from 1999 to 2016, the so-called "progressive" government of the social democratic New Democratic Party in Manitoba consistently refused to bring forward anti-scab legislation.

Workers in the fast food industry continue to be ruthlessly exploited. In Ontario, when the provincial minimum wage rose to \$14 an hour in 2018, several Tim Horton's franchise owners and many other businesses across the province responded with undisguised hostility. They announced an end to paid breaks for their workers, removed other workplace perks, and even instituted the claw-back of infrequent tips. In many cases, these measures not only offset the minimum wage increase, but left workers earning less money than before the wage hike took effect.

In a particularly scandalous move that received much attention in the Canadian media, Ron Joyce Jr. and Jeri-Lynn Horton-Joyce, the owners of two Tim Horton's franchises, and heirs to billionaire Ron Joyce Sr., the co-founder of the Tim Horton's coffee shop empire, ordered their Ontario workers to sign a document acknowledging their loss of paid breaks, paid benefits and other monetary incentives.

### Mexican hotel workers strike over union recognition

Workers at the Los Cabos Hard Rock and Nobu Hotels in Cabo San Lucas, Baja California, Mexico walked off the job January 4 to demand that the owners—including actor Robert De Niro—comply with federal labor law and accept the Workers and Farmers Revolutionary Confederation (CROC) as their collective bargaining representative.

The workers at both hotels had held a secret ballot vote in the presence of three public notaries. The vote indicated that the workers favored CROC as their representative over their present union, the Confederation of Workers of Mexico (CTM). The CTM collaborated with the Mexican government and employers to suppress the strike at the Matamoros *maquilas* and the rebellion of autoworkers at the GM Silao complex last year.

Although the CROC is not a revolutionary union, a previous vote in November already showed that the workers preferred it over the corrupt CTM. Nonetheless, the hotel administration refused to recognize the former, a clear violation of labor law. CROC says that it has documented proof of management threats to fire workers and blacklist them at other hotels and other tourism industry businesses in the area.

CROC is calling for the intervention of local and federal authorities to enforce the workers' will. It is also demanding that

inspectors come in to oblige the bosses to respect recently passed labor laws.

### **Mexican waste pickers protest privatization plans**

About 250 waste pickers, known in Spanish as *pepenadores*, held a protest at the entrance to the San Nicolás Sanitary Landfill in Aguascalientes, capital of the Mexican state of the same name, on January 3. In freezing weather, they carried signs declaring “250 families without livelihood,” “No to the privatization of the landfill” and others, and denounced plans by the municipality to contract out their work, which they have been performing since 1959.

According to a December 2016 report on Mexico City landfill workers by Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), waste pickers “are responsible for separating the recyclable materials from the waste moving through conveyor belts. The *pepenadores* make a living from selling the recyclables.”

As for working conditions, the WIEGO report adds, “Their informal status further leads to discrimination ... The main challenge they face is the lack of recognition as workers by the government, and this is caused by the absence of contracts. Consequently, they have no salary, employment security, social security, or any other work-related benefits. Many of these workers even have to buy their own uniforms.”

The protesters, who briefly held up the delivery of trash trucks as a half dozen police looked on, also had signs saying, “Tere, you left us without work,” referring to the refusal of PAN party mayor, Teresa Jiménez Esquivel, to respond to previous pleas to meet with the *pepenadores* and concessionaires.

After about 45 minutes, an official with the Aguascalientes Workers Federation told workers that a meeting with the mayor had been arranged and that the workers would be able to keep their jobs and continue working under the same scheme. A *La Jornada* report noted, “By what the *pepenadores* say, they indicate that from the brief manner that they have been informed that they will not lose their sources of income, that nonetheless they doubt that they will comply with this measure.”

### **Guyanese logging company workers protest pay and conditions**

Workers at Ping Establishment, a logging company in Coomacka Mines, a small village approximately eight miles from the town of Linden, Guyana, held a protest on January 3 over their pay and working conditions. Protesters carried picket signs demanding better pay and treatment. The workers accuse Ping of taking advantage of workers. One protester told the *Guyana Times* that “when we talk for our rights, they tell us ‘go home’ and don’t

come back.”

A community councilor told the workers that he would talk to the regional chairman on January 6, with representatives of their union and the labor department present, and the workers resumed their duties.

### **Argentine taxi drivers hold brief strike over fares**

Taxi drivers in the Argentine city of Córdoba held a four-hour strike December 31 from 8:00 p.m. until midnight. The short strike was held to protest the refusal of employers to respond to their demand for a fare increase, which would raise their pay.

The strike followed another stoppage that lasted from December 24 to 26, but evoked no response from employers or from the municipality.

The current rate of pay has been called “obsolete” by the Córdoba Taxi Workers Syndicate due to the nation’s high inflation rate.

### **Massachusetts judge calls intimidation by school officials against teachers “troubling”**

A Superior Court judge issued a ruling December 31 calling the actions of administrators at the Andover elementary school “troubling.” The ruling stems from the intervention of school principal Tracy Crowley and other administrators against teachers who wanted to conduct a survey of teachers concerning a hostile work environment at the school. The judge did not grant the Andover Education Association’s request for an injunction.

When the school’s administration learned that teachers were trying to determine the scope of intimidation at the school, they dragged 20 of the elementary school’s 40 teachers before Andover city’s labor lawyer to answer questions. Half of those interviewed may face disciplinary action, according to school superintendent Sheldon Berman.

On December 26 teachers held a rally to call attention to the situation. The Andover Education Association has also filed an unfair labor practice grievance with the state Massachusetts Department of Labor Relations and a hearing has been moved up for some time in January.



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