

Massachusetts nurses vote overwhelmingly to strike for safe staffing ratios

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

United States

The 800 nurses at St. Vincent Hospital in Worcester, Massachusetts voted February 10 by an 89 percent margin to strike over unsafe staffing ratios. The Massachusetts Nurses Association (MNA) is seeking to reduce the ratio of nurses to patients from the current one-to-five to a one-to-four ratio.

During the first surge of the coronavirus pandemic, the hospital agreed to put in place a one-to-three ratio. But in April 2020, Tenet Healthcare, the Fortune 500 conglomerate which owns St. Vincent, announced it would combine furloughs with \$1.6 billion in CARES act loans and grants “to ensure we were focused on maximizing our cash position.”

Marlena Pellegrino, an MNA nurse told Worcester Telegram & Gazette, “Our COVID floors right now are drowning. Our emergency rooms are drowning. Our ICUs are drowning.”

The MNA has attempted unsuccessfully for ten years to obtain safe staffing levels through the Massachusetts legislature. Two years ago, they lost a ballot initiative.

On the same day as the strike vote, Tenet Healthcare announced 2020 profits of \$414 million. The MNA responded, “Tenet is a for-profit healthcare conglomerate, and we cannot stand by while they take advantage of a global pandemic to, in the words of their Dallas-based CEO, ‘maintain a strong cash position.’”

St. Vincent management have refused to negotiate since their last offer on January 28. The MNA must issue a ten-day notice of intent to strike before picketing can begin.

Latin America

Another strike ratification vote scheduled for workers at Mexican airline

On-site voting for strike authorization at Mexico’s Interjet airline sites is scheduled for February 16. The workers and the airline have been embroiled in conflict over Interjet’s nonpayment of wages for months. After numerous company false starts and delaying tactics, the workers struck on January 8.

Interjet lawyers, claiming that the 62 percent strike vote did not represent the will of the majority of workers, appealed to the Federal Conciliation and Arbitration Board (JFCA) to declare the walkout “nonexistent,” but the board ruled the strike valid. However, it also called for a new strike authorization vote.

By now, the company owes the workers more than eight biweekly payments in addition to the end-of-year bonus, food vouchers and other benefits. The workers’ union is part of the Workers Confederation of Mexico, which is notorious for its corrupt class-collaborationist policy, including threats, betrayals and retaliation against militant workers.

Salvadoran culture ministry workers strike over contract violations

Two unions in El Salvador, the Secretariat of Culture Syndicate (Sitrasesc) and the Cultural Workers Syndicate (Sicultura) went on strike February 11 over noncompliance of the Ministry of Culture (Micultra) with the collective contract. Micultra then announced the closure until further notice of all cultural spaces.

Micultra justified the closures for reasons of force majeure without elaborating, but the unions accuse the ministry of shuttering facilities because the workers are on strike over benefits that have not been paid after two months. A statement on Sitrasesc’s Facebook page declared, “For support of the basic basket that they owe us for two months until now, thus we are standing in struggle until we see a result in favor of the working class.”

According to José Luna, Sicultura’s secretary general, these include payment of US\$50 above the wage of the lowest-paid workers up to a salary of US\$1,200. (The dollar is El Salvador’s official currency.)

He accused Micultra of “bad intention, because this benefit is contained in the collective contract, approved by law and should

be paid the first six days of every month.” The payments for January and February have yet to be delivered.

Sicultra also is calling for the rehiring of Hugo Díaz, an archaeologist who was fired at the beginning of the pandemic. Luna claims that Díaz was sacked for being “a great defender” of the workers and called his firing “a political decision.”

Dominican Republic: University professors strike for pay raise

Professors at the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo (UASD) went on strike February 8 to demand a raise. The UASD Professors Associations Federation (Faprouasd) is calling for a 40 percent pay increase. The University Employees Association (Asudem) announced that its members would join the strike and added some additional demands, including the creation of a blood bank and expansion of health care coverage. Asudem members also want to receive 100 percent of their pay upon retirement.

On Feb. 9, UASD management offered Faprouasd a five percent raise, which was rejected as insufficient. The federation is demanding incentive pay for teaching virtual classes to be raised from 9,000 pesos (US\$155) to 25,000 pesos (US\$431) per month and is also calling for pensions for retirees of 60,000 pesos, or US\$1,034.

Colombian hospital workers strike for overdue pay

Some 420 workers—150 of them contract laborers—at the San Francisco de Asís Hospital in Quibdó, the capital city of Chocó Department, in Western Colombia, remain on strike over unpaid wages. The workers walked out January 22 to demand wages owed from October, November and December, in addition to the year-end bonus. Emergency services have remained functioning the whole time.

On February 5, the hospital administration began to pay some of the back wages, but the workers vowed to stay on strike until all personnel are paid. According to the hospital’s auditor, it has received 21 billion pesos (US\$6 million) recently, but with debt of about 42 billion pesos, it will be at least six months before reaching “a point of equilibrium.” Alertapaisa.com reports, “With things as they are, the next payments could be between one and two months.”

After a February 9 meeting of the workers, the auditor and the procurator-general, workers allowed administrative personnel to enter the building. In order to get that concession, the Chocó governor, who is also president of the San Francisco de Asís board of directors, agreed to some commitments. The governor claimed that he would track and evaluate the “advances of the process.”

Whether the governor delivers on any of his promises remains to be seen. The workers, having heard such promises before, remain on strike.

Argentine bus company workers strike for unpaid wages

Some 230 workers for the Mi Bus transport company in Bariloche, Argentina took strike action February 10 to protest the firm’s noncompliance with an agreement to pay their wages for January. The agreement had been signed by Mi Bus and the municipality in the local office of the Labor Ministry with Automotor Transport Union (UTA) reps.

A few days before, the provincial government deposited over seven million pesos (US\$82,000) and the municipality authorized an extraordinary contribution of nearly 4.7 million pesos (US\$53,000), which was used to pay some pending parity payments as well as the year-end payment of some workers, but not the January monies.

On February 11, with no indication that the full wages had been deposited, the UTA called for the strike to continue. However, UTA delegation director Pablo Figueroa explained that the workers are ready to return to work as soon as the salary issue is deposited.

Canada

Ontario unions file lawsuit over provincial Ford government pay limits

A coalition of 40 unions has filed a lawsuit against legislation enacted by the right-wing Ontario government of Premier Doug Ford that severely limits wage and benefit increases for public workers.

The lawsuit targets Bill 124, enacted in November 2019, that imposed pay and benefit caps for the province’s one million public workers of a 1 percent annual increase. The limits were used as a standard for imposing pay raises of less than one percent annually on Ontario teachers last year.

Under the circumstances, the unions’ lawsuit represents a miserable cover for the labor bureaucrats’ abject capitulation to Ford. The unions have blown hot air over the caps, but nonetheless have capitulated to the Ford government time and again.



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