

## Mexico Interjet workers continue strike, Molson workers locked out in Toronto

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Latin America

### **Mexican Interjet airline workers vote resoundingly to continue strike for overdue pay and benefits**

On February 16, workers at the Mexican airline Interjet voted over 95 percent in favor of continuing the strike that they began on January 8 to press their demands for overdue wages. The pilots, flight attendants, ground crew, customer service and other workers had voted online to strike for wages that had been unpaid since August and for benefits, such as the end-of-year bonus, the Infonavit housing fund and the savings fund, that had not been deposited since last March.

Interjet attorneys appealed to the Federal Conciliation and Arbitration Board (JFCA) to reject that vote and declare the walkout “nonexistent,” asserting that the 62 percent “yes” vote did not represent the will of the majority of workers and that many workers were not honoring the strike. While the board nixed Interjet’s appeal, it called for a revote to be held in person at Interjet terminals, hangars and offices, with JFCA representatives present. Over 4,000 of Interjet’s 5,000 employees voted in the most recent ballot.

Interjet, which is heavily indebted to suppliers and tax agencies, suspended operations in December. Its attempts to get a government bailout have failed.

### **Construction workers strike against poor pay and conditions at Dos Bocas, Mexico refinery**

Over 1,000 workers at a refinery construction project in the port of Dos Bocas, in Paraíso, Tabasco, Mexico went on a sit-down strike February 16 over inhuman conditions, poor pay and the refusal of the company, ICA Fluor, to provide adequate COVID-19 protective clothing and equipment (PPE). The workers included welders, carpenters, ironworkers, scaffolding workers, electricians and masons.

The striking workers accuse ICA Fluor of exploitation, with workdays of over 10 hours without overtime pay, measly wages and terrible conditions. The striking workers include slogans against their union leadership, which they say has sent armed goons to intimidate them. They have issued a plea to President Andrés Manuel López Obrador to force ICA Fluor to raise their wages 20 percent.

Another key demand of the workers is the provision of PPE. High levels of unemployment due to the pandemic are impelling people both young and old, men and women, to wait in long lines to apply for a chance to risk their lives to earn the pittance that ICA Fluor pays. Work on the project has not slackened since the initial outbreak of COVID-19, and Paraíso accounts for about 12 percent of COVID-related deaths in the state.

The reaction of the state government was predictable. On February 18, units of the National Guard and State Prosecutor’s Office were deployed to the site and dislodged the workers, claiming strikers had threatened to “disrupt the installations.”

### **Oaxacan health workers strike to demand COVID-19 vaccinations**

Over 1,700 doctors, nurses and administrative personnel on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in the Mexican state of Oaxaca decided February 16 to stop work if frontline personnel who treat infected patients are not vaccinated against COVID-19 by February 23.

Since February 13, hospital doctors and nurses have been receiving their first doses of the Pfizer/Biontech vaccine, but in the 100 clinics and health centers throughout the state, nurses and administrative workers have yet to receive it.

### **Costa Rican professors, students protest proposed public employment law**

Professors, students and administrators from Costa Rica’s state universities held a protest in front of the nation’s legislative assembly in San José on February 18. The action was called to urge the lawmakers not to include universities in a bill that would regulate public employment.

The bill, which would create eight salary scales for public sector employees, has been promoted as a way to increase efficiency and consistency in public institutions, but the protesters claim that it would adversely affect the autonomy and functioning of the country’s five state universities. It is part of a deal being worked out with the International Monetary Fund, which would lend the government \$1.75 billion in exchange for “reforms,” including cuts to public sector employees’ salaries.

The demonstration was the latest in a number of protests since the government’s announcement of plans to negotiate a loan with the IMF back in September 2020.

## Dancers in Panama perform publicly to protest pandemic plight

A group of professional dancers and artists held a performance in the Vía España shopping center area in Panama City on February 17. For half an hour, members of the Dance Artists Syndicate of Panama (Sadanpa) held forth, executing lively dances in colorful costumes.

However, the performance had a serious purpose. The event was held to bring attention to the neglect that the nation's performing artists have suffered since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. A Sadanpa statement deplored the loss of income that professional entertainers have experienced and the dim future before them.

Sadanpa communications secretary Félix Ruiz told reporters, "We don't have a guarantee on the part of the government nor from any state entity to safeguard the position of the artist, we keep graduating professionals from the University of Panama who don't know if they're to have work; that is, we live in the shadow of informality."

He criticized the Culture Ministry, telling EFE reporters that it had "impoverished art in our country ... because we solely depend on them, and many times the contributions artists make to the ministry and its projects are paid with a plate of food, with 'Thanks a lot and we'll see you soon,' and that cannot happen." The ministry later reported that it met with the artistic and cultural groups to discuss the issue.

## Argentine municipal workers strike for higher pay

Municipal workers for the city of Junín in Argentina's Buenos Aires province struck from February 17 through February 21. Trash collection, street maintenance, bill payment and other services were halted, while minimal services were maintained in health, social development and other categories.

The Municipal Workers Syndicate called the walkout to demand a raise and accused the municipal government of lacking "the will to dialogue, to keep its word, to honor the workers." It also denounced its "disinformation and bad faith."

On February 20, a union statement claimed adhesion of 90 percent and stated that "we thank the compañeros for this general support in our struggle for just salaries," and concluded, "The Executive still has not understood that we have starvation wages. We want a raise NOW that permits us to sustain our families in a dignified manner."

United States

## Springfield, Oregon nursing home workers launch strike over unsafe conditions in wake of COVID-19 deaths

Nursing home workers at The Rawlin memory care facility in Springfield, Oregon, launched a 10-day strike starting February 16 over demands for safe staffing, wages, training and union recognition. Workers are outraged over terrible conditions at the facility that have led to an outbreak of COVID-19 that has led to 21 deaths in the last nine weeks, including six recent COVID-19 deaths.

Striker Summer Trosko, a lead medical tech emphasized the lack of staffing. "You've got care partners in tears, trying to take care of them

and they can't keep up. They can't give them all the care they need, it's not physically possible. So we're losing people and we're watching people get sick who don't need to get sick, because we don't have the staffing to care for them."

Some 85 percent of the workers voted to unionize with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). But OneLife, the company that owns The Rawlin, refused to recognize the union and workers declined to let the company sabotage their struggle and walked off the job.

OneLife CEO Zack Falk demonstrated his utter contempt for the deaths from COVID-19 in the nursing home, telling KVAL news, "Around the winter months and after the holidays there is an uptick in deaths so I think it's not unusual to see that." In another interview with KLCC, Falk said the deaths were due to operational issues. Residents are admitted with the expectation that they'll remain in the facility until they pass away.

The SEIU reports that Greg Falk, another owner of OneLife, paid \$6.5 million in cash for a mansion in Arizona.

## McDonald's fined for firing Los Angeles, California fast food workers

The California Labor Commissioner fined a McDonald's franchisee in the Boyle Heights neighborhood of Los Angeles over \$125,000 on February 12 for illegally firing four workers after they reported violations concerning working conditions and COVID-19 protocols. Between March and October 2020, the fast food workers reported seven complaints after six workers tested positive for COVID-19.

Workers accused management of not enforcing masking and social distancing and not providing personal protective equipment. The workers filed a retaliation complaint with the Labor Commissioner's Office, OSHA and the LA County Department of Health.

Canada

## Toronto Molson Coors beer workers locked out

About 300 production, packaging and warehouse workers at Molson Coors' giant Toronto brewery were locked out this past weekend after an overwhelming rejection of a concessions contract. The company has insisted that most workers be moved from a defined benefit pension program to an inferior defined contribution plan based on the vagaries of the stock market. The company immediately announced that it would continue production without its unionized workforce, but refused to say whether outside scabs or managers would be mobilized to carry out the task.

Canadian Union of Brewery and General Workers Local 325 president Gaurav Sharma has not taken steps to mobilize in the likelihood that scabs are hired. Rather, Sharma told reporters that there are six to eight weeks of inventory on hand, and in any case, the company could increase output at its other brewery operations to make up any production shortfalls.

During the last contract dispute in 2017 workers struck for six weeks against company demands for across-the-board concessions on wages, work rules and benefits, cuts which were by and large imposed in the eventual negotiated settlement. Molson Coors is the third largest brewery in the world.



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