

Mexican judicial workers protest for payment of food vouchers; Minneapolis airport workers reach agreement

Workers Struggles: The Americas

18 January 2022

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

Mexican judicial workers protest for payment of food vouchers

Members of the Single Union of Workers of the Judiciary of Mexico City (SUTPJ-CDMX) took over some offices of the Mexico City Superior Court (TSJ-CDMX) and blocked the building's entrance January 10. The action, which lasted over five hours, was taken to demand the payment of year-end food vouchers.

The judicial workers also blocked traffic in the capital, but Secretary of Citizen Security police were deployed to clear the blockades, which had briefly caused traffic jams. Negotiations between the SUTPTSJ-CDMX and TSJ-CDMX began at about 3 PM, resulting in an agreement to free up the vouchers, which are used by over 11,000 workers in the judicial sector.

The protesting workers had other demands, including payment of retroactive salaries and risk bonds, but they were not addressed.

Trash collection workers in Chihuahua strike for overdue pay

Dozens of workers for the Kliffer del Norte trash collection company in Chihuahua, Chihuahua began a strike on January 10 to demand payment of their wages. The workers also demanded Christmas bonuses and vacation pay.

Kliffer also has unpaid debts with the government. On January 12, the Mexican Social Security Institute, followed by the Federal Conciliation Board, sent personnel to the company to seize one each of their trucks as payment for debts. Workers expressed worries that if the company were liquidated, they would be left high and dry.

On January 14, the workers lifted their strike when they reached an agreement with the company. They will work for a month while the debts, supposedly, are repaid. An employee told *El Herald* de

Chihuahua, "We are going to work for a month; that is fine as long as we see how the situation is resolved, otherwise we will strike again and continue with legal actions."

Jamaican university lecturers union suspends strike over pay and benefits

The West Indies Group of University Teachers (WIGUT), which represents lecturers at the University of the West Indies, announced January 10 that it had suspended the strike they had voted for on January 7. The walkout was set to begin January 17.

The vote by the more than 800 lecturers resulted from their failure to receive payments due them, as well as UWI's refusal to consider a meager 4 percent raise proposed by the union. They resolved to stop attending meetings or take part in activities in preparation for the upcoming semester. Most critically, they refused to upload grades from the semester just concluded.

According to a Jamaica Gleaner report, the UWI claimed that "several advancements were made in relation to key outstanding claim items, including the salary issue. Consequently, WIGUT agreed to suspend its industrial action."

Partial strike by Uruguayan bank workers highlights stalled talks, salary demands

Members of the Uruguayan Banking Employees Association (AEBU) refused to reload ATMs in about a dozen cities the night of January 14. They also stopped working security and overtime, not returning to work until 12:50 PM on January 17.

These actions were taken to protest the lack of progress in collective bargaining talks, and to emphasize their rejection of management's salary raise offer of 5.8 percent as inflation has reached nearly 8 percent. This is in the context of increased profits in the banking sector.

If negotiations remain stalled, the AEBU says it will consider a national one-day strike and a protest march.

Argentine labor ministry's mandatory conciliation decree staves off lifeguards' strike over wage demands

Following the January 13 announcement by the union of lifeguards in Argentina's Villa Gesell beach resort city that it was going on strike over wages, the Labor Ministry decreed mandatory conciliation (i.e., binding arbitration) and demanded that the union and the municipality continue talks.

The union had called the walkout after an assembly decision that the city's wage offer was insufficient. However, the lifeguards had other issues that the city government was not addressing, including the lack of equipment and security, inadequate work periods, noncompliance with various health and safety regulations and insufficient inspections of private spas.

Tentative agreement with two Minneapolis-St. Paul airport maintenance unions prevent joint strike

Tentative agreements were reached January 11-12 with two unions at the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport, avoiding the possibility of joint strike action. The 94 members of Teamsters Local 320 who plow runways were slated to strike January 20, while the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 49, who operate heavy equipment, was preparing to strike on January 25.

The Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC), fearing two strikes, called a Full Commission meeting at the beginning of January to assess the situation. MAC board chair Rick King griped that airport snowplow drivers were already paid more than Minneapolis and St. Paul snowplow drivers and "appear willing to disrupt the air transportation system..."

Workers counter, however, that some of their benefits, such as severance pay, are markedly lower than other airport workers.

Tentative agreement averts California hospital strike

The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and negotiators for Doctors Hospital in Riverside, California reached a tentative agreement January 12, narrowly avoiding a walkout by 334 health care workers the following day. The one-day walkout was called to protest low wages, health care cuts, under-staffing and "unsustainable turnover," according to the union.

The SEIU revealed that key wage increases had been granted, as many of the workers receive minimum wage pay. The low pay contributes to a large turnover rate, as many new hires stay for only 3-6 months before moving to another hospital, contributing to

under-staffing.

Pathology assistant John Richardson told City News Service, "Even before COVID, we were massively understaffed. Now, it's just ridiculous. We've got patients waiting seven or eight hours just to get into a room because there isn't anybody to transport them there. We've got COVID rooms that aren't getting cleaned because there aren't enough housekeeping staff."

Workers will vote on the tentative agreement towards the end of January. Doctors Hospital was purchased in 2019 by AHMC, a for-profit privately held hospital corporation which owns seven facilities and employs more than 7,000 workers in the Greater San Gabriel Valley of California.

Nurses in Ontario and Quebec demand adequate PPE

Almost two years since the COVID-19 pandemic began spreading across the globe, thousands of nurses in Canada's most populous provinces are still demanding a proper supply of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Fit-tested N-95 masks still go lacking in hospitals, clinics and long-term-care facilities. The shortages have continued in each new wave of the pandemic, even as nurses have been highlighting the governmental negligence since March 2020.

With scientists confirming last spring that the spread of the virus is largely achieved through aerosol transmission (rather than droplets), the necessity for properly fitted N-95 masks was underscored once again. However, federal health officials did not update their guidance until this past autumn. Even then, adequate procurement and distribution of the vital life-saving equipment has been sporadic.

Nurses now point out that with new health authority guidance for health care staff to attend work after only five days of isolation and even when still testing positive for the virus, the need for proper masking is ever more acute both for patient and worker safety.

As the shortages continue and as the Omicron variant rips through society, hospitals and other care facilities can no longer cope with the mass intake of patients combined with exhausted, under-paid and demoralized staff. This past weekend, new records for infection were set in Ontario and Quebec.

In Ontario, 3,957 COVID patients were hospitalized this past Saturday, up 1,500 since last week, and 558 people lie in intensive care units. In the past 24-hour period, test positivity now exceeds 25 percent of all those tested. In Ontario, 10,565 have so far died of COVID. In Quebec, 12,289 deaths have thus far been recorded with 96 deaths occurring this past Saturday alone, and 3,195 are currently hospitalized, with 275 in intensive care.



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