

Sutter nurses strike Bay Area hospitals, Mexican Audi autoworkers reject union backed deal

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

Resident doctors in Mexico strike, protest cut in year-end bonus

Resident doctors who work for Petróleos Mexicanos (Petromex) Health Services struck at least six hospitals in Mexico City and other municipalities in the states of Veracruz, Tamaulipas and Oaxaca on December 21. The doctors, members of the Pemex Resident Doctors National Front, protested both the shortchanging of the end-of-year bonus and threats they had received when they demanded the payment.

According to the doctors, the bonus should have been around 13,000 pesos (US\$671), but Pemex cut it to 2,500 pesos (US\$129). To add insult to injury, doctors noted that they had worked through waves of the COVID pandemic and in return received an insulting bonus. Pemex officials claim that because of increases in their pay—which the Front described as “modest”—during the year, the bonus was lowered.

In demonstrations in the environs of the hospitals, protesters chanted and carried signs saying, “It’s a bonus, not a tip! (¡Es aguinaldo, no propina!) “No more threats” and “No more garbage contracts!” The last slogan referred to Pemex management’s refusal to reach an agreement in a meeting with reps from Interior and Labor Ministries.

Resident doctors and interns in hospitals have protested their poor working conditions, shortages, job insecurity, mistreatment and violence against them before. In October, resident doctors at the capital’s October 1 Regional Hospital protested the arrest of a medical student accused of stealing supplies. The student explained on social media: “I told them [police] that it is material that I and all my fellow interns and doctors do not take without permission from higher-ranking personalities. Why? Because they are materials that we use in daily practice to carry out all our treatments and cures.”

Mexican autoworkers vote to reject four-year below-inflation contract

Mexico’s Federal Labor Court for Collective Affairs sent an official notification December 22 to the Independent Union of Workers of Audi de México (Sitaudi) that it had received its notice to strike. Of the 4,002 unionized workers, 3,604 voted on two company proposals. The more recent offer was rejected by a margin of 2,326 votes three days before.

The contract that Sitaudi brought to its members would apply from 2023

to 2026 and would raise wages by 8.4 percent. Workers considered this rate insufficient in view of the official inflation rate, which reached 8.5 percent in November alone.

Sitaudi and the firm are continuing negotiations with a deadline of December 31. Without an agreement acceptable to workers by then, the walkout will begin at zero hour on January 1 at the automaker’s factory in San José Chiapa in the southeastern state of Puebla.

Bolivian fried chicken restaurant workers end strike over labor rights

On December 23, unionized workers at a La Paz, Bolivia restaurant chain, Pollos Copacabana, ended a strike they began on December 17. The workers had walked out over nonpayment of wages, overtime and bonuses as well as cancellation of vacations in the midst of the pandemic, which continues to ravage the country.

Pollos Copacabana management alleged that the strike was illegal, a claim denied by conflict secretary of the Federation of Factory Workers of La Paz, Marco Antonio Mamani, who told reporters, “Sit-downs are legal according to the Political Constitution of the State; So, our colleagues cannot be fired.”

The day before the lifting of the strike, a group of employees held a counterprotest and chanted, “We want to work!” Although some insults were exchanged, the conflict did not escalate. Minami denounced the counter protesters, saying that they were administrative employees “who earn more than 12,000 to 15,000 bolivianos [US\$1,740- 2170]” while those on the picket line “earn between 3,000 and 4,000 bolivianos [US\$434-579]; they are the ones who are fighting for their labor rights.”

Nonetheless, on December 23, management and the union announced that they had reached a “pre-agreement” and that workers would return to work that afternoon. This did not stop Pollos Copacabana manager Oscar Camacho from calling the strike “illegal” and denouncing the striking workers of defaming, insulting and abusing the company. He also claimed that the company complies with all benefit requirements. Neither the company nor the union elaborated on the details of the “pre-agreement.”

Bank workers in Argentina hold one-day strike over changes to retirement law

Some 420 branches of Buenos Aires province’s Banco Provincia were paralyzed on December 21 as members of the La Bancaria bank workers union called a one-day strike. The bank employees walked out to protest

the lack of progress in the modification of Law No. 15,008, a measure that would regulate the retirement of bank workers.

Although approved during the 2015-2019 administration of María Eugenia Vidal, the law has been stalled in the legislature in opposition to the efforts of Vidal's successor of the right-wing Juntos por el Cambio (Together for Change) bloc. Among the changes to the law that Juntos opposes are recalculations of retirement benefits, a change in the retirement age and an increase in both employees' and employers' contributions to the retirement fund.

United States

Sutter nurses launch 10-day strike at two Bay Area facilities, oppose concessions, hospital closure

Nurses at Sutter's Berkeley, California Alta Bates hospital and Summit Medical Center in Oakland launched a 10-day strike after rejecting decisively a sellout deal imposed by the National Nurses United-California Nurses Association (NNU-CNA) union leadership that includes a two-tier wage system and inferior pay increases. Over 1,800 nurses walked out Christmas Eve and are set to continue their action through January 1.

The nurses voted to strike December 12 and the union gave management a 10-day strike notice December 13 to minimize the impact of the walkout.

Nurses had reportedly been leaving Sutter in large numbers to work at Kaiser facilities where they can earn \$10-12 more per hour, leading to severe staffing shortages at Sutter. Nurses are angry that their union has refused to demand parity and instead sought to impose inferior agreements, dividing nurses against each other, rather than fight for a strong master contract.

The NNU-CAN leadership forced through inferior agreements at other Sutter hospitals in the state, splitting the membership.

Sutter nurses oppose a plan by management to close Alta Bates hospital. Sutter has allowed conditions at the hospital to deteriorate drastically to the point where new patients have sought to avoid treatment there.

In a show of solidarity, Oakland teachers joined the picket line. They are opposing plans by the district to close 11 schools in largely lower-income areas. Oakland residents oppose the closure of Alta Bates, the only remaining hospital inside the city.

Tentative agreement heads off strikes at two Ohio casinos

Two unions, jointly representing a combined 900 workers at the Hollywood Casinos in Toledo and Columbus, Ohio, announced December 22 they had reached a tentative agreement just hours before a planned strike. United Steelworkers Local 1-346 and United Auto Workers Local 14 will make the company proposal available to workers this week and a ratification vote would probably follow during the first week of January.

Eric Sweeny for the USW called the wage increase for workers a "historical deal," but full details were unavailable. Casino workers were making a miserable base pay of just \$6.36 an hour, not including tips. According to Sweeny, workers would receive a paltry wage increase of about \$1 an hour in the first year, followed by unspecified increases in subsequent years of a four-year agreement.

The union workers were also pressing for more affordable health care. Many were unable to afford preferred health care plans on the depressed

wages.

Penn Entertainment, which operates the two casinos, manages a total of 40 casinos across the United States. The company recently reported third-quarter revenues of \$1.6 billion, up 7.5 percent from the same period one year ago.

Utah-based company found to violate child labor laws

An investigation by the Department of Labor found that Crumble Cookies, a Utah-based company, has violated child labor laws at a number of their Utah locations. The company had workers as young as 14 working over the eight-hour limit and some operating ovens or machinery in violation of federal law.

Plants in Bountiful, Centerville, Layton and Ogden, Utah were cited. Other locations in California, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Tennessee and Washington state are also being investigated.

Crumble was founded in 2017. Making cookies and ice cream, it rapidly expanded, reaching 149 stores by July 2021. Today it operates over 600 stores across 47 states.

Northern Minnesota snowplow drivers vote overwhelmingly to strike

Snowplow drivers and other workers in Minnesota's St. Louis County voted December 19 by 99 percent to authorize strike action over wages and other benefits. Teamsters Local 320, which represents some 170 workers, was bargaining for a 4 percent raise in each year of a three-year agreement as opposed to the 3 percent per year offered by county administrators.

The county offered a \$400 cash bonus if the contract is ratified by December 31. The Teamsters are seeking a mere \$100 more.

Despite the overwhelming strike vote, Local 320 President Erik Skoog has indicated he will not move immediately to file the mandatory intent to strike with the state of Minnesota. The filing would initiate a ten-day cooling off period before a strike could take place.

St. Louis County, which runs from the Lake Superior port of Duluth, Minnesota, up to the Canadian border, has been hit by extreme cold and heavy snowfall in the recent cold wave impacting wide areas the US.

Canada

Private sector ambulance strike in Newfoundland set to begin

About 120 private sector paramedics and ambulance drivers, members of the Teamsters union, are preparing for an imminent strike involving crews in central and eastern Newfoundland that service Clarendville, Ferryland, Come-by-Chance and nearby rural areas. The workers are employed by private businessman Robert Fewer. They have been without a contract since March 2020.

The workers had been moving toward a work stoppage last spring until the provincial government intervened to send the opposing parties through a conciliation process. Workers who were preparing a strike vote at that time were particularly angered by reports of the employer preparing a scab workforce should a work stoppage ensue.

The government-imposed conciliation process broke down last week

after months of failed discussions. The workers had indicated last May that they would not withdraw emergency responses and instead restrict their job action to patient transfers and other secondary duties.

The paramedics and drivers receive pay, benefits and working conditions far inferior to those employed in the public sector. Workers get paid for less than 12 hours of their 24-hour shifts and are expected to work overtime without any extra pay should they be attending to a call as their shift is ending. The crews also do not receive any pension benefits.



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