Mexican autoworkers union delays strike against carmaker Audi in Puebla; Chicago health care workers end three-day strike

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Mexican autoworkers union delays strike at Audi plant in Puebla after members reject two sellout contracts

The Independent Union of Workers of Audi Mexico (SITAUDI) extended its January 1 strike deadline to January 11 after its members rejected two company proposals. The workers at the plant in Puebla voted against the two wage-increase offers—8.4 and 9.4 percent—because they did not keep pace with inflation. Workers are calling for an 18 percent increase.

The majority of the 4,000 unionized workers at the San José Chiapa plant voted for strike action months ago and, in fact, SITAUDI received an official notification from the Federal Labor Court for Collective Affairs on December 22 that it had received its strike notice. The union set the January 1 strike deadline as negotiations were underway at the Federal Center for Labor Conciliation and Registration (CFCRL).

In a manner now familiar to workers in the US and other countries, SITAUDI, instead of abiding by the will of its members, will continue to "negotiate" and offer contracts with minor changes that do not meet workers' demands. Eventually, the bureaucracy aims to wear down the workers' resistance until they "get it right," i.e., vote for a sellout contract.

This strategy was already employed last September by the "independent" SITIAVW union against 7,000 workers at the Volkswagen plant, also in Puebla. After two rejections, the workers voted for the third contract, which was not significantly different from the first two. The WSWS reported then that the workers "realized that the union could not be pushed to fight and was ganging up with management and the government against them."

Teachers, students at Bahamian high school protest staff shortages, violence

Teachers and students at Albury High School in Eleuthera, Bahamas left their classrooms and protested outside the building on the morning of January 4. Some of the protesters passed out copies of a flyer calling for more teachers for core subjects, especially mathematics, English language and technical areas.

Another concern of the protesters was the lack of support for teachers who are confronted with disrespect, and in some cases, violence. According to Bahamas Union of Teachers president Belinda Wilson, "These matters have been brought to the attention of the administration, the district superintendent, the acting director, and others—meetings were held last year. However, the matters have not been addressed."

Other issues include the difficulty that newly hired teachers encounter when trying to find housing and the need for a travel allowance. Acting director of education Dominique McCartney-Russell said that she expected that meetings will take place this week.

Trinidad and Tobago: Secondary school teachers stage "drive out" over dangerous conditions

Teachers at St. Joseph Secondary School in St. Joseph, Trinidad left the building, got in their cars and, honking their horns, drove away on January 3. The "drive-out" was held to protest the robbery of a student's parent at gunpoint the day before right outside the school.

Robbers hide in the overgrown grass and shrubbery "almost on a daily basis" and rob students at knife- or gunpoint, one teacher, who requested anonymity, told the *Guardian*. Conditions at the school are dangerous enough: missing grills over drains, no light bulbs in areas that require illumination, concrete falling off of buildings, to name a few.

Over the years, thieves have stolen whatever they can—iron and copper, metal rods, electrical fittings—leaving a "shell," according to the teacher. The Ministry of Education, meanwhile, has ignored pleas for help, either claiming that there is not enough money for necessary infrastructure improvements or putting them on the back burner.

The next day, students stayed home while the T&T Unified Teachers Association (TTUTA) met with officials from the Ministry of Education's Educational Facilities Planning and Procurement Division along with Occupational Health and Safety inspectors, who promised to perform the necessary repairs and upgrades but gave no timeline. According to the *Guardian*, "Minister of Education Dr Nyan Gadsby-Dolly did not respond to requests for comments about the situation at St Joseph Secondary yesterday and efforts to reach TTUTA president Martin Lum Kin were futile."

Argentine toll station workers strike cut short by Labor Ministry mandatory conciliation decree

Members of the Single Union of Toll and Allied Workers (SUTPA)

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struck January 2, raising barriers at toll stations of Buenos Aires and La Plata and on routes to Argentina's Atlantic coast. It was a continuation of "force measures" the workers had begun on December 28.

A SUTPA representative criticized the Autopistas de Buenos Aires SA (AUBASA) firm, which handles toll stations, for its labor reconversion plan.

An AUBASA statement denounced the strike as "totally unjustified" and claimed that the company had followed all guidelines and laws in regard to the reconversion plan. In the midst of the conflict, provincial governor Axel Kicillof called for stripping of SUTPA's trade union status.

The strike action only lasted a few hours due to a decree that afternoon by the Labor Ministry ordering that the parties "start a mandatory conciliation period for a term of fifteen (15) days, in accordance with the provisions of Article 11 of the pre-indicated regulations, and the situation must be returned to the existing one. prior to the start of the conflict and for the duration of this conciliation procedure" and forbade workers from "any direct-action measure that they were implementing and/or planned to implement" and ordered them to provide "services in a normal and habitual way."

The Ministry's order summoned union and company reps to a virtual meeting on January 5. SUTPA complied and lifted the strike.

University of Washington librarians authorize strike action over wages

Librarians at the University of Washington have authorized a strike after extended talks. Years without a wage increase have brought the issue to a boil. Some 120 librarians and press workers unionized in 2021.

University management has hidden itself behind state law, which bars them from unilaterally adjusting wages during negotiations. Meanwhile, they have dragged out talks.

Prior to unionization, workers would receive a miserly 2 percent annual wage increase, but with the onset of the pandemic in 2020, management canceled even these raises. The last raise was in 2019. Meanwhile, the pandemic sparked resignations leading to reduced staffing.

In October of last year, workers carried out a one-day strike and in November, some 94 percent of the bargaining unit voted for an open-ended strike.

Teachers union signs last-minute deal to prevent strike by Akron, Ohio educators

The Akron Education Association reached a last-minute deal Sunday night to prevent a strike by 2,000 teachers and support staff, which was set to begin Monday. The AEA is organizing a snap vote on Tuesday on the three-year deal, which includes below inflation rate raises of 4 percent, 3 percent and 3.5 percent, according to the *Akron Beacon Journal.*

Educators in the 20,000-student school district have been working without a contract since July. This would have been the first teachers strike in the city—a former center of the rubber industry where a quarter of the population lives below the official poverty rate—since 1989.

Christine Fowler Mack, the district's superintendent, said in a statement on Twitter: "I'm pleased with our leaders and of the teachers union. Now our students can report to school Monday in person."

Chicago health care workers conclude three-day strike at 11 clinics

The 440 health care workers at Howard Brown Health clinics in Chicago returned to work January 6 after a three-day strike over stalled negotiations and the layoff of 61 workers on the first day of the walkout. Howard Brown Health, which operates 11 clinics that primarily service LGBTQ patients, has been hit by a $12 million revenue shortfall due to losses in federal funding.

Although the strikers are non-nursing health care workers, they are represented by the Illinois Nurses Association. The union has challenged Howard Brown Health claims about the budget shortfall and the necessity of layoffs. Workers earlier rejected a buyout proposal offered by management.

Lindsey Martin told Block Club Chicago, "At the beginning of 2022, my team had 14 people, but as people quit or left because of the exact reasons that we are striking and unionized, they didn't replace these people. My team was dwindled down to seven people. And last Friday, they laid three of us off. There are now four behavioral health providers for 11 clinics and 30,000 patients."

None of the outstanding issues have been resolved by the three-day strike.

Charlotte, North Carolina, bus drivers authorize strike

Bus drivers for the city of Charlotte, North Carolina, voted by 254 to 14 to authorize a strike after three contract rejections and months of failed negotiations over wages, benefits and safety following the killing of a driver last year. SMART, the union representing the drivers, has not announced a strike deadline and talks are ongoing.

Workers are also concerned about the loss of personal time off days and a clause regarding sympathy strikes. Last summer, the bus system was hit by a series of protests. These involved workers using time off to register a protest with RATP Dev, the company that manages the bus transit system. Over one-third of drivers took part in the protest at its height.

In the wake of the protest, John Lewis, CEO for the Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS), vowed to "close that loophole" by slashing personal time off.

Strike at San Jose, California recycling facilities ends after sympathy walkout

A six-hour clerical worker strike at the California Waste Solutions (CWS) in San Jose January 7 shut down recycling operations for a day before management and the Teamsters reached an agreement. The strike by 10 clerical workers with Teamsters Local 350 was set off in the wake of an attempt by management to remove contract language in side letters that kept clerical work within the bargaining unit and protected against unjust layoffs.

When clerical workers walked out early Friday morning, some 150 drivers, mechanics and landfill workers honored their picket line, resulting in the shutdown of recycling services.

Exact details of the final settlement with CWS are not clear. Robert Sandoval with the Teamsters stated, "we were able to modify it to appease and satisfy some of the concerns of the employer."

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British Columbia Labour Board rules it is illegal for workers to honour some picket lines

In a landmark decision for labour law in the province, the BC Labour Relations Board recently reversed an earlier decision and ruled in favour of ship docking giant Seaspan in a now settled dispute with striking tugboat captains that had drawn in the support of other Vancouver and Victoria dockworkers.

Last September, 1,000 welders, pipefitters, electricians and other trades at Seaspan's North Vancouver shipyard and at a nearby dry dock refused to cross picket lines mounted by striking tugboat captains and engineers. In addition, another 800 tradesmen at Seaspan's Victoria shipyard also honoured picket lines, bringing work to a standstill.

Tugboat captains and engineers in British Columbia, members of the Canadian Merchant Service Guild, went on strike August 25 against Seaspan, the largest ship-docking tug and barge company on Canada's west coast. Workers had been without a contract since September 2019, with management refusing to make a serious wage offer. Instead, Seaspan used the time in the run-up to the strike to pressure its shipyard workers to continue work should the tugboat crews set up picket lines.

However, management's attempts to intimidate its shipyard workers failed. Among other things, the solidarity with the tugboat captains impacted work on two support ships for the Canadian Navy and a Coast Guard vessel in North Vancouver, and also delayed work on standing contracts for repair and maintenance of both navy vessels and other ships at the Victoria shipyard.

When Seaspan appealed to the provincial labour board demanding that the sympathy action of the shipyard workers be outlawed, the board had initially denied the company's request.

The strike by the tugboat crews was eventually settled in October. It has been reported that the striking tugboat workers won a wage increase well above the miserly 2 percent initially offered by Seaspan but nonetheless still below the rate of inflation.

In the new ruling that overturned the original board decision not to outlaw the sympathy actions, the board stated that those actions were, in fact, illegal. To justify their new precedent, the board stated that since the tugboat workers were federally regulated, the board could not apply provincial law that offers some protection for workers refusing to cross a picket line.

Although no retroactive fines were handed down in the new ruling, the decision nonetheless sets a broad new precedent. There are about 120,000 federally regulated workers in the province in industries such as banking and telecommunications as well as rail, air and maritime transport.

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