

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

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## Sao Paulo, Brazil workers protest privatizations and budget cuts

On November 28 São Paulo transit workers carried out a one-day protest strike, paralyzing transit services across the industrial state of São Paulo. Joining them in the protest, but prevented from striking, were education workers from across the state.

Workers across the state are protesting the privatization of public firms and cuts in the province's education budget by the administration of governor Tarcísio de Freitas.

This is the third strike this year in São Paulo against the privatization of public transit, which is scheduled to be completed in 2025.

## Chiapas citizens demand an end to civil war conditions in Mexican state

On November 30, one thousand workers, teachers, students and relatives of disappeared family members marched in the city of San Cristobal de las Casas, in Chiapas state, in southern Mexico, demanding peace and safety in their region.

The demonstrators condemned the wave of violence taking place in this state, involving organized gangs fighting over control of weapons and drug trafficking. These gangs routinely disrupt communications, extort indigenous towns and kidnap peasants.

The protesters rallied at the Justice Building, condemning every-day violence built into the structure of the region, and largely ignored by local, state and federal authorities.

Family members of three recently disappeared young workers denounced the silence of local authorities.

Teachers carried signs demanding an end to attacks on education workers and justice for teachers that have been kidnapped and disappeared and killed while on the job.

## Guatemala newspaper reporters protest

On November 30, Guatemalan Journalists Day, newspaper workers rallied in Guatemala City Public Ministry and in other parts of the

city, demanding an end to the repression of free speech by the current administration.

A week earlier the march organizers at a rally in the Human Rights Square, across from the Main Hall of Justice, Byron Barrera, leader of the Reporters Union (APG) had called the citizenry for support for the protest and for churches to ring their bells during the event.

At the November 30th rally, APG speakers pointed out that in addition to the newspaper workers, the free speech rights of students, educators and investigators are being repressed.

## MGM Grand Detroit Casino workers back to work after being forced to vote again on same agreement they had earlier rejected

The Detroit Casino Council reported that workers at the MGM Grand Detroit Casino voted to accept a new 64-month contract and will return to work after 47 days on strike. The deal is reportedly unchanged from the one they had previously rejected.

The contract contains an immediate \$3 per hour pay raise, an average of 18 percent, and a total of \$5 per hour in raises over the life of the agreement. While the union coalition hailed the pay raises as historic, they come after wages have remained all but static over the last 8 years. They raises do not offset the 20 percent inflation since 2020 let alone cover anticipated future price increases. Most workers currently earn abysmal pay, with some starting in the \$12 an hour range.

Workers at MGM Grand Detroit, Hollywood Casino at Greektown and MotorCity Casino walked out on October 17. While workers at the other two casinos narrowly voted to accept a similar deal November 19, about 1,600 MGM Grand Detroit workers voted down the contract, calling it grossly inadequate given the sacrifices workers made during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Detroit Casino Council comprises about 3,700 workers at the three casinos, members of five unions; the United Auto Workers, UNITE HERE, Teamsters, the Operating Engineers and the Carpenters unions.

The Detroit casinos have reported revenues exceeding pre-pandemic highs. The three Detroit casinos took in more than \$2.27 billion in revenues in 2022 and are expected to surpass that in 2023. The supposedly "historic" gains claimed by the unions amount to only a tiny fraction of casino profits.

## Negotiations resume at Los Robles hospital in Thousand Oaks, California, after five-day strike fails to achieve agreement

Negotiations resumed after the five-day strike by 800 nurses at Los Robles Regional Medical Center in Thousand Oaks, California. The nurses, members of the Service Employees International Union Local 121 RN, want to improve staffing ratios, wages, vacations and healthcare benefits but management is unresponsive.

Details on the status of negotiations are not clear. The *Thousand Oaks Acorn*, stated, “What the parties are not as eager to discuss are compensation details. One picketing nurse told the *Acorn* that the union hasn’t shared many details about that aspect of negotiations.” One nurse told the *Acorn*, “Pay negotiations are part of it, just trying to combat the inflation we are experiencing in California.”

Mindee Carlos raised the issue of nurse-to-staffing ratios. “It’s not safe. We have a ratio, but sometimes we have to go over the ratio and we’re not able to properly take care of patients.”

Los Robles is part of the giant healthcare system HCA Healthcare. The company operated 186 hospitals as of 2020. Its annual gross profit in 2022 was over \$50 billion.

### **City workers in Milpitas, California, want to strike to break contract deadlock**

Two groups of city workers in Milpitas, California, are deeply frustrated with stalled contract negotiations and are considering strike action. The 72 members of the Milpitas’ Professional Technical Workers (ProTech) and another 62 members of the Milpitas Employees Association (MEA) have been in fruitless negotiations ever since their contracts expired this past June.

The two groups constitute the lowest paid city workers. Past minimal wage increases have been devoured by inflation while housing expenses in Milpitas are 269 percent higher than the national average.

Robert De Long, president of the MEA, told The Milpitas Beat that in addition to economic issues, workers were also scarred by the pandemic. “Everyone realized that the City couldn’t function without us. Our members provide more services to the citizens in Milpitas than any department in the City. All my guys worked. We were swimming in Covid. We all got sick. Luckily nobody died. We didn’t ask the City for anything extra.”

ProTech is seeking a 6 percent wage increase in the first year followed by a 4 percent increase in year two. The MEA is looking for 7 percent and 4 percent wage increases. City negotiators have remained obstinate in only offering increases of 4 percent and 3 percent.

### **New York aerospace workers enter second month on strike with no negotiations**

The 70 machinists at Howmet Aerospace in Kingston, New York, are entering the second month on strike with no new negotiation scheduled and the company, according to the union, declaring that any discussion over “wages or overtime pay was non-negotiable.”

The International Association of Machinists (IAM) Local 1562 noted, “The company was unwilling to make any more concessions to

economics. They told us that was their best and final. We don’t believe that that was beneficial to the membership, and we told them that we’d be willing to talk once they were able to put some more money on the table.” However, the IAM has left the Howmet workers isolated.

The company has stated 2023 revenues are “projected at \$6.545 billion.” The strike in New York was preceded by a wage struggle last summer of Howmet Aerospace workers in the United Kingdom.

### **Halifax Sobey’s Pete’s Frootique workers continue strike**

About one hundred retail grocery workers in Halifax, Nova Scotia are in their third week of a strike against retail food giant Sobey’s in a fight to end poverty level wages. The workers, members of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), unionized in May 2022 but have yet to win a contract.

Sobey’s, which is one of the largest grocery store chains in Canada, immediately went to the provincial Labour Board to challenge aspects of the union recognition vote and delay ratification but almost a year later dropped its illegitimate complaint in favour of slow-walking negotiations for a first contract.

Sobey’s has confined its Pete’s Frootique workers—a fresh produce branch of the business—to years of minimum wage employment. Currently, the provincial minimum wage stands at \$15 per hour. It is estimated that a family of four in Halifax with both parents working full time would require the parents to earn \$26.50 each to make ends meet.

This autumn the company finally presented a derisory wage offer that would give most workers a paltry 5 cent per hour raise. Even workers on a higher tier—some with more than 10 years seniority—were offered a miserable 20 cent per hour increase. Those two tiers comprise over 70 percent of the store’s workforce.

Sobey’s, like the other major food retail companies in the country, continues to see profits soar through the pandemic crisis. Over the past three years, an average purchase of groceries in Canada has increased by 20 percent—the largest price jump in over 40 years.

In this current year Sobey’s recorded \$30.478 billion CAD in sales—an increase of \$312 million from 2022. Its gross profit this fiscal year has grown by 1.7 percent and has surpassed \$7.79 billion CAD. Michael Medline, the CEO of Empire, Sobey’s parent company, pocketed more than \$8.6 million last year.



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