

Mexican healthcare workers rally outside Interior Ministry as union readies vote on sellout contract

Our reporter
8 October 2026

On Wednesday evening a worker filmed the National Union of Social Security Workers (SNTSS) headquarters, which he noted was now being heavily guarded and reinforced, and asked whether the bureaucracy meant to keep the building for itself. “Tomorrow we’ll see each other at the Interior Ministry, compañeros. Don’t give in,” he wrote beneath the video, which drew 36,000 views.

On Thursday morning, active and retired workers of the Mexican Social Security Institute (IMSS) assembled in another massive mobilization at the gates of the Interior Ministry (Segob) in Mexico City. The protest came a week after workers forced open the gates of their own union’s headquarters on Zamora Street in Mexico City, an action that forced the talks set for today.

Inside, officials were to open talks at 11 a.m. between the SNTSS bureaucracy and a commission of 37 rank-and-file delegates, one for each of the 37 union sections, plus a single retiree. Information regarding who sat at the table for Segob and the union, what was agreed, and the next date has yet to be made public.

A worker streamed the crowd outside the ministry for an hour, where the crowd renewed the chants of “Olivos out!”—referring to SNTSS secretary general Rafael Olivos Hernández—and “Not one step back!” Within two hours the broadcast had 15,000 views and messages from Chiapas and Ciudad Juárez. “Chiapas is with you, compañeros,” one read.

In Tecámac, State of Mexico, two banners hung from a pedestrian bridge outside Regional General Hospital 200. They reinforced the demands to remove the union’s secretary general, and called for an extraordinary union congress, a 10 percent raise, enough supplies and staff, repeal of the Article 136 Bis “gag law,” and no more contributions to the Afores, the private pension funds.

Workers also marched that morning in Cuernavaca, Morelos. In Acapulco, Guerrero, about 50 doctors, nurses and stretcher-bearers walked from the Vicente Guerrero Regional Hospital to the offices of SNTSS Section 17, echoing the demands made in 2019: “We demand materials and supplies so we can work without risk,” Arturo Ávila Vega, a physician, told *El Sol de Chilpancingo*.

In Zihuatanejo, workers held placards in the rain outside the IMSS hospital, joined by staff from clinics in Petacalco, La Unión and Petatlán. In Iguala, more than 50 workers and retirees began a sit-in at a family medicine clinic at 6 a.m. A spokesperson said it would last until the delegates in Mexico City reached agreements.

Retirees have marched beside them in solidarity. “We refuse to keep watching patients and their families suffer, or to have them see us as the face of governments that are not only incompetent but also

complicit—protecting the untaxed, immoral profits of a usurious banking and financial system,” read the caption of a video from a Mexico City march, posted by a member of the retirees’ group Jubilados Pie de Lucha.

In the week before the talks, workers organized through their own pages. En Defensa del Seguro Social began collecting handwritten placards under the hashtag #DesdeLasBases, “from the ranks.” The first came from Family Medicine Unit 177 in Lagos de Moreno, Jalisco, and read: “No to the measly raise” and “No more money to Afores.”

The grievances are multidimensional. In Quintana Roo, IMSS staff told journalist Pedro Canché that larger deductions for their retirement accounts are eating up their pay. “They keep taking more and more of our benefits,” one worker said.

The protests Thursday morning were in part a result of the rank and file’s anger over the union’s terms for who would sit at the table for the talks. After the rank and file beat back the bureaucracy’s attempts to restrict the representation of workers from 37 sections to only five workers, the union gave them only two days to name delegates nationwide. Nurse Daniel Borjas spoke to *Meganoticias* of the union’s treatment of delegates: “Inside, they just manipulate them, threaten them, intimidate them.”

Many are now rejecting Segob mediation outright, and the protest at the Interior Ministry was organized against the union’s delegate-selection process, which they argue was intended to stifle rank-and-file representation. The rank-and-file groups remain committed to marching on October 9 in the expectation that the controlled talks will fail to sufficiently amend the initial agreement to meet their demands.

Six days after the talks, on October 14, the SNTSS is scheduled to hold a national vote on the wage agreement that its 65th congress approved in September. The national vote is now also being seen as a mechanism to suppress the workers’ demand and impose the wage agreement. On Wednesday, the Facebook page ContratoColectivo Imss Igualdad posted a screenshot of an anonymous message from a writer who calls herself an ordinary employee of the union’s national executive. The writer makes damning allegations, which, if true, expose the perfidy of the union bureaucracy and the Morena government.

She explained in her message that the national executive is riddled with nervousness over the power of the rank and file and their possible exit from the organization to other unions, and she alleged that the union has already planned to produce a Yes vote even if most workers vote No, because “the government gave the order for the Yes to win,

no matter what.”

In addition to alleging the union will be working for a Yes vote through an app and online pages it controls, she alleged that “they also hired people to distort videos, sow confusion among the workers ... and break their resolve one way or another.” She implied that reprisals may follow, claiming that “photographers have already handed over individual photos of everyone—face by face—and we already know who everyone is.”

The message ended with a statement of solidarity which read: “Don’t forget, colleagues, that we are workers too; some of us are here for the opportunity, and even though we support the struggle, we have to keep quiet.” By Thursday afternoon the post had been shared 161 times and received 77 comments. “I do believe the vote will be rigged,” wrote one commenter, whose comment received 44 likes. Another commenter appealed: “Compañeros, when you have your ballot, before they put it in the ballot box, take pictures to have proof that the ‘no’ vote won, and don’t be afraid of those thieving beggars.”

An SNTSS graphic circulating online explains what happens if the raise is rejected: talks continue, the union’s National Congress weighs the options, and a strike requires the approval of two-thirds of the entire membership. The National Congress, however, is the same body that approved the agreement, by 1,056 votes to 260. The statement, “a strike is a legal option, but it is not automatic” is appended in bold to scare workers away from independent wildcat action.

One worker who shared the graphic noted that members’ dues are meant to sustain a strike, “but it seems that percentage has vanished.” And a commenter on the anonymous post echoed the frustration over the union’s handling of members’ dues, writing: “... since they know it’s a gold mine for them, they don’t want to relinquish the power that makes them multimillionaires,” adding, “Colleagues, we are 850,000 active, retired, and pensioned workers affiliated with the union, and for this reason, union dues are deducted from our accounts.” She calculates, by her own estimate, that “We deposit more than 2,040,000,000.00 annually so that they can defend us and request things from the company for the benefit of their members. They, in turn, have the obligation to provide their members with a monthly report on the income and expenses of the money we give them as union dues ... Besides, what do they even do with so much money?”

The rank and file’s demand for Olivos’s removal—and the possible construction of an independent rank-and-file political leadership—threatens to sever the mutually beneficial relationship between the SNTSS and Morena built to keep labor peace within the IMSS.

Arturo Olivares Cerda, who led the SNTSS through the 2020 and 2024 wage agreements, now sits in the Chamber of Deputies for President Claudia Sheinbaum’s Morena party. His registered alternate, who would take the seat if and when he leaves it, is Olivos.

The 2024 agreement was signed on October 15 of that year before two witnesses: the labor secretary, Marath Bolaños, and the head of the CFCRL, the agency that will supervise this month’s vote. IMSS Director Zoé Robledo used the ceremony to praise Olivos, then the incoming leader, as “a great ally of the causes of Mexican unionism.”

The ministry leaves no question as to whom it will protect in the struggle between the rank and file and the union bureaucracy, and workers have drawn their own conclusions. “Whoever serves two masters fails one of them,” read identical posts on TikTok on October 6, which described Olivos as a Morena deputy.

According to En Defensa del Seguro Social, some sections closed

their offices on the morning of the talks and suspended the operations of the union savings fund, citing the weather. The post answered by stating: “And they’re right. Because today, in the SNTSS, there is also a climate of political instability. It has started to rain here too. And no drywall ceiling can stop a storm when discontent comes from below, when workers begin to lose their fear, and when democracy comes knocking at the door again ... Democracy is not suspended because of rain.”

The strength and motivation of the rank and file are not in question. Writing about a strike, a doctor told followers on Facebook that Mexico’s health system would collapse without its workers: “It wouldn’t last even eight hours.” What is now in question is who leads the fight and through what avenue.

Will the revolt by the rank and file stop at the removal of Olivos alone? Will his replacement be decided by the same bureaucracy that has controlled and suppressed workers’ demands through a legal process constructed to ensure labor peace? Or will the rank and file take the decisive next step, organize itself, and democratically elect an independent political leadership that mobilizes its labor power to win its demands in opposition to the legal chains that now bind it?

IMSS workers must learn from the maquiladora workers in 2019 and begin to gather in democratic assemblies to form rank-and-file committees in every hospital, clinic and department, independent of the SNTSS, the SNTSA and every capitalist party. There, delegates can be democratically elected and subject to recall through committees run by and for the workers. Workers must reject placing their fate in the hands of officials who reside in the lofty offices of the SNTSS, offices that workers are now barred from entering. Before October 14, these committees can demand that the union publish the ballot question, the voter rolls and the count; place their own observers at every polling place; and campaign for a No vote.

“Not one step back” has been a core chant of the rank and file. This must translate into accepting nothing less than a raise above inflation and indexed to it, full staffing and supplies, the restoration of the defined-benefit pension for every worker, the repeal of Article 136 Bis, and the opening of the union’s books, the strike fund included. Rank-and-file committees can unite IMSS workers with those of IMSS-Bienestar, the ISSSTE and the health ministry, active and retired, and with health workers in other countries through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

The *World Socialist Web Site* urges IMSS and IMSS-Bienestar workers who want to build these committees to contact us.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact