

Mexican health workers reject 8 percent deal imposed by SNTSS union and Morena government

Nakai Beltran
22 October 2026

On Wednesday, the Mexican Social Security Institute (IMSS) and the National Union of Social Security Workers (SNTSS) settled on an 8 percent wage package and declared the matter closed. To call it an offer would be to obscure the force that the government, the IMSS and the SNTSS are exerting to impose the package upon workers against their will.

SNTSS Secretary General Rafael Olivos announced that this time around, the new offer would not even be put to a vote by the rank and file. Workers had voted down the initial wage package on October 14 by a huge margin, after storming the headquarters of their union on October 1, organizing stoppages over its head on October 8-10 and occupying seven of the union's 37 sections.

Within hours, rank-and-file workers emphatically rejected the new deal and marched from the Siglo XXI National Medical Center toward the Zócalo in Mexico City. Workers also protested in Monterrey, Mexicali, Tijuana, San Luis Potosí and Xalapa. Workers called blockades outside the Siglo XXI and La Raza medical centers for Thursday, another national march for October 30 and an assembly of elected delegates for October 31.

Workers denounced the imposition of a salary increase without their mandate as an attempt to suppress the movement, chanting "Olivos, get this: the rank and file is not for sale." In Mexicali, security guards locked marchers out of the IMSS regional office. In Tijuana, workers chanted, "No cotton swabs, no alcohol, just corruption," and said colleagues had been reprimanded for speaking publicly about the shortages.

IMSS Director Zoé Robledo, accompanied by Labor Secretary Marath Bolaños, announced that the institute's Technical Council had raised the package from 6.8 to 8 percent: 4 percent on the base wage and 4 percent on a rent allowance known as Concepto 11. The rejected package included increases of 2.9 and 3.9 percent respectively. The new offer therefore merely adds 1.1 points to the base wage, on which pensions are calculated, and one-tenth of a point to the allowance.

Robledo called the package "financially viable," to be covered by "republican austerity." The SNTSS called it "the highest with respect to inflation achieved in the last 20 years." In fact, the global figure is no higher than the 8 percent of 2024 or the 8.1 percent of 2025; it compares better with inflation only because inflation has eased. Last year the base wage rose just 3.1 percent, below the 3.76 percent inflation of September 2025. Against 3.45

percent inflation this September, this year's 4 percent is just over half a point in real terms.

The package came with other promises, including permanent positions for 10,939 temporary workers and 31,700 additional surgeries. None came with a date, and the "comprehensive plan" has yet to pass a Technical Council review of its budgetary viability.

Instead of providing a report on the negotiations to all 37 sections as demanded by workers, Olivos declared the review settled. He added that the union had held the October 14 vote "without being legally obliged to do so," ruled out the extraordinary national congress workers have demanded since early October, and said he would not step down "not now, not tomorrow, not later."

The government of President Claudia Sheinbaum and her party Morena set the terms of the deal on the basis of continued austerity and explicitly stated that it expects the union to enforce them. On October 20, Sheinbaum asked Robledo for "an exercise in how to reduce spending in certain areas without affecting IMSS services." On Wednesday morning, she declared: "I say it very clearly, the union has to cooperate with this."

The raise is to be paid for by cuts inside the IMSS, not new federal money, within a 2027 budget that holds health spending to 2.9 percent of GDP while debt service takes about 4 percent. The cooperation Sheinbaum demands of the union is cooperation in restructuring the institute at the expense of the workers whose demands it claims to meet. On Thursday, she claimed "far fewer" workers had marched. Asked about Olivos, she ruled out removing him from above: "that is for the workers to do."

"It's a mockery"

Rafael Soto, an IMSS nurse at the Siglo XXI cardiology hospital and a spokesman for the movement, called the deal "a mockery." That morning, before the terms were made public, marchers refused an invitation to meet a commission of the Presidency at the National Palace. "We are waiting for them to tell us what they are negotiating in the dark," Soto told *La Razón*. When it was

announced, he said the offer was “just as meager as the first offer.” He told *Infobae*, “They have tried to demobilize us,” and declared that “the struggle continues.”

In San Luis Potosí, Rubio Arteaga, the Section 18 representative to the 37+1 rank-and-file group, said: “The 4 percent [on the rent allowance] is absolutely useless.” A Facebook page of IMSS workers declared: “They clearly view IMSS workers as beggars, tossing them mere crumbs while expecting smiles and applause in return.”

Answering a post by Mery Barragán, a nurse from Section III in Jalisco and a leader of the 37+1 group, one worker wrote:

We are the ones who sustain the IMSS: Those of us who are on the ward, in the emergency room, in the laboratory, in the operating room, in the ambulance, in cleaning, in the kitchen, in maintenance. Without us, the IMSS does NOT work... Today it's about the salary. Tomorrow it will be about everything. BASE, EVENTUAL, INTERIM... ALL WITH ONE VOICE.

When Jorge Romero, leader of the right-wing National Action Party (PAN), arrived with legislators at the Paseo de la Reforma sit-in, workers drove them out shouting, “Out with the PAN!” and “Get out, thieves!” So much for Sheinbaum's claims that the rank-and-file is being manipulated by the right-wing opposition.

Eduardo Vinicio, a retired IMSS worker, said that on October 30 workers will “paralyze the city” until the Interior and Labor ministries allow an extraordinary national congress. Octavio Fernández, an anesthesiologist at Siglo XXI, announced that an assembly on October 31 will elect delegates to that congress, “one representative for every 350 workers, according to shift and hospital unit.”

The question of new organizations

Rank-and-file workers have rejected the deal, but the union and government imposed it regardless, calculating that marches and blockades will not stop the hospitals. The question now is what organizations can carry the struggle forward.

The election of delegates by shift and hospital unit is a significant step forward. But replacing Olivos through a congress held under the SNTSS statutes, with the permission of the Interior and Labor ministries, would leave workers facing the same government and legal machinery.

The same holds for the court challenge Soto announced to *Proceso*, on the grounds that the deal “has to go through an extraordinary congress, under the statutes, to be valid.” Workers need new organizations, not new faces: rank-and-file committees elected in every hospital, clinic and department, with delegates recallable by those who elect them, which cannot accept limits, including legal ones, on organizing and striking outside official

union structures.

These committees must be independent of the SNTSS, Morena and every other capitalist party. Workers are moving in this direction. “We need to demand the president's resignation... Out with Morena!” one wrote. The expulsion of the PAN from the protests shows that workers broadly know the alternative cannot be the party whose government imposed the 2007 ISSSTE law privatizing public workers' pensions.

On this basis, the ongoing debate over a national strike can be taken up. “One minute of a national strike could cost lives,” Soto has said. But many among the rank and file are drawing a different conclusion. “A strike cannot last more than a few hours; the country would collapse,” one worker wrote. “Let's stop being cowards.”

The concern for patients is sincere, and the threat of firings from a strike without the union's legal recognition is real. But patients are already paying for the shortages, and the deal does nothing to end them. Emergency care can be protected: in Chihuahua on October 9, outpatient services stopped while emergency rooms kept running, and Thursday's blockades were planned to keep emergency and operating rooms open.

A national strike prepared and led by rank-and-file committees, with broad support inside and outside the IMSS, could organize emergency care under workers' own control while stopping the system that produces the shortages.

Such committees can open the books of the IMSS and the SNTSS and link IMSS workers with IMSS-Bienestar and ISSSTE workers, teachers and health workers internationally through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. They could also use this organized power against reprisals like firings.

The IMSS rebellion is part of a national and international upsurge against social inequality, austerity and the union bureaucracies and capitalist government enforcing these policies. Within Mexico this includes struggles by Volkswagen workers in Puebla, students fighting over safety and harassment in Mexico City, youth demanding clean water in Guadalajara and CNTE teachers fighting cuts. And internationally, mass protests have erupted in France, Spain, Germany, Italy and beyond.

The demands by workers remain 10 percent on the base wage indexed to inflation, full staffing and supplies, the restoration of the defined-benefit pension for every worker and health spending of at least 7 percent of GDP, paid for by halting payments to creditors. Their realization requires a new political leadership armed with a socialist program, that means building a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International in Mexico.

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



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact