

1,700 Detroit janitors on poverty wages face a July 31 contract expiration

## Workers Struggles: The Americas

24 July 2018

### Strike vote by Detroit janitors

Some 1,700 janitors employed by private companies in the city of Detroit have voted to give strike authorization. The workers, who clean the Detroit Renaissance Center and other downtown buildings, earn as little as \$9.45 an hour topping out at \$12.45.

The workers, members of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 1, have a July 31 strike deadline. The result of the strike vote was announced at a prayer vigil in front of the Compuware building in Campus Martius in which local clergy offered prayers “for a positive outcome to bargaining.”

Testifying to the bankrupt role of the SEIU in suppressing wages, many of the workers rely on public assistance to survive. The SEIU has linked the janitors’ contract negotiations to the phony “Fight for \$15” campaign aimed at pressuring the Democrats to grant union recognition, and dues collection, to the SEIU and other service unions.

At the prayer vigil, local Democrats including Detroit Councilwoman Janeé Ayers and State Representative Stephanie Chang, postured as allies of the janitors. The SEIU for its part has launched a “one Detroit” campaign seeking to raise janitors’ wages to the poverty level \$15 an hour in order to “share” in the supposed revitalization of Detroit, in reality the pouring of funds into upscale development.

### Iowa sheet metal workers strike over wages and benefits

Members of the Sheet Metal Workers Local 45 stopped work July 9 on the massive new Kum & Go headquarters in downtown Des Moines, Iowa. Workers have been without a contract since May 31 and are opposed to current wage and benefit proposals being

proposed by the Sheet Metal Contractors of Iowa who represent some 13 companies that hire workers from Local 45.

### Strike by Mexican municipal water workers continues

Workers for the Potable Water, Sewage and Sanitation Operating Organism (OOAPAS) in Morelia, Mexico have continued their strike that they began June 18. About 740 out of 840 workers, who belong to the STAOOAPAS union, walked out over wage demands, which the municipal administration claims would cost 100 million pesos (US\$5.25 million).

The OOAPAS administration has hired replacement workers and has accused the union of harassing and threatening the scabs, which STAOOAPAS denies. The union accused OOAPAS of vilifying it and trying to pit workers and citizens against it.

### Honduran public transport workers strike again to protest fuel price hikes

The Honduran transport workers union in Tegucigalpa, Honduras decided to renew industrial action carried out recently against hikes in fuel prices. The decision followed a meeting last week with the public transport minister, who refused to reduce the price of gasoline by 20 lempiras (US\$0.84), instead offering a subsidy.

Claiming that there had been vandalism on July 19, the government issued a communiqué calling for a “day of rest” for public workers on July 20.

### Quebec liquor workers launch job action

Workers at 404 outlets of the Quebec Liquor Corporation or Société des alcools du Québec (SAQ)

held a one-day strike across the province last week as the first of six such strike days to be carried out in the coming weeks.

The 5,500 workers, members of the Syndicat des employé(e)s de magasins et de bureaux de la SAQ (SEMB SAQ), have been without a contract since March of 2017. Although union negotiators say that there has been some movement from the employer over 16 months of negotiations, the two sides are still at odds over the central issues of schedules and work hours. Though over 70 percent of workers are part-time, SAQ wants more experienced employees to work evenings and weekends, which is opposed by the union.

Workers voted weeks ago to give their union a strike mandate, but job action was only taken after the most recent bargaining session ended without a deal. Over 60 SAQ outlets remained open during the strike with the use of management as replacement labor.

### **Toronto stage workers locked out**

Technical and stage workers employed at Exhibition Place in downtown Toronto were locked out last week after their union, the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE), refused to suspend picketing until after the Canadian National Exhibition (CNE) in August.

The dispute will affect at least six venues on the CNE grounds, but management has said that they have contingency plans in place to remain open for business should there be no resolution before August 17, when the CNE opens. According to the union, the company is trying to eliminate union jobs that have existed for decades to try and cut costs.

Negotiations have been ongoing for months, but the lockout was only instituted after the latest round of negotiations that involved a provincially appointed mediator failed.

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