

February 22, 2023 - No. 7

Fight of Telecommunications Workers for Their Rights
All Out to Support TELUS Workers!
Hold TELUS to Account!

RiseUP -- Telus Workers' Solidarity Rallies



Edmonton

Saturday, February 25 -- 12:00-1:00 pm

Meet at Save on Foods parking lot and march to Londonderry Mall (137 Avenue and 66 Street) for rally.

Calgary

Saturday, February 25 -- 12:00-1:00 pm

TELUS Sky Building, 114 - 7 Avenue SW.

Montreal

Sunday, February 26 -- 2:00-3:00 pm

Maison TELUS, 630 René-Lévesque Boulevard West

- **Some of Telus' Demands for Anti-Worker Concessions**
 - **Information on Subcontracting and Offshoring**

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Telus workers rally against company demands for concessions in Montreal, January 16, 2023

Some 7,000 workers, members of United Steelworkers Local 1944, working at telecommunications giant TELUS in British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario and Quebec are defending their rights against company dictate for anti-labour concessions. They have been trying, in vain, to sign a new collective agreement with conditions they deem acceptable since October 2021. The contract of the 7,000 technicians and call centre workers expired on December 31, 2021.



TELUS refused from the get-go to negotiate with the union. It has hammered the workers with anti-worker demands for concessions regarding wages, pensions, benefits and working conditions. The company has rejected workers' demands on issues such as job security through the restriction of subcontracting and offshoring, which it is massively engaged in.

Workers report that TELUS managers have put one-on-one pressure on workers to get them to agree to the company's proposals and has even sent its offer out to their homes. In October 2022, workers gave the union a 97 per cent strike mandate. The company walked away from the bargaining table at the end of the year. In January, the union held virtual town hall meetings over a two-week period in all areas where its members are employed, to inform them about the company's offer and hold a vote. Over 79 per cent of workers registered to vote, with 72.7 per cent casting a

ballot and 65.3 per cent voting "No."

Workers are pointing out that TELUS posted record profits in 2021 and 2022 and that the company's offer is not only inadequate and unacceptable, but an insult to their hard work during the pandemic to keep telecommunications going at a time when many workers became ill.

To mobilize public opinion and prepare for a possible strike, TELUS workers are waging the RiseUP campaign, which is a call to workers and the public to oppose the company's wrecking dictate. They have leafleted outside TELUS offices and stores. They are holding rallies, information pickets and strike practices in various locations, which are well attended and often held with the participation of other workers and unions.

In January, with the support and participation of the Alberta Federation of Labour, the United Nurses of Alberta, the Canadian Union of Public Employees and the Amalgamated Transit Union, amongst others, hundreds of TELUS workers held pickets across Canada. The pickets took place in Burnaby, Victoria, Prince George, Edmonton, Toronto and Montreal.

Over recent weeks, actions were held in Rimouski, Kamloops and Kelowna, as well as in Strathmore and Airdrie in Alberta.

On February 17, the Canadian office of the United Steelworkers launched a campaign requesting that its members and the public at large send letters to Parliament calling upon various Trudeau cabinet ministers to urge TELUS to go back to the bargaining table.

Workers' Forum fully supports the fight of Telus workers for wages and living and working conditions they deem acceptable and against the dictate for concessions. It calls upon all Canadian and Quebec workers to give them their full support.

Actions Across Canada February 18-19







(Photos: USW Local 1944)



Some of Telus' Demands for Anti-Worker Concessions



Burnaby, Telus workers' picket, January 16, 2023

The Steelworkers' union is reporting that TELUS had over 50 anti-worker concessionary demands at the beginning of the process that it called a negotiation. Its main demands for concessions remain in place after more than a year.

TELUS wants a six-year contract with a total wage increase of 11.5 per cent, which is far below inflation. It is actually offering a zero per cent increase for 2022, which means no retroactive pay raise for the first year of the collective agreement, which has already gone by. TELUS also wants the cost of living allowance withdrawn from the contract, which means that its global offer is even further below the inflation rate. The company is offering a lump sum of \$5,000 at the time of ratification in 2023, plus a lump sum in the same amount in October 2023.

The union views the company's wage offer as unacceptable, considering the hardships workers faced during the pandemic, the current rate of inflation, and the fact that Telus is reaping record profits. It is proposing a three-year contract with a five per cent yearly wage increase that is retroactive to January 1, 2022, with a \$10,000 lump sum payment at ratification. It wants to maintain the cost-of-living allowance clause in the contract, with updated dates and percentages.

During conciliation, the union put forward a package that included wages, benefits and all outstanding issues. As part of the package, it proposed a three per cent wage settlement increase per year over a five-year contract, totalling 15 percent over the life of the agreement. The monetary movement was conditional upon Telus's acceptance of the whole package. TELUS rejected the entire package through sleight of hand and the union reverted to its initial wage proposal.



Prince George, Telus workers' picket, January 22, 2023

In terms of pensions, TELUS is proposing that new workers be excluded from the Telecommunications Workers Pension Plan, which is the defined-benefit pension plan of the members of the Telus bargaining unit in BC. New workers would be covered by a defined-contribution plan, which is inferior.

As for benefits, TELUS wants to move workers out of the current negotiated Benefit Plan, with its definite benefits, and place them on a flex benefit plan where workers get a lump sum and decide where it goes. According to the workers, this amounts to higher out-of-pocket costs for similar coverage. The company also wants to reduce short- and long-term disability benefits. In its offer, the union is proposing to include a provision that changes to the Benefits Plan can only be made with the agreement of both parties, which Telus is simply dismissing.

The company is also demanding a free hand in subcontracting and outsourcing work, which it does on a massive scale. As part of their demand for job security, TELUS unionized workers are demanding that subcontracting be restricted through such measures as protecting their jurisdiction over repair and maintenance work on company infrastructure. TELUS is rejecting this and other union proposals restricting subcontracting and offshoring.



Information on Subcontracting and Offshoring

The subcontracting and offshoring of work is massive at TELUS. The union estimates that over the last 20 years or so, the number of unionized workers has dropped from around 20,000 to 7,000 today. And TELUS is using its current refusal to negotiate with the workers and its demands for concessions to decrease that number further. Workers point out that subcontracting and offshoring is a divisive practice aimed at weakening workers' organized strength and driving down the overall working conditions at TELUS.



Rimouski, Telus workers' picket, February 13, 2023

TELUS workers have coined the expression the "offshore lie," which refers to the beginning of the outsourcing of TELUS work in other countries, that took place during the bitter 2000-2005 labour dispute that led to the company locking out its workers in 2005. At that time, TELUS executives claimed that offshoring the work was a temporary measure the company was taking to provide temporary relief to their managers during the dispute. They promised to return Canadian jobs once the lockout was over. According to the union, TELUS has offshored around 11,000 unionized jobs since then.

TELUS's dictate on offshoring work is such that it refuses to withdraw a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) it has with the union that forbids its workers waging a Keep Jobs in Canada Campaign. In 2010, it approached the Telecommunications Workers Union, which represented TELUS workers at that time, and got it to sign the MOA, which has been in place ever since.

The MOA commits the union to "not publicly reference TELUS or TELUS International Inc. in any potentially negative or disparaging manner in any campaign or communication related to any offshoring initiative that it may be involved in, either directly or indirectly."

Although the memorandum is not part of the collective agreement, the union is attempting to renew the labour contract with wages and conditions that workers deem acceptable, and to demand that the MOA be withdrawn. TELUS has flatly rejected this demand. Workers insist that it be withdrawn as a part of their drive to make their voice heard and to hold TELUS accountable for its anti-worker activities.



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