

## Mexico City medical workers protest lack of protective equipment

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

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The *World Socialist Web Site* invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

### **Mexican hospital workers protest, blockade street to demand protective supplies**

Nurses, doctors and other workers for the October 1 Hospital in Mexico City, carrying homemade signs and chanting, protested and blocked an avenue on April 13. They held the action to demand the provision of protective equipment and supplies as the number of COVID-19 cases rises.

Protesters, under anonymity for fear of reprisals, told reporters of being given one flimsy mask per day and then being expected to work with dozens of infected patients. They have had to pay for masks, antibacterial gel and other supplies out of their own pockets due to shortages of basic materials. One protester noted how patients are being brought from other hospitals; one in particular was left, coughing, in a hallway that had not been cleaned.

At least one October 1 nurse has succumbed to the disease, and a doctor is in intensive therapy. In addition to the provision of necessary supplies, the protesters call for the firing of the administrative sub-director of the Institute for Social Security and Services for State Workers and for responses from health authorities to their demands. They denounced the director of the hospital for ignoring their petitions.

As of April 13, more than 5,000 confirmed cases and 332 deaths from COVID-19 have been reported in Mexico.

### **Honduran workers idled by pandemic protest to demand food aid**

People in Honduras who are unable to work due to the COVID-19 pandemic have had to risk contagion to demand promised food aid. Faced with food insecurity and poverty, residents of poor neighborhoods in the capital Tegucigalpa and its twin city Comayagüela have protested and blocked highways. At least 2,000 people complained of not having food.

The protesters demanded the delivery of the Saco Solidario, or “Solidarity Sack,” of food promised by the government at the beginning of the quarantine of their neighborhoods. The resources were supposedly going to be provided through donations from international financial organizations, aid from allies and the creation

of laws for “relief” for businesses. The government is awaiting 15 billion lempiras (US\$604 million).

Similar protests have also broken out in the north in the department of Cortés. At the same time, doctors, nurses and other workers in the health sector nationwide continue protests to demand protective gear to treat patients.

### **Dominican Republic: Protests against reopening free trade zone**

Residents of Santiago, the Dominican Republic’s second largest city, protested April 14 and 15 against the reopening of the zona franca or free trade zone. The protesters gathered in front of the customs office to request the intervention of the government to maintain the quarantine.

Thousands of workers in the zona franca are employed in the manufacture of tobacco products. The protesters fear that conditions at the factories will not be safe enough to resume operations.

### **Colombian health workers protest lack of protective equipment and supplies**

Health workers at the Kennedy Hospital in Bogotá, Colombia carried out a day of protest on April 13 over the lack of protection from COVID-19. The hospital workers have sent a plea to the national government of right-wing president Iván Duque asking him to guarantee safe and dignified working conditions for themselves as well as for ambulance drivers, paramedics and support staff.

Protesting workers complained not only of poor working conditions and lack of protection, but since in 80 percent of cases they are subcontracted workers, they are underpaid and often late in receiving their wages. Nonetheless, they said that they would continue to serve the population despite the conditions under which they have been working.

### **Barrio residents in Colombia block roads to demand aid**

Residents of various working-class neighborhoods in Bogotá, including Usme, Suba, Potosí, La Colombianita and others, blocked

highways and protested by banging pots and pans several days last week. The protesters are working people who have complied with the government's social distancing and quarantine decrees, but who have not received any aid as their food supplies have run out.

Neighbors threw tires, trash cans and boards on the streets, impeding traffic, and carried out rolling blockades of bus stations. At the same time, they set up community kitchens in order to feed children and seniors, though the amount of available food is insufficient. They also placed guards on shifts.

Residents denounced the negligence of the government. One protester told [alrtabogota.com](http://alrtabogota.com), "We're already tired ... we don't know what else we can do. We've been four days here and nobody has come. It isn't fair; we can't work and after the fact they neglect us."

As of April 17, Colombia had 3,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and over 100 fatalities. The government set up a program called Ingreso Solidario (Solidarity Income) that was supposed to provide food for over 80,000 of the poorest families in Bogotá who do not have access to other programs, but that help has been delayed for many families.

### **Hawaii governor declares unilateral cuts for teachers, public workers**

Hawaii's Democratic governor David Ige announced in a meeting with union officials that the government would have to cut teachers' salaries by 20 percent and other public workers by 10 percent to stave off a "collapse" of the state's economy. No written order has been given, but it is expected that the cuts could be imposed as early as May 1 and would affect firefighters, nurses, medical technicians and other public workers.

Hawaii's tourism industry has been stopped dead in its tracks by the coronavirus pandemic and the result could be as much as a 25 percent reduction in state collections. State representatives gave lip service in opposition to the cuts, but they have already issued warnings that teachers and public workers will have to surrender pay raises negotiated in contracts that were previously enacted by the legislature.

Hawaii State Teachers Association President Corey Rosenlee told *Hawaii News Now* the cuts were "unacceptable" and "this is something that we believe is going to be imposed on us, rather than a conversation." However, there is no thought by the unions to mobilize rank and file opposition. "I think we will have to look at what are our legal means," said Rosenlee.

### **Minnesota Hormel workers demand protective equipment**

Meatpacking workers at the Hormel plant in Austin, Minnesota are appealing to Democratic Governor Tim Walz to be reclassified as "first responders" as opposed to "essential workers" in an effort to obtain personal protective equipment. The 2,500 workers at the plant often work shoulder to shoulder and have been unsuccessful in procuring masks and other equipment to guard against coronavirus infection.

United Food and Commercial Workers Local 9 President Richard Morgan, who represents the Hormel workers, made the preposterous statement that Hormel is "bending over backwards to keep everyone healthy." Despite the fact that several plants in the surrounding agricultural region of southern Minnesota that process hogs, chicken and cattle have closed, Hormel continues operations and is only staggering shifts to limit the interaction of workers.

The Austin Hormel plant was the scene of the 1985–86 year-long strike that saw Democratic Governor Rudy Perpich dispatch the National Guard to help crush the strike by Local P-9.

### **Nova Scotia dock workers refuse unsafe work**

At one of North America's largest vehicle shipping operations in Eastern Passage, Nova Scotia workers asserted their right to refuse unsafe work over the company's failure to provide adequate safety measures in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Autoport facility is owned by CN rail, one of the largest transport companies in the country.

Waterside workers were being transferred to the ship loading sites in small, cramped shuttle vans. In addition, when entering the shipping areas workers were required to gain access by placing their hands in an access identification device. At least 200 workers, members of Unifor, log in at the site by this method. Workers demanded that such unsafe practices be remediated by Autoport. However, management failed to address their concerns. When 10 workers refused to subject themselves to unsafe work, the company sent them home without pay.

Workers then initiated a grievance with the provincial Labour Board. An investigation subsequently showed that Autoport was egregiously violating the most basic of social distancing and other anti-virus transmission standards ordered by the province's Chief Medical Officer. As a result of the work refusals, Autoport was ordered to provide adequate transportation procedures and regular deep cleaning of workspaces.



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