

Protest by El Salvador autoworkers over nonpayment of wages; actions continue over coronavirus response

## Workers Struggles: The Americas

12 May 2020

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

### Chilean taxi drivers strike for 24 hours to demand help during economic crisis

Taxi and bus drivers in Chile struck on May 6 to dramatize their dire situation and demand help from the government. Representatives of the drivers, members of the Collective Taxis Regional Federation (FERETACOL), took a letter to the administrative building of Rancagua, a city about 90 km (54 miles) south of the national capital Santiago, asking for a subsidy or minimum payment for three months to make it through the coronavirus pandemic.

The number of customers for taxi drivers has plunged 80 percent since the COVID-19 crisis hit. According to FERETACOL president Eduardo Lillo, “This union is not made up of big businessmen; we live day to day and if we don’t go to work, we don’t eat the next day.” Attempts to renegotiate loans have failed, as the banks have demanded high interest rates, so “it’s not easy, super complicated.”

After declaring that “we don’t like to insert ourselves in politics, but we’re obliged to,” Lillo said that the taxi drivers would write “no right-wing government” on their rear windows. He also appealed to “councilmen, mayors, congress members, senators to turn on your batteries and pressure the government,” saying that the drivers “are not going to have poor memories” when the next electoral cycle comes.

### Chilean firefighters protest budget cut

Firefighters in Chile protested May 5 against the announcement by the government budget directorate that it would cut the budget of the Firefighters of Chile, a volunteer organization, by 7.89 percent, or 3,755,000,000 pesos (US\$4,547,000). The National Directorate of Firefighters of Chile denounced “the energetic and

categorical manner, the decision adopted by the government, in order to lower the budget of the Firefighters of Chile for the year 2020 ... far below the 3 percent announced for the distinct entities and apportionments of the public sector, and of which the Firefighters of Chile do not form a part ...”

The firefighters asked the government to call a “dialogue board with a duly mandated representative for the search for means of consensus that allows us to revert and restore shortly the reduced resources.”

The statement also said that fire stations nationwide would sound their sirens beginning at 9:30 that night until 11:00 a.m. the next day. The statement concluded that if the dialogue was not agreed to by the government, “Firefighters of Chile will not cease in seeking to reverse this situation that gravely affects the institution, not discounting new means of protest.”

### Argentine health professionals protest for pay, equipment

Protests by health professionals took place across Argentina May 7 to press demands for additional pay and the provision of personal protective equipment to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. Over 40 unions and social groups were represented at the protests. Demonstrators observed social distancing and wore masks, but defied the decree against public gatherings.

Health care workers in Argentina are not only under the pressure of long hours and inadequate protection; many have to work at more than one locale, increasing the odds for infection. Health care workers account for over 870 of 5,208 confirmed cases of infection, and nine have died.

The Fesprosa health care professionals union is calling for a national plan to be implemented “with equipment of adequate quantity and quality, that health personnel are tested quickly, and that salary negotiations are opened in the provinces because the pandemic is being used as an excuse to freeze pay,” union president Fernanda Boriotti told reporters.

### Salvadoran auto parts workers protest nonpayment and

## **firings**

Workers at the Yasaki auto parts factory in Santa Ana, El Salvador's second largest city, held a protest on May 5 to protest the nonpayment of wages that they were supposed to receive on April 17. They gathered at the entrance of the plant to demand their pay and to denounce the company's refusal to communicate with them over the issue.

After keeping workers on the job at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Yasaki "froze" the contracts of 2,500 employees and sent them home to fend for themselves. The workers have held protests and have asked the government to intervene to enforce the State of Emergency decree and guarantee that the workers and their families get the aid that they need.

## **Mexican hospital workers protest for equipment to fight pandemic**

Doctors, nurses, administrative and other workers at the Juan C. Corzo Hospital in Tonalá, a city in the Mexican state of Chiapas, protested with picket signs in front of the hospital entrance to demand the provision of protective equipment to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. The facility, part of the Mexican Social Security Institute, closed for the day.

Of 18 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Tonalá, 14 have been of hospital personnel. The hospital itself has only two ventilators. However, the Health Secretariat claims that the equipment is sufficient.

## **Mexican firefighters protest provision of poor-quality PPE**

On May 6, members of the Firefighters and Rescue Corps (CREI) who work at the Mexico City International Airport (AICM) held a protest in the corridors of Terminal 1 to protest the poor quality of the personal protective equipment that they have been given. The Communications and Transport Union, to which the protesting workers belong, has about 750 members who work at the AICM.

Several workers, carrying a mattress with a sheet spray-painted with the sentence "The authorities don't respond," went to the office of the AICM general director to demand better quality PPE. It was the mattress on which a 32-year-old CREI worker had slept before he succumbed to COVID-19.

## **Nevada nurses protest lack of protective equipment to prevent coronavirus infection**

Registered nurses at St. Mary's Hospital in Reno, Nevada held a protest May 7 to demand

management provide proper personal protective equipment (PPE) to all health care workers at the facility to protect against the coronavirus. The nurses, affiliated with National Nurses United, are also complaining management is not providing them with sufficient information.

Tamara Erickson told KOLO News that when the pandemic broke out they were assured by the hospital that it had sufficient PPE. But with time, that changed. "We're told we're going to be doing things differently and that only certain departments would have certain types of equipment and by the end of March they're saying, aren't you glad the community is making us gowns."

Prime Healthcare, which owns St. Mary's along with another 44 hospitals in 14 states, replied with the usual boilerplate that it "is committed to protecting the safety of patients, providers and the community ..."

## **Regina Co-op Federated lockout continues as Unifor maintains workers isolation**

Locked-out workers at Co-op Federated refinery in Regina, Saskatchewan are continuing picketing after rejecting management's "best and final" offer by an 89 percent margin. The lockout involving 750 workers has continued for over five months while the Unifor union has blocked any wider action in support of the workers.

In March management rejected a proposed settlement brought down by an arbitrator and demanded further concessions, citing the COVID-19 pandemic. Both the arbitrator's proposal and management's final offer called for an 8 percent employee contribution to pensions, but differed over the start date. Management also wants major concessionary changes to work rules. Workers currently pay nothing toward pensions.

To divert workers' anger Unifor organized a series of stunts, including an appearance by Unifor President Jerry Dias at the picket line. Unifor has meanwhile bowed to court injunctions and limited picketing, allowing the refinery to resume deliveries.



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