

## Argentine rubber workers; Mexican health workers strike over COVID-19 response

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

### Argentine rubber workers strike for 24 hours over COVID-19 concerns

The Unique Tire Workers Syndicate of Argentina (SUTNA) called a strike on June 11 at the Bridgestone-Firestone plant in Llavallol, a city in Buenos Aires Province. The main demand of the one-day stoppage was to demand “concrete improvements in the preventive measures regarding the COVID-19,” according to a SUTNA statement.

Four cases of COVID-19 have been confirmed at the plant, but the company “continues requiring [workers] to work at close contact with infected persons and refuses to make a quarantine.”

A SUTNA communiqué stated that, though the walkout was for 24 hours, “upon not receiving positive responses, the measures will continue to increment.” The statement ridiculed the “absurd argument” that there was social distancing in the plant, when not only do workers labor close together, but there is no separation between shifts.

The statement concluded that the goal of the strike was so that “management will listen to the workers’ just complaint and that the provincial and national authorities intervene in favor of the employees.”

### Mexican health workers protest sanctions and threats against those demanding supplies

Members of the National Union of Health Workers of Mexico held a protest in front of the federal Health Secretariat June 12 to denounce threats and sanctions against health workers who demand quality medical equipment and supplies, as well as better labor conditions.

The protesters brought documented proof of harassment and firings of nurses demanding better supplies for protecting themselves and patients as the COVID-19 pandemic rages.

For the moment, “We are not calling a strike; we’re calling a gathering,” said one nurse and union spokesman, but “if there are more firings, if instead of dialogue we have repression ... this peaceful

mobilization can be converted to the call for a national strike.”

### Mexican truckers, construction workers strike to demand overdue pay from photovoltaic cell company

Workers at a solar power generation project in Cuyoaco, a municipality in Puebla in southeastern Mexico, struck June 10 to demand payment of up to 12 million pesos (US\$540,000) for truckers who haul materials to the project. The truckers, who number about 100, are members of the Workers Confederation of Mexico (CTM) and the National Liberty Syndicates. Another 200 work installing solar panels.

The CTM stated that, since the signing of the contract for the project by the Spanish photovoltaic cell manufacturer Iberdrola in October 2019, the company has not covered costs of operations, manpower and materials transport. Workers protested in March but returned to work after an agreement was reached that Iberdrola would resolve the debt. However, the payments were not completely delivered, so the truckers have gone back on strike.

Workers’ livelihoods have also been negatively impacted by delays caused by stay-at-home measures and closures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

After a meeting on June 11, Iberdrola negotiators and CTM bureaucrats claimed that they had reached an agreement, though they did not reveal major details other than that they were going to call the strikers back to work. That morning Puebla’s governor stated that the Labor Secretariat would intervene to find a solution to the conflict, but that “the agency’s participation will be of an institutional character, not as representative of either the truckers or the employer,” reported Milenio.

### Mexican news agency forced to recognize legitimacy of workers’ strikes after 108 days

Workers at Notimex, Mexico’s state news agency, went on strike February 21 against spending cuts and over 200 layoffs. The cuts and firings were in line with the austerity agenda of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), who had appointed the agency’s

director, Sanjuana Martínez, a close ally, the year before. Many of the laid-off workers were critical of the AMLO administration, and they accused Martínez of violating principles of independence and freedom of expression.

A collaborative study by human rights organization Article 19 (a reference to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights' section regarding press freedom) and the Interdisciplinary Laboratory of the Technological Institute of Higher Studies of the Occident Institute found, in the months that followed, "harassment and selective attacks against journalists, editorialists, and intellectuals [opposed to] Lopez Obrador and his government. Also, against workers of the State News Agency NOTIMEX, through accounts on the social network Twitter with atypical activities and systematized behavior against users in opposition with the director of the state agency Sanjuana Martinez Montemayor, appointed by AMLO."

The Federal Board of Conciliation of the Ministry of Labor ruled the strike legitimate and ordered an end to the harassment campaign, but Martínez and the Notimex board stonewalled. Strikers set up an encampment in front of the newsroom to demand that the laid-off workers be reinstated and that Martínez be dismissed. On June 8, the board announced that it would cease activities temporarily on June 9 and negotiate with the workers' union, SutNotimex, to resolve the conflict.

### **Mexican students and teachers protest elimination of posts**

About 200 teaching students and teacher training professors in Morelia, capital of Michoacán, Mexico marched to the state Congress June 11 to demand that the legislature convene to maintain the enrollment at the state's eight teacher-training colleges and not eliminate 44 positions that education authorities had announced.

The march and demonstration were called by the CNTE teachers union, which organized a commission of students and teachers to meet with the legislature's education commission. The demonstrators also demanded the release of seven people, six of whom are students, arrested for blocking train tracks and confronting state police.

CNTE said that the protests will continue until the State Education Secretariat agrees to participate in dialogue over the issues; so far it has adamantly refused.

### **Protests over Colombian government's shortchanging of health resources, labor conditions**

Workers in the health, education and other sectors in Colombia protested the broken promises and premature reopening plans of the government of right-wing president Iván Duque last week.

On June 9, health organizations called for protests against the government's failure to deliver on promised resources to meet the anticipated peak in COVID-19 infections. The government had promised 13.7 trillion pesos (US\$3.8 billion) in the last three months, but only delivered about 11 percent: 1.5 billion pesos (US\$420 million), according to La Silla Vacía, a political news website.

Colombian health workers, tired of the broken promises of aid, acts

of aggression—including death threats—and horrendous working conditions, have held wildcat strikes and protests. Others have resigned en masse.

On June 11, members of FECODE, the Colombian Education Workers Federation, protested and held an encampment at Bogotá's Parque Colón to protest the Education Ministry's plans to reopen schools in August without adequate measures to ensure the health of students, teachers and parents. FECODE sent a letter to parents explaining their position.

FECODE was joined by about 50 labor and social organizations at the protest. Speakers also denounced violence against teachers and labor union leaders and criticized the nation's anti-worker labor reforms, as well as the hikes in public service and transportation fees.

### **California walnut workers demand hazard paycheck**

Workers held a demonstration during the afternoon shift change at Diamond of California's walnut processing facility in Stockton, California, to demand hazard pay. The workers are demanding that they receive compensation similar to workers at other food processing facilities such as an extra \$100 a week or an additional \$2 an hour compensation.

Teamsters Local 856 representative Ashley Alvarado told recordet.com that when she met with the company, they told her "they are not interested in paying more." The Teamsters did not call the protest from the standpoint of uniting all food processing workers to oppose the homicidal coronavirus working conditions, but as an appeal to politicians to pass legislation to implement uniform rules across California.

### **Grocery store chains end special COVID pay for workers**

Several large grocery store chains including Metro, Save-On Foods, Loblaw and Walmart have ended a temporary \$2 per hour COVID-19 wage increase provided to their frontline retail employees. Billed by the companies as a "reward" for their brave service in the essential food distribution business, the wage top-ups were in reality meant as a way to stem the flow of the minimum-wage staff who had been absenting themselves as the coronavirus spread into the population even as the companies were slow to provide adequate protections for the workers.

The move comes as Canadian provincial governments prioritize a staggered return to retail business re-openings across the country.



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