

## Growing protests across the America's over coronavirus 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.

### Film industry workers in Argentina rally to demand unemployment assistance

Workers employed by the Argentine movie industry rallied in downtown Buenos Aires June 25 demanding a monthly stipend of 30,000 pesos (\$425 US dollars) to get them through the present pandemic and the consequent layoffs. The demonstration included contingent technical workers demanding an end to their temporary and free-lance status.

Since the lockdown began in Argentina, at the beginning of April, more than 5,000 laid off cinema and television techs and temp workers have yet to receive any form of government assistance.

### Transit workers demand back wages in Jujuy province in Argentina

Seventy bus drivers for several private transit agencies in northwestern Jujuy Province have not been paid, even though their employers, Unión Bus, El Urbano, and Evelia continue to receive government subsidies.

Last week a food appeal was organized by the drivers, some of whom are going through a food emergency and are unable to feed their families. They have repeatedly appealed to Labor Ministry officials, to no avail.

### São Paulo Transit workers vote to strike

São Paulo transit workers voted last week to strike on July 1 in repudiation of unilateral measures taken by transit bosses that downgrade health, working conditions and food subsidies. Over 90 percent of those voting approved the strike. The São Paulo transit system employs 2,500 workers.

The new measures coincided with the first death of a São Paulo transit employee due to COVID-19. So far, 300 transit workers have been infected by the coronavirus.

### Mexican teachers demand back pay and an end to school overcrowding

Last Wednesday, teachers in Chimalhuacán, a suburb of Mexico City, picketed the State government house in Toluca demanding their back pay. The 700 education workers, now teaching online classes, are owed nine months of back pay. Collectively, the Chimalhuacán educators teach 20,000 students in 75 schools, with classes of up to 80 students.

State authorities say there is no money to pay the teachers. They also have cynically used the overcrowding against the teachers, pointing out the teachers are in violation of rules that mandate no more than 25 students per classroom.

Chimalhuacán is one of the most impoverished cities in all of Mexico; about 13 percent of its 600,000 inhabitants exist in shantytowns and live in extreme poverty. Over one half of its children and teenagers have no access to education or health care. Many students must commute one or two hours to get to their schools.

Many of the city's inhabitants earn their living from scavenging in waste dumps. Teacher representative Eduardo Torres, interviewed by the Mexico City daily *Excelsior*, described the extreme overcrowding of students: "It is anti-pedagogical and inhuman for teachers and students".

### Perú Copper miners demand reopening of Cobriza mine; 200 are arrested

Workers rallied in the Andean city of Huancayo over the sale of the Cobriza mine, which was shut down last December, following the death of three miners and as a consequence of the bankruptcy of Doe Run Perú. The liquidation of the mine is being carried out in violation of an agreement to guarantee the jobs of the 2,500 miners formerly employed there, and who have not been paid is seven months.

Peruvian authorities used the COVID-19 emergency measures as a pretext to jail on June 23 200 miners on their way to the morning rally that had been scheduled to begin at 8:30 am, allegedly for violating the 9 pm to 4 am curfew.

### Lawsuit charges Tyson foods culpable in death of three workers at Iowa pork plant

A lawsuit on behalf of the families of three workers who died of COVID-19 at Tyson's largest pork-processing facility in Waterloo, Iowa was filed June 25. Sedika Buljic, aged 58, Reberiano Garcia, aged 60 and Jose Ayala, Jr., aged 44, died during the period April to May from the coronavirus under conditions where the company knowingly put workers at risk.

The Spence Law Firm is charging that the company was aware of the

spread of the virus to the Waterloo plant, but concealed the information. As the contagion grew, management failed to implement safety measures. Lastly, in what an AP report called an “explosive claim,” Tyson, “allowed workers and subcontractors from another Iowa plant that had closed due to a coronavirus outbreak to begin working in Waterloo in April. Plant supervisors told employees that their sick coworkers had the flu and warned them not to discuss coronavirus at work.”

In an April newspaper ad, the company’s CEO John Tyson issued a warning that coronavirus and plant closures were leading to a breakdown in the “food supply chain” and there would be meat shortages. Meanwhile, Tyson’s exports of pork to China during the same month increased.

### **Disneyland workers protest unsafe conditions for reopening theme park in virus-ridden California counties**

A caravan of Disneyland Resort workers in cars drove around the company’s Anaheim, California complex June 27 to protest conditions under which the facility is to be reopened. Originally, the entertainment resort, owned by the Walt Disney Company, was slated to open July 17, but the date has been delayed while six of the 26 unions representing 17,000 workers are still in negotiations with the company.

Disney, which was already hurting financially from its acquisition of 21st Century Fox, has been further impacted by the shuttering of its facilities three months ago due to coronavirus. Overall, the company has seen a 37 percent drop in income from \$3.8 billion last year to \$2.4 billion in the current year. In addition, the company was forced to cancel a \$1.6 billion semiannual dividend, due in July, and this no doubt is compelling it to reopen operations to recover profitability without concern to workers’ health.

According to press reports, the company has not agreed to minimal conditions requested by labor unions before opening, those being testing guidelines for COVID-19, higher staffing levels aimed at deep cleaning standards, electrostatic cleaning of rooms and acceptance of guidelines from the Center for Disease Control. Further, the state of California will not be unveiling its guidelines for the reopening of theme parks until after the 4th of July holiday.

Disney’s Anaheim complex is located within one hour of Los Angeles County, which currently has a mass of COVID-19 cases. Anaheim, located in Orange County, has the most cases in that county. Unemployment benefits for workers will run out in July, creating an economic cudgel to force workers to return to work under unsafe conditions.

### **Florida nursing home that denied cases of coronavirus despite workers warnings; now faces outbreak**

The Florida Department of Health reported 34 cases of COVID-19 last week at a Fort Myers, Florida nursing home, giving it the highest total in Southwest Florida. Heritage Park Rehabilitation and Healthcare, which is owned by Consulate Healthcare, has not commented on the increase in coronavirus cases, but the outbreak is not surprising after nursing assistants reported in May their fears about coming to work after discovering management was concealing cases of COVID-19.

The United Healthcare Workers union filed complaints the same month with the state’s Healthcare Administration and the Occupational Safety

and Health Administration about workers’ concerns and a story published in *Wink News* brought the public’s attention to the outbreak, leading management to provide additional personal protective equipment.

According to a worker who spoke to *Wink News*, the nursing home’s executive director told staff there were no cases of coronavirus in the facility, but on April 22, workers found online data that revealed two residents and two staff members tested positive.

At the time, nursing assistants were requested to attend to patients in isolated rooms, but were not informed why residents were being isolated. While attending these patients, workers were not provided face shields or goggles to avoid infection.

### **Quebec drug store warehouse workers vote to strike as pandemic pay ends**

Seven hundred warehouse workers servicing the Metro-Jean Coutu drug store chain have voted by 99 percent for strike action. The workers, based in the Montreal suburb of Varennes, are demanding improvements to pensions, insurance coverage, work schedules and the regulation of sub-contracted and part-time employees. Workers, already in a legal strike position, have yet to see the company return to the bargaining table.

Organized by the Confédération des Syndicats Nationaux (CSN), the workers saw a temporary COVID-19 \$2 per hour boost to their wages end on June 13. Drug store and grocery operations throughout Canada have been deemed essential services and have remained open throughout the pandemic. Quebec has been the hardest hit of all the Canadian provinces by the coronavirus. To date, over 55,000 Quebecers have tested positive for the virus and 5,450 deaths recorded. The epicenter of the infection continues to be in the Montreal area.

Jean Coutu is an iconic drug store brand in the province of Quebec and eastern Ontario. The Montreal-based Metro grocery store chain purchased it in 2018. Over the course of the pandemic, Metro greatly increased its profitability, reporting a 45 percent rise in its second quarter net income.



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