

Chilean health unions conclude sellout deal with right-wing government

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Chilean health care unions have announced to an angry membership that an agreement has been reached with the government over the “COVID bonus” promised to frontline health professionals.

The Facebook page of the Confederation of Health Workers (FENATS Nacional) announced yesterday that the unions had settled the agreement with the Ministry of Finance and that eligible health professionals would receive the payment of 200,000 pesos no later than next January 30.

“Patricia Valderas, president of (FENATS) considered the fact as ‘a well deserved achievement by the workers, who have made an effort during the pandemic and always, to attend the citizens as best as possible, without counting many times with the necessary resources. We will continue to fight for the rest of the demands we have pending,’” reported the site.

What she did not explain is that the risible 200,000 pesos (approx. US\$275), achieved after months of horse-trading, is not even half the measly 500,000 pesos (approx. US\$650) originally pledged by the Congress earlier in June. Nor will the tens of thousands of precarious independent contractors, known as *honorarios*, or replacement workers, receive a cent of the bonus.

This slap in the face orchestrated by the public sector unions has been treated with the contempt it deserves. In the last 15 hours hundreds of angry responses from a cross-section of health care workers denounced the deal as a sellout. Below is a small sample of the comments:

Roxana Andrea: A shame that honorary workers are excluded from any bonus, and even more, from the covid bonus. We’ve been out there since day one of the pandemic and doing the same job as a plant or incumbent employee. A huge injustice!

Gustavo Cruz Ramirez: Truly a shame, this is a humiliation for health workers instead of an achievement.

Ximena Rodriguez: In my opinion there should no longer be FENATS. It has completely lost the credibility of its members and the discontent of all health officials. This completely violates our rights and dignity. How awful is the (FENATS union) president and (Finance Minister) Briones. The frontline is worth 200,000.

Joshe Manuel: SORRY, BUT AN ACHIEVEMENT FOR THOSE OF US WHO HAVE FOUGHT IN THIS PANDEMIC? Please! The only ones who have been fighting this Pandemic and I could say 90% of us are replacement and *honorario* personnel. They should give that bonus only to those staff members who have been on duty working in the field, in each hospital on a face-to-face basis. As always, *honorarios* and replacements are left aside though we are the ones who are fighting this bug 24/7.

Natalia Espinoza Nuñez: Joshe Manuel: Think, that those of us who are on leave, away from our work, by preventive distancing, it is not for vacation, it is for being sick, and where most of us get sick is at work, and others for years of service...

Marlys Quintallana: And to the leaders, how much did the bonus increase, it’s a real shitty thing that their “achievement” is not for their workers.

Paz Carrillo: Marlys Quintallana: You know, colleague, what seems most unusual to me is that the officials of the armed forces were given triple and more bonuses, and those who are and have been in constant danger are the health workers, not them. But this country is like that, they give more privileges and recognition to those who torture, harm and not to those who help, what a pity and outrage ... Let’s hope that

the other bonuses won years ago are given and that they don't just settle for this famous bonus!

Silvia Chza: Marlys Quintallana: It's very true, they are all sellouts.

Oriel Gomez: Super that the (Carabineros) get something like close to a million (approx. US\$1,380) bonus. And those of us who were (on the frontline) until we were quarantined and then continued to work, they gave us crumbs.

These statements are testament to a hostility and growing opposition in the working class toward the corporatist unions and the political parties that have dominated them for almost half a century.

The unions were transformed during the military dictatorship into corporatized instruments of the employers and the government, and used to drive productivity increases, wage cuts and job destruction, thereby allowing Chile to become the most socially unequal country in the OECD. Especially under the center-left coalition governments that have ruled during 20 of the last 30 years of civilian rule, they have done everything in their power to suffocate any independent struggles, leading the workers into stunts and promoting empty and demoralizing parliamentary appeals.

As the conditions of the working class deteriorated over the second decade of this century, the political fortunes of this sizeable middle class bureaucracy have improved markedly, deriving their privileged existence from positions in the executive apparatus or the legislature, the civil service, the unions and other social organizations, or by directly integrating themselves into the corporate world. Not a few "Socialists" and "lefts" sit on the boards of lucrative superannuation funds, the AFPs.

The corporatist agenda has only accelerated during the pandemic: the Communist Party (PCCh)-dominated CUT and the other trade union federations agreed to a return to work in mining and other sectors of the economy. They accepted a freeze on collective bargaining, along with wage cuts, supported the furloughing of hundreds of thousands of workers in private industry for the benefit of employers, and refused to call any industrial action against poverty, hunger, insecurity and evictions impacting the working class.

Their grip is increasingly tenuous and they know this.

The long list of betrayals has had an impact on mass consciousness. Amid the dangerous surge in the coronavirus pandemic across the country, workers and working class communes have come out in spontaneous protests and demonstrations in direct opposition to the "left" political caste.

But opposition to the unions is not enough. The working class urgently requires a clearly worked out program to take forward its independent political interests. It must break with bourgeois politics, especially the Stalinist PCCh, the pseudo-left Frente Amplio and the establishment left, who accept the confines of parliamentary legality, capitalist private property and production for profit.

Only with a revolutionary socialist perspective can the struggle of health professionals—and the working class as a whole—make any advances. It must reject the unions and create new organs of political power that are comprised of and controlled by the rank and file.

With its online publication the *World Socialist Web Site*, the International Committee of the Fourth International has created the instrument where health professionals and other workers can democratically discuss the development of workplace health and safety, decent incomes and conditions, and establish international rank and file committees which will organize the fight for these life and death questions as part of the struggle for the socialist transformation of society on a world scale.



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