

Bolivian health workers strike over COVID demands; Arizona Albertsons warehouse workers authorize strike over PPE

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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Latin America

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

Bolivian health workers hold one-day strike over COVID-19 demands

Members of the Syndical Federation of Health Workers of Cochabamba struck and marched February 4 to demand that Bolivia's government stick to its agreement to carry out measures to protect them from COVID-19. They assembled at the Health Service Department (Sedes) headquarters and marched to the city's historic September 14 Plaza.

The decision to carry out the strike stems from Sedes's failure to adhere to an agreement that federation officials had signed. The accord contained measures to guarantee the safety of health personnel, including provision of personal protective equipment (PPE), vaccinations and supplies, and improved working conditions. Another demand was the dismissal of the current Sedes director, Yercin Mamani.

Emergency services were maintained throughout the walkout. Cochabamba has had over 21,600 cases of COVID-19 and nearly 1,500 since the pandemic began last March. This month has seen a second wave, with 208 cases on February 4, compared to 153 on February 3.

Argentina: Police tear gas protesters demanding work, tools from city government

A protest took place on February 3 in front of the municipal building of Mar de Plata, Argentina, to demand tools and jobs for unemployed people. The protesters, members and supporters of the Miguel Roldán Social Front, have held similar actions in the past demanding tools for community gardens, construction materials and jobs for unemployed workers hard hit by the pandemic.

The protesters were met by a contingent of police, who prevented their entry into the municipal building and launched tear gas at them. The cops arrested a woman who they claimed had broken a window but released her shortly afterward. A protester told reporters, "We asked for work and tools and they wanted to give us 40 bags of merchandise that we didn't accept."

Last November, the Front had delivered a petition to municipal authorities and held demonstrations asking for an end-of-year bonus and emergency funds for workers and retirees affected by the pandemic and by the "adjustments" demanded by the International Monetary Fund in the

midst of the crisis. They also asked for tools and supplies for community gardens, and construction materials. The authorities did not agree to their petition.

Argentine hospital workers strike over firings, conditions, management intransigence

Workers at the Gumersindo Sayago Municipal Hospital, as well as municipal clinics, in Carlos Paz, a city in Argentina's Córdoba province, held a one-day strike February 5 over management's refusal to address their demands. The State Workers Association (ATE) claimed 90 percent adherence to the action. Emergency and urgent care, however, remained in effect.

Workers have complained about unjustified firings and transfers, harassment and the growth of cases of COVID-19 among hospital personnel, with at least one fatality. They are also demanding vaccinations for all hospital personnel.

While the ATE lauded the solidarity among the various sectors in the system, including obstetrics, anesthesiology and surgery, in the face of pressure and threats, its spokespersons asked Mayor Daniel Gómez Gesteira to "make a call to reflection and call us to dialogue." If the mayor does not respond, the ATE says that it will call other actions.

The hospital's five anesthesiologists took matters into their own hands the next day. An ATE statement said that they "presented their resignations in the face of the lack of responses and solutions on the part of the Municipal Executive to their demands."

Nurses in the Bahamas protest for overdue pay

Nurses held protest actions last week to demand the payment of over US\$300,000 owed them for working during the Category 5 Hurricane Dorian in September 2019, as well as for their labors in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Bahamas Nurses Union (BNU) had delivered a list of nearly 100 workers who had not been paid to the Ministry of Health on February 2 and were told that the majority had already been paid.

On February 3, several dozen nurses gathered in downtown Nassau's historic Rawson Square, where the House of Assembly is located. They came to appeal to Prime Minister Dr. Hubert Minnis to make good on the government's promises to pay those who braved the hurricane and the pandemic to serve the public. When Minnis arrived, he waved at the nurses, without stopping to talk.

The next day, nurses demonstrated outside Minnis's office, demanding once again to talk to him. BNU's president, Amancha Williams, accused Health Ministry and Public Hospitals Authority officials of "playing with words," pointing out that the nurses were supposed to have been paid time and a half when all they got was a flat rate.

As various officials entered the building, the nurses demanded to be allowed to meet with Minnis but were blocked by police officers and barricades set up to prevent their entry. Later, khaki-clad police officers approached Williams to dissuade her and the nurses from continuing their protest. Williams called off the protest when Office of the Prime Minister officials told her that Minnis would meet with her at a different site.

United States

Arizona warehouse workers vote to strike food giant Albertsons over failure to provide coronavirus protections

Warehouse workers at Albertsons' Southwest distribution center in Tolleson, Arizona, voted by a 98 percent margin to authorize a strike over the company's failure to provide personal protective equipment and institute social distancing in the 900,000-square-foot facility. Teamsters Local 104, which represents the 700 warehouse workers, also has a contract expiring February 27.

In a statement, the union said, "Albertsons is raking in record profits during the pandemic, while its frontline workers are putting themselves and their families at risk. It's outrageous that these workers are being forced to supply their own personal protective equipment and being crowded in on top of each other in Albertsons' warehouse."

In January, Local 700 held a protest that coincided with a protest by Teamsters Local 745 at Albertsons' Dallas, Texas, distribution center. Meanwhile, Teamsters Local 710, based in the Chicago area, is negotiating a contract covering 900 drivers and warehouse workers who service Albertsons' Jewel-Osco supermarket chain. In all, the Teamsters indicate that some 11,000 workers could be affected by negotiations and grievances.

Oregon nursing home workers to launch 10-day strike after management refuses to recognize unionization vote

Nursing home workers at The Rawlin memory care facility in Springfield, Oregon, citing a crisis condition due to under-staffing and the pandemic, are preparing to go on a 10-day strike after management refused to immediately grant union recognition. Eighty-five percent of the workforce signed a petition to join the Service Employees International Union.

On February 1, workers delivered their petition to the company in the wake of a COVID-19 outbreak resulting in 47 cases and six deaths. On February 5, the company refused to recognize the union, leading to a decision to strike.

In video statements, workers gave their reasons for taking immediate action. Jenn Gregory stated, "Our employer has refused to recognize our union. They want to force us to an election process that could take months. We don't have months. We have had 21 deaths in the past eight weeks, many of them for non-COVID-related reasons. My co-workers and I are convinced that with adequate staff and training, some of these residents would be alive today."

Sumner Trosko stated, "We are done watching our residents suffer and

watching each other suffer from the effects of critical understaffing, extreme turnover due to low wages, and traumatizing working conditions at The Rawlin."

The Rawlin is owned by OneLife and is the recipient of \$260,858 in COVID relief funding. Its founder, Zack Falk, along with partners and investors, jumped into the expanding senior-living boom that according to their website "has strategically positioned them to provide for the fastest growing population in the world."

Construction workers shut down Amazon warehouse in Oxnard, California, over use of non-union contractor

Some 75 union construction workers walked off the job February 4 at the Oxnard, California, future site for an Amazon fulfillment center, protesting the company's decision to bring in a non-union contractor. Members of the Iron Workers Local 443 and the Teamsters downed tools, and some 25 non-union workers refused to cross the union picket line.

Building Zone Industries, the non-union contractor, was targeted by the unions for seeking to undercut prevailing construction wages. The area surrounding Oxnard has been hit by high unemployment during the pandemic and has some 18,000 construction workers idle.

CANADA

Nurses union rejects Quebec government's latest contract offer

The Fédération de la Santé du Québec (FSQ) said it had rejected the Quebec provincial government's offer submitted January 21 because it "does not guarantee any real improvement in working conditions."

The union covers some 5,000 nurses, auxiliary nurses and respiratory therapists in Laval, the Gaspé, Quebec's north shore, and northern Quebec. In rejecting the offer, the union said it did not guarantee any real improvement in working conditions. It complained the offer included premiums if medical workers continued to endure overwork and unsafe conditions, instead of addressing those conditions.



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