

Mexican doctors stage protest over vaccinations; Teamsters isolate action by Minneapolis area Marathon workers

Workers Struggles: The Americas

5 April 2021

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

Private sector doctors in Mexico protest to demand vaccinations

Doctors in the private sector held a protest near the Naval Military School in Mexico City on April 1. The doctors demanded they be inoculated with doses of anti-COVID vaccine that had become available at the Naval Military School, which is a vaccination headquarters.

There have been a number of protests and strikes across Mexico among public sector medical personnel to demand greater protective measures—initially PPE and disinfectant cleaners, then vaccinations—against COVID-19. Private sector doctors have complained that the federal government has ignored them, although they also have direct contact with infected patients.

The doctors had found out about the availability of the doses through social media and gathered at the school. By noon, some doctors had already been vaccinated but by 2 p.m. they were told that the vaccine had run out and the doors were closed.

The doctors protested and at one point blocked a main thoroughfare. At about 4 p.m. the school authorities, claiming that more doses had arrived, reopened the site and administered more shots until announcing that the doses had run out for certain at about 6:30 p.m.

One-day strike called by Puerto Rican electrical union over contract

On March 30, Puerto Rico's Electrical and Irrigation Workers Union (Utier) called for a 24-hour strike to begin April 5 at 10:00 p.m. A general assembly was scheduled for April 6 to discuss a strike vote over the "public/private" contract signed by the territory's Electrical Energy Authority (AEE) and energy company LUMA last June.

LUMA claims that it is "committed to finding efficiencies in the current system" to cut costs by US\$100 million a year by 2026 and to increase efficiency, but critics say that the contract will lead to privatization and attacks on workers' wages, security and labor rights, while not appreciably lowering—in fact, likely raising—rates for consumers.

An October report by the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis noted, "The largest part of LUMA Energy's fee for running the grid must be paid whether or not the company is performing well," and called the contract "objectionable on a mix of policy and procedural grounds that are so extensive that its execution is unlikely to achieve

critical resiliency, affordability, renewable energy, workforce and budgetary goals."

The assembly includes a presentation by Utier officials on LUMA's performance so far and, as anticipated, followed by a vote over an indefinite strike to demand rescission of the contract.

Bolivian doctors extend strike against Emergency Health Law

Bolivia's National Health Council (Conasa) announced on April 4 that it would extend for another 15 days the strike it began on February 19. The call for the extension of the stoppage in opposition to the Sanitary Emergency Law, included blockades of major highways nationwide on April 6.

Conasa called the original strike to protest the government's refusal to include Conasa in the creation and planning of the law. Conasa has accused the government of Luis Arce of having "deaf ears" and avoiding dialogue. As of April 3, according to worldometers.info, Bolivia had 274,467 cases and 12,316 deaths from the pandemic.

Uruguayan meat storage workers strike over COVID-19 death

Workers at Frigorífico Canelones, a refrigerated meat storage warehouse about 50 km (31 miles) north of Montevideo, Uruguay, began an indefinite strike March 31 following the death of a coworker from COVID-19. The worker, 30-year-old Marcelo Miguez, died on March 24.

The workers union, Soofrica, announced that there were at least 28 Canelones workers with the disease and several others awaiting test results. At an April 4 press conference, Soofrica head Raúl Torres said that the workers would stay out at least until April 6. He said that the union had asked for a sanitary shutdown, but "we weren't successful."

The union is asking for five days of disinfection, tests of the workers and a lowering of the production level. However, according to Torres, "The company continues to prioritize production over people's health." Meat is a significant source of export income for Uruguay.

As of April 4, there were 25 workers reported with the infection, while 138 workers were in quarantine, along with their families.

Argentina: cultural workers protest firings

Members of the artistic community in Salta, capital of Argentina's Salta province, protested at the city's Casa de la Cultura on March 31 to oppose the firing of eight workers for the province's ballet company. The workers denounced irregularities in the performance competition held the week before and allege that the eight were let go because they had petitioned for better working conditions.

The workers say that the Salta Culture Secretariat calling for a performance competition in the midst of the pandemic was irregular in the first place, and the firings violated the national decree prohibiting firings without just cause during the pandemic. In addition, the judges did not take into account the fact that workers had to submit to an evaluation after months without practicing together.

In fact, the ballet dancers had submitted a petition for a return to in-person practice that was never answered. The request had as much to do with maintaining their work risk insurance as it did with the need to practice. One dancer complained, "They keep you on vacation so as not to have medical coverage, but they make you go to a competition."

Protesters interviewed by Salta/12 also complained of the precarious and uncertain nature of cultural work: even with years of experience, no job security; insufficient insurance coverage in a field in which injuries are not uncommon; the attitude that ballet performers are expendable; lack of transparency in hiring processes; threats and abuses against cultural workers.

Chilean shipping industry workers vote for strike over shipping times

Officers and crewmembers of the Humboldt shipping company's Chilean sites voted to strike after rejecting management's latest offer April 3. The vote was 92 percent in favor of the walkout. The strike was provisionally set to begin April 6 if Humboldt does not agree to changes in the contract. The union said that the latest offer "consisted basically of the same clauses of the previous collective agreement, which was widely rejected by the union leadership, and the workers involved in the negotiation."

Some 430 officers and crew in the merchant marine union work on ships and tugboats owned by the Ultrana holding company, which has concessions in Valparaíso, Coquimbo and other ports. Its logistics chain serves mining and petroleum interests, as well as both international and national cabotage.

The workers' main demand is better shipping times. The long shipping times have kept workers away from their families, a situation that has been exacerbated by the pandemic.

Teamsters appeal to stockholders while isolating striking Minnesota oil workers

The Teamsters union issued a March 29 letter to Marathon Petroleum Corporation stockholders appealing to them to vote down a proposed executive compensation package at its April 28 shareholders meeting. The letter serves as a cover for the union's abandonment of the two-and-a-half month strike by the 200 members of Teamsters Local 120 at Marathon's St. Paul Park, Minnesota refinery.

Workers voted 167-4 to strike over the company's demand to incorporate contract language that could mean 40 bargaining unit jobs going to low-cost outside contractors. But after 24 hours on the picket line, the Teamsters leadership offered to return to work, making clear the

union bureaucracy had no strategy to win the strike. Meanwhile, management has refused to allow workers to return to work while replacement workers are being brought in.

The Teamsters now claim the work stoppage is a lockout while Marathon insists it is still a strike. The union has also called for a boycott of a few Speedway gas stations in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metro region, which will have no impact on the giant corporation. Marathon is the major provider for Speedway stations.

Las Vegas warehouse workers picket over the firing of seven workers

Warehouse workers began picketing the Circa Resort & Casino in Las Vegas, Nevada at the end of March to protest the firing of seven workers who work for Three Corners LLC, which provides warehouse services for Circa. Both Circa Resort and Three Corners are owned by the same person, Derek Stevens.

The seven workers are alleged to have been conducting a unionization drive under Teamsters Local 986 at Three Corners. Sean Harren, president of Local 986 called on Stevens "to act as a responsible community partner" and said his actions were "heartless." The Teamsters have filed unfair labor practices charges.

Aerospace workers strike in Renfrew, Ontario

Three hundred and fifty aerospace workers, organized by the United Steelworkers (USW), went on strike last week in a fight for wage increases in a new contract. The workers are employed by Magellan Aerospace, one of the largest manufacturing operations in the Ottawa Valley. In addition, the workers have demanded recognition in their wage package of their production over the past year under strict COVID restrictions that has made their labor more onerous.

Magellan is a global corporation producing parts, castings and electronic systems for defense, space and aerospace concerns. The company experienced a bitter five-week strike in 2012 after it offered a derisory 15 cents per hour wage rise spread over three years. That strike was eventually settled for an almost equally paltry 82 cents per hour increase that was spread out over three years. The job action in Renfrew comes amid a steady uptick in strike activity across the country over the past two months.



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