

## Protests as COVID-19 outbreak surges in Latin America

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

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### Latin America

#### **Protest against attempts by Argentine authorities to stigmatize health workers**

Hundreds of health workers mobilized last week, forming pickets and organizing car caravans in defense of their accused colleagues and demanding better working conditions.

On Friday and Saturday (May 29 and 30), car caravans took place in the Argentine cities Bahía Blanca, Córdoba, Jujuy, Mendoza, Rosario, Tucumán and elsewhere. Workers carried signs denouncing the lack of personal protective equipment and demanding better working conditions and higher wages.

A large number of Argentine doctors battling COVID-19 are residents employed as contingent labor, whose wages are often paid three months late. Many of the strikers carried signs denouncing authoritarianism, lack of professionalism in scores of hospitals and clinics that were totally unprepared for the pandemic.

In the industrial province of Córdoba, demonstrations also took place on May 25, Argentine Independence Day. In the city of Córdoba, the massive car caravan crowded the main downtown arteries. Many had signs denouncing the Peronist government's criminal allegations against the health workers.

#### **Brazil: Health workers rally against Bolsonaro regime**

In Río de Janeiro, health workers rallied on May 27 to demand the removal of President Bolsonaro and Vice-President Mourão, for prioritizing corporate profits over human lives and for unleashing the police in the city's slums. The workers oppose the government's

policies that allow for the explosive growth of CORONA-19 cases across Brazil, as well as the fascistic police assassination policy in the slums of Río (favelas).

#### **Delivery workers mobilize in Mexico and Costa Rica**

Delivery workers, mostly young temporaries, mobilized and rallied in front of the Revolution Monument in downtown Mexico City on May 27. Hundreds of youth, employed by grocery and food delivery firms, most of them wearing facemasks, arrived on their bicycles and motorcycles at the historic monument.

The demonstrators carried signs commemorating comrades who have fallen victims of the COVID-19 virus or from traffic accidents, leaving their families destitute because their employers refuse to provide any insurance or compensation.

#### **Contingent workers in Uruguay stage protest against austerity**

Part-time and contingent workers employed by Uruguay's Social Development Ministry (MIDES) rallied last Thursday at the MIDES offices in Montevideo to protest their precarious employment and the cuts in social programs as part of the government's austerity policies. At the rally, MIDES workers demanded an end to their employment insecurity and an end to cuts in social services.

#### **New York City condo workers strike**

More than a dozen condominium workers at the 75 Wall Street FiDi building went on strike May 18 after three years of fruitless negotiations between the Service Employees International Union Local 32BJ and management. The strike by porters, doormen and

concierges was triggered after management changed paid time-off practices and failing to provide protective equipment during the coronavirus pandemic.

Ron Crowley, a freight elevator operator, told *Belabored*, “We went maybe three, three and a half weeks where we had no masks at all. We had a small amount of gloves and we had no disinfectant whatsoever. In the meantime, some of the residents of the building were giving us masks, gloves, and disinfectant.”

The 75 Wall Street building is a luxury condo in the Manhattan’s financial district. Workers unionized three years ago and have yet to receive their first contract.

### **Sickout at Texas postal facility after worker tests positive for COVID-19**

Hundreds of postal workers at the North Texas Processing and Distribution Center in Coppell, Texas, called in sick after a confirmed case of COVID-19 was reported at the facility last week. Some 40 percent of the workforce called in sick on the first day, followed by 60 percent—about 400 postal workers—on the following day.

An official of the American Postal Workers Union told NBC T News that the postal service has been slow to provide protective equipment and many workers supply their own masks, shields and gloves. The Coppell processing center, located just north of Dallas-Fort Worth, is the main distribution facility for North Texas and processes thousands of pieces of mail each day.

Meanwhile, a postal worker at the main post office at Tyler, Texas, just southwest of Dallas-Fort Worth has also tested positive for COVID-19.

### **Tyson Foods forced to close Iowa pork plant after massive outbreak of COVID-19**

Iowa state health officials confirmed May 28 that 555 workers at the Tyson’s Storm Lake pork processing facility tested positive for COVID-19, leading the company to close down the plant that employees 2,400 workers. The company sought to shift responsibility for the massive outbreak as a result of delay in processing test results.

### **Regina, Saskatchewan oil refinery lockout entering sixth month**

The lockout of 750 oil refinery workers in Regina, Saskatchewan, enters its sixth month this week. The dispute has seen the full force of the police and the courts, backed by the right-wing provincial government, marshalled against the locked-out workers who had mounted blockades of FCL facilities in late January and early February. Federated Cooperatives Limited (FCL) continues to operate the refinery with hundreds of scabs and management personnel.

Emboldened by Unifor’s repeated climb-downs, the company has escalated its concession demands, both by reviving proposals it had previously withdrawn and tabling new ones on several consecutive occasions.

When the parties met on January 30, Unifor offered FCL C\$20 million per year in pension givebacks. So steep were the concessions proposed by Unifor that the union’s lead negotiator, Scott Doherty, said he feared being “beaten up” by rank-and-file workers.

Under the company’s latest demands, which were overwhelmingly rejected by workers in a vote forced by the provincial Labour Board in April, new payroll deductions, including in the defined-benefit pension plan, would cost workers up to C\$20,000 per year in overall earnings even as the company’s pension solvency responsibilities would be weakened.

FCL also wants to impose permanent layoffs of maintenance workers, remove master operators from the union rolls, lower premiums for attaining higher professional qualifications, introduce cross-crafting provisions that would lead to the de-skilling of the workforce and undermine occupational safety, and scrap a savings plan benefit.

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