

## OSHA orders COVID protections for health workers; other high-risk professions left out



By PAI

**A**lmost 16 months and 600,000 deaths after the government officially declared the coronavirus a pandemic, the Democratic Biden administration issued its Emergency Temporary Standard forcing health care firms to protect their workers, now.

But the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) mandate only applies to the health care firms, which lead all the rest of “essential” occupations in reports of coronavirus outbreaks and illness numbers.

It doesn't apply to other essential workers toiling in high-risk industries, such as truckers, retail workers, and, most importantly, meat and poultry plant workers. The processing plants have been sites of some of the worst employer refusals to protect workers against the virus and its community spread.

“We've identified the grave danger for the health care workers, but we recognize there's a hazard in other industries,” Jim Frederick, OSHA's current top official as acting assistant administrator told a June 10 telephone press conference.

As a result, neither National Nurses United, which was first and foremost in campaigning for the emergency standard, nor the labor-backed National Council on Occupational Safety and Health (NACOSH), was completely satisfied.

Hospitals' failure to protect workers and foot-

dragging to protect profits “is directly responsible for the appalling level of infections and deaths we have experienced. An ETS is a major step toward requiring accountability for hospitals who consistently put their budget goals and profits over our health and safety,” she added.

NNU supports stronger workplace safety measures for all workers, all patients, and all communities, she added. She also warned against a potential resurgence of the pandemic in coming months.

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“Health care workers who have saved lives during this pandemic deserve full protection—and so do the other workers who provided us with food, shelter, sanitation, and everything else,” said the council's co-executive director, Marcy Goldstein-Gelb.

AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka lauded the

**Almost 16 months and 600,000 deaths later, the government is finally forcing health care firms to protect their workers.**

standard as a good first step while pointing out most other “essential” workers it does not cover are low-wage workers of color.

NNU identified two more hazards to workers and customers. One is lack of protections against aerosol-driven (sprayed through the air by speech, coughs or sneezes) Covid-19 droplets. NNU will check the standard to see what it mandates about that. The other is governments’ loosening of anti-pandemic rules as infection numbers have declined.

As for meatpacking firms, grocery stores, retailers, and other firms with higher infections, OSHA “will continue targeting inspections at the plants with high numbers of sufferers from Covid-19,” Frederick said. If it finds those firms don’t protect workers, OSHA will charge them under its General Duty Clause, a vague standard without specific criteria.

The Emergency Temporary Standard decision was delayed for weeks. OSHA sent the ETS to Democratic President Joe Biden’s White House Office of Intergovernmental and Regulatory Affairs

in late April. OIRA finally approved it on June 9. There was no explanation for the delay.

But that’s an improvement over the prior GOP Trump regime. There, the regulatory office was where rules were killed, thanks to secret insider lobbying from corporate interests.

Bosses need to provide workers “with N95 respirators or other personal protective equipment, and “ensure 6 feet of distance. In those cases, “employers should erect barriers between employees where feasible.”

The bosses have to give workers paid time off to get vaccinated and to recover from side effects, and if workers test positive—even if they’re asymptomatic—they “must work remotely or otherwise be separated from other workers or be given paid time off up to \$1400 per week.”

“President Biden needs to have workers’ backs—by ensuring the nation’s federal safety agency has the resources and teeth needed to hold employers accountable.”

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## Nicaragua warns of election interference, hits out at U.S. sanctions

By Steve Sweeney

**N**icaragua has demanded an end to “all illegal and coercive measures,” including U.S. sanctions, as it warned of a dirty tricks campaign ahead of November’s elections.

A number of Western media reports accuse the Nicaraguan authorities of detaining opposition figures, a narrative that critics say is part of a broader attempt to discredit the government and sow discord in the run-up to the elections.

But those who have been taken into custody are under investigation for serious crimes, including money laundering, treason, and seditious conspiracy, with the government insisting that it is operating in an open and transparent manner in accordance with Nicaraguan law.

The detained opposition figures include Cristiana Chamorro, whose Foundation for Reconciliation and Democracy is accused of receiving millions of dollars from U.S. organizations including the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), which was formed in 1983 “to do today what was done covertly 25 years ago by the CIA.”

That money was allegedly then funneled to various family members and a number of opposition

media organizations, including Channel 10, Channel 12, and Vos TV, Radio Corporacion, and the Cafe con Voz radio show, as well as online outlets 100% Noticias, Nicaragua Investiga, Nicaragua Actual, BacanalNica, and Despacho 505.

This is a tried and tested method of Washington’s intelligence services. During the Cold War, the CIA funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty as an explicitly anti-communist news organization pumping propaganda into the socialist states. At one stage, it even employed several former Nazi agents who had been involved in anti-Soviet activities under Adolf Hitler’s direction.

The Democratic Restoration Party was also deemed ineligible as it had not updated electoral authorities on changes to its statutes and bylaws, as all parties are required to do.

A number of “opposition usurpers” are under investigation for receiving millions of dollars from the U.S. government through NED, USAid, and other agencies, with the aim of “overthrowing the government of President Daniel Ortega.”

A total of 19 parties have registered to contest the elections, either individually or as part of an alliance.

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# AFL-CIO leader: No coincidence unions and voting rights under attack simultaneously



By Mark Gruenberg

**L**abor’s strong campaign to preserve and strengthen voting rights, joined by those of civil rights, religious, and civic allies, took center stage at a key session of the AFL-CIO’s Northeast Regional meeting for union leaders and activists.

But speakers, including federation Secretary-Treasurer Liz Shuler, the keynoter, didn’t neglect other causes, especially the Protect the Right to Organize (PRO) Act. She linked them.

“It’s also a civil rights bill,” Shuler declared of the PROAct, labor’s top legislative priority. “And it’s no coincidence there’s an attack on unions at the same time there’s an attack on voting rights.” The corporate elite and radical right “want to divide us and want to disenfranchise us.”

And it would be shelved forever if the right wing and white nationalists gain permanent hegemony over the U.S., though they’re in the minority—a hegemony that can be prevented if Congress passed the For the People Act and the John Lewis Voting Rights Act, the legislation discussed at the June 10 session. The For the People Act, in particular, would halt the danger.

The burgeoning slew of GOP threats to voting rights, state by state—almost 400 pieces of legislation and counting—“are a threat to the entire labor agenda,” said Clayola Brown, longtime union officer, former president of the A. Philip Randolph Institute and head of the federation’s Civil, Human

and Women’s Rights Department.

Poll taxes have been replaced, in the new round of repression, with fees for documents workers need to prove their right to register. The usual mode is to charge high fees for drivers’ licenses, passports, birth certificates, or other ID voters need.

Then the white GOP majority passed and white right-wing GOP Gov. Ron DeSantis signed legislation mandating the ex-felons, most of whom are poor, must pay all their high fines, fees, and court costs before they can register to vote. That law effectively re-disenfranchises them.

Republican-run states rushed to implement a slew of voting restrictions. “In the past 20 years, we’re going back in time,” Brown commented.

To combat the repression, Brown and Roe outlined a four-pronged drive to protect and enhance voting rights.

The prongs start with geographic outreach to union members, both to convince them of the absolute priority they must give to preserving, protecting, and enhancing voting rights.

Then there’s advocacy, to convince unionists to lobby lawmakers—especially Senate Republicans—for the For The People and John Lewis Acts.

The other two prongs are relationship building with like-minded civil rights, civic and religious groups, for joint campaigns, and building capacity to train workers and their allies as poll watchers, monitors, and reporters of election repression, county by county.

**Campaign to strengthen voting rights key topic at AFL-CIO session.**

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### Struggles on the Ground Against White Supremacy

By Special to People's World

**P**rogressives everywhere are concerned about the spread of white supremacy and neo-fascist movements linked emotionally to former president Donald Trump. Although Trump lost the 2020 presidential election, he managed to secure 74 million votes.

As a result of the election, the Democratic Party has slim majorities in both legislative chambers, but conservatives control the Supreme Court and campaigning has already begun for the 2022 Congressional elections. In addition, some 30 states are red; that is governorships and legislative bodies are controlled by the Republican Party.

While political movements struggling against racism, worker exploitation, misogyny, and environmental damage have grown, the future remains unclear. And it is in this context that struggles to build multiracial working-class movements are more vital than ever.

But what is being done to build such movements? What can progressives learn from on-the-ground movements? What must we do to attract those 74 million voters and build for survival in 2022 and 2024?

To address these issues, People's World and Online University of the Left are hosting a discussion on June 30, 2021.

## A las masas cansadas de Centroamérica se les debe la entrada

BY JOHN WOJCIK

**L**a vicepresidenta Kamala Harris se reunió con el presidente guatemalteco Alejandro Giammattei el lunes y el martes con el presidente de México, Andrés Manuel López Obrador. Su viaje tiene la intención anunciada de ayudar a resolver la situación migratoria en la frontera sur de Estados Unidos.

Harris dijo en Guatemala que el objetivo de la política de Estados Unidos es mejorar las condiciones dentro de Guatemala para que la gente no quiera arriesgar su vida y sus extremidades para salir de allí y viajar a la frontera de Estados Unidos con México.

El trabajo que se le ha dado a Harris es en gran parte imposible. Parte de la batalla en Centroamérica, señaló, es lidiar con la corrupción. Sin embargo, una de sus reuniones principales consistió en llegar a acuerdos con Giammattei, considerado en todo el mundo como un capo de la corrupción en la región.

Pero en lugar de simplemente adoptar un enfoque de clasificación para las oleadas de llegadas fronterizas, Biden dice que quiere llegar a la raíz del problema en Centroamérica. La forma de Trump de llegar a esas raíces fue recompensar a los líderes corruptos de esos países para que controlen a sus poblaciones, incluido el corte de su capacidad de venir a los EE. UU. Dado que esos líderes corruptos no hicieron esto, la política fue un fracaso.

El apoyo de Estados Unidos a firmas capitalistas multinacionales como United Fruit, su respaldo a dictadores de derecha en Centroamérica y su papel para ayudar a crear las condi-

ciones para un gángsterismo desenfrenado se han traducido en desastres reales entre los que, por ejemplo, se encuentra la tasa más alta de mujeres homicidio en el mundo.

Los estados del Triángulo Norte se encuentran entre los lugares más peligrosos del planeta para las mujeres. La violación es un asunto normal. Las mujeres son violadas y luego sus hijos son arrancados de sus brazos y traficados en la región y el mundo. Si las mujeres y sus hijos no se someten a la voluntad de las bandas viciosas, simplemente son exterminados. Y luego la gente pregunta por qué los guatemaltecos no se quedan en casa. Este es el tipo de información que hubiera sido genial que la vicepresidenta Harris explicara en su conferencia de prensa el lunes. ¿Cuánto tiempo antes de que se pueda decir la verdad?

Estados Unidos debe reconocer el papel que ha desempeñado en la destrucción de la vida de la gente de Centroamérica. Es una responsabilidad tanto moral como política. Se está produciendo un desastre humanitario al sur de nuestra frontera, y debemos encontrar todas las formas posibles en las que podamos ayudar a resolverlo.

Pero lo que es más importante, no podemos decirle a la gente que no pueden venir aquí. Debemos estar dispuestos a acoger a las víctimas, refugiados centroamericanos que no serían refugiados si no hubiéramos participado en la destrucción criminal de sus países. Estos son los cansados, los pobres, las masas apiñadas a las que nos proclamamos su lugar de refugio. Debemos estar a la altura de ese mensaje sobre la Estatua de la Libertad escrito por Emma Lazarus.

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