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USA: Organizing without a Union During the Coronavirus

Organizándose sin sindicato durante el coronavirus

Friday 3 April 2020, by [FERRARI Katie](#) (Date first published: 1 April 2020).

Workers' health and safety matter more than anything, but workers are being forced to choose between their income and their health. It is right and necessary to be angry about how you and your co-workers are being treated.

Almost 200 people joined last night's video call to hear from nonunion workers in agriculture, grocery, transit, and hair styling. This was Labor Notes' first bilingual webinar! Thanks to Cesar Boc and Henry Boc for interpreting from Spanish to English.

Among the lessons: Nonunion workers have tremendous power when they act together. Start by talking to your co-workers about the problems they are dealing with. Bring people together (on Zoom or over the phone) to decide on demands and figure out who has the power to grant them. Then begin to escalate: create an online petition, build pressure by confronting your boss together and holding walk-outs, and involve the community. Share your fight on social media and with the press.

Remind your co-workers of what is at stake: everyone's health and safety. The key is a united front. When workers act together, they can win.

FARMWORKER WALKOUT

Workers at an organic farm packinghouse in Western Massachusetts walked off the job last week, demanding gloves, masks, and social distancing. Eduardo, who is the manager at the packinghouse, told his co-workers how dangerous coronavirus is and reminded them that they have rights even if they are undocumented.

Everyone went to talk to the boss together. Eduardo has worked on farms his whole life, and he has found that "the boss intimidates workers if they talk to him alone, but when all the workers go together, the boss looks scared."

Eduardo and his co-workers are working with Margaret Sawyer and Rose Bookbinder of the Pioneer Valley Worker Center to escalate their campaign: they are creating a petition for the community to sign.

GROCERY FIGHT

Publix grocery workers are fighting to wear gloves and homemade masks at work. In a show of solidarity, they don't want to use the N-95 masks that health care workers need.

When Kelly Pope went to her boss alone and asked for a mask, she feared retaliation. Undaunted, she shared her story on National Public Radio and is now following Eduardo's advice: she's

organizing a group of co-workers to confront the boss about hazard pay and protective equipment.

Unionized grocery workers are having big wins. We learned mid-webinar that workers at Kroger, represented by United Food and Commercial Workers, won a \$2-an-hour pay increase in retail, manufacturing, distribution, and call centers. They also won emergency paid leave, additional cleaning and sanitizing protocols, and shorter store hours.

GETTING UNEMPLOYMENT AT A BEAUTY SALON

Workers at an upscale beauty salon fought to close their shop and get laid off so they could qualify for unemployment. One of the salon's clients had tested positive for coronavirus after returning from a trip to Italy. Siobhan O'Leary advised a worker-organizer to remind her co-workers of what was at stake: they and their families could get sick.

Workers decided that they did not want to take protective equipment from nurses and they could not make the salon safe, since they work so close to clients. Together, they told the boss that their working conditions were unsafe; then they walked off the job. They were laid off that day, and all qualified for the expanded unemployment benefits that Senator Bernie Sanders fought for in last week's stimulus bill.

Airline industry workers created a petition and won protective equipment, paid time off, and six feet of spacing between workers. A worker-organizer told Cesar Boc that she worked with a local union to organize temporary and full-time workers across shifts.

HELP IS AVAILABLE

The Democratic Socialists of America and the United Electrical Workers (UE) have joined forces to help nonunion workers across the country to organize their workplaces! If you want help in your workplace, fill out this form and a DSA/UE organizer will get in touch with you.

Collette Perold of DSA's Labor Committee said organizers have called hundreds of people who filled out the form. If you would like to join the organizing effort and make calls, fill out this form.

The Food Chain Workers Alliance is also offering organizing help! If you work in a food-related sector—for instance, on a farm, in a grocery store, in a meatpacking plant, or at a restaurant—fill out this form in English or this form in Spanish.

For more resources on organizing tactics and your legal rights, visit our [Organizing in a Pandemic: Labor Notes Resources](#) page.

* Katie Ferrari is a journalist, teacher, and member of the Oakland Education Association.

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