

Contract workers blockade Chuquicamata copper mine in Chile;  
striking Petrobras workers rally in Rio de Janeiro

## Workers Struggles: The Americas

31 May 2021

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

### Contract workers blockade Chuquicamata copper mine in Chile

Two hundred miners employed by the Acciona Ossa Pizarota contractor occupied and blocked the entrance to the underground Chuquicamata copper mine. The miners demanded that the contractor “share its wealth with the workers, who every day make it richer,” according to the sign at the mine entrance. The workers are demanding that their wages at Chuquicamata be set at the same rate as those prevailing across the industry. As part of a technological revolution in electric transportation and green energy, the increasing demand for copper is forcing prices up and raising profits for firms in the industry.

Chuquicamata is an open pit mine located in northern Chile and run by Chile’s nationalized copper firm, Codelco. It is one of the world’s largest sources of copper and molybdenum. Last year, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, it shifted to digging a mine under very difficult conditions, based on contract labor hired by Acciona, a Spanish-Italian contractor at depressed labor costs. The mine is a significant contributor to Codelco’s current bonanza of copper profits.

### Striking Petrobras workers hold rally in Rio de Janeiro

On May 27 striking workers at the “green” division of the Petrobras oil firm rallied at the company headquarters in Rio de Janeiro. They are striking, which began on May 20, for the defense of their jobs. The privatization of this division,

Biocombustível (PBio) which produces bio-diesel, would result in the sacking of its current workforce.

PBio is one of the main producers of bio-diesel in Brazil and operates three major refineries.

### Rural teachers college students protest in Oaxaca, Mexico

Teaching college students—normalistas—protested in Oaxaca, Guerrero State on May 20. They demanded the release of 95 arrested normalistas from the Mactumatzá teaching college. The arrests took place on May 18. The demonstrators pointed out that in addition to those under arrest, there are dozens of disappeared students. The demonstrators likened this to the disappearance of the 43 normalistas from the Ayotzinapa teaching college on September 26, 2014. The marchers charged Chiapas Governor Escandon Cadenas of responsibility for the disappearances.

Chanting “¡Mactumatzá aguanta, Oaxaca se levanta!” (Mactumatzá resists, Oaxaca rises up!), the demonstrators gave the governor 48 hours to account for and free all the students. If not, they would take stronger measures.

Initially the Mactumatzá Rural College students had demanded that the entrance examination for students entering the career be in person, since many come from rural communities with no Internet. They also demanded more government funds for the Rural Teaching Schools.

Authorities reported that while 95 students had been reported under arrest, the actual number is 125, including two minors. They did acknowledge that there are 20 missing students and that all the arrested students have been barred from being in contact with their families. Furthermore, the names of the arrested have not been released.

## **Nurses to strike Logan Health in Kalispell, Montana**

Nurses in Kalispell, Montana are set to strike regional health care network Logan Health on June 1-3, demanding a nurse staffing committee, reinstating charge nurses in each hospital unit, “safe staffing ratios, benefits that don’t charge single parents an extra \$1,200 a year and wages that are comparable with other large Montana hospitals,” according to registered nurse Julie Anderson, speaking to the *Flathead Beacon*.

The nurses are members of SEIU Healthcare 1199NW, which represents 32,000 nurses and other health care providers in hospitals and other facilities across Washington state and western Montana. The union covers 650 nurses at Logan Health in a unit that was formed in July 2019 and has been bargaining for a contract for the past 18 months.

According to Logan Health, however, not all 650 nurses will be on strike. A spokesperson for the hospital told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “There are at least 100 nurses not willing to strike and will continue their shifts, along with physicians and nurse practitioners stepping up to fill any gaps. We don’t anticipate any staffing issues during the strike.”

Many of those nurses are part of a newly formed group called Nurses and Community Unite, whose members have called the strike vote a “sham,” accusing the SEIU of trying to force a strike for the prestige of the union and not patient care.

## **One-day strike by nurses at San Francisco’s Chinese Hospital over staffing level**

Over 100 nurses carried out a one-day strike against San Francisco’s Chinese Hospital May 25 to protest unsafe staffing, low wages and other issues that have contributed to “substandard workplace and economic conditions.” The nurses, who voted to join the California Nurses Association in 2019, have been negotiating with Chinese Hospital since February 2020 and are still without a contract.

Nurses are demanding meal and shift breaks. But to achieve that, they require staffing levels that will accommodate the safe coverage of patients. Management has been attempting to use supervisors to provide workers with some relief, but nurses object that supervisory personnel are not qualified to care for patients.

The substandard working conditions have also driven away many high seniority nurses, including bilingual nurses

who are essential to care for the large number of patients who only speak Chinese.

## **Ontario Reliance HVAC workers in third week of lockout**

About 830 heating, ventilation and air conditioning technicians, installers, plumbers and electricians are in the third week of a lockout at 30 Reliant Home Comfort operations across Ontario. The workers, members of Unifor, voted down an inferior tentative contract recommended by the union in March. With further negotiations at a stalemate, management locked out the workers on May 13. Since then the company has been using a scab labour force of subcontractors to continue customer service.

The workers are demanding significant improvements to the two-tier wages and benefits system, which exploits many junior workers with substandard wages and a lack of sick time provisions. The issue of sick days is particularly galling for the membership. During the 15 months of pandemic, workers attended to up to 10 house calls per day, thereby increasing the risk of COVID-19 infection. But lacking sick days, second-tier workers have been pressured to continue working even when feeling ill.

In an effort to force workers back onto the job and ratify an inferior contract, Reliance management last week unilaterally cancelled extended medical and dental benefits for workers on short-term and long-term disability.



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