

Toronto nurses march to demand pay and better conditions

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Transit workers strike in Buenos Aires

On February 27 transit workers went on a strike of unlimited duration in Buenos Aires over unpaid wages. The strike affected 50 municipal routes belonging to the DOTA group, representing a substantial portion of urban transit.

The strikers denounced delays in the payment of wages under conditions of 100 percent yearly inflation.

2 killed in Colombia protests against Emerald Energy

At least two, a policeman and a farm worker, died in southern Colombia last Thursday. The demonstrators were demanding reparation payments from the Emerald Energy petroleum company for damages it caused in the community of Los Pozos in the Caquetá region of southern Colombia.

Demonstrations at the plant have been ongoing during the last few weeks demanding payments for damages caused.

Teachers and students demand Ecuador's president resign

Hundreds of members of the Ecuadorean University Students Federation and the National Educators Union marched last Friday in Quito demanding the ouster of President Guillermo Lasso because of his ties with the illegal drug trade and corruption.

National Educators Union President Isabel Vargas also accused the president of being incapable or resolving the country's problems. The demonstrators are planning another protest rally this Wednesday and again on April 14.

Newspaper reporters protest against government repression in Guatemala

Reporters employed by newspapers and news agencies in Guatemala

rallied at the nation's Supreme Court building on March 3 denouncing government persecution. At issue is a court order on February 28 against nine reporters from the *El Periodico* daily for reporting on government corruption. The government argues that such "malicious" reporting is in itself a crime. At the rally many reporters denounced the persecution of Zamora Marroquin.

Zamora Marroquin, *El Periodico*'s director, was arrested last July for supposed "money laundering." The demonstrators insisted that Marroquin's arrest was over the newspaper's many articles on government bribery and corruption.

Thousands of farmers rally in Asunción, Paraguay

Some 7,000 farmers rallied on March 6 at the Agriculture Ministry in Asuncion, Paraguay, demanding land and that the government carry out a March 2022 agreement.

A spokesperson for the protesting farmers declared that they were sick and tired of listening to "false promises" from the government. She declared that the demonstrators intend to stay in Asunción until a meaningful agreement is reached with the administration of Mario Abdo Benitez.

The March 2022 agreement promised support for small farmers, the resolution of farmers' debts, an end to evictions and better conditions in farming communities.

Land tenure inequality in Paraguay is among the most extreme in the world.

United States

Morgan County, Ohio school employees continue strike

School support staff in Morgan County, Ohio, members of Ohio Association of Public School Employees (OAPSE) Local 51, struck on March 1 after working without a contract since July 2022. Classes are continuing remotely.

The district, in a former coal mining area in southeast Ohio, is offering wage increases of 5 percent, 3 percent and 2 percent over the life of a three-year contract. The union is demanding raises of 6 percent, 5 percent and 5 percent, still below the annual inflation rate of 6.5 percent. It is far below the 27 percent raise that would be needed to bring Morgan County school employees into parity with other districts.

According to Local 51 President Tom Quaintance, the average annual pay of the 100 school workers is a poverty wage amounting to \$23,500. A 6 percent raise would do little to materially improve their situation.

Negotiations are not set to resume until March 10. The workers, including bus drivers, custodians, classroom and health aides, secretaries and others, have won broad community support. Over 200 students, parents and other community members turned out for a support rally last month.

Pennsylvania teachers striking against concessions

Teachers from the Penns Manor Area School District in the west-central part of Pennsylvania have been on strike since February 27 in opposition to a series of concessions being demanded by district negotiators. The school district has targeted health care, tuition reimbursement and contract language providing early retirement benefits.

The 68 members of the Penns Manor Education Association are adamantly opposed to the measure that would drop health care insurance for teachers' spouses, expressing concerns that it would subsequently be followed up with the demand to axe coverage for children. Past wage freezes and being forced to work through the COVID-19 pandemic have also exacerbated relations between teachers and the district.

Penns Manor has the lowest starting pay for teachers in the region and is the only district in Indiana County that has not settled its contract. The two sides have been negotiating since January 2022, and the old agreement expired on July 31.

One parent who joined picketing teachers carried a sign reading, "Parents for teachers because if you'd shield my baby girl from an active shooter, I sure as h-ll can shield you from an unfair deal."

Marietta, Ohio manufacturing workers on strike against 2-tier wage system

Some 100 workers at ProFusion Industries in Marietta, Ohio, are continuing to strike over wages, seniority and a two-tier wage system. Members of the International Chemical Workers Union Local 343 walked off the job after rejecting two contract offers and a mediated proposal.

The biggest irritant is a two-tier wage structure agreed to by the company and union in 2012 that created a wide chasm between older seniority workers and the new hires brought in after that agreement. Today, some 70 percent of the workforce labor for lower wages and benefits under the bottom tier.

"The workers are just ... tired of the concessions," admitted Local 343 Rep Ed Rempel. "They need to make an equal playing field for both tier one and tier two groups."

ProFusion management issued a statement bemoaning the fact that workers had rejected a proposal that "would have provided, on average, double-digit percentage wage and benefit increases this year."

Strike at Missouri cement fabrication plant ends with contract settlement

The 100 workers at the Continental Cement plant in Hannibal, Missouri, ratified a new five-year contract on March 2, bringing an eight-day strike to an end. The United Steelworkers Local 11-205 said the new agreement resulted in annual 5 percent increases during the contract's first three

years followed by 4 percent increases in the last two years.

Included in the agreement is a one-time ratification bonus and what the union describes as a new job classification system. Other contract language purports to limit the use of third-party contractors.

Negotiations first began in May 2022, and workers were working without a contract since September 30.

IndustriALL Global Union said that negotiations were "hindered by management's unfair demands on workers to be silent on matters regarding scheduling issues, overtime, and cross training, as well as its discriminatory terminations of union employees and refusal to provide information needed for bargaining."

Canada

Hundreds of nurses march in Toronto for contract demands

Last Thursday hundreds of nurses in Toronto rallied and marched to demand a significant wage increase, better working conditions and higher levels of staffing. Negotiations between the Ontario Nurses Association (ONA) and the Ontario Hospital Association were near an impasse when the rally began. The following day the impasse was made official. The dispute will now head to arbitration in May. Union officials have already pledged that they will abide by provincial regulations that prohibit strike action.

Three years ago Ontario nurses were forced to accept a miserly 1 percent wage rise as part of the Conservative provincial government's public sector wage restraint program. In addition, that contract did not redress major grievances around unsafe working conditions and long hours that have plagued the profession not only in Ontario but across the country. The Conservative government's wage restraint legislation was recently ruled unconstitutional. An appeal of that lower court decision will begin in June.

Ontario hospital nurses currently earn \$34.24 an hour as a starting salary, which tops out gradually at \$49.02 an hour after 25 years of service. Fewer and fewer nurses, however, are staying within the public hospital system. Oppressively long hours, grueling working conditions and unsafe workplaces, exacerbated by the pandemic, have resulted in thousands of nurses leaving the profession.

ONA union officials have refused to provide their membership with the wage and working conditions proposals they have presented to management nor have they made specific the demands that they will now present to the arbitrator.

The ONA represents 68,000 registered nurses in Ontario, as well as 18,000 nursing student affiliates. The union negotiates for the nurses in 140 public hospitals across the province. Due to decades of draconian cuts in the entire health care system by both Liberal and Conservative governments, hospital care across the country is in deep crisis. It is estimated that up to two-thirds of newly graduated nurses leave the profession within two years of service. Hospitals report over 34,000 current unfilled nursing vacancies and another 126,000 vacancies in the overall health care sector. Since the pandemic, "burnout symptoms" plague 94 percent of nurses surveyed, with half of those reporting "severe burnout."



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