

## Workers Struggles: The Americas

Miners and members of miners' cooperatives stage protest in La Paz, Bolivia; Saskatchewan health care workers rally at provincial legislature

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### Miners and members of miners' cooperatives stage protest in La Paz, Bolivia

Thousands of miners and members of mining cooperatives protested in La Paz on Wednesday, April 23, blocking streets in the city center. Miners presented the Arce administration with a list of 19 demands. These center around the shortage and high price of fuels and explosives due to Bolivia's economic recession that is a product of the lack of US dollars and the collapse of the Bolivian peso.

The miners are demanding government help in the face of a decline in the output of minerals for export. Prior to the current crisis, cooperatives would receive payments for mineral exports directly in US dollars. Currently, due to the scarcity of dollars, they are paid in devalued Bolivian pesos.

The demonstrators marched in central La Paz and blocked major streets. They were blocked by police as they approached Plaza de Armas square, where Bolivia's government house is located.

Following the march, hundreds of miners stayed overnight, blocking avenues and streets. The Arce government agreed to negotiate with the miners toward the end of the week.

### Peru's Indian farmers occupy oil pipeline station to protest spills

On April 22, farmers and peasants belonging to the Awajun and Manseriche Indian tribes occupied the Petroperú oil company's pipeline station 5 in Northern Peru over the repeated oil spills and contamination of their lands and water supplies.

The pipeline goes through the Indian lands in the Manseriche District, part of the Andean Department of Loreto which borders with Ecuador, Colombia and Brazil.

On March 19, following the latest oil spill that poisoned several streams and one river, the peasant communities demanded that Peruvian authorities provide emergency food and clean water, but got

no response. Last week's takeover is meant to paralyze the movement of oil in the pipeline until it is repaired by the government and Petroperú. In addition, the protesters have taken over the Saramiriza-Bagua highway and are demanding improvements in the education system for their children.

Shajuan Shawit, a spokesperson for the Awajun tribe, described the occupation as a "territorial control strike" and made it clear that no activities will be allowed, public or private, or movements along the highway.

"Ours is a strike over territorial control," declared Shajuan Shawit; "Neither the regional or national government have had the will to respond to the people over the oil spills in the Manseriche district or provided even one drop of water, or food products, even though the oil has contaminated our valleys."

### Panamanian educators strike

On Wednesday, April 24, Panamanian teachers went on strike against government attacks on their social security rights and against US troops being stationed in the country. The strike is of indefinite duration.

On the same day, as part of the above struggle and in support of the educators, construction workers and trade unionists and students marched in Panama City and other cities, facing police repression.

The new social security law (Law 462) replaces the public pension system with private plans controlled by financial institutions, which would appropriate workers social security savings and result in pension payments being reduced.

The striking teachers are also demanding the expulsion of US troops (in three former US military bases along the Panama Canal). A recent agreement between the Panamanian government and the Trump administration allowed the troops back in.

"The government, in a despicable manner, has guaranteed the US military presence," declared a spokesperson for the strikers.

In 1989, US troops staged a bloody invasion of Panama that killed a large number of civilians, possibly thousands.

## Maryland transit workers strike over wages and benefits

Some 120 transit workers have gone on strike over wages and benefits against contractor Martz Gold Line in Hyattsville, Maryland. The contractor operates fixed routes for the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA).

In early April, members of the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 689 overwhelmingly voted down the company's last offer. When negotiations resumed on April 22, Martz Gold Line continued to push its old agreement, which the ATU says will further erode workers' living standards. Workers are demanding increased wages, better health care and a 401(k) retirement plan.

Martz Gold Line workers are a small portion of the MTA workforce. The ATU represents some 15,000 transit workers and retirees.

## Corning, New York healthcare workers vote to carry out informational picketing as contract expiration looms

The 450 healthcare workers at Guthrie Corning Hospital in Corning, New York, voted overwhelmingly April 21 to authorize their union to call for an informational picket as the two sides near the April 30 expiration date of the old agreement. Members of the Service Employees International Union (1199SEIU) are demanding quality and affordable health insurance and competitive wages in an effort to hold and recruit workers to combat under-staffing.

Workers are uniformly opposed to the hospital's proposals. Kathy Ville, 1199SEIU administrative organizer, warned, "Management's proposed changes will result in high health insurance deductibles and copays that many workers cannot afford."

1199SEIU said it will issue a 10-day notice before launching the informational picket. However, the contract expiration is less than 10 days away, indicating the union is not contemplating a strike when the old agreement expires on April 30.

## Workers grant strike authorization at Philadelphia hospital

Nurses and medical technicians at Temple Health–Chestnut Hill Hospital in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, granted strike authorization March 19 as they press for safe staffing levels and improved wages. Hospital management has refused to negotiate over the past two months and is engaged in a bargaining strategy to take away pandemic pay hikes for certain workers and a ladder wage scale implemented under the previous hospital ownership.

ICU nurse Barbara Strain, who is a 20-year veteran, told Chestnut Hill Local that Temple Health, which took over the hospital a little over a year ago, was the first management team to press for wage cuts. Hospital standards call for staffing in intensive care units to be one nurse for every two patients. But Temple Hill forces staff to take on three patients.

"It's physically demanding and mentally taxing to care for three patients at one time, as well as the family members that would also have to accommodate," said Strain. "There have been safety issues

when we're short-staffed, especially when we have three patients."

According to workers, under-staffing was present under previous owners of the Chestnut Hill facility. When Temple Health took ownership in January 2023, workers waited 11 months and when no improvements on staffing were forthcoming, they unionized with the Pennsylvania Association of Staff Nurses and Allied Professionals (PASNAP).

PASNAP is also negotiating separately with workers at another Temple Health facility—Temple University Hospital-Jeans Campus. PASNAP has not given any indication that there will be joint action between the two groups.

## Saskatchewan healthcare workers rally at provincial legislature

Hundreds of healthcare workers from across the province rallied in Regina last week in pursuit of a new contract to address the crisis of chronic underfunding in the healthcare system. Fourteen thousand nurses, medical technologists, care aides and maintenance workers, members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), are demanding increased wages, increased recruitment to alleviate worsening workloads and the increase in baseline funding for healthcare from the right-wing government of Scott Moe.

The government is proposing a 2025-26 healthcare budget that piles on another \$17 million in cuts to an already reeling system. At the same time, it has instructed the Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations to hold the line on wage increases. The workers have been without a contract since April 2023 and have not had a wage increase for the last three years. During that time, inflation rose by almost 12 percent.

As a result of the low-wage regime in the provincial healthcare system, workers have been leaving for better compensation in other provinces, causing chronic under-staffing and longer wait times for patient care. Workers are required to work onerous shifts and are regularly denied vacation requests. In a widely publicized news story, one medical technologist reported that he had to work 50 consecutive hours with only 45 minutes of rest between several callbacks. The technologist was so exhausted that on the last callback he lost consciousness at the wheel and crashed his car.



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