

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

Police attack protest by Uruguay fishermen; WellSpan Health nurses at Chambersburg, Pennsylvania hospital vote for strike authorization in over safe staffing and wages

7 July 2025

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## Police attack protest by Uruguayan fishermen

On July 2, a peaceful protest by striking Uruguayan fishermen, members of the Union of Sea Workers (SUNTMA), in Independence Plaza in Montevideo, called to demand that management cease boycotting contract negotiations, was viciously attacked by Montevideo Police.

Two thousand fishermen have been on strike since mid-June. Industry officials estimate losses of 15 million US dollars, with fishing fleets paralyzed.

According to SUNTMA president Alexis Pintos, the rally was peaceful “and the police response was repression. The police pushed without justification.” Montevideo police set upon the fishermen with billy clubs, armored cars and helicopters, wounding three demonstrators. Several workers were arrested.

Police officials claim the fishermen attacked first.

## Retiree protests continue in Argentina in the face of hunger and lack of heat

Last Wednesday, retirees marched once again in Buenos Aires, demanding increases in their Social Security and denouncing “the fascist and racist barbarism of the Javier Milei administration.” The pensioners rallied at the Congress Plaza square. Supporting the retirees were workers, students and football fans.

As in previous protests, the marchers braved police repression directed by Milei’s Security Minister, Patricia Bullrich.

In this cold Buenos Aires winter season, pensioners are

demanding that the legislature declare a food and heating emergency. Over 63 homeless in Buenos Aires have perished in recent weeks due to the “polar cold weather” affecting the city. Many households that are not homeless nonetheless report not being able to afford to pay gas heating.

“The state has to guarantee food, medications and housing. We are no longer talking of income; we are talking of survival. Retirees are dying,” declared a spokesperson for the marchers.

The purchasing power of retirement checks, which had been falling under previous administrations, has collapsed by 13 percent under the current government.

Next Wednesday, the Transport Workers Union and social organizations plan to set up soup kitchens for the retirees.

## Ecuador health workers protest

Last Wednesday workers in Ecuador rallied at the Labor Ministry in Quito, Ecuador demanding higher wages and in defense of the rights of government workers.

The workers denounce the so-called “Law of Public Integrity” proposed by the government of Daniel Noboa, which attacks workers’ and patients’ rights. In addition, health workers are demanding an end to the use of temporary nurses and health workers and the provision of medications and updated equipment in hospitals and clinics.

Government-supported health care is collapsing in Ecuador. Less than 40 percent of health workers have permanent employment, and nurses report having to bring food and equipment from their own homes to care for their patients.

National protests are scheduled for July 11.

## California hospice workers carry out two-day strike over stalled contract negotiations and threat of private equity

## takeover

Some 120 hospice workers in Petaluma and Santa Rosa, California held a two-day picket beginning July 2 to protest stalled negotiations and the decision by the non-profit provider Providence to carry through a merger with a private equity-backed hospice company.

The hospice workers, members of the National Union of Healthcare Workers (NUHW), have been locked in negotiations for a first-time contract for the past two years over the question of wages and working conditions. They view Providence's foot-dragging over a contract as a ploy to hand off the hospices without protections to Ohio-based Compassus, making it more difficult to get a contract once the joint venture is in place.

Providence, based out of Renton, Washington, operates 51 hospitals across seven states. The joint-venture was launched back in March, with Compassus initially taking control of 24 home healthcare locations in Alaska, Texas, California, Oregon and Washington. There are another 17 hospice and palliative care sites in those same states.

The mechanism for hospice provider reimbursement is based on the number of patients served. Workers fear that quantity and not quality will be Compassus' focus and that the number of times a patient is seen will decline. Providence has indicated that the current hospice operations are not sustainable.

A US Health and Human Services report revealed that, "Healthcare businesses purchased by (private equity) firms increased from 352 in 2010 to 937 in 2020." Private equity's overall investments in inpatient and outpatient services, elder and disabled care and pharmaceuticals total \$806 billion.

## **WellSpan Health nurses at Chambersburg, Pennsylvania hospital vote for strike authorization over safe staffing and wages**

Nurses at the WellSpan Chambersburg, Pennsylvania hospital voted for a strike by an 87 percent margin July 1. The 1,400 nurses, members of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), are demanding increased wages and additional staffing to better serve patients and relieve pressure on hospital staff.

Gayle Alleman, a registered nurse, told WGAL, "The health care workers are really upset because we want WellSpan Health to acknowledge the struggle and the dire crisis of understaffing, burnout and exhaustion that our team at Chambersburg Hospital has been facing."

The current staffing overloads and low wages are creating high turnover rates, and nurses are critical of the outside staffing agency that the hospital uses. The constant use of

outside staffing fails to provide continuity of care for patients, who would instead be better served by a permanent pool of nurses.

No ten-day strike notice has been given by the SEIU. Negotiations are ongoing.

## **CN Tower workers in Toronto locked out**

About 250 hospitality workers at Toronto's iconic tourist site are entering the second week of a lockout in a fight for wage and pension increases. The CN Tower workers, members of Unifor, work as bartenders, waiters, kitchen crew and hosts. Most workers earn only slightly more than the province's \$17.20 minimum wage. There has not been an increase in the meager pension for fifteen years. The Canada Lands Company management, which called the lockout last week, is keeping the CN Tower open but without food and bar services.

## **Vancouver Sheraton Hotel workers strike**

About 140 full and part-time room attendants, kitchen staff, waiters, maintenance workers and receptionists began a strike on July 5 in pursuit of a significant wage increase to meet the spiking cost of living in one of Canada's most expensive cities. The hospitality workers, members of Unifor, voted to reject a tentative agreement that the union had recently presented to them.

The workers have been seeking a new negotiated contract for over a year with their employer, Pacific Reach Properties, a Vancouver based investment firm with holdings in real estate, hospitality, healthcare and technology.



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