

Long-term care and nursing home workers in Ontario seek new contracts; Puerto Rican workers demand expulsion of Financial Control Board

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

Bolivian workers rally in support of peasants battling far right Paz regime

On May 1, thousands assembled for a *Cabildo Abierto* (Open Town Hall meeting) in the city of El Alto, Bolivia's second largest, in the Andes Plateau. Such open discussion rallies are common in Bolivia.

The rally expressed support for the peasant marchers protesting against Law 1720 that promotes agribusinesses at the expense of tribal and peasant farmers.

The meeting was called by several unions (including truckers, educators, miners, farm workers and health workers) and peasant organizations to organize a struggle against the right-wing government of President Rodrigo Paz. At the rally the Bolivian Workers Federation (COB) called for a general strike of indefinite duration beginning on May 2.

The COB demands, advanced at the Open Town Hall, call for a 20 percent increase in the minimum wage, a 50 percent reduction in salaries for high government officials, lower taxes for small businesses, higher pensions, an end to government plans to privatize publicly owned companies.

In a separate May Day event, in the city of Cochabamba, President La Paz rejected the COB demands, and suggested that workers increase their work performance, instead.

Puerto Rican workers demand expulsion of Financial Control Board

Thousands of workers and students marched and rallied in San Juan on International Workers Day demanding an end to the Financial Control Board that rules over Puerto Rico's finances..

The protest march marked ten years of workers' resistance against the board that has imposed brutal cuts to ensure repayment of debts to Wall Street.

The demonstrators denounced the austerity measures that have negatively affected the lives of Puerto Ricans, and forced thousands to leave the island. The demonstrators also demanded wage increases, decent retirements, and better working conditions.

"The Board does not supervise; it controls. This board does not administer; it rules. It accelerates the crisis and bankruptcy," declared a speaker representing the University Professors Union, on behalf of the 31 unions that supported the march.

Since it took over, the Financial Control Board has continuously

attacked workers' contracts, retirees' pensions, and University budgets, under conditions of rising inflation. It is estimated that over 200,000 Puerto Ricans have emigrated in the last seven years.

University of Puerto Rico students declare strike over cuts, tuition hikes

Students at one of Puerto Rico's main public universities, University of Puerto Rico in San Juan's Rio Piedras suburb, declared themselves on strike and occupied the campus on April 26. At issue is the University budget for 2022-27, frozen at \$500 million, which brings with it tuition increases and cuts in student aid, that the strikers consider essential for student access.

The demands also include guarantees that there will be no cancellation of university programs, of classes, and no layoffs of personnel (teaching and non-teaching). Currently, there is a freeze on hiring. Furthermore, the strikers are proposing major investments in campus maintenance.

Protesting Chilean high school students assaulted by police

Students in Chile marched and rallied in Santiago, Valparaiso and several other Chilean Cities on April 30. At issue are the right-wing policies and budget cuts of the Kast administration.

In Santiago, thousands of high schoolers joined the march, dubbed "the backpack protest" by the Secondary Student Group of the Metropolitan Region (*Secundarios de la Región Metropolitana*), blocking transit hubs in the city center. The protest was attacked by police armed with water-cannons and tear gas. Students were arrested at random.

The demonstrators denounced proposed budget cuts and so-called security measures at the high schools (symbolized by backpack inspections at the high schools) as well as new rules that take away free education for students charged with violent acts, including protests.

Protests in addition to Santiago and the port city of Valparaiso, protests also took place in Los Andes and Temuco, where students rallied at the regional hospital, where President Kast was visiting.

Coinciding with the protest day, the Kast administration announced a slash of 37 million dollars to the budget of the Ministry of Social Development and the Family, directly affecting youth and child services.

Parents of Ayotzinapa student massacre victims hold Mexico City protest

On Sunday April 26, parents of the 43 Ayotzinapa teaching students, kidnapped in Iguala in 2014, nearly 12 years ago, and presumed dead

at the hands of the Mexican Army, protested the lack of progress in the investigation of their sons' disappearance and the lack of communication with the Claudia Sheinbaum administration, who they suspect is covering up for the army.

The demonstrators demand the returns of the Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts which originally investigated the disappearances, the release of all army files, and the revisiting of military phone records related to the transportation of 17 of the students.

The march went from Mexico City's Independence monument (*Angel de la Independencia*) to the "Anti-monument sculpture to the 43".

At the same time at the Ayotzinapa Teachers' College in Chilpancingo, students and relatives of the disappeared also protested and condemned what they describe as a "Wall of Impunity" erected by the Mexican Army.

United States

Washington state concrete ready-mix drivers enter second month on strike

Concrete ready-mix drivers for Glacier Northwest in Pierce County, Washington, are entering their second month on strike as negotiations between the company and Teamsters Local 313 are stalled. The company is a subsidiary of CalPortland, but pays substantially less than other drivers under contract by the Teamsters in nearby King County.

Nick Lansdale, Secretary-Treasurer of Teamsters Local 313, which represents the striking workers, stated in a release, "All we are asking for is to be treated with the same respect and fairness that CalPortland treats drivers who live an hour away from us."

Glacier Northwest has begun employing strikebreakers. CalPortland claims to be the largest producer of ready-mix and other building materials in the Western United States.

California Marathon Renewables workers strike after company rejects national pattern agreement

Workers at the Marathon's Martinez Renewables processing plant in Martinez, California, went on strike April 27 after four months of failed bargaining. Members of United Steelworkers Local 5 are seeking a contract similar to the union's four-year pattern agreement with US oil refinery plants that included a 15 percent wage hike.

But Martinez Renewables has refused to accept the pattern agreement. Martinez Renewables is a 50/50 joint venture between Marathon Petroleum and Neste. The company announced in 2020 that it would convert the facility from crude oil processing to renewable feedstocks such as soybeans and corn oil. The old contract agreement expired January 31 of this year.

Minneapolis baseball concession workers begin voting to authorize strike

A strike vote commenced May 1 involving concession workers at Target Field in Minneapolis, home of Major League Baseball's Minnesota Twins. Unite Here Local 17, which represents the 500 workers, expects the authorization to pass.

"This is the first time in history that workers at Target Field have taken a strike vote," Sheigh Freeberg, the union's secretary-treasurer told KARE 11. "And to be frank, they're tired of low pay, disrespect, no health insurance, and no job protections."

The union has put forward a demand for a \$20 hourly wage, a mere \$3 an hour above Minneapolis' minimum wage. The unionized workforce covers servers, bartenders, cooks, and in-seat vendors.

Delaware North, the company that runs concessions at Target Field,

utilizes an additional 300 nonprofit volunteers that operate concession stands, a tactic the union says undercuts union jobs and helps keep pay low.

Delaware North, a US multinational food service and hospitality company, is headquartered in Buffalo, New York, and employs 55,000 workers world-wide.

Canada

[subhead]Long-term care and nursing home workers in Ontario seek new contracts[/subhead]

Frontline nurses working in nursing homes across Ontario are seeking wage parity with their union colleagues who work in provincial and municipally run hospitals. The 4,400 workers, members of the Ontario Nurses Association (ONA), are fighting brutal concession demands by their employers in the for-profit nursing home sector even as private nursing homeowners last year claimed millions in profits. One major employer, Extencicare, reported almost \$97 million in annual profits for the past year.

The nurses are also fighting for improvement in the grueling working conditions imposed on them by their employers who continue to slash staffing levels in the homes. With negotiations deadlocked, the nurses' union – which is prohibited from taking any job actions whatsoever by provincial law – must submit their members to binding arbitration should a settlement not soon be reached. The nurses will head to arbitration on June 15 and 16.

At the same time, more than 30,000 Ontario long-term care and retirement home workers organized by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), and often working in the same facilities as the nurses, are fighting for new contracts that provide a 6 percent wage increase for each year of a new agreement with improved benefits and working conditions. The union is also calling for a \$3.2-billion increase in hospital funding to close the gap between Ontario and the rest of Canada. Unlike the nurses, CUPE members may pursue limited job actions but are also prohibited from striking. Late last month, workers at Extencicare facilities voted 99 percent for job actions.

The disputes in Ontario mirror conditions faced by nurses and other health care attendants in long term care facilities across Canada. In Nova Scotia, two more CUPE locals this week will join a burgeoning strike in that province's long-term care facilities that now sees some 34 out of 42 health care facilities strikebound, albeit with essential services still provided. That strike, which is entering its fourth week, now involves over 3,400 workers.



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