

British Columbia nurses vote to reject tentative contract

## Workers Struggles: The Americas

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Latin America

### University protests resume in Argentina

Between June 16 and June 20 educators and university workers in Argentina went on protest strikes and took to the streets in a renewed round of action against the Milei administration's cuts to the country's prized public universities. Strikers point out that the buying power of wage increases implemented a few months ago have already been wiped out.

The protest strike demands an increase in public university budgets, and wages that make up for inflation. A segment of university workers and educators report that their wages barely cover their monthly expenses, while reduced university budgets make it more and more difficult to support academic and administrative tasks.

Strikers point out that the very existence of the country's prestigious public university system is at stake.

### Paz regime in Bolivia declares "state of exception" after major unions withdraw support for national protest movement

After 50 days of protests and road blockages by workers, peasants and indigenous groups, Bolivia's Labor Federation (COB), has withdrawn its support for the movement and entered talks with the government of President Rodrigo Paz. Immediately following the COB cancellation of its support for the national protests, the Paz administration declared a 90-day "state of exception", mobilizing the police and army to attack the protests, arrest their leaders and remove

roadblocks.

The COB surrender is contingent on future agreements on privatization and mining contracts with the La Paz administration, to be negotiated, during the 90-day state of exception, by so-called labor-commissions. Cynically, a COB leader announced the decision while wearing a miner hard-hat; miners continue to participate in the protests, despite the COB betrayal, and that of their own union. The use of mining hard-hats has become very common in many of the road blockages.

In addition to the use of the military, the 90-day state of emergency limits the democratic right of protest across the country.

The decision was announced at the beginning of a three-day national holiday. Its full impact will begin to appear on Tuesday June 23.

A central demand by all the demonstrators is the resignation of the Paz administration. Bolivia is in a state of financial crisis and is increasingly dependent on aid from the Milei and Trump administrations.

United States

### Port Jefferson, New York nurses vote to authorize strike over wages and unsafe staffing ratios

The New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA) announced June 11 that the 300-plus nurses at Catholic Health/St. Charles Hospital in Port Jefferson, New York, voted by a 99.7 percent margin to authorize a strike, as more than a dozen bargaining sessions have failed to resolve nurses demands for wages and safe staffing ratios. The union has not given the mandatory 10-day strike notice while the two sides continue to negotiate.

A New York state law passed in 2023 requires one nurse for every two critical or intensive care patients. A 2023 contract with the NYSNA contained language requiring one nurse for every six patients in non-emergency units.

But nurses complain that hospital management continually overrides the ratios. “This is a regular occurrence,” Rob Barone, a 28-year intensive care nurse and union president told *Newsday*.

A 2024 Department of Health investigation found St. Charles “not in compliance” with a number of issues, among them staffing ratios that had been agreed upon in the 2023 contract ratified by both sides.

### **Indiana aluminum workers enter sixth week on strike for union recognition**

Workers at the Batesville Products aluminum casting and finishing foundry in Lawrenceburg, Indiana are entering their sixth week on strike for union recognition. Impelled by low wages, high health insurance costs, forced overtime and poor working conditions, some 17 workers are seeking union representation with Teamsters Local 135.

Since February they have labored under a mandatory 60-hour workweek. Management refused to voluntarily recognize the union after a near unanimous signing of union cards. It has challenged the inclusion of certain categories of workers in an effort to frustrate and delay the union election. The bargaining unit comprises machinists, polishers and shipping and receiving workers.

Canada

### **British Columbia nurses vote to reject tentative contract**

Members of the BC Nurses Union last week voted by 67 percent to reject a tentative contract that had been unanimously recommended by union officials. Some 60,000 nurses have been fighting for a new contract since March 2025. Prior to the announcement that a tentative deal had been reached, the nurses had voted by 98.2 percent for strike action. However, union officials delayed giving the employer the required 72 hours’ notice to strike and instead decided to present a miserable contract to the membership.

As nursing is designated an essential service, a full-scale walkout is not allowed by government labour law, but some nurses are still able to work-to-rule, such as taking breaks or refusing to work overtime. Union officials, who only last week were enthusiastic about the proposed agreement, have not made any announcement about job actions, instead stating that they will go back to the bargaining table.

In the rejected contract, the nurses were offered a meager 12 per cent wage increase over four years. They have been demanding improved benefits and compensation as well as the implementation of a 2023 agreement on nursing ratios that has been ignored by the sitting New Democratic Party provincial government.

Central to the nurses’ demands have been redress of skeleton staffing levels that have caused high stress and extreme exhaustion. In addition, as staffing levels decrease and wait times for patients in emergency rooms and wards increase, injury rates for nurses have gone up by 25 per cent since 2019. Every 16 hours one nurse goes off duty due to violence on the wards and emergency rooms. These issues were not significantly addressed in the rejected contract.

The brewing unrest in the British Columbia health care system takes place as nurses in Ontario battle their own employers and provincial governments. Nurses in Ontario, according to provincial law, are banned from taking any job actions whatsoever. Instead, their disputes must go to binding arbitration. Just this past week, some 4,400 front-line nurses working in nursing homes across Ontario, who are seeking wage parity with their union colleagues who work in hospitals, had their future contract forced into binding arbitration under government-appointed arbitrators.

### **Quebec grocery store workers reject contract**

Some 550 warehouse workers, office employees and area-wide truck drivers for Metro grocery’s fruit and vegetable distribution center near Montreal voted overwhelmingly last week to reject management’s latest offer. Workers, who have been on strike for 3 months, voted 96 percent to reject management’s offer. They have accused management of employing strikebreakers.

The workers, members of the Federation of Commerce and affiliated with the Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN), the province’s second largest union federation, had voted by 97 percent for indefinite strike action. To make up for years of inflation-eroded compensation, workers are fighting for a 20 percent raise in the first year of a new contract, followed by five per cent raises in each of the two subsequent years.



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