

Protests in Ecuador hit end of fuel subsidies; Oregon Providence nurses set to strike

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

Popular protests in Ecuador against end of fuel subsidies and rise in value added tax

Workers in Quito and other Ecuadorean cities protested on June 12 and June 13 against President Noboa's plan to eliminate gasoline subsidies. In Quito, on June 12, chanting "Noboa Out, Now!" and burning cardboard images of the president, demonstrators marched from the Ecuadorean Social Security Institute toward Carondelet Palace, the country's government house. Noboa sent a large contingent of gendarmes to stop them and set up barriers around the building.

The marchers demanded that the government continue subsidizing the price of gasoline, and that it cancel plans to raise the national Value Added Tax. An increase in the price of fuel will in turn raise the prices of all consumption goods that are shipped by trucks, further impoverishing the Ecuadorean workers and peasants.

Rally to demand freedom for jailed Venezuela steelworkers

Workers protested in Caracas, demanding freedom for jailed steelworkers. It has been one year since Leonardo Azócar and Daniel Romero were arrested following a strike by steelworkers at the Orinoco Steel Plant, defending their labor rights, demanding better wages, and denouncing the broken promises from government negotiators in the context of their fight for democratic rights. Four days later, three of the strikers were arrested by the National Guard, one was freed shortly thereafter, the other two are still in jail. At the rally workers displayed signs against criminalization of strikes and protests.

Videos of the rally were widely transmitted via social media.

United States

Three-day strike by 3,000 Oregon nurses against Providence hospitals set over staffing ratios

The Oregon Nurses Association (ONA) issued a strike notice to six of the state's Providence hospitals that 3,000 nurses will strike for three days beginning June 18 in what could be Oregon's largest healthcare strike. The Providence hospitals are located in Portland, Newberg, Oregon City, Medford, Hood River and Milwaukie.

The website nurses.org reported, "At the heart of the conflict is the allegation that Providence hospitals have failed to adhere to the new safe staffing law for healthcare HB 2697. The ONA says they have filed over a dozen complaints against Providence, accusing them of violating the regulations designed to ensure adequate staffing levels and protect patient safety.

"According to the State of Oregon, the staffing law requires hospitals to establish staffing committees that include direct-care nurses and to follow specific nurse-to-patient ratios based on the acuity of patients. However, the union claims that Providence hospitals have consistently disregarded these requirements, leading to understaffing and compromising the quality of care."

California grocery workers authorize strike against Food 4 Less

The union representing some 6,000 grocery workers at Food 4 Less stores across California announced June 15 its membership voted overwhelmingly to grant strike authorization against the Kroger-owned chain as contract talks bog down. The United Food and Commercial Workers union has filed a number of unfair labor practice charges alleging surveillance and discrimination against workers and charges the company is offering "far less than what their parent company, Kroger, offers to other union grocery workers in the area."

Workers are seeking comparable wages to those of workers at Ralphs, also owned by Kroger. After three months of bargaining, Food 4 Less is proposing an hourly wage increase of only \$3.25 over the course of a new three-year contract. Workers are demanding double that amount.

Clara Vega, a 30-year veteran at Food 4 Less, told the *Guardian*, "We work our butts off and they come back at us with nothing that can help us. We're tired of living paycheck to paycheck. My daughter is going to college soon and I'm trying to figure out how to pay for

that. I can barely pay my mortgage. It's really hard, and we just want what's fair."

Food 4 Less has begun advertising for strikebreakers. Tyrone Severe, a cashier, told the *Los Angeles Times*, "They are trying to hire nonunion workers and pay them more, instead of just negotiating with us. We think that sucks."

Healthcare workers at USC Keck hospitals hold informational picket to press for improvements

Healthcare workers at the University of Southern California's Keck Medicine hospital system in Los Angeles held an informational picket June 5 to press their demands for safe staffing, increased wages, better healthcare benefits and an end to job subcontracting. The contract for the 2,000 members of the National Union of Healthcare Workers (NUHW) expired April 30 and management has been demanding concessions.

In a statement, NUHW president Sophia Mendoza, said, "Despite posting a \$531 million operating profit throughout its health care system last year, the university is seeking to impose wage freezes and make its caregivers pay more for their healthcare coverage. USC's proposal would worsen already unsafe staffing levels in its hospitals putting patients at risk."

Management is also pushing a "silencing clause" that David Zavala, a patient care technician and member of the bargaining team, said would "silence us from talking publicly about issues in the future. For us, the concern is that we wouldn't be allowed to talk about patient safety issues or patient care issues."

The NUHW bargaining unit at Keck comprises licensed vocational nurses, nursing assistants, medical technicians and respiratory therapists at one of Los Angeles' largest hospital systems.

Canada

Alberta Cargill meatpackers move toward strike

About 380 meatpackers at the Calgary Cargill Case Ready plant voted 100 percent for strike action should a new contract not be reached in the ensuing weeks. The workers, members of the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), have been without a new contract for over a year as Cargill management stonewalls on worker demands for measures to address low wages, the spiking cost-of-living, irregularities in overtime pay and hours worked guarantees.

So determined is Cargill management to forestall any strike action that it filed a complaint with the provincial labour board to block the counting of the ballots on the grounds that a handful of voters were on maternity leave or on injury leave. Their attempt to overturn the massive vote for strike action, however, was later withdrawn not only because it had little merit but also due to the overwhelming result of the vote. Turnout for the unanimous vote was a significant 84 percent of the workforce.

The Cargill Case Ready plant packages counter-ready meat for retail stores delivered from the Cargill beef processing facility in High River, Alberta.

Union officials have announced that they will now continue negotiations with Cargill through to the end of June, but have already begun organizing picket schedules for the workers. They have also approached the Conservative provincial government to announce their intention to deploy informational picket lines at retail stores that stock Case Ready products.

The government has imposed legislative limits to secondary picketing. The Labour Board can review the facts of each secondary picketing case to determine its legality. However, several recent legal decisions handed down by the courts preserve the right for secondary picketing but for informational purposes only. Such court rulings are nonetheless adamant in criminalizing any sympathy job actions from workers in other facilities of a strikebound company.

UFCW officials, who also organize workers at the giant High River slaughterhouse and meat processing operation, have signaled that they will not attempt to mobilize workers in any job actions there.

Already, in Guelph, Ontario, about 1,000 Calgary meatpackers are in their third week of a strike for similar demands. Those workers, also in the UFCW, soundly voted down an inferior contract offer that had been unanimously recommended to them by their own local union officials.

Saskatchewan Teachers Federation ends job action; proceeds to binding arbitration

The Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation has agreed to binding arbitration over the issues of wages and class complexity-accountability framework after a bitter and lengthy dispute with the right-wing Conservative government. The union immediately called off a province-wide work-to-rule campaign that followed several province-wide and regional strikes this past winter and stated there will be no further job actions.

Thirteen thousand teachers in the province have been without a new contract since last summer. The decision by the union to participate in binding arbitration means members will not be permitted to vote on any collective agreement that emerges from the arbitration.

Teachers have rejected a series of inferior contract proposals. Only last month, teachers for the second time in May refused to ratify tentative contract offers. In the final time that they voted at the end of the month, they rejected yet another sell-out settlement. That tentative contract had been unanimously recommended by the leadership of their union. Earlier in May, teachers had roundly rejected another unsatisfactory deal by a robust 90 percent margin.



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