

Workers Struggles: The Americas

8 March 2005

The *World Socialist Web Site* invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature by e-mailing information to: editor@wsws.org

Latin America

Argentine teachers demand wage increases

Teachers employed by the Northwestern Province of Salta are on strike, demanding that their monthly checks, a mixture of wages and bonuses, be folded into base salaries. Most of their income is not counted as wages, which means it is not considered in retirement calculations. Currently, teachers must retire at a monthly salary of 400 pesos (US\$140). Had bonuses been rolled into base salaries, the pension would have doubled. The teachers are demanding that the base monthly salary of \$239 pesos be raised to \$750 pesos (approximately US\$250).

Last week, teachers' assemblies across the province rejected a proposal by Governor Romero to raise teachers' salaries, which would have resulted in a 130-peso gap between new teachers and 30-year veterans. Romero denounced the teachers' demands, claiming that they would cut into money earmarked for public work projects.

Last week, Salta parents mobilized and joined picket lines in solidarity with the striking educators.

Teachers also initiated strikes of 72 and 96 hours in the provinces of Santa Fe, Entre Rios, Corrientes, Chaco and Santiago del Estero. In Cordoba and Rio Negro, teachers did not strike, engaging in mass protests, instead. In the province of Mendoza, teachers are threatening to strike this week over curriculum changes.

Public health doctors strike continues in Peru

The strike by 13,000 public health doctors in Peru is entering its second week. The walkout began on March 2 at 300 hospitals and 1,400 clinics across the nation. Public hospitals in Lima are only treating emergency cases. In other Peruvian cities, only life or death cases are being admitted.

The dispute centers on wages and on the disparity in salaries between the Public Health System doctors and those of Peru's Social Security System. The difference between the two is about 1000 soles (US\$310) a month. The latter earn between US\$580 and US\$670.

Doctors also point out that Peru's health budget is the lowest in South America; this forces them to work with

decrepit and outdated equipment, often without adequate supplies. They are demanding that the government dramatically increase the health budget.

Ecuador's doctors strike

A strike by 25,000 public health doctors is now two weeks old. At issue is the payment of back wages. Public hospital doctors work for eight hours daily but are only compensated for four. The government agreed last year to resolve the inequity, but has now announced that it lacks the money to carry out the agreement.

The strike affects 6,000 public hospitals across the country.

Tire workers strike in Ecuador

On March 2, 450 workers at the Compañía Ecuatoriana Contiental/General Tire walked out and occupied their plant in Cuenca. At issue are wages, the rehiring of six workers sacked a year ago and the enforcement of contract rules that restrict workers being moved from one job to another. The plant makes 5,000 tires each year.

Brazilian garbage collectors on strike

Seventeen hundred municipal garbage collectors in the city of São Jose dos Campos in São Paulo state went on strike March 2. Initially, the strike was scheduled to last only two days. However, a workers' assembly voted to extend it indefinitely.

The workers are demanding a 4 percent wage increase, profit sharing and improvements in health benefits.

On Friday night, a private hauler contracted by the city to collect garbage during the strike attempted to unload 18 trucks at a garbage-processing plant. Thirty strikers who had occupied the plant blocked them. This led to a confrontation with the city's police, who drove the strikers from the plant using clubs and pepper spray.

United States

Talks in Cincinnati chemical strike break off without agreement

A two-hour session of talks between the Cincinnati chemical manufacturer, Cognis Corp., and United Steelworkers (USW) Local 14340 broke off without agreement March 5 as the company rejected a offer by union officials to lower starting pay by 20 percent.

The USW's most recent proposal would force the 270

workers at the company's Winton Place operations to sacrifice \$2 million in concessions. Both sides have agreed on pensions, and the union has come to terms with the company over health care by accepting an increase in workers' contributions from 11 percent of the cost to 20 percent.

Job security is a major issue in the negotiations. Cognis wants to spin off a portion of the plant's operations to a subsidiary, affecting some 200 jobs. A majority of the workforce has more than 25 years seniority with the company and fear the move could result in a loss of jobs for those near retirement.

Transit workers strike Liberty Lines in Westchester, New York

Almost 600 bus drivers, cleaners, and mechanics went out on strike against Liberty Lines in Westchester, New York, on Thursday, March 3, two days after the four year contract had expired.

The workers, who are represented by Transport Workers Union (TWU) Local 100, are demanding an increase in pay of 4 percent in each year of a three-year contract, the ability to retire at 57 instead of 62, and better dental and vision benefits. The company, which runs buses in Westchester County and parts of the borough of the Bronx in New York City, is demanding a five-year contract with a smaller pay hike and increased employee contributions for health insurance.

In a transparent attempt to pit the riding public against the strikers, Westchester County executive Andy Spano denounced the workers for the walkout, condemning their demands as unreasonable and claiming that their victory would result in both increased bus fares and higher property taxes, which are used to help subsidize the bus company. However, the union's president has maintained that a major cause of the strike is management's demand to tear up workers' health benefits. Strikers have said that the company's proposals would dramatically increase their co-payments for doctor's visits and prescription drugs.

It is estimated that 55,000 riders are affected by the work stoppage. The last strike against Liberty took place in 2001 and lasted for one day.

Link between breast cancer and industrial metalworking fluids

An article in the American Journal of Industrial Medicine, vol. 47, highlights a preliminary study that finds women who come in contact with soluble, oil-based metalworking fluids may have a higher risk of contracting breast cancer.

The study tracked 4,680 women who worked in car-manufacturing plants for at least three years and found 99 cases of breast cancer. Analysis showed that exposure to soluble fluids 10 years before diagnosis revealed the

strongest link to breast cancer.

New talks in Iowa crane manufacturing strike

The United Auto Workers (UAW) and negotiators for Koehring Cranes in Waverly, Iowa, returned to the negotiating table at the end of last week to resume bargaining as the strike by 120 assembly workers enters its second month. Neither side has been willing to discuss contract details.

Workers at Koehring are going through their third strike in the last decade. The plant was first opened in 1945 and builds heavy-duty truck cranes for construction, quarrying and other industries. The plant employed 600 workers at its height in the 1970s. Today, it operates as a subsidiary of Terex Cranes.

Canada

Kawartha teachers vote to strike

On March 5, teachers working in Kawartha Pine Ridge secondary schools voted 91 percent in favor of strike action. The teachers are represented by the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation (OSSTF) District 14. Kawartha Pine Ridge region is located in Ontario, about 100 km northeast of Toronto.

The strike vote by Kawartha Pine Ridge teachers is only the latest in the growing list of OSSTF locals across the province that have recently voted overwhelmingly to strike in response to the failure of negotiations to resolve the issues of workload, salary and benefits. The Ontario secondary teachers' contract expired on August 31 of last year.

British Columbia loggers on strike

About 500 log haulers in Prince George, British Columbia, went on strike February 19 in the northern part of the province. The BC interior owner-operators, who are represented by Prince George Truckers Association and United Steelworkers of America, are demanding that Canfor Corp., the largest lumber producer in Prince George, bargain with them directly over trucking rates, fuel surcharges and operational issues such as turnaround times and working conditions.

The striking operators haul logs from the bush to sawmills to supply Canfor and other major lumber companies in British Columbia. The dispute affects 10 sawmills in the Prince George area.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact