

Workers Struggles: The Americas

7 June 2005

Latin America

Peruvian doctors to escalate strike

Juan Carlos Yance, president of the Peruvian Association of Social Security (ESSALUD) Doctors (AMSSOP), announced that striking public health doctors would extend their walkout to include hospital emergency rooms this week. Yance indicated that the strikers are taking this extreme measure to press ESSALUD President Jose Luis Chirinos to the negotiating table. Chirinos has refused to negotiate with the striking doctors unless they end their strike.

Public health workers strike in Brazil

On June 2, 38,000 employees of Brazil's National Social Security Institute walked out. The strike is affecting most of the 1,114 clinics in Brazil. At issue are workers' demands for improvements in wages.

Reports indicate that the strike is strongest in Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo, Minas Gerais, Bahia, Rio Grande do Sur and Brasilia. Employees in Acre, Roraima and Amazonia announced that they would join the strike this week.

The strikers are demanding a new wage schedule, with a minimum monthly base wage at or above 1,500 reales (US\$625). This wage corresponds to a basic family breadbasket of goods and services based on a study by the Trade Union Department of Economic and Socioeconomic Studies.

Four workers wounded in Panama strike

Workers in Panama, who have been on a general strike for over a week, carried out marches and rallies last Friday to press for their demand against a reform of the country's social security pension system, which raises retirement age and attacks other provisions. The National Front to Defend Social Security (FRENADESSO), a coalition of about 50 trade unions, is leading the strike and protests.

Four workers were wounded; two shot by a replacement bus driver and two others were run over by a car. Throughout the day strikers, including teachers,

nurses and public employees, blocked roads in Panama City. Protests also took place in cities across Panama. In response, the government of President Omar Torrijos indicated that it was "running out of patience" and threatened to take repressive measures against the strikers.

FRENADESSO is demanding that Torrijos abolish the reform measures.

United States

Arizona construction equipment operators strike

Workers who operate heavy equipment launched a statewide strike against contractors June 3 that brought work at construction sites across Arizona to a crawl, including operations on Cardinal Stadium and at Sky Harbor International Airport. Gary Teel, a crane operator picketing at Cardinal Stadium, told the *Arizona Republic*, "We are striking for better wages, benefits and health care." Pipe fitters, electrical and sheet metal workers, brick masons and ironworkers were reported to have honored picket lines at the stadium worksite.

The ironworkers union said it had asked its workers to return to work at the stadium at the beginning of this week in order to honor contract agreements. Meanwhile, the Operating Engineers union, which represents the striking heavy equipment workers, signed a contract extension in order to keep work going at the international airport.

Pennsylvania brewery workers strike over health care

Workers at the Lion Brewery in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania walked out on strike June 1 as their old agreement expired and after rejecting brewery management's last offer. Health care issues sparked the main opposition, as workers rejected a proposal to pay a \$1,000 deductible and shoulder responsibility for all future increases in premium payments.

Workers voted 90-0 to reject the contract and followed that with an 89-1 vote to strike. Management

reacted quickly by bringing in Special Response Corp. security guards. The security company's web site touts its services as "North America's most trusted specialist in protecting personnel and property during strikes, labor disputes and other potentially dangerous workplace situations."

Walkout at New York laundry plant

First shift workers at the Angelica Textile Services plant in Batavia, New York held a four-hour walkout to protest stalled contract talks and the firing of workers without formal hearings. The company retaliated by retracting the eight hours of holiday pay for the plant's 120 workers that they were due to be paid for Memorial Day.

UNITE-HERE, the textile, hotel and restaurant services union, represents 22 of the 35 commercial laundries owned by Angelica. Last week workers called a one-day strike at an Angelica plant in Wichita Falls, Texas. The following day the company retaliated by locking workers out of the job for 24 hours.

Nursing homes rank third from top in injury rates

The US Labor Department's Bureau of Statistics reports that nursing homes ranked third in injury rates among 84 industry groups during 2003. Unlike other industries, such as construction and manufacturing, which operate under Occupational Safety and Health Administration strictures, nursing homes have no OSHA standards governing their operation to prevent injuries.

In 2002 OSHA issued guidelines for nursing homes, but they are unenforceable by law and industry lobbyists have fought attempts to impose legal mandates. Nursing homes, like other services, have been absorbed into national chains run by for-profit corporations. The major cause of injury is the requirement for staff workers to lift patients. Equipment has been designed to relieve workers of this task, but it costs between \$80,000 and \$100,000 and has not been adopted by the industry.

Massachusetts company locks out drivers

Company negotiators for Northeast Electrical in Canton, Massachusetts walked out of contract talks with the Teamsters union June 1 and locked out its two dozen drivers. The workers, who deliver products for the company, overwhelmingly voted to unionize back in February. Northeast Electrical has hired replacement workers to resume company deliveries while other

unionized drivers refuse to cross picket lines.

Canada

Quebec day care workers stage three day strike

About 7,000 workers in more than 300 provincially run day care centers across the province of Quebec went on a three-day strike beginning June 3. The workers, whose previous contract expired in April 2004, are asking for a wage increase of 15 percent in order to reach parity with Ontario day care workers. They are also fighting government cuts in funding that have stretched the budgets of many day care centers, forcing them to cut costs on expenses such as food and heating. The striking workers are represented by CSN labor federation.

Montreal flight kitchen workers strike

On June 1, about 520 workers who make on-board meals at Cara Operations Ltd. went on strike in Montreal. Cara operates 10 kitchens across Canada that prepare meals for airlines, but only the Montreal unit is affected by the strike. Under pressure to cut costs by its largest customer, Air Canada, it has proposed a new contract that includes a pay scale that is \$2 an hour lower for newly hired workers than for the others. New employees would also be included in the insurance plan only after 12 months of employment, rather than six months, as in the old contract. Cara workers, who are members of the Canadian Auto Workers union (CAW), went on strike the same day that the old contract expired.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact