

Workers Struggles: The Americas

19 July 2005

Latin America

Peruvian public health doctors declare strike

On July 17, Peruvian public health doctors announced a 24-hour strike to demand an increase in wages and an increase in the budget for health services. The date of the strike will be determined at an assembly of doctors on July 21.

A strike last March resulted in an agreement for an additional 750 million soles in the 2005 budget. The Toledo government never implemented the increase.

Julio Vargas, president of the Association of Health Ministry Doctors (AMMINSA), declared that the additional funds are urgently needed to support health programs, such as tuberculosis control, vaccinations and maternal health.

AMMINSA doctors will launch a national strike of indefinite duration if the government does not address their demands.

Guerrero health employees begin strike and occupy offices

Nine hundred workers employed by the Health Department of Guerrero State in Mexico began a strike of indefinite duration on July 15 by taking over their offices. The strike is to protest management abuses against the workers, including arbitrary firings.

The National Union of Health and Assistance Employees (SNTSA) is also demanding transparency in the purchase of medications and hospital supplies and that the SNTSA have a formal role in the hiring of new personnel and in the purchase of medications and equipment.

United States

Government steps up attack on air controllers ahead of negotiations

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) stepped up its assault on air traffic controllers, with contract talks set to start July 18. The FAA claimed workers in the control towers are overpaid and dictated work rules and schedules. FAA Administrator Marion Blakey

railed that members of the National Air Traffic Controllers Association (NATCA) shouldn't be paid more than police or firemen who "put their own lives on the line in the course of their jobs."

Behind the campaign by the FAA to reduce controllers' living standards is the drive by business interests to privatize the air traffic control system. Recently, the FAA hired Joe Miniace as deputy assistant administrator for labor relations. Miniace previously served as head of the Pacific Maritime Association, which locked out West Coast longshoremen. During negotiation sessions with the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU), Miniace came to a negotiating session with armed personal bodyguards. The contract for NATCA becomes amendable in September. The previous five-year agreement was negotiated in 1998 and extended by Blakey in 2003.

New talks in Buffalo, New York, industrial strike

The United Auto Workers (UAW) and the Eastman Machine Company will meet July 18 in a new attempt to reach an agreement in the four-month-old strike by 70 workers at the Buffalo, New York, plant that makes cloth-cutting machines for the apparel industry.

Members of UAW Local 936 overwhelmingly rejected what Eastman termed its last offer back in April and went out on strike March 12. Job security, outsourcing and health care costs have all proved to be contentious issues. Management has continued production during the strike.

Union reports government gave hospitals extravagant profits

The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) reported last week that the Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation paid hospitals \$544 million more than the cost required to treat workers under the program.

The SEIU report reveals that the bureau paid \$1.6 billion for workers' compensation treatments that cost \$1.1 billion since 1997. In percentage terms, the

payments were 71 percent more than actual costs.

Canada

Toronto outside workers reach deal with city

On July 10, the union representing Toronto's outside workers, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 416, reached a deal with the city after 103 days of negotiations and two missed strike deadlines. The issues in the dispute included wages, union security, layoff and recall, job content, service and seniority, hours of work and pensions. Toronto municipal workers' last strike was in 2002 and lasted 16 days.

The 6,000 outside workers, who include garbage collectors, ferry workers, paramedics and pool and park workers, ratified the deal on July 14 by a margin of 93 percent. The four-year deal includes wage increases of 2.75 percent, 3.0 percent, 3.25 percent and 3.25 percent. It also includes improvements in job security, layoff and recall, seniority and service, and benefits.

On the same day that city workers settled, 2,400 Public Library workers, represented by the same union, and who were also poised to strike over similar issues, negotiated a tentative deal.

Ontario phone technicians reach tentative deal

Telephone installation and repair technicians employed by Bell subsidiary Bell Subco reached a tentative deal with the company on July 10. If the deal is ratified, it will end a four-month-long strike.

Bell Subco was known as Entourage Technology Solutions Inc. until Bell bought it back earlier this year, after having sold it in 1996. The 1,400 workers, represented by Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada (CEP), walked out on March 24, demanding wage and benefit parity with the technicians employed directly by Bell.

Telus workers stage one-day walkout

About 600 employees of telecommunications company Telus Corp. staged a walkout in several cities in British Columbia on July 14, attempting to pressure the company into mediated negotiations. The Telecommunications Workers Union (TWU) increased job action after the company had announced on July 12 that it would impose the terms of a contract proposal that it offered in April, even though it was rejected by the union. According to TWU, that proposal contains provisions for contracting out work, scheduling and overtime that are weaker than provisions in the

previous contract it had with B.C. Tel, which merged with Telus in 1999.

Telus and its 13,000 unionized workers have been in a contract dispute for the last four years, and recently hostilities have increased. The company has imposed limited lockouts, and the union has started work-to-rule actions. Telus is insisting that it needs "flexibility" in order to survive stiff competition in the telecommunications market with Shaw Cable and Bell Canada, which are increasingly moving into its traditional business areas in the West. A full-fledged strike next week appears likely.



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