Workers Struggles: The Americas

29 November 2005

Latin America

Hospital strike continues in Nicaragua

The walkout by public health employees that began November 12 continues in Nicaragua with negotiations deadlocked between striking public unions and the government. The strikers are demanding a 37 percent wage hike, which would cost the government $US23 million. The Federation of Health Workers (FETSALUD) lowered its wage demand from a 100 percent to a 37 percent raise. The government insists that it can only afford $US10 million, a 16 percent raise.

FETSALUD leader Gustavo Porras said that the government has enough money to fund the entire raise. He charged that the reason for the impasse is the insistence by the International Monetary Fund that the government grant no raises higher than 9 percent.

FETSALUD represents 20,000 striking health employees. Some 3,000 public health doctors have joined them in the strike. The physicians are demanding a 70 percent raise.

Airline workers strike in Argentina

Pilots and maintenance workers at Aerolineas Argentinas (AA) began a strike of indefinite duration strike last Friday, leaving thousands of passengers stranded. The airline retaliated by firing 82 workers, but later relented under pressure from the Labor Ministry. The latter demanded that both parties agree to arbitrate their dispute and threatened to impose heavy fines. A spokesperson for the striking pilots responded, saying that for more than 18 months the workers have submitted to numerous binding arbitrations, all to no avail.

The strike involves members of the Association of Aeronautical Technicians (APTA) and the Pilots Association (APLA). Both unions have had a long-standing dispute with the airline involving wages and layoffs.

The workers are demanding a 45 percent wage increase. The current monthly base wage is $US649. AA has offered a 4 percent raise.

Aerolineas Argentinas is the nation's largest airline and operates 85 percent of domestic flights.

Peruvian court employees strike over budget

On November 23, clerks at the Peruvian judiciary carried out a 24-hour protest strike to press their demand that Congress increase the court's budget in 2006. The employees are demanding $US346 million in raises; $US127 million more than currently budgeted.

The clerks rallied at the Palace of Justice in Lima and then marched on Congress to present their demand. While judges did not join in the strike, they made it clear that they supported the clerks' demand.

Retired workers protest in Peru

A group of retired workers went on a hunger strike at the Church of Saint Francis in Lima to publicize the meager pensions that they are currently receiving. A spokesperson for the hunger striker said that Congress had given itself fat salaries and pensions while the needs of the vast majority of retired workers were constantly overlooked. Peru's CPN Radio quoted one of the hunger strikers, Ruth Mednoza, who said, "We are forced to beg, go hungry and homeless while they receive outrageous wages."

At the Church dozens of retirees chained themselves to each other and chanted, "We want justice; we live in misery." The retirees are demanding the $US30 increase that they were promised by the Peruvian President five years ago.

The hunger strike ended on November 25. Following rallies on November 28, the pensioners plan to expand their hunger strike to cities across this nation. It is estimated that there are 300,000 pensioners in Peru.

Supermarket strike in Chile

Twelve hundred and eleven supermarket workers at the Jumbo, Montecarlo and Santa Isabel supermarkets went on strike November 21 demanding higher wages. According the General Confederation of Workers (CGT), the walkout was sparked by management's refusal to address the workers' demands. The CGT press release said that lack of enforcement by the labor ministry has allowed management to constantly break labor laws and to use strikebreakers during the dispute.

Monthly base pay for the striking supermarket employees is $US267.

United States

Illinois county strike ends

The Fulton County board voted 19-0 to approve a four-year agreement with American Federation of State, County

© World Socialist Web Site

and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 3433. The union's 40 members, comprised of courthouse, clerical, janitorial and animal control workers in the Lewistown, Illinois area, agreed to the new contract November 21.

Workers will receive a 50 cent-an-hour wage increase the first year, followed by increases of either 50 cents or 4 percent in the second and third year, whichever is greater. In years three and four, a similar option of either a 55 cent-an-hour or 4 percent wage increase will be available. But health care premiums for workers will rise in the second year from 22 percent to 26 percent. In year three, premiums will climb to 27 percent and year four they will go up yet again to 28 percent.

In the lead-up to the strike, AFSCME filed an unfair labor practice charge against Fulton County Sheriff Dan Daly, who allegedly confronted two clerical workers and the mother of a switchboard operator and pressured them to vote against a strike and to cross picket lines if a strike should be called.

Delta pilots accuse bankruptcy judge of bias

An attorney for the pilots' union at Delta Air Lines has called on the judge presiding over the company's bankruptcy case to remove herself from ruling over Delta's request to impose wage cuts on pilots. The Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA) is pointing to comments made in court by US Bankruptcy Judge Prudence Carter Beatty revealing her partiality.

In a September 15 hearing, Beatty stated that pilots' salaries were "hideously high." On November 10, she stated, "Oh, you know [what's] really weird is why anybody agreed to pay them as much money to begin with. They get paid a lot of money." ALPA has threatened to strike if the judge agrees to impose the latest round of concessions.

A Delta spokesman said the statements merely reflected the judge's "sense of humor." Delta is seeking to obtain $325 million in concessions from pilots. ALPA is currently offering cuts of $90.7 million. These concessions would come on top of a five-year deal agreed to by ALPA in 2004 that grants Delta $1 billion in annual concessions.

Southern Illinois teachers strike over health care issues

Teachers in Campbell Hill, Illinois continued their strike through the Thanksgiving Holiday over health insurance issues. The 64 members of the Trico Education Association went on strike November 21 after failing to reach an acceptable agreement with the district's school board.

The two sides had agreed that health care provisions would remain unchanged in the first year of the new contract and then the board would cap its portion of costs in the second year. But when the board insisted on extending the cap to a third year, teachers refused, claiming health care costs are too unpredictable that far out.

Approximately 947 students attend the Trico schools. Teachers have been without a contract since August 15. The last strike to affect the district occurred 25 years ago.

Accident in meat plant kills worker

A meat worker was killed November 16 when a conveyor system at a Cargill Meat Solutions plant in Ottumwa, Iowa collapsed on him. The worker, Paul McCrory was caught under the rail of the conveyor for 40 minutes.

OSHA is investigating the accident to determine the cause. The agency is also looking into allegations that McCrory had previously warned Cargill Meat Solutions of potential safety hazards. Work at the plant has been halted, idling 2,000 workers.

Canada

Québec bookstore workers locked out

About 350 workers employed by the Québec bookstore chain Renaud-Bray were locked out on November 21. The lockout affects 11 of the company's 26 stores in Montreal, Sherbrooke, Saint-Jérôme and Brossard. The main issue in the dispute is wages, according to a spokesman of the union representing the workers, Syndicat des employées et employés professionnels-les et du bureau. Employees earn between $7.87 and $8.40 per hour to start, barely more than the minimum wage of $7.60 an hour.

The bookstore workers' previous contract expired in December 2004. Before the lockout they had been conducting rotating strikes.

Finning workers end strike

On November 25 International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAMAW) Local 99 reached a tentative deal with Finning Canada, ending a five-week strike by about 1,000 workers in Edmonton, Alberta and the Northwest Territories, pending rank-and-file ratification.

The main issue in the strike was job security. The union has not provided details of the new contract, saying only that the "three-year deal includes language that prevents contracting out of labor to the extent the company had wanted."

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site