

Workers Struggles: The Americas

21 February 2006

Struggles by bus operators and doctors in Nicaragua

Striking owner-operators of Managua's transit buses returned to work after suspending their job action for 10 days. The transit strike had lasted a week, affecting 850,000 daily commuters.

The drivers' decision to suspend their walkout came in response to a move by the government of President Enrique Bolaños, which is considering a fuel tax to subsidize Managua's municipal bus system. The 3 percent tax is to be imposed on oil company profits.

Fuel providers have so far opposed the tax, threatening to pass the resulting increased costs on to consumers.

Meanwhile, there are no signs that a strike by Nicaraguan public health doctors will be resolved, even though the doctors have reduced their wage demand to a 30 percent increase, down from 70 percent.

Last week, the Medical Federation and the Federation of Health Workers (FETSALUD) organized marches and rallies in Managua in support of the doctors. Thousands marched from the university rotunda to the Ministry of Agriculture and Credit in downtown Managua. Among the supporters of the doctors attending the march were hundreds of students carrying signs denouncing the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the wage inequality that exists in Nicaragua. FETSALUD is demanding a 48 percent wage increase for its 20,000 members, all public health employees. It is also asking for more money for public hospitals and for the closure of private clinics that currently operate within public hospitals.

The Nicaraguan government, claiming that it is prohibited from granting the workers' demands by an agreement with the IMF, has convened representatives of the public health unions, striking doctors and representatives of the IMF to meet this Tuesday with the hope of reaching a compromise that will end the strike. The health ministry took a conciliatory step last

week by agreeing to pay doctors their February salaries. In return, doctors agreed to open hospital emergency rooms.

Mexican urban train workers set to strike

Employees of Mexico City's Metro underground and urban train system have set a February 21 strike date. They are demanding a 15 percent wage increase.

Mexico City's government secretary, Ricardo Ruiz, said this weekend that the government is preparing contingency measures to guarantee transit service. Ruiz also said that the workers' demands exceed what other municipal employees are getting and what the city can afford.

Veracruz textile firm declares bankruptcy after workers walk out

On February 15 government authorities of the state of Veracruz, Mexico, declared the "Compañía Industrial Veracruzana" bankrupt three weeks after its employees walked off their jobs to protest not being paid.

Sergio Rodriguez, municipal president of the city of Mendoza, where the firm is located, promised that the workers would be paid from the company's liquid assets, and that the company would continue operating it as a workers' cooperative to prevent the dismantling of the factory. According to Rodriguez, over 7,000 industrial jobs have disappeared from the region in the last decade, in large part due to the closure of textile mills. He accused the textile mill managers and owners of conspiring to eradicate the textile industry from Veracruz, leaving the workers without legally mandated severance and often owing them back wages.

Delta pilots' union says executive payout undermines concession bargaining

The Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA) at Delta Airlines warned last week that a \$14 million severance payout to corporate officers and directors could undermine the current concessions bargaining between the union and the company. On February 8, the company requested a bankruptcy judge approve what it

called a “conservative” package that will reward 144 officers and directors.

ALPA declared the company “tone deaf” to the effects that such a provision would have as the company seeks some \$315 million in concessions from pilots while the union currently has a proposal for \$115 million on the table. The current round of pilot concessions comes on top of a 2004 pay cut of 32.5 percent that surrendered \$1 billion to the company.

“The ability of ALPA to garner the necessary support among its membership for a negotiated agreement if the pilots view the process as tainted by special benefits awards for a select few while they bear the brunt of cost-cutting will be severely hampered,” said ALPA.

Maine state workers protest delayed pay raise

State clerical workers rallied outside Maine’s State Employees Association February 17 to protest the announcement that raises would be delayed until January 2007 due to “red tape.” The workers, members of Local 1989 of the Service Employees International Union, were promised the raises by Governor John Baldacci after a 2005 study found state clerical workers had been underpaid by \$3 an hour since 2003 compared with their counterparts in the private sector.

“This stuff about our raises being caught up in red tape is just a bunch of malarkey,” Doreen Lawson told the *Morning Sentinel*. The delay in raises affects some 2,000 state workers.

New York nurses picket over lagging contract talks

Nurses at Flushing Hospital in New York held an informational picket February 14 to demand better wages and benefits after working without a contract for six months. According to the New York State Nurses Association, the Flushing hospital, which employs 370 registered nurses, pays the lowest salaries in Queens and Brooklyn while handling more patients than is believed safe.

Alice Ganter, a 35-year veteran at Flushing, told the *Queens Chronicle*, “We are losing our health benefits as of March 1 and the hospital only wants to give us a \$1,000 raise.” Nurses are indignant over the hospital’s intransigence in the current bargaining. When Flushing faced bankruptcy, nurses gave up more than \$4 million in salary and benefits.

Toronto Humane Society workers strike

On February 18, employees of the Toronto Humane

Society (THS) who are members of the Teamsters union went on strike. They insist that the main issue in their dispute is not wages, but a poor work environment. A deal that they recently rejected would have given them a 5 percent salary increase over the next two years, but they are asking instead for a one-year contract that would maintain the status quo in wages and benefits and address only the issue of labor relations. Management of the THS has rejected this proposal.

Teamsters workers make up about one-third of the society’s workforce of 74 in Toronto. THS is a non-profit organization that cares for animals and relies on donations and receives no money from the government.

Workers at Halifax nursing home vote to strike

One hundred twenty workers at Glades Lodge Nursing Home in Halifax, Nova Scotia, voted February 17 by an 86 percent margin in favor of going on strike if a deal cannot be reached between their union, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 1259, and the employer. According to CUPE national representative Peter Baxter, there are several issues outstanding, including sick leave, family leave and concessions demanded by the employer, in addition to provincial common proposals.

Members of Local 1259 include dietary, laundry, cleaning and personal care workers, licensed practical nurses and maintenance workers.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact