

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

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*República* that union negotiators “accepted the increase after comprehending the financial situation of the enterprise.”

## Peru: Water agency workers end two-day strike

Workers at the Peruvian state water authority Sedapal in Lima lifted their two-day-old strike on May 19 after extended negotiations between union representatives and the agency. The Ministry of Labor had called the parties to the table shortly after the strike began on May 17.

The Sedapal workers’ union, Sutesal, authorized the union’s board of directors to sign the agreement and to call off the strike at a general assembly Wednesday morning.

The strike was called after 90 days of negotiations did not produce an agreement on wages. On May 12, Henry Viera, secretary general of Sutesal, told *La Primera* that the agency was in good enough financial shape to grant a monthly increase of 600 soles (about US\$210), but “Sedapal has offered us a 45 soles [US\$15] raise, that is 1.5 soles [50 US cents], a day.” Viera called the offer “a joke.” He also called for investigations of charges of corruption.

The union and management agreed to a monthly wage increase of 155 soles (about US\$55)—little more than a fourth of their original demand—without a *bolsa por cierre*. As explained in the Peruvian daily *La República*, “The *bolsa por cierre* is an allotment that striking workers receive for participating at a negotiating table.”

The agreement will affect about 1,200 employees who work in areas like administration, logistics, water treatment and others. Víctor López Orihuela, vice-president of the board of directors of Sedapal, told *La*

## Argentina: Teachers lift strike and blockades

On Friday, May 21, teachers in the province of Neuquén ended their three-month-long work stoppage and accepted the latest government proposal on salary increases. The archbishops of Neuquén had intervened to bring the teachers union and the government to an agreement to end the strike, which had entailed the loss of 40 class days.

Provincial governor Jorge Sapag had earlier called the stoppage “illegitimate and savage,” after some 4,000 educators, members of the ATEN teachers union, blockaded the principal access routes to Neuquén, the province’s capital city, for four hours. Sapag attempted to break the stoppage by signing two decrees, one declaring the strike illegal and the other calling education an essential public service. The teachers reacted by proposing to extend the blockades through the weekend.

The accord raised the base monthly salary from 2,000 pesos (US\$505) to 2,250 (US\$568). In addition, the government agreed that teachers may recover pay for the lost days when they work them. According to *El Clarín*, “This system of recovery will be discussed in the Provincial Education Council in which both parties participate. Also, it was agreed that new negotiations be opened to address other demands.”

Meanwhile, members of national university unions Conadu y Fedun voted to accept a raise of between 21 and 26 percent agreed to between the two unions and the Secretariat of University Policy. Another national teachers union, Conadu Histórica, rejected the offer and

demanded that negotiations be reopened. Members of Conadu Histórica held a 48-hour work stoppage and set up a booth outside the headquarters of the Education Ministry, “where they held a protest with public classes,” reported *Página/12*. In addition to the reopening of classes, the union demands that “the quotas of the salary increase be speeded up.”

### **Mississippi workers strike over takeaway contract**

Production workers at Omnova Solutions in Columbus, Mississippi, went on strike May 22 after rejecting the company’s demands to gut benefit and incentive programs. Members of United Steelworkers Local 748-L voted 168-2 against the company’s request for “flexibility” that aimed at stripping away production incentives that would undermine the ability of workers to maintain their standard of living.

The plant, which produces wall coverings and upholstery, awards workers based on production and the workforce requires little supervision. The rejected proposal would undermine incentives, retirement packages, shift and seniority rights.

“I already make less now right now than I did when I was hired. That’s now. That’s before this,” 22-year veteran worker Jerry Aldridge told the *Dispatch*. Omnova management has indicated it will attempt to continue production during the strike.

### **Strike at New York Mott plant**

Some 300 workers at the Mott’s apple products plant in Williamson, New York, walked out on strike May 23 after the company announced the unilateral imposition of contract concessions. The old agreement expired April 15 and management was unable to come to terms with the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union.

Mott’s, which is owned by the Texas-based Dr. Pepper Snapple Group, moved on the same day of the strike to impose a \$1.50-an-hour wage cut, the

elimination of the pension plan, and a 20 percent reduction in company contributions to a 401(k) plan.

### **Manitoba construction workers on strike**

After voting down a contract recommended by their union, almost 350 plumbers and pipefitters in the province of Manitoba went on strike May 17 with the support of hundreds of other workers in the construction industry.

The workers are represented by the United Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters (UA). The union struck a tentative agreement on May 10, which the membership subsequently voted down. Workers are demanding wage increases to bring them in line with their counterparts across the country—6 percent in each year of a three-year contract—double what their union had agreed to with the Construction Labour Relations Association of Manitoba (CLR).

The strike halted construction on a number of sites when workers from other trades rallied in support. Workers in other building trades unions could join the strike in the coming weeks if no progress is made in negotiations.



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