

Workers Struggles: The Americas

29 June 2010

Health workers in Peru go on indefinite strike

Health workers for Peru's public health care system EsSalud—which employs over 30,000 workers—walked off the job June 23 at 239 hospitals nationwide in an indefinite strike over issues of salaries, scheduling, working conditions and productivity bonuses. In addition, they are demanding an end to administrative services contracts (CAS). Emergency services remained available.

The day before the strike, Félix Ortega, an EsSalud spokesperson, claimed that the strike was illegal and that those workers who participated would be given warnings or fired. He also denied the claim by the union, Sindicato de Trabajadores de EsSalud, that salaries were insufficient.

The first day of the strike found workers picketing and chanting in front of hospitals. Workers told reporters that in some cases they had not received raises in 14 years. On the second day, in the northwestern city of Piura, about 30 police beat protesters who had entered the hospital. Six workers were injured and required emergency services, with one being transferred to a hospital in Lima.

The protesters continued their protest, denouncing the police for their violent behavior. After a discussion between union reps and hospital directors, “at last the bitter protest ended with the departure of the police who were booed and hissed at mockingly by the strikers,” according to *correoperu.com*.

Argentina: Telephone workers hold 48-hour strike

Employees of telephone companies Telefónica and Telecom held a 48-hour strike beginning June 24 after talks between the five unions that represent the workers and the companies broke down the day before over workers' demands for a 35 percent salary hike.

Telefónica said that the stoppage would provoke “inconveniences in the provision of some of the company's services” such as information, repairs and prepaid lines. Telecom called the strike “illegitimate.”

The Federación de Obreros y Empleados Telefónicos (Telephonic Workers and Employees Federation) argued that “the legitimacy of the protest is conferred by the Constitution.”

The Labor Ministry called for a new round of negotiations between the unions and the companies on Monday morning.

Argentina: Impasse in negotiations between interurban bus drivers, owners

Owners of long distance passenger buses have announced their refusal of a one-month extension of a bonus of 700 pesos (US\$178) to omnibus drivers, members of the transport drivers union, UTA. The owners claim the union and the Labor Ministry are ignoring their concerns. They maintain that resources do not exist to extend the bonuses, and that they are unconcerned about any industrial action the union may take when the bonus payments expire on June 30.

Salary negotiations have taken place for two months without resolution. In order to avoid a strike during Argentina's bicentennial festivities, the government had ordered that the owners pay the bonus “in exceptional form” to the drivers this month.

With no agreement in sight, on June 24 the labor office extended the payment for the month of June. The owners asked the government for a series of measures to cover salary increases and higher operating costs, including monthly subsidies of between 10,000 and 15,000 pesos (US\$2,500-3,800) per vehicle. They also want an extraordinary compensation from the state to pay for the salary hikes retroactive to January.

According to *El Clarín*, “Until now, the government did not heed any complaints. It remains to be seen what will happen on Wednesday if the businesses make good on their threat not to pay the increase.” The union has not indicated what it will do.

Costa Rican resident doctors end 13-day strike

On June 26, thirteen days after walking out, resident doctors of the Unión Médica Nacional (National Medical Union) voted to lift their strike and return to work. The vote, which affected 700 doctors in the country's social security agency, CCSS, followed an agreement reached between the CCSS and the union the day before. Of the 425 professionals that voted, 288 (67 percent) voted in favor, with 134 against and two abstentions.

The agreement will substitute a guaranteed fund for an internship contract. The internship contract obliges doctors that pursue a specialty to sign a promissory note for up to 32 million colones (US \$61,455) in case the doctor leaves the institution before completing an agreed period of work.

The period is currently three years of work for each year of

study. In the new agreement, it will be one for one. The guaranteed fund establishes a mandatory contribution of eight percent over the base fund of each resident. Whoever fails to complete the agreed term loses the guarantee to this fund. If they complete the term, they get the money back at the end of their studies.

Tentative agreement in 18-day Indiana Teamsters strike

The Teamster union announced June 25 that it had reached a tentative agreement covering 300 truck drivers involved in construction projects for Northeast Indiana and called an end to an 18-day strike that had paralyzed the industry. Rank and file Teamsters are expected to vote on the agreement sometime this week.

Workers originally voted down a proposal by 16 contracting companies that comprise the Four-County Contractors Association because it did not measure up to another agreement the union signed with the Northwest Indiana Contractors Association in terms of pensions, healthcare and wages. As recently as June 21, Teamsters had voted down a tentative agreement by the Four-County Contractors by a margin of 266-43.

According to a Teamsters spokesperson, the new agreement is “exactly what we got from the Northwest Indiana Contractors Association.” Picketing continues against a number of independent contractors who fall outside the Four-County and Northwest Indiana associations.

New York food processing workers rally against concessions

Hundreds of workers rallied to support 300 workers on strike against Motts apple-processing plant in Williamson, New York. Strikers are angry that Motts highly profitable parent company, Doctor Pepper Snapple, is seeking to increase workers’ portion of health care contributions, cut wages, and freeze pensions for current workers while eliminating them for future employees.

CEO Larry Young’s salary has risen by 113 percent over the last three years, to \$6.5 million. Other executives have also received ample salaries and bonuses while the company’s recent annual profits came to \$555 million.

The Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union Local 220, which represents the striking workers, sought to build up illusions that the Democratic Party would intervene on the side of the workers. Congressman Dan Maffei, a featured speaker at the rally attempted to channel workers’ opposition along nationalistic lines, saying of the company’s demands, “That’s not fair, that’s not right. That’s not American.”

New York Senator Charles Schumer also sent a letter to the company calling for new negotiations. Mott’s plant is the largest buyer of local apples, while Wayne County, New York, where the strike is taking place, ranks among the largest counties in the US

for apple production.

Union ends hotel strike—police make arrests

UNITE HERE called off a strike at Novotel after only two days. Union leaders ended the strike Friday evening to accommodate French dignitaries arriving for the G20. Of the 32 Toronto hotels currently in a legal strike position, Novotel is the hotel that has been struck.

The following day about 300 G20 protesters gathered at the downtown hotel to show their support for hotel workers. Police moved in, arresting most of the protestors, carting them off in buses.

Eighty housekeeping and service staff at Novotel are fighting for improvements in wages and working conditions against their employer, hotel giant Accor. After a month of sitting with the latest union offer, company negotiators walked away from the bargaining table on Tuesday, provoking the strike.

Red Cross strikers reject deal

A strike by 47 drivers with the Red Cross that began June 7 in Mississauga-Halton, west of Toronto, will continue after workers rejected an offer brought to them by their union, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) last Friday.

The drivers are negotiating for their first union contract and have faced a campaign of threats and intimidation by their employer. CUPE is also trying to organize passenger assistants who are on layoff as a result of the strike. A provincial mediate has been appointed in those negotiations.



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