

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

20 July 2010

## Panamanian union federation calls off 24-hour general strike

A general strike called by Panama's National Front for the Defense of Social Rights (FRENADESO) was called off July 13, with union leaders calling it a success, while business downplayed its effectiveness. The stoppage was called to protest the passage July 12 of Ley 30, popularly known as La Ley Chorizo, "the Sausage Law," which ostensibly deals with aviation issues, but contains several anti-labor provisions.

Union higher-ups claimed that the strike action—which included a march of around 1,000 in Panama City—had an over 90 percent success rate at construction sites and schools. Mario Almanza, secretary general of the AMIA teachers' federation, claimed, "[T]he message that was sent to the government was rather forceful" over "the need for a dialogue to derogate the law."

Business leaders claimed that most sectors of the economy outside of construction and education were largely unaffected. Chamber of Commerce President Fernando Argano "called on the unions and the government sit down to dialogue to transcend their differences that have brought about the strike."

The protest ended after the government reached an agreement with the strikers to temporarily suspend the anti-labor provisions. Panama's Assistant Attorney General Ángel Calderón said a proposal would be brought before parliament to put the provisions on hold and create a commission to study them and make recommendations.

## Peruvian construction workers march to demand wages and safety regulations

July 14 protests called by Peru's FTCCP construction

workers union federation brought 150,000 workers into the streets of cities throughout the country. Over 25,000 demonstrated in Lima.

Members of 125 unions participated in the march, which, in addition to protesting the deaths and injuries of 131 construction workers since 2008, demanded wage raises and improved working conditions. According to media outlets, "[T]he mobilization caused huge traffic tie-ups in downtown Lima, Arequipa and Chiclayo." Workers denounced the government of President Alan García.

In a press release, FTCCP General Secretary Mario Huamán Rivera said that the protest "will demand of the Congress the passage of a law that protects the lives of workers, that penalizes with jailing those businesspeople who...provoke death or injuries to their workers." He added that dependents of the dead workers have filed charges in court against the construction firms, but the companies were merely levied a fine that must be paid to the Labor Ministry.

## Argentine pilots union ends strike

At 11 p.m. July 15, pilots for the LAN Argentina airline ended a strike they launched earlier the same day after "the Labour Ministry called for a compulsory negotiation to solve the conflict...the pilots decided to accept the offer and resume their tasks," reported the *Buenos Aires Herald*.

The strike was called by APLA (Airline Pilots Association) over "discriminatory measures" taken by the airline in selecting personnel. Eleven flights were cancelled, while another six were rescheduled.

APLA Vice President Pablo Biró accused the company of violating articles 14a and 16 of the National Constitution which "guarantee the protection of labor laws and the rejection of the prerogatives of blood or birth."

negotiate with the union, has said it has no intention of hiring back any of the strikers. The workers walked out April 15. The contract between Spectrum and District 1199 expired in March 2009.

### **Chilean bank workers strike**

Workers at BBVA Chile, a subsidiary of the Spanish banking giant, went out on indefinite strike July 10 after negotiations failed to reach agreement over working conditions, wages, bonuses and other issues. Rejecting BBVA's offer as "a real joke," the bank workers' union announced it would use "our legitimate right to legal strikes" by mobilizing first at the bank's central branch, "and from there we will mobilize different branches."

The union issued a statement claiming that "we believe that our employer can make a last effort and reach a proposal worthy of BBVA employees...we do not want to be the poor relations of the BBVA BANCO any more, we demand respect and equal benefits."

The statement added that "we do not rule out starting a hunger strike in the coming days to raise the employers' sensitivity. We believe that only their will can end this situation."

As of Friday, the strike—which involves about 340 union bank workers—was still in effect.

### **Striking healthcare union seeks backing of Connecticut governor**

The union representing striking healthcare workers at four Connecticut nursing homes moved picketing to the residence of Republican Governor Mary Jodi Rell on July 15. Some 375 members of the New England Health Care Employees Union District 1199 have been on strike for three months against Spectrum Healthcare, which hired permanent replacements at the affected nursing homes in Hartford, Derby, Ansonia and Winsted.

Given the fact that two-thirds of Connecticut's 28,000 nursing home patients have their care paid for by the Medicaid program, the union is seeking to pressure the governor to intervene in the strike and bring about a settlement. The plea was rebuffed by the governor's office. A spokesperson for Rell responded, "It would be inappropriate for the governor to intervene in a strike."

District 1199 charges that Spectrum, while continuing to

### **Vancouver airport workers face lockout**

Twenty-one refuelling supervisors and staff at Vancouver International Airport are facing lockout this week after the company they work for, Servisair, gave them 72-hour notice over the weekend.

The workers, who are in a first contract battle, earlier voted unanimously for strike action. However, the Canadian Transportation Employees union, their bargaining agent, was waiting to hear from a federal conciliator before taking any action.

The company has threatened the lockout even though negotiations are ongoing and such an action would disrupt service to one of the largest airports in the country. The main issues in dispute include wages, work hours and working conditions.

### **Red Cross strike ends with first contract**

The strike by 40 drivers employed by the Canadian Red Cross in Mississauga west of Toronto ended last week when workers ratified a first contract negotiated by their union, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE).

The strike, which began June 7 was marked by intimidation tactics by the employer in efforts to thwart unionization. Although full details of the one-year contract are not yet available, it reportedly includes wage increases of 9 percent and some job protection.



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