

Workers Struggles: The Americas

31 May 2011

Argentinean state workers lift partial strike

Workers at Argentina's National Automotive Property Registry (RNPA) returned to work May 23 after three weeks of a series of three-day strikes. The partial stoppages had kept some 30,000 vehicles from clearing customs at the Zarate y Campana port terminal.

The strikes were a response to RNPA's offer of a 33 percent salary hike. The workers, members of the ATE state workers union, went on strike without the support of the other state workers union, UPCN. ATE whose officials began meetings with the Justice Minister May 24.

Argentinean pharmacy workers reach accord

Pharmacy employees agreed to a contract with Argentina's business sector on May 24 that will raise their wages 33 percent. The contract will cover the period May 2011-July 2012. The raise is above the 25 percent originally offered by management, but slightly below the demand of 33.8 percent put forward by the FATSA health workers confederation.

The agreement will involve a scaled series of raises that will take effect in May, July and September of this year and in March of 2012. The current basic category 2 wage of 2,989 pesos (US\$732) will eventually reach 4,000 pesos (US\$979) by March 2012.

There was no news of another key demand: the reduction of the work week from 48 to 44 hours.

Chilean contract mine workers strike

About 10,000 contract workers at Chile's El Teniente state mining complex began a strike May 26 over salary demands, which include a

US\$4,000 bonus. The workers are employed by private contractors and the state enterprise Codelco, which administers El Teniente.

Codelco has refused to address the strike, claiming that it is between the contract workers and private contractors, and that workers must negotiate directly with the contractors.

Several thousand striking workers marched through downtown Rancagua, about 85 kilometers south of the capital Santiago.

The Copper Workers Federation (FTC) issued a communiqué saying, "The Copper Workers Federation has always maintained a solidarity posture with the legitimate aspirations of the contract workers." The document criticized the "excessive *tercerización* [use of *terceros*, contract laborers] for Codelco tasks and activities; at the same time we have demanded full respect for the new regulatory law that governs subcontracting in our country."

The FTC did not go out on strike, instead summoning the Executive to give a "clear response" to the workers' demands.

Jamaican Supreme Court orders striking air traffic controllers back to work

Air traffic controllers at Jamaica's international airports declared a strike beginning Sunday, May 22 over demands for a retroactive salary increase and participation in ongoing negotiations between the government and public sector workers.

The industrial action met with a swift response by the government. Aviation authorities called on management personnel to supervise flights. By that night, the Supreme Court ordered the striking controllers back to work immediately under threat of firing. Although some flights were delayed or cancelled, the impact was minimal.

On May 23, Jamaica Civil Aviation Authority (JCAA) spokesperson Nicole Hutchinson told the *Jamaica Observer*, "The controllers reported last night for the 11:00 pm shift and service restored to normality with flights coming and departing on time."

Workers who defied the Supreme Court back-to-work order are now subject to retaliation. Labour minister Parnell Charles has requested the solicitor general begin legal proceedings against defiant strikers. Moreover, the controllers have been forbidden to take further

industrial action for 28 days.

Peruvian labor inspectors begin indefinite strike

Labor inspectors employed at Peru's Ministry of Labor and Promotion of Employment (MTPE) began an indefinite strike on May 25. The strike was called after a number of fruitless meetings between the MTPE and the SI-PERU union, which represents the inspectors.

Outstanding demands include better pay, complete coverage for families, a bonus for moving when transferred, vacation pay and the right to Compensation for Time of Service (CTS).

SI-PERU secretary general Paola Egúsqiza blamed the labor minister, Manuela García, for refusing to sign an arbitration agreement regarding improvements in working conditions, and urged the intervention of a third party.

Deputy Minister of Promotion of Employment and Vocational Training, Javier Barreda, maintained that his ministry cannot meet this demand because the Budget Act of 2011 forbids it. "We value the work of the inspectors, and we approved all the policies for them, but we cannot promise something we cannot deliver."

New Jersey and Pennsylvania Red Cross workers strike

About 250 Red Cross workers in Southeast Pennsylvania and New Jersey went on strike May 24 to protest proposed contract changes that will affect health care, scheduling, staffing, training and loss of holidays. Red Cross wants to eliminate health care issues from all future negotiations so it can impose its own plan on workers.

Nurses and blood donor staff, members of the Health Professionals and Allied Employees Local 5103, also cite a lack of staffing and long hours. "If the worker has worked the night before until 10 or 11 o'clock and they get home at one or two o'clock and have to be at work the next morning at six o'clock, the safety of the donor, that's what we're concerned about," Renee Conyers, co-president of Local 5103 told *Newsworks.org*.

Minnesota Judge bars protests against low wage grocery chains

A county judge issued a temporary order on May 27 barring janitors

and their supporters from conducting protests against low pay on the premises of Cub Food stores in Minneapolis. The decision comes as part of a suit filed by Cub Foods against Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en Lucha (Center of Workers United in Struggle), an organization backed by churches, foundations and unions, charging them with an "increasingly aggressive campaign" of "defamation and trespass".

While subcontractors employ the janitors, the protesters charge that Cub Foods, along with other grocery chains such as Rainbow Foods, Target, Byerly's and Lunds, have used competition among the cleaners to drive down costs which contribute to poverty wages and increased workloads for the 1,000 non-union janitors.

Most of the workers make around \$8 an hour—wages that have fallen from the previous scales of \$10 to \$11 an hour. Workers and other supporters are now into their second week of a hunger protest against the chains.

Saskatchewan health care strikes continue

Ending the latest in a series of rotating strikes, 60 health care workers returned to work last Friday and their union, the Health Sciences Association of Saskatchewan (HSAS) has not ruled out further job action in the coming days.

Over 1,500 health care workers in the province have been in a legal strike position since earlier this month but their union has so far launched only limited actions while the province has moved to limit the impact of any strike by declaring over half the affected workers as essential service employees.

Wages are a central issue in the dispute with SAHO (the Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations) offering a 7.5 percent wage increase over four years, and the union asking for 18.5 percent for the same term. HSAS has been without a contract for two years and has appealed to have the dispute sent to binding arbitration.



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