

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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The *World Socialist Web Site* invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

Argentine hospital workers hold limited strikes

A number of hospitals around metropolitan Buenos Aires have been hit by limited strikes recently. At the Ricardo Gutiérrez Children's Hospital, doctors, nurses and technicians struck for 48 hours on June 28-29. The workers are demanding the reopening of parity talks for salary increases and are protesting supply shortages.

The provincial government characterized the strike as "political" and caused by "a minority group." Buenos Aires Health Ministry subsecretary Néstor Pérez Baliño told *Página/12* that the action was "the first time at Gutiérrez in the middle of the peak of bronchitis that this group does these demonstrations." One employee responded: "In a time of year where those affected by bronchitis appear, oxygen is lacking at the central level: of the 12 intermediate respiratory therapy beds, four are unutilized due to lack of oxygen."

At Juan P. Garrahan Hospital, members of the State Workers Association (ATE) held an assembly on July 1 to discuss "continuation of the plan of struggle" as a follow-up to a one-day strike on June 23 over their salary demands.

Doctors and other professionals at the Alejandro Posadas Hospital in the Haedo suburb called for a 48-hour strike beginning June 30 over the reopening of parity talks. In addition, they are demanding the fulfillment of an agreement signed with Health Ministry authorities two years ago that included measures to stem the rise of job insecurity caused by casualization.

The hospital workers were supported by musicians from the Teatro Colón, who performed in solidarity in front of the national Health Ministry headquarters June 29. The Teatro Colón workers themselves have announced a 24-hour strike for July 14.

Argentina: Teachers return to classes after 58 days on strike

At 9:00 p.m. June 28, the ADOSAC and AMET teachers' unions in the southern Argentine province of Santa Cruz lifted their strike begun April 15. After a judge declared their strike "illegal," ADOSAC resolved in an assembly vote in the city of Caleta Olivia to suspend the action.

ADOSAC head Diego Barrionuevo told reporters that the teachers decided to "return to the classrooms" as a "gesture" to the

government, which hasn't yet even made "a wink" toward improving on its 25 percent raise offer, half of the unions' demand.

Barrionuevo added, "We have appealed, but we are returning to classes by decision of the affiliates."

Chilean mining community protests neglect by central government

Over 15,000 residents—and more than 100 organizations—of the Chilean mining city of Calama marched in protest over decades of government neglect on June 29. The march was part of a "communal strike" to call attention to the lack of investment in infrastructure and services by the central government. Businesses, transport and schools were closed for the day while protesters marched and chanted "*Producimos Cobre, Seguimos Pobres*." ("We produce copper, we remain poor.")

Calama is located in the Atacama Desert in northern Chile and is the capital of El Loa Province. The Chuquicamata copper mine, which is owned by state-owned copper giant Codelco, is near Calama, and is the second-largest open pit copper mine in the world.

In 2003 residents of the nearby town of Chuquicamata were moved to Calama, away from company-owned residences, to find housing on their own.

Residents maintain that the transfer of the Chuquicamata encampment to Calama was done with few resources being given to the city, placing a heavy burden upon local coffers. One speaker at the post-march rally proclaimed that "despite being the capital of the national mining industry, Calama must struggle with the highest levels of poverty of the country, deficient public education, drug addiction, prostitution and delinquency."

The city is demanding that the national government compensate it for the Chuquicamata transfer and apportion five percent of proceeds from the mine to the community.

Mayor Esteban Velásquez told Radio Cooperativa, "This is the first warning strike. It sounds harsh, but we have little to lose here in Calama, when we have nothing of nothing."

Honduran nurses strike for eight hours

Auxiliary nurses suspended their work for eight hours across Honduras on July 1 over the government's failure to carry out a salary agreement and other issues. The nurses, members of the National Nurses Association of Honduras (ANEAH), requested a job

reclassification that would mean a monthly raise of 1,100 lempiras (US\$58).

“This raise, according to the promises of the president of the Republic Porfirio Lobo, should have been paid at the beginning of January of this year,” reported *El Heraldo*. So far, the raise has not been paid.

ANEAH president Yanet Almendárez told reporters that the union would be in “informative assemblies” from 6:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. “We gave a deadline to the Secretary of Health, until yesterday (Thursday) in order to cancel and they did not do it, the deadline ran out,” she added.

The raise is meant for 6,200 nurses and technicians nationwide who work in emergency, labor and birth, newborn and intensive care.

Antigua and Barbuda airline workers hold one-day strike

The eastern Caribbean islands of Antigua and Barbuda witnessed a walkout by airline workers June 29 over salary issues. Around 100 workers, mostly from the accounting, mechanics and flight operations departments of regional airline LIAT, stopped work at 9:00 a.m. over the company’s wage offer in negotiations with the Antigua and Barbuda Workers Union (ABWU).

The ABWU wants a three percent yearly wage increase, while the company is holding firm to its two percent offer. June 30 was the expiration date for the previous contract, and workers were angered at LIAT management’s foot-dragging. The company claims that it is suffering from “severe cash flow constraints on the current financial and economic conditions in the region.”

Like other Caribbean islands, the small (pop. 86,000) two-island nation depends on tourism for a large portion of its GDP, and it has been impacted heavily by the global economic crisis. In 2009, both tourism and remittances from relatives abroad declined sharply, and the economy contracted by seven percent. It recently received a \$117.8 million loan from the International Monetary Fund, with the usual “adjustment” strings attached: spending cuts, reduction of the public sector and business-friendly tax policies.

The dispute was referred to Labour Commissioner Hesketh Williams, who ordered the parties to resume negotiations on Tuesday, July 5. The workers were called back to the job on June 30.

Union calls off one-day strike against Golden Gate ferry

Service on the Golden Gate Ferry System ran as usual July 1 after an announced one-day strike by ticket takers was called off by their union, the Inland Boatman’s Association. The ticket takers are set to lose their jobs when new automated ticket machines are installed. The district, which also operates the Golden Gate Bridge and bus service in San Francisco and in Marin and Sonoma counties in Northern California, said it had not been informed of the strike in advance. About 4,500 to 5,000 passengers use the ferry each day.

The district’s contract with the Inland Boatman’s Association expired midnight June 30. Management plans to automate ticket sales as part of an effort to eliminate an \$89 million, five-year deficit. The

union said the district had not offered an adequate severance plan for the 7 ticket agents who will lose their jobs when the new automated system takes effect.

The plan also includes automating toll collection on the Golden Gate Bridge and automatic ferry information for customers, eliminating another 32 jobs.

Indiana operating engineers end strike

Work resumed last week on road, bridge, highway and other construction projects in northwest Indiana following a tentative agreement between the three main employer associations and operating engineers. The walkout, which started on June 9, affected projects in 14 northwest Indiana counties. No details of the settlement have been released.

The International Union of Operating Engineers Local 150 wanted the employers’ group to assist in meeting health care costs, which are increasing at 10 to 14 percent a year. Prior to the strike a group of 20 contractors broke with the main employer group and signed a separate contract with Local 150.

BC machinists continue strike against Caterpillar dealer

Seven hundred workers employed by the world’s largest dealer of Caterpillar equipment, Finning International Inc., are continuing a strike that began June 20 at locations across the province of British Columbia.

The workers affected, who are organized under the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAMAW), include machinists as well as parts and support staff servicing equipment for the forestry and construction industry. Main issues in the contract dispute cover wages, benefits and job security.

The company has said that while shop and service operations may be limited by the strike, equipment and parts sales will not be disrupted nor will operations in neighboring Alberta and the Northwest Territories be affected. Striking workers in BC have been without a contract since April 14.



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