

Workers Struggles, the Americas

25 June 2013

Nicaraguan health workers strike to demand resources to fight diseases.

Some 300 public health workers in the Nicaraguan department of Chinandega began a strike June 18 to demand that the government supply needed medicines and equipment to combat diseases in the area, as well as other demands.

Fernando Loáisiga, secretary general of the health workers' union, Fetsalud, told *El Nuevo Diario* that dengue, malaria and leptospirosis outbreaks have been reported in various parts of the department, and the workers have been laboring along with 80 soldiers to combat the diseases. "As union members we propose to work from Monday to Friday, but the Minsa (Health Ministry) wants to include us in Saturday and Sunday, something that we do not accept."

Loáisiga added that the delivery of resources for the nurses, doctors, educators and *brigadistas* was "urgent" to fight the diseases. The health workers also called for the sacking of some directors of hospitals and assistance centers, whom they accuse of poor management and verbally abusive mistreatment.

Still other demands are repairs of ambulances and equipment; delivery of fuel for applying insecticides and cleaning; and travel pay.

Costa Rican banana workers strike over firings

On June 5 over 650 workers for Del Monte's Costa Rican subsidiary, the Banana Development Company, or Bandeco, struck to demand the reinstatement of 59 workers who were fired during a 2011 strike. A judge recently ruled the firings illegal.

The banana workers' union, known as Sitepp, called the action at three Bandeco farms in the city of Daytonia de Sixaola, near the Panamanian border. On June 13 and 14, about 200 workers blocked the main streets of Sixaola to protest stalled negotiations.

Argentine chemical workers end weeklong strike over unfulfilled contract commitments

Workers at about 40 chemical industry firms in the Argentine cities of Zárate and Campana returned to their jobs on June 19 after seven days on strike. The workers went back following the signing of an accord at a meeting between representatives of the Petrobras firm, the Labor Ministry and the Chemical and Petrochemical Industries Syndicate the night before.

Originally the strike was solely against Petrobras, but it spread to other chemical industry firms in the Gualeguaychú Industrial Park in northern Buenos Aires. It included pickets that prevented the entry of personnel and raw materials and the exit of finished products, affecting all the chemical-related industries in the two cities.

The workers walked out over the oil company's failure to apply the salary agreement that was signed in 2012 and included a 22 percent raise. Under the terms of the June 18 agreement, Petrobras is to pay the salary hike, including retroactive payments going back to April of last year, in five increments beginning in July and ending in March 2014. Petrobras also agreed to rescind the sacking of four employees.

48-hour strike by Uruguayan teachers for increased education budget

On June 20, public school teachers across Uruguay went on a two-day strike to demand that more resources for education be included in budget proposals that the government will present to the national parliament on June 30. The strike was reported to have been total throughout the country.

In about thirty institutions, police were sent to dislodge teachers who occupied buildings. Under orders from their unions, the teachers left peacefully, but said that they would return to occupy in the future.

The president of the National Secondary Professors Federation (Fenapes), Manuel Oroño, told reporters that the strike and occupations were meant to pressure the government regarding three aspects of education funding: “One is to improve infrastructure, because there’s an important lack of buildings and many need repairs. There are also shortages in the number of clerical staff, teachers and services. The third element relates to salaries. In the next budget, we want the teachers to make more.”

Currently, the base-level salary for teachers is 17,000 pesos (US\$800); the teachers unions are calling for a raise to 25,000 pesos (US\$1,190) by the end of the current administration of president José Mujica in 2015.

Mujica claimed that “under no circumstance” has the budget proposal been completely defined yet. However, the president, who was elected with union support on a left-reformist platform, warned against policies that would “unleash inflation and an immeasurable increase in the fiscal debt” and lead to “a retraction in investment because we would eat up the possibilities for jobs in the future.”

New York car wash workers strike ends with contract agreement

Workers at Sunny Day Car Wash in New York City ended their 13-week strike and signed a first-time labor agreement on June 4. During the course of the new three-year agreement wages will rise from the minimum wage to \$9.18 an hour. Workers will also receive a standard 40-hour week, seniority and five paid days off and two personal days.

The organization of Sunny Day Car Wash workers follows an earlier union organizing drive that resulted in an agreement at Astoria Car Wash & Hi-Tek 10 Minute Lube. Two organizations--“Make the Road New York” and “New York Communities for Change”--backed by the the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union have mounted a campaign to organize an estimated 5,000 car wash workers in New York City.

Parents launch hunger strike against Philadelphia school layoffs

Four parents and two school employees launched a hunger strike against the decision by the Philadelphia Schools administration to lay off lunchtime aides in an overall cut

that will see 3,800 school workers axed. The layoffs will hit staff, assistant principals, teachers, counselors and secretaries, totaling some 20 percent of the Philadelphia school district’s workforce.

The district’s \$304 million deficit will also cut music, arts and sports when the fall school year begins. There is no indication that Republican Governor Tom Corbett or the state legislature will make up the deficit before the legislature’s June 30 deadline to pass a budget.

The hunger strike was organized by UNITE HERE, which represents the 1,200 lunchtime aides that received layoff notices.

Nova Scotia paramedics to strike against union brokered deal

Up to 800 air and ground paramedics across the province of Nova Scotia could go on strike as early as July 5 after rejecting a deal recommended by their union, the International Union of Operating Engineers.

The membership voted 73 percent against the proposed contract. It was the second time in four months that they had voted down a deal that had been accepted by union negotiators.

Union leaders had promoted the deal because it contained a defined benefit plan for pensions, which had been a major sticking point in negotiations.

Paramedics in Nova Scotia are not restricted from striking under essential services laws but the union and the employer, Emergency Medical Care Inc., had agreed that there would not be a strike or lockout for at least two weeks if the deal was rejected.



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