

Workers Struggles: The Americas

10 June 2014

Latin America

Peruvian doctors suspend 22-day strike

Doctors in Peru's social insurance system, known as EsSalud, suspended their strike on June 3 after reaching an agreement with EsSalud. The doctors' union Sinamssop had called the action on May 13 to demand a new salary schedule and Sinamssop's inclusion in reforms of the health system, as well as other demands.

Regarding the reforms in EsSalud, Luis Ríos Galdo, union director, told reporters, "What we want isn't to participate in management, but in restructuring. It is good to carry out mediation but not so liberal; it should be regulated, balanced, and not throw the social service into imbalance."

According to the agreement, specialists who work in Peru's interior will get a bonus, and the salary scale from 20 years ago will be implemented. Peru has the lowest salaries in South America for doctors, according to Ríos Galdo.

He added that the strike was not ended, but suspended "to be able to perform the operations and consultations that have been put on hold." He said that the strike would be ended when other demands have been met.

Meanwhile, doctors in the Ministry of Health (Minsa) are still on strike. The Minsa doctors—including obstetricians, dental surgeons, biologists, psychologists, nutritionists, social workers and medical technicians—walked out June 3. Minsa has declared the strike illegal.

Two-day strike by Argentine hospital workers over benefit payment system

On June 3, the Clinic, Sanitarium and Hospital Confederation of Argentina (Confeclicsa) and other health sector unions began a 48-hour strike at hospitals and clinics nationwide. The strike was called to protest changes by the PAMI (Integrated Medical Assistance Benefits), the nation's retirement benefits agency.

In August 2013, PAMI changed its model for providing benefits, and the unions accuse the agency of shortchanging retirees. Since then, as Confeclicsa official Enrique Cimino told reporters June 4, "there is no clear procedure to operate and there are massive sums to allot out of those that still haven't received a response."

The strike also called attention to other problems at medical facilities across Argentina, such as lack of supplies and difficulty in obtaining medicines.

In Mendoza province, Confeclicsa claimed 90 percent participation in the strike. Emergency services, security, major surgeries and pharmacies continued to function.

The United States

Sickout by San Francisco transit workers ends

San Francisco public transportation returned to normal June 5 after a three-day sickout by transit workers angry over a new contract paralyzed the city. One week earlier, members of Transport Workers Union Local 250-A voted by a lopsided 1,198-42 margin to reject a concessions contract. But because workers are barred from striking and a recent municipal law imposes arbitration, transit workers had no other way to express their opposition.

San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee and other city officials denounced the sickout and attempted to turn public officials against the workers claiming the new contract

would make them the second highest paid transit workers in the country. But the new contract also required workers to contribute 7.5 percent to their pensions, resulting in a \$1.10 pay cut.

Referring to the sickout, Eric Williams, president of Local 250-A declared, “We did not sanction that” and told transit workers to be prepared to produce a doctor’s note when returning to work. A memorandum from the transit agency’s chief of staff, Alicia John-Baptiste made clear transit workers who engaged in the sickout would not receive pay and other city officials threatened discipline up to and including termination.

Canada

BC teachers vote on full-scale strike

Following two weeks of rotating strike action, 41,000 elementary and high school teachers across British Columbia will vote this week on escalating to a full-scale strike.

Despite giving their union a strike mandate in March, the British Columbia Teachers’ Federation (BCTF) has said that a second vote is necessary to show government the determination of teachers to make gains in a new contract. This, even as the union has scaled back on contract demands including a reduction in wage demands last week.

Provincial negotiators have not improved their contract offer to meet demands for reduced class sizes and composition and improvements in provisions for special-needs students; they have continued a limited lockout for teachers, which was recently approved by the Labour Relations Board.

Toronto area city workers gear up for strike

Inside municipal workers in Durham region, east of Toronto, will be in a legal strike position as of June 13 as strike votes continue through the week.

The 1,600 workers affected by a possible strike include paramedics, child care and court service

workers, and health inspectors. With contract negotiations continuing, the Region has said that contingency plans are in place to avoid any possible disruption to services.



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