

Workers Struggles: The Americas

15 April 2003

Government workers demand wage increase in Paraguay

On April 10, government workers rallied in downtown Asuncion to demand a 35 percent raise. Unless the government addresses their demands, they promised to strike on April 23, 24 and 25. The National Confederation of State Functionaries and Employees (CONFEE) organized the protest 17 days before the scheduled national elections in order channel popular anger behind their electoral strategy of pressuring the ruling Colorado Party.

Colombian congress seeks to avert oil workers strike

On April 9, Colombia's congress intervened in negotiations between the oil workers union—the Sindicalist Workers Union (USO)—and the state-owned oil company, Ecopetrol. The government is seeking to prevent strike action against the country's main refineries. USO postponed an announcement of the strike date, pending the results of the congressional initiative. Colombian President Alvaro Uribe cautioned USO not to strike, threatening he would declare any walkout "illegal."

Three million stranded in Sao Paulo bus strike

Sao Paulo, the largest South American city, was paralyzed by a transit strike on April 7. All metropolitan bus terminals were closed. The object of the strike was to protest a government plan to consolidate the bus lines that operate throughout this city into a few large operators.

Bolivian teachers go back to work

After 13 days on strike public school teachers in Bolivia went back to work April 14. A week after declaring they were standing firm for an 800 percent wage increase, the teachers' union leadership settled for a paltry 4 percent wage increase plus a yearly \$52 bonus.

Workers in El Salvador mobilize in support of striking doctors

Workers and students blocked highways into San Salvador today and doctors in government hospitals walked off their jobs April 9 in solidarity with six doctors on a two-week hunger strike against the privatization of health care. Protesters demanded the doctors be rehired together with their fellow public health clinic doctors on strike since September.

Throughout the day, groups of protesters blocked major streets. Doctors at state-run hospitals walked out indefinitely, demanding a resolution of the dispute at the public health clinics.

Janitors at medical association strike for health benefits

Janitors at the national offices of the American Medical Association (AMA) in Washington DC walked off the job April 8 to protest low wages and no medical benefits. The AMA subcontracts custodial services to EMI, which pays janitors a mere \$6.15 an hour and no health benefits.

The Service Employees International Union, which represents janitors in the DC area, points out that a prescription for antibiotics alone costs an entire day's wage for an EMI janitor. Furthermore, Washington DC has one of the highest housing costs in the nation.

Tyson prepares strikebreaking at Wisconsin plant

Tyson foods has begun screening permanent replacement workers in an effort to break a strike at its Jefferson, Wisconsin plant. Workers are picketing the Watertown, Wisconsin Holiday Inn Express where Tyson is interviewing prospective strikebreakers. They are also dispatching "Truth Squads" to other processing plants in the region, appealing for support.

Workers at Tyson's Dosckocil Food Service plant voted to strike Tyson by a 400-9 margin February 28 after the company demanded pay cuts of 74 cents an hour along with a four-year wage freeze and an increase in health care premiums to \$40 per week.

New York nursing home strike prolonged by budget cuts

Over 100 caregivers at a New York State nursing home are entering their sixth week on strike against Northwoods Rehabilitation and Extended Care Facilities in East Greenbush, near Albany, New York.

Last week management insisted on a clause called “effect of legislation” that specified “should certain federal or state aid funding to the facility(s) be reduced, the employer shall receive a credit by outlined mechanisms.” The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) charges that the clause will allow management to break their contract should state legislators fail to provide Medicaid reimbursements at a particular level. “They’re offering an illusion, not a real contract,” charged an SEIU negotiator.

Appeals court rules hidden cameras subject to bargaining agreements

A federal appeals court ruled last week that National Steel Corporation’s refusal to discuss the company’s use of hidden cameras with the steelworkers’ union bureaucracy was a violation of labor law. For 15 years the company used hidden cameras to monitor its 3,000 employees at its Granite City, Illinois steel mill. The company has some 100 video cameras in plain view, but the issue of hidden cameras only came into the open when an employee was dismissed for using an office phone that was recorded by a camera concealed in a filing cabinet.

The steelworkers union was aware of the hidden cameras and did not oppose them. Instead the union bureaucrats insisted they be installed by union labor.

Workers strike the Sunrise School Division

Two-hundred teaching assistants, custodial, maintenance and bus workers at Manitoba’s Sunrise School Division went on strike April 8. The workers are represented by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 1618, and have been without a contract since December 2002. They were joined on the picket lines April 11 by the school division’s clerical workers, represented by CUPE Local 4456.

The employees’ main demand is for wage harmonization following the recent amalgamation of the old Agassiz school division with the rural part of the Transcona-Springfield school division, which formed the Sunrise School Division. The new school division has said that in order to meet the strikers’ demands, \$1.2 million in additional funding is needed from the New Democratic Party provincial government.

The union is also demanding the creation of a defined-benefit pension plan. According to CUPE officials, the school division’s most recent offer was still 12 percent short of the workers’ demands.

On April 11, 200 high school students in Beausejour walked out of classes in support of the striking workers.

Outside workers in Sydney stage wildcat strike

Three hundred thirty municipal bus drivers and garbage workers in Sydney, Nova Scotia, staged a one-day wildcat strike on April 11 in response to a manager unfairly docking the pay of 20 workers. The workers were reportedly each docked 30 minutes of pay for missing only one or two minutes of work. Later in the day, the Cape Breton Municipal Authority relented, promising the employees the withheld wages would be fully paid.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact