# Workers Struggles: The Americas

**18 September 2001**

**Teachers protests continue in Mexico**

Tlaxcala teaching students continued blocking roads on September 11 as part of a protest to save Mexican rural schools. Originally the government had cut new admissions to 56 at the Benito Juarez school, down from 110. The teaching students are continuing their protest even after the government appeared to relent, demanding that the new appointments go to those students who had participated in the protests. The Tlaxcala students are being supported by teaching students across the country.

**Bolivian health workers to mobilize**

Workers at the National Health Fund (CNS) declared on September 14 that they will mobilize September 17 against the privatization of health care. CNS Director Hector Chavez is said to have already signed contracts with three private companies to provide laundry, janitorial and food services to patients at three hospitals—Materno, Infantil and Obrero. Health employees are demanding that Chavez rescind the contracts immediately because they violate an agreement between the Bolivian Workers Central (COB) and the national government.

**Chilean dock workers battle police**

Scores of dock workers at the Port of Valparaiso fought police on September 14 as Chilean security forces moved in against a barricade set up by protesting stevedores. Police dispersed the workers with tear gas.

Maritime leader Jaime Munoz warned that this would be the first of a series of mobilizations to demand that the government of Ricardo Lagos carry out promises made by the Frei administration in exchange for workers accepting the privatization of some ports. These promises included retraining programs and subsidies to small businesses set up by laid-off workers. Munoz declared that the longshore and maritime workers union would strike during the fruit harvest season if necessary.

**Volkswagen workers carry out job actions in Sao Paulo**

During the past two weeks production of automobiles at the San Bernardo do Campo VW assembly plant in Brazil was interrupted by partial strikes by its workers. In July and August there were three series of two-hour strikes over a productivity bonus (Profit and Results Participation—PLR). Workers are to vote this week on the management offer, which has fallen short of workers' demands.

The job actions began in July to protest the firing of two union officials. A rank-and-file group that has opposed the policies of the ABC Metal Workers Union leadership organized the protests. It also led the strikes for higher PLR bonuses.

Workers are concerned that management may turn its back on a 1998 no-layoff agreement that reduced working hours and wages to save the jobs of 7,500 workers. Consequently, the issue of the latest partial walkouts has been to prevent VW from outsourcing work.

On September 17 another strike may take place, this time in conjunction with other members of the Metal Workers in Sao Paulo against layoffs at Ericsson and Phillips. VW workers warned that if sackings occur, management can expect an immediate plant closure.

The VW plant, which currently employs 16,000 workers, produces the Golf, the most popular car in Brazil.

**Sao Paulo workers fight layoffs**

The electronics transnational firm Ericsson announced September 13 that it would stop production of cellular phones at its Sao Jose dos Campos plant in Sao Paulo, Brazil, laying off 900 workers. Production will shift to another Sao Paulo plant.

Ericsson's 1,400 employees are set to strike September 17. The ABC Metal Workers Union pledged to end the strike only when agreement is reached on severance conditions.

Another electronics firm, Philips, announced a two-week shutdown of its plant in Sao Jose dos Campos, laying off 2,000 workers. The plant closure is linked to a drop in its electronic components sales. Demand for electronic devices is down due to Brazil's scarcity of electricity and government rationing, according to the above companies.

Members of the Metal Workers Union at other Sao Paulo Ford and VW plants will join the strike.

**Wal-Mart sued over forced overtime, unpaid labor**

Wal-Mart Stores Inc. was sued in Washington state by two former employees who charge the retail chain forced them and other employees to work unpaid overtime, forego breaks and lunch periods and attend meetings while not clocked in.

The class action lawsuit alleges that Wal-Mart management, seeking to increase profits by holding down

© World Socialist Web Site

wage compensation, would lock doors after employees had clocked out and force them to continue working into the night. Systematic bullying and threats of termination were used to get employees to work through breaks.

The two plaintiffs, Tamra Moore and Debra Barnett, said employees were locked in stores for hours. They seek back pay in addition to overtime for all uncompensated hours for themselves and employees at each of Washington's 30 Wal-Mart stores. Similar lawsuits are pending against Wal-Mart in New York, Indiana, Nevada, New Mexico, Ohio, Texas, California, Iowa, Oregon, Georgia and Kentucky.

**Flight attendants succeed in petition drive for union vote at Delta**

The National Mediation Board (NMB) confirmed that the Association of Flight Attendants (AFA) has filed enough cards petitioning the government board for a union representation election on behalf of Delta Air Lines' 20,000 flight attendants. The exact total is not clear, but the AFA did obtain more than the required 35 percent.

Delta's pilots have been the company's only major employee group to have a union. Traditionally, Delta has avoided unionization by maintaining compensation at or near the industry's highest levels. But flight attendants now charge that Delta's benefits and work rules are not comparable to those at other major airlines.

Normally the NMB sets a date for an election within 60 days of a successful petition for certification. The NMB also has before it charges that Delta used illegal tactics to discourage flight attendants from signing union petitions during the AFA's campaign, but no ruling has yet materialized.

Meanwhile, the Aircraft Mechanics Fraternal Association continues its unionization drive to represent Delta's 10,000 mechanics.

**NLRB to charge Verizon with unfair labor tactics**

The Communications Workers of America announced that the National Labor Relations board is preparing a complaint against Verizon Communications, charging the company with threatening to fire workers for trying to unionize the company.

There are 86 alleged violations involving workers at Verizon Information Service's operations in New York, which includes the company's yellow pages directory sales. The allegations include physical assault by a supervisor and threats that workers would lose their jobs. Other threats included loss of stock options and refusal to grant time off for family illnesses.

According to the Communications Workers some 70 percent of Verizon employees voted for union representation last February, but the company has refused to recognize the union.

**Concessions at Wheeling-Pittsburgh Steel**

Bankrupt Wheeling-Pittsburgh Steel Corporation and the United Steelworkers union agreed to job and pay cuts to help the steelmaker emerge from Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection. Details of the changes, which will affect 3,300 workers in West Virginia, Ohio and Pennsylvania, remain undisclosed. Wage cuts are to remain in effect for six months. There will also be changes in the pension plan.

Wheeling-Pittsburgh has lost $316 million since January 2000. It filed for bankruptcy protection in the fall of the same year. Union members will receive contract summaries and mail-in ballots that will be counted September 29. If the changes are ratified, the union contract, which was scheduled to expire 2002, will be extended until 2006.

**Unions suspend actions in wake of terror attacks in US**

The leadership of the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) is utilizing the shock and horror over last week's terror attacks in the US as an excuse to shut down an ongoing campaign of protests, walkouts and one-day strikes by public sector workers. The union says all of its planned actions across the country have been called off indefinitely.

PSAC is currently engaged in negotiations with the federal government for a new contract. The union is seeking wage increases of up to 5 percent a year in a three-year deal. At last report the government was limiting its offer to around 2.5 percent a year. The disruptions of last week at centers in Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and British Columbia were immediately suspended when news of the attacks on US buildings was learned.

In addition, Canadian Labour Congress President Ken Georgetti has called on the ICFTU (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions) to postpone a planned worldwide demonstration against free trade which was scheduled for November 9.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**wsws.org/contact**

© World Socialist Web Site