

# Minnesota state workers defend strike

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The strike by 28,000 Minnesota state workers, which began Monday, is continuing without prospects for a quick resolution. John Wodele, spokesperson for Governor Jesse Ventura, told the media, "The governor is not inclined to put any further money on the table.... The strike will go on as long as they [the strikers] want it to."

In another statement, Wodele said, "We have a worst case scenario planned and it will be put into effect." The state has deployed almost 1,000 National Guard troops as strikebreakers to perform work at veteran centers, hospitals and nursing homes.

Ventura, who is in New York to meet with bonding agencies about the state of Minnesota's finances and put in media appearances on "Good Morning America" at the site of attack on the World Trade Center, called on strikers to return to work without a contract. Earlier the governor, a former Under Demolition Team member who the media fashions as an ex-Navy Seal, suggested that the strikers were unpatriotic for walking out as the economy was faltering and the country was entering a war.

Striking pickets at the Minnesota Department of Health said they were angered by the governor's comments. When asked if she felt the state was exploiting the tragedy in order to disguise the attack on workers' living standards, Carlota replied, "Of course it is. In fact, the offer they made to us before September 11 is the same offer they made to us after September 11. September 11 has nothing to do with it. We had already voted to go on strike before September 11. Now you see Governor Ventura on TV saying that workers need to compromise."

Carlota, a picket captain for the Minnesota Association of Professional Employees (MAPE) and an employee of the Minnesota Department of Health, pointed out that little has changed in the stance of the government in some nine months of negotiations. "In a

nutshell, the state has offered us a contract that will result in a pay cut because of the increases in health care premiums. This offer has been negotiated since February. During the summer the state government almost shut down, so negotiations were suspended. It's clear that the money was there to settle with us. But Jesse [Ventura] wanted to do tax refunds so he can be popular. It was totally political. He was taking advantage of public workers.

"Here you're standing in front of the Department of Public Health. We would be the first line of defense in the event of a terrorist attack. But we're not worth a cost-of-living increase."

Another Health Department worker with 25 years as a chemist in the public health laboratory told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "What's the same from negotiations on other contracts is that we were offered 2 percent and 2 percent in each year of the contract. All they did after September 11 was make it 4 percent in the first year. As I understand, the percent increase is really only 3.8 percent. So to me, it's less money. We've typically been paid less than the cost of living. One year we gave up our retirement funds to bail out Northwest Airlines.

"What's different in this year's negotiation is that my health benefits are going from having cost me \$20 a pay period to \$120 a pay period. Prior to this, the state would select from four different health plans and provide that as the base plan. You could take a higher cost plan, but the additional cost would come out of your pocket.

"Now what they are doing is to rate each clinic as to whether they are a one-tier clinic, two-tier clinic or three-tier clinic. You will pay more depending upon what tier they are. I called my clinic to find out what tier they are in, but they told me the state has not given them a designation. I don't see how people can understand what they are going to ultimately have to pay for health care."

Concerning the attack against workers for disrupting national unity, she said, “I think that the question is being put to the wrong people. It was the state that didn’t think what they could do to make this a better world. We’re not monsters, we’re not terrorists. We’re just workers. People are up in a kind of froth, but we’re not responsible for that.

“Our laboratory analyzes drinking water and soil. If there is a terrorist emergency we will be called on. We have an emergency response team for nuclear emergencies. When we postponed our strike, people in my department felt that we were doing it for the right reasons, in case there was an attack.”



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