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## 23,000 Bus Line Workers In Mexico City Fired

*by John Neagle*

*Category/Department: General*

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On May 3, the Mexican government fired 23,000 city bus workers who went on strike, and said it was establishing limits on raises for public employees. Bus drivers, mechanics and administrative workers walked out after public school teachers won concessions with a strike now in its third week. President Carlos Salinas de Gortari's office said pay hikes granted teachers would not be extended to other public employees because teachers had been left behind in past years. The statement did not mention bus workers but said widespread wage increases could lead to a resumption of consumer price inflation. The government had increased its original offer of an 18% raise in teachers' salaries and benefits to 25%. Talks on extending that offer to school staff members and on union democracy continued May 3. Mexican public school teachers earn an average of about \$1,700 a year. Government news agency Notimex and the pro-government Televisa television network said bus system employees earn an average of about \$9,000 a year. City government spokesperson Jose Luis Manjarrez said that because the bus strike was declared illegal in advance by the federal labor mediations board, employees were aware that "when they stopped working they would be fired." The board acted after the bus workers rejected a 14% increase in wages and benefits and demanded a 50% pay increase. A statement from Mayor Manuel Camacho Solis' office said the bus workers were fired, the union's contract was canceled and the bus line would be reorganized to reduce government subsidies, deterioration of the system and pollution problems. Manjarrez said the firings affected 23,000 employees, but declined to say if that many jobs would be filled. He added that fired workers can apply, but applicants must fill the requirements for "qualifications and quality." Radio Red reported that bus drivers held a mass meeting and decided to return to work, but it was not clear if the government would permit their return. The buses are part of a system that includes a subway, jitneys and private bus lines. City buses charge 100 pesos (about 4 cents) per ride. The bus line employees' strike left hundreds of thousands stranded. About 800 drivers and other workers marched to the Zocalo, painting their demands on the sidewalk as they went. (Basic data from AP, 05/03/89)

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