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Argentina: Telephone Company Employees On Strike; President Menem Prepares Decree To Outlaw Public Sector Strikes

by Barbara Khol

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On Sept. 3, state-run telephone company employees continued a strike to protest dismissal of 150 co-workers last week. Employees are also demanding a wage hike higher than offered by the Labor Ministry. Next, government officials asserted that the strikes are also a challenge to the upcoming privatization of the enterprise. The government declared the strike illegal last week, effectively permitting the firing of strikers, and suspension of the union's legal status. The union argued that only the courts can impose such sanctions, and ignored the Labor Ministry ruling. The strike began Aug. 27, ended briefly Aug. 31, and was reimposed Sept. 1. The strike has disrupted local and international communications, and telex and FAX services. Repair, maintenance and customer service departments also were affected. On the same day, Raul Granillo Ocampo, President Carlos Menem's legal and technical secretary, said Menem will sign a decree outlawing strikes by public service employees "when conditions permit." The decree could replace legislation submitted by the executive six months ago. The Congress has yet to act on the bill. Both Justicialista (Peronist) and opposition party congresspersons do not support the legislation. Granillo said the opportune moment for signing the decree will be when unions decide to unleash a "wave of strikes in public services endangering their continuity." Also on Sept. 3, the government threatened another 500 dismissals, and called on the police to ensure normal telephone services. The strike effort received the support of the Azopardo faction of the General Workers Confederation (CGT), one of CGT's two factions. (Basic data from AP, EFE, 09/03/90)

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