5-19-1992

Venezuela: Summary Of Strikes, May 12 - 18

Barbara Khol

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/notisur

Recommended Citation

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in NotiSur by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.
Venezuela: Summary Of Strikes, May 12 - 18

by Barbara Khol
Category/Department: General
Published: Tuesday, May 19, 1992

May 12: Interior Minister Luis Pinerua said strikes planned by public sector employees to take place in a staggered fashion throughout the week were "illegal." (See Chronicle 05/12/92 for previous coverage of strikes.) On Monday, 6,000 Finance Ministry employees went on strike, preventing income tax collection. At the same time, public employees in the western state of Lara joined a strike which their counterparts in Sucre state launched the previous Friday. Employees of federal government ministries, the merchant marine, airports and hospitals are some of civil servant categories scheduled to participate. Public health sector physicians have been on strike since early May. Public sector employee unions are demanding renewal of a collective bargaining contract for all civil servants, salary hikes of up to 40%, and the creation of a separate social security institute for government employees. Antonio Rios, president of the Venezuelan Workers Confederation (CTV), and a member of the ruling Accion Democratica (AD) party, threw his weight behind the strikes. Trade union leaders decided to proceed with the strikes despite Pinerua's proclamation. They asserted that "if we followed the government's criteria, a legal strike would never take place anywhere in the country." On Tuesday, the staff at eight major airports participated in a slowdown. Over 4,000 pharmacies closed their doors in protest against a decision by the government to sell medicinal drugs in supermarkets. The executive approved an extraordinary US$932 million spending bill. Treasury Minister Pedro Rosas said the money will be used for a 20% increase in public sector salaries, and to raise the minimum wage. Rosas added that money for the special authorization is to derive from savings resulting from federal budget cuts, increased customs revenue and other taxes, Central Bank profits, and the government's US$1 billion "macroeconomic stabilization fund." The fund, created in 1991, consists of windfall profits derived from high oil prices caused by the Gulf conflict. The supplemental spending bill must be approved by the national congress. May 13: Thousands of Agriculture and Livestock, Industry and Trade, and Energy and Mines Ministry employees launched a 24-hour strike. Security zone workers at airports participated in a sit-down strike. In downtown Caracas, residents demonstrated against market speculation and recent price hikes affecting beef and milk products. Public sector trade union leaders called on President Carlos Andres Perez to halt the wave of strikes by immediately signing a US$276.9 million collective bargaining contract for 1.3 million civil servants. In the absence of such contract, public employees plan to launch a general strike May 20. Contract talks have been going on for the past year. Jose Beltran Vallejo, coordinator of the CTV's collective contract department, said strikes will continue until the government responds. According to the Inter Press Service, in the past 20 days there have been 20 work stoppages, mainly by public sector workers demanding the payment of contractual benefits and salary increases, and protesting against an imminent reduction in the public sector work force. The government plans to reduce the number of ministries from 27 to nine. May 14: President Perez said the public sector employee strikes were illegal and "have no justification" since they commenced prior to any negotiations with government officials. He added that the strikes have caused at least US$13 million in financial losses thus far. The president called on all workers to recognize that Venezuela is undergoing an economic crisis, caused in large part by low prices for crude oil on the world market. The 1992 budget was calculated on the basis of US$19 per barrel of exported crude, but since Jan. 1, the average price obtained for Venezuelan oil exports...
is between US$13 and US$14 per barrel. Consequently, the federal budget was cut by US$1.107 billion. Oil exports account for nearly 90% of federal revenue. Pharmacies shut down for four hours on Thursday. Environment Ministry employees and workers at all government offices in Zulia and Bolivar states commenced a 48-hour strike. Approximately 30,000 health sector workers on strike since the first week in May organized a demonstration to demand the withdrawal of night-duty allowances granted to the 14,000 public sector physicians, and to protest the deterioration of public hospital services. Spokespersons for the telephone company employee union announced plans to launch a strike the following week unless management reinstates 14 recently dismissed workers. Court employees throughout the country commenced a work slow-down. The strike by 14,000 public sector physicians may be extended to May 30 unless officials release back pay. Emergency services continue. Farmer and rancher organizations organized a national strike two weeks ago. Organization representatives threatened to escalate protest measures unless Agriculture Minister Jonathan Coles resigns. Among other things, farm workers brought cattle into Caracas to obstruct traffic. Public sector employees threatened an indefinite general strike unless their demands were addressed by Friday. The Chamber of Deputies approved a resolution to request the resignation of Agriculture Minister Coles. May 15: About 3,000 merchant marine employees joined the walkouts, as well as workers on pilot ships which guide foreign vessels into the country’s harbors. May 18: Work stoppages and slowdowns by ministry employees and state government workers continued. (Basic data from several reports by Agence France-Presse, 05/12/92, 05/13/92, 05/14/92; Spanish news service EFE, 05/12/92, 05/14/92; Notimex, 05/13/92, 05/18/92)

-- End --