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CGTP and Aprista Lead National Strike
by LADB Staff  
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President Alejandro Toledo faced the first general strike to occur during his term, although his government claimed the work stoppage had failed to attract widespread support. The Confederacion General de Trabajadores de Peru (CGTP) called for the strike while the APRA (Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana, Partido Aprista Peruano) the opposition party that includes former President Alan Garcia (1985-1990) joined the strike, calling for the deeply unpopular Toledo to change his economic policies or resign.

The CGTP marched through the capital on July 14 with the support of about 150 organizations, their numbers sapped by threats of docked pay for those who participated. The CGTP called for the restitution of labor rights, a program of job creation, renegotiation of the country's external debt, and a rejection of the free-trade agreement (FTA) Peru is currently negotiating with the US. The stoppage had sought to paralyze the country, though many press reports and Toledo's government, close to completing its third year in office, said the strike did not achieve that aim.

General strike receives only partial support

The first national strike in Peru in five years had the goal of getting higher wages for laborers and putting an end to neoliberal economic policies, though some analysts and Toledo administrators saw the involvement of APRA as an indication that the strike reflected political opposition more than it did economic discontent. Construction workers and teachers unions pledged support for the 24-hour stoppage, as did miners and health workers, according to the general secretary of the CGTP.

The two opposing sides of the strike claimed broad support for their particular viewpoint, with the government saying the vast majority of Peruvians had not stayed away from their jobs, and CGTP-APRA spokespeople saying that 80% of workers had joined the strike.

The general secretary of the CGTP, Juan Jose Gorriti, said, "The streets of the country's principle cities have shown that the people reject the policies of Alejandro Toledo." Garcia, currently the projected frontrunner for the 2006 presidential campaign, said 15 million workers in Puno, Cuzco, Arequipa, and several districts in the capital city had joined the strike effort. Yet the Toledo administration said that only 2% of workers had joined the strike with a total of only 46,000 marchers showing up on the streets of the different cities of Peru.

The Interior Ministry announced that there had been 76 arrests and three people had been wounded during the demonstrations. The Ministry estimated 6,000 Lima residents had taken over the historic Dos de Mayo plaza, calling on Toledo to make a 180-degree turn in his economic policies and accusing him of corruption. Toledo's poll numbers are mired firmly in the single-digit range with the population perceiving him as indecisive and unable to create greater employment (see NotiSur, 2003-12-12). Unions had predicted that 2 million people would join the stoppage.

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A poll by the Universidad de Lima found that 49.5% of Lima residents opposed the strike and 38.9% supported it, with 11.5% not declaring either way. Of those interviewed, 46.6% believed that APRA's Garcia would be the one who would benefit most politically from the strike.

**Toledo declares strike illegal**

On the eve of the strike, the government said workers would be docked a day's pay if they did not show up at their jobs, convincing some to head to work. Labor Minister Javier Neves announced at a press conference that the government was declaring the strike illegal. Neves said, "We are dealing with a political strike, as its own organizers have stated, but that is also illegal." He said the call for a national strike did not comply with the procedures required by the laws governing collective labor relations and that the advance announcement of the stoppage was therefore contrary to law. The government mobilized 93,000 police agents to guard the streets during the strike.

Prior to the day of the march, federal officials warned that radical groups linked to the Partido Comunista del Peru (PCP, Patria Roja) were planning acts of violence. Interior Minister Javier Reategui said on Radioprogramas del Peru that "radical organizations, linked with Patria Roja, are plotting violent acts for the national strike." He said Patria Roja is made up of many small organizations, "and some of them are meeting in groups of 20 to 60 people to act violently while police are conducting security measures."

In the 1970s, a group of militants from Patria Roja formed the group Sendero Luminoso, which was at the center of the internal violence that rocked Peru between 1980 and 2000. Reategui recently took the office of interior minister, succeeding Fernando Rospigliosi who resigned after the Congress voted to censure him following the lynching of a mayor from the southern department of Puno (see NotiSur, 2004-05-07).

After the strike, Reategui told journalists that police were fulfilling their objective "of maintaining peace and tranquility through preventive actions." He said some detainees were found with explosives and tacks, which they had spread on highways to prevent the passage of vehicles. He said in the northeastern department of Loreto some attempts were made to block roads, as well as in the cities of Chimbote and Juliaca in the department of Puno.

**Transportation work stoppage hits Copa America**

Peruvians who chose not to join the strike and sought to reach their workplaces struggled with a transportation strike that was part of the general work stoppage. They crowded onto the few operating buses on the streets, buses that became more numerous later in the morning as drivers found that they could drive without facing attacks from strikers. The absence of buses was particularly noticeable to soccer fans in Peru for the 41st Copa America de Futbol. There was a scarce presence of workers on the streets in addition to the restricted amount of public transportation, and many marketplaces closed their doors for fear of violence. There were some confrontations with the police in residential zones in the outskirts of the capital.
Since July 6, Peru has been the host for the 41st Copa America, in which teams from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela are playing. After the strike ended, Toledo congratulated strikers on their "maturity," and said the protests had been carried out "peacefully."

The president of the Consejo de Ministros, Carlos Ferrero, whose resignation protestors called for, said the low turnout was a warning to Alan Garcia. "Garcia convoked [the strike], and the people did not come," said the Cabinet chief. "The Apristas are receiving a warning telling them, 'I'm not going to vote for you either,'" in the 2006 general elections.

-- End --