

12-15-1988

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Recommended Citation

Neagle, John. "Brazil: Strike Paralyzes Port Operations." (1988). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/notisur/2531>

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Brazil: Strike Paralyzes Port Operations

by John Neagle

Category/Department: General

Published: Thursday, December 15, 1988

On Dec. 13 at 12:00 a.m. port workers launched an indefinite strike, affecting 21 ports. The workers are demanding a 38.34% retroactive pay increase for the June-November period. About 25,000 workers of a total 30,000 throughout the country were participating in the strike. Workers in the state of Santa Catarina had chosen not to join the strike effort. On Tuesday, 12 of Brazil's 30 ports were totally paralyzed, including Santos, Latin America's biggest port. On Tuesday, the Portobras press office said that about \$3 million had been lost in uncollected port fees. Portobras is the government agency responsible for operating the nation's docking facilities. In Santos, the strike was causing daily losses of about \$1.1 million, officials said. About 52,000 tons of products per day "are being left unhandled aboard 25 ships that are docked in Santos," said Sergio Coelho, a spokesperson for the Sao Paulo State Dock Co. Coelho told AP that the dock company has not made any wage offers to the strikers "because we barely have enough money to pay December's salaries." The local media reported Dec. 14 that the decision to strike was taken on Nov. 30 at a meeting of representatives from 23 unions, and the National Port Workers Federation. Carlos Teofilo, director of Portobras (the state-run port authority company), said the company may lose up to 2 billion cruzados per day if all port activity is shut down. Thus far, Portobras had reportedly lost \$50 million, result of cancellations of freight operations, and related losses of tariffs and taxes. According to Teofilo, Portobras is waiting for a decision on the strikers' demands from the Interministerial State Workers Council (CISE) before entering into negotiations. (Basic data from AP, 12/13/88; Xinhua, 12/14/88)

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