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## **Chile: Labor Confederation Organizes General Strike For April 18**

*by John Neagle*

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On April 14, Interior Minister Carlos Caceres called on Chileans to ignore the call by the United Workers Central (Central Unitaria de Trabajadores-CUT) for a general strike to commence April 18. The strike was organized in an attempt to pressure the government into releasing from prison Manuel Bustos and Arturo Martinez, CUT president and vice president, respectively. Caceres said citizens must not heed the call for a strike because it will involve acts of violence and terrorism during demonstrations. On the same day, Manuel Feliu, president of the Production and Commerce Federation, told reporters that he had met with Gen. Augusto Pinochet, and that the government is studying a minimum wage hike. The minimum wage is currently 15,488 pesos per month (about US\$48). Feliu said that employers support a minimum wage increase. Leaders of several opposition parties said they do not support the CUT's call for a general strike because of fears that violence could result in negative political consequences. However, the opposition recognizes the legitimacy of CUT's decision. Santiago Archbishop Cardinal Francisco Fresno called on the government to release the two labor leaders in a gesture of peace and reconciliation. On April 11, at the XII congress in Caracas of the Inter-American Regional Labor Organization (Organizacion Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores-ORIT) approved a resolution supporting CUT's decision to call a general strike for April 18. ORIT delegates affirmed that Gen. Pinochet's dictatorship launched a campaign to discredit the CUT and its leaders in their attempt to free Bustos and Martinez, defend social welfare demands, and the sustained advancement of democratic institutions. The ORIT resolution added that the Chilean government has stepped up violence against human and labor rights by threatening the lives of CUT leaders, with the clear intention of terrorizing workers and debilitating the national strike effort. The resolution then called on the "international union movement" to call on governments and international organizations to intercede on the behalf of the persecuted union leaders and toward neutralizing the Chilean regime's repression. The resolution decreed a state of emergency for all ORIT organizations "in the expectation that the dictatorship's repressive apparatus will act with accustomed violence against Chilean workers." Next, the ORIT asserted that the Pinochet regime is directly responsible for the physical integrity of CUT leaders and members. "ORIT demands that [the Chilean government] guarantee the liberty and rights of the Chilean people and the labor movement during and after the strike." The congress was opened with an address by Venezuelan President Carlos Andres Perez. (Basic data from AP, 04/11/89; Notimex, 04/14/89)

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