

4-25-1989

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Recommended Citation

Neagle, John. "Venezuela: Notes On Mobilization Against Austerity Policies." (1989). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/notisur/3023>

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Venezuela: Notes On Mobilization Against Austerity Policies

by John Neagle

Category/Department: General

Published: Tuesday, April 25, 1989

On April 12, labor unions and political groups in Merida department called a 12-hour strike to protest government austerity policies, and as an act of public mourning for the victims of the Feb. 27 riots. In Caracas, where the worst violence occurred, some 300 persons died, and more than 3,000 businesses suffered looting and other property damage. In Merida, department capital of 200,000, shops were closed, and all schools canceled classes, including the Universidad de los Andes. Merida is located 550 km. southwest of Caracas. The strike was observed throughout the department. University student leaders called a national strike for April 13. On April 22, president of the Venezuelan Workers Confederation (CTV), Juan Jose Delpino, announced a 24-hour general strike in May to protest government austerity measures. The one-day strike would be the first major work stoppage in 31 years of democratic government. The CTV scheduled a two-day congress for the following week to discuss strategy for pressuring the government to modify its austerity program. The confederation represents 3 million of Venezuela's 5.8 million workers. President Carlos Andres Perez called the threatened strike "suicide, because nobody would join it." According to Delpino, "The strike and the massive obedience to our call will be the response to that claim." In remarks to AP, Delpino said, "Venezuelan workers are living through the worst crisis since the CTV was created. Workers have felt the severe impact of the economic policy." [Basic data from El Nuevo Herald (Miami), 04/13/89; AP, 04/22/89]

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