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## **Dominican Republic: Summary Of Two-day General Strike**

*by John Neagle*

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According to local news sources, the June 19-20 general strike was successful, paralyzing economic activity throughout the country. Disenchantment with the economic policies of President Joaquin Balaguer's government is so widespread that the work stoppage was supported not only by workers and the poor in general, but also by middle class professionals, businesspersons and the Roman Catholic Church. Business organizations have said workers had a legitimate right to seek better living conditions and that they were willing to raise salaries by as much as 30%. Beginning at noon June 19, the Catholic Church initiated attempts to mediate between the government and strike leaders. The mediation effort, headed by Archbishop of Santo Domingo Nicolas de Jesus Lopez Rodriguez, failed with the government refusing to budge a millimeter. Labor leaders have announced plans to meet July 15 to decide their next move. The strike was called by the country's four main labor federations and hundreds of grassroots organizations to demand a doubling of the minimum wage (currently about US\$80), an economic policy overhaul, and improvements in public services, particularly electricity. Clashes with police left three people dead and at least 20 injured from gunshot wounds, stores looted and streets cluttered with the remains of burning barricades. The first death occurred on Monday in Santo Domingo when soldiers and riot squad police attempted to disperse demonstrators by shooting automatic weapons in the air. In the ensuing melee, a 24-year-old man was shot in the head. Balaguer, a Christian Democrat who is 82 years old and blind, took over in 1986 for his fifth term in office. His actions have sparked bitter criticism, particularly pushing for construction projects that are perceived as inflation-fueling monuments to the president rather than benefits for residents. Such projects include an aquarium, a lighthouse, the remodeling of four downtown avenues and a tunnel. Independent economists say inflation is running at an annual rate of 60% and could hit 100%. (Basic data from AP, 06/20/89; AFP, 06/21/89)

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