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Guatemalan Labor Struggles: Summary Of Recent Events & Statements

by Deborah Tyroler

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July 21: President Vinicio Cerezo and Education Minister Ricardo Gomez authorized mayors and department governors to take control of public schools, coordinate classes, and contract teachers (or accept new teachers selected by the national government). [See summary of teachers' strike above.] July 23: Speaking on behalf of eleven mayors from Chiquimula, Chimaltenango department, teacher Roberto Garcia, president of the Departmental Association of Municipalities, said that the mayors will not reopen schools or bring charges against striking teachers because they fear a confrontation with parents and do not wish to compromise their support for the teachers. July 24: Fifteen teachers and 15 trade union leaders affiliated with several organizations continue a hunger strike commenced July 17 in the Plaza Mayor, Guatemala City. The teachers include natives of Huehuetenango, Chiquimula, El Progreso, Totonicapan, Retalhuleu and other departments. STINDE union leader Jorge Castillo was among the 15 trade unionists. The positions of 650 public administration employees were eliminated via a decree stating that the action was "an administrative budgetary procedure within the power of the president and state ministers. As such it does not require the intervention of the courts, given that legally they do not constitute dismissals." Among those affected were 312 supervisors, 16 education directors, 207 post-primary education directors, and 12 department heads. Some employees of the country's telegraph service and the Finance Ministry have returned to work. Work stoppages continue at the Post Office, Institute of Anthropology and History (IDAEH), the National Institute of Municipal Development (INFOM), the National Institute of Agrarian Reform (INTA), and the General Direction of Livestock Services (DIGESEPE), among others. Postal workers trade union leader Edgar Batres denied that his union had signed an agreement with the Communications Ministry to end the strike. According to Batres, negotiations with the government by the telegraph workers' union occurred without the knowledge and participation of the rank and file. He added that members of the postal union would continue the strike until their salary demands are met. July 28: The Finance Ministry approved a new regulation governing personal travel expense reimbursement for government officials, justified by price inflation at home and abroad. High-level officials will receive the following per diem travel stipends: for Europe, 1,080 quetzals (US\$400); US, 729 quetzals (US\$270); and, Guatemala, 90 quetzals (US\$34). Aug. 1: Congressperson Obdulio Chinchilla denounced the Education Ministry for transferring funds previously allocated to the salaries of recently dismissed teachers to an account for personal expenses of government officials. [Basic data from Teleprensa, 07/21/89; Prensa Libre, 07/23/89, 07/24/89, 08/01/89; El Grafico, 07/28/89, in report by Comision de Derechos Humanos de Guatemala, Mexico]

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