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Argentina: On Labor Unrest, Protests Against Government Economic Policies

by John Neagle
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On Nov. 7, bus drivers in Buenos Aires parked their buses at intersections, deflated the tires and walked away. Labor Minister Jorge Triaca said if an agreement between drivers and bus owners was not reached on Wednesday, he would order compulsory arbitration during which drivers are forced to work. Bus drivers who were paid about $86 for October are demanding $32 more, and a base salary of $139 for November and December. Bus owners are offering a monthly pay of about $100 through March. A recent strike by signalmen on commuter train lines was declared illegal by the Labor Ministry. The pay of teachers who suspended classes in October was docked. Employees at the state-owned oil and telephone companies have protested President Carlos Menem's privatization plans aimed at reducing the national budget deficit and attracting foreign investment. Collective bargaining with unionized metal industry workers has stalled. Unions representing most employees of government ministries suspended contract talks two weeks ago. In recent weeks, grade school teachers, university professors, doctors, court clerks and public employees in many provinces have staged strikes to demand salary hikes. Next, organizations representing Argentina's biggest industrial and farm enterprises continue to protest a pending tax hike, and plans to reduce tariff barriers. Inflation was reduced from 197% in July to 5.6% last month via currency devaluation, huge increases in public service rates, and wage and price guidelines. The government is offering a $16 per month increase to public employees, effective from October through March 1990. Projecting inflation at a steady 2% a month beginning in November, government officials have insisted that private businesses must hold price hikes to 15% or less through March. (Basic data from AP, 11/08/89; Noticias Argentinas, 11/07/89, 11/08/89)

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