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Argentina: Metal Industry Workers On Strike

by John Neagle

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On Nov. 14, the Metallurgy Workers Union (UOM) commenced a series of nationwide work stoppages in an effort to obtain wage hikes. UOM adjunct secretary general Luis Guerrero told reporters that the union would gradually escalate down-time duration until Nov. 26, concluding with a 15-minute stoppage per hour. He added that the union's action is an expression of opposition against employers, not the government, nor its economic policy. UOM has 350,000 members, and is considered Argentina's most powerful union. Workers are demanding a 72.4% basic wage hike, to compensate for real wage losses during the last quarter, and in anticipation of inflation during the October-March 1990 period. Employers offered a minimum wage of 50,000 australs ($76 at the official exchange rate) for September, plus a 9% increase for October-December, and another 4% for January through March. Real wage losses during the past quarter (July-September) were not addressed. As of Nov. 15, the passenger transport workers union, UTA, had accepted a wage package worked out under a government decreed obligatory arbitration. Labor Ministry officials served as arbitrators for the UTA and employers. The union had insisted on the rehiring of 600 workers dismissed during a week-long strike, and minimum monthly wage of 85,000 australs, retroactive to September. Employers offered 80,000 australs, beginning in October, and announced that workers who had joined the strike would be docked pay. Notimex did not report on the terms of the government-arbitrated wage agreement. (Basic data from Notimex, 11/15/89)

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