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Nicaragua: Strikes In Public & Private Sectors

by Deborah Tyroler

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On June 29, over 8,000 public employees walked off the job to pressure the government into responding to a series of demands, including wage hikes promised in May, suspension of decrees on review of land confiscations and renting state-owned lands, fulfillment of civil service legislation provisions, adequate funding for the judiciary, and the continuity of transportation subsidies for teachers and students. On July 2, unionized transport workers cut services by half in Managua to protest the government's elimination of transport subsidies. AFP reported that public employees from several ministries, and workers in metal, textile, beer and construction industries joined the strike. Hundreds of students demonstrated outside the Construction and Transportation Ministry, and about 1,500 students forced their way into the ministry courtyards and staged a sit-in. The students left peacefully about two hours later after Minister Jaime Icabalceta promised to allow high school and university students to continue riding public transportation free of charge. Last week, the ministry announced it was removing the transportation subsidy and ending free transportation for students. In addition to protesting the subsidy elimination and politically motivated dismissals of public employees, workers are demanding a monthly wage of at least \$200, job security, financing for industrial recovery, wage adjustments for police, and prompt government payments to construction companies facing bankruptcy. AP reported that the strike was "fizzling," with an estimated 1,000 workers in the mayor's office and Foreign Ministry participating in the strike on Monday. Lucio Jimenez, coordinator of the National Workers Front (FNT), told reporters that the "phased national strike" was a total success on Monday. The pro-Sandinista FNT organized the strike to pressure the government into accepting a 13-point economic plan delivered to officials last week. According to Jimenez, in the first phase of the strike about 40,000 public employees walked off the job. The FNT asserted that President Violeta Barrios de Chamorro's administration has already violated the terms of an agreement with public employee unions which followed a series of strike actions in May. After paralyzing the country for a week, the strike in May ended when the government promised a 100% pay hike to workers, and not to retaliate against strikers. Jose Angel Bermudez, secretary general of the National Employees' Union, said more than 800 government employees, most of them Sandinistas, have been fired out of "pure revenge." [Basic data from 06/30/90 report by Nicaragua Network (Washington, DC); AP, AFP, 07/02/90; Xinhua, 07/03/90]

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