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Nicaragua: Strike Ends, Negotiations Concluded

by Deborah Tyroler

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[See CAU 07/04/90, 07/06/90, 07/11/90 for previous coverage of strike.] July 11: In a press release issued early Wednesday, the National Workers Front (FNT) called on the government to resume negotiations, and requested that strikers "create conditions that will favor the start of negotiations." [On July 2, the strike degenerated into violence in Managua and other cities when government supporters or anti-Sandinistas, attempted to force strikers back to work and withdraw their demands. According to Notimex (07/12/90), former contras' leadership of armed anti-Sandinista groups in attacks against strikers were confirmed. By early Thursday morning, seven persons had died, and an estimated 100 injured in clashes between strikers and their opponents.] On Wednesday evening at a press conference, President Violeta Barrios de Chamorro requested that the National Workers Front (FNT) end the strike, remove its supporters from government buildings, and begin negotiations. The president was accompanied by army commander-in-chief, Gen. Humberto Ortega, and other cabinet members. July 12: Following eight hours of negotiations ending at dawn, FNT and government representatives announced a new agreement ending the strike. In many areas, groups of government supporters quickly formed human chains to dismantle the street barricades, and by mid-day, most government offices and state-run companies had been vacated by strikers. According to Notimex, activities in Managua were returning to normal on Thursday, although public transport was operating at only 20% capacity due to lack of fuel. Major points under the accord are summarized below: * 43% wage hike for public employees, and a further, unspecified, amount in August depending on the country's economic situation. * No reprisals are to be taken against workers who participated in the strike. * Restoration of public transportation subsidies for the benefit of students and workers and others who had them under the previous government. * About 800 public employees dismissed by the government will be compensated. * A tripartite commission made up of representatives from the government, employers and the FNT will draft a new minimum wage law. In particular, the FNT has insisted on establishment of a minimum wage scheduled based on the cordoba oro, Nicaragua's new currency to be introduced in the near future. * The government agreed to channel investment to state-run companies, especially in textile, construction, and metal-mechanical sectors. * Suspension of a presidential decree issued in early May that could return confiscated lands to previous owners, and thus, aimed at dissolution of agricultural cooperatives comprised of peasant beneficiaries. The decree would have temporarily returned lands confiscated by the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) government since 1979 and formally owned by the government to de facto control by previous owners via a "rental" contract. The rental arrangement would remain in force until the judiciary had rendered decisions on the prior owners' claims to retaking control of land titles. * National government jobs will be reclassified beginning in September. Jose Angel Bermudez, leader of the National Employees Union, a member organization of the FNT, said: "The government now recognizes the right...of the workers to participate in the country's economic policies, and to present their just demands." According to Bermudez, "The most important victory is keeping 665,000 ha. of cultivated lands in the hands of the workers." In statements to reporters, former presidential Daniel Ortega said Vice President Virgilio Godoy, with the support of extremists in the US, had attempted to organize a coup during the past 10 days of upheaval. On July 10, the Nicaraguan Opposition Unity (UNO) political

council announced the creation of a National Salvation Committee headed by Godoy. The purpose of the Committee was to "confront the delinquent and anti-democratic activities" of the FSLN. Committee member Gilberto Cuadra asserted that Chamorro's government had been isolated due to its lack of firmness in dealing with the strike. Cuadra heads the Superior Council of Private Enterprise (COSEP). On the same day, President Chamorro refused to recognize or lend legitimacy to the Committee or any other "extra-governmental [body] that intends to assume functions which are the exclusive competence of the government." According to Ortega, the emergence of armed groups attacking the strikers and the Committee headed by Godoy were part of preparations for a coup by UNO extremists and their ideological brethren in the United States. Ortega said both categories of extremists were "betting on an escalation in the conflict to levels approaching civil war, justifying the intervention of Yankee troops who were being mobilized to depart for Nicaragua." In the event of a coup, said Ortega, Godoy and "UNO extremist sectors" would substitute for Chamorro's government. Next, the former president asserted that in contrast to the behavior of the FSLN, the striking unions, and the armed forces who have no intention of fomenting a coup against the current government, nor any other elected government, Godoy has demonstrated "genuinely subversive, anti-patriotic and anti-popular" attitudes. According to Finance Minister Emilio Pereira, the government lost \$3 million per day result of the strike, for a total of about \$30 million. (Basic data from Notimex, AP, 07/11/90, 07/12/90; AFP, DPA, Xinhua, 07/12/90)

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