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Nicaragua: F.s.l.n. Announces Plans To Join Social Pact Talks After Government Suspends Further Budget Cutbacks

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Sept. 28, Presidency Minister Antonio Lacayo announced that the government will suspend layoffs of public employees, reduce utility bills for the poor, and provide food for 34 rural communities in northern Nicaragua affected by drought. The measures also include free milk for schoolchildren, temporary work and additional assistance for laid off public employees, and the creation of a commission to oversee land distribution. The announcement followed a Sept. 27 meeting with former president Daniel Ortega. Lacayo said the government will terminate further spending cuts until agreement is reached on the means to proceed with economic reforms. The National Workers Front (FNT), alongside the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), had announced a series of partial work stoppages, culminating in a nationwide strike on Oct. 1. (See CAU 09/26/90, 09/28/90 for previous coverage.) In a statement broadcast Sept. 29, Ortega said Lacayo's announcements were positive. He also asserted that it is not possible to halt inflation and simultaneously maintain a currency at parity with the US dollar. "No other Latin American nation has been able to do this even in more favorable conditions than prevail in Nicaragua," said Ortega. On Oct. 2 at a press conference in Managua, Ortega announced that labor and occupational organizations linked to the FSLN will participate in the government-sponsored talks to formulate consensus on economic policy ("concertacion"). Measures announced by Lacayo, said Ortega, "create an environment more propitious for concertacion." Ortega mentioned another meeting which took place on Sept. 28, arranged by UN delegate Francesco Vincenti. Participants included Ortega, Lacayo and US Ambassador Harry Shlaudeman. Next, Ortega said that Lacayo had informed him that the government had also decided to refrain from returning confiscated property to persons linked to the deposed Somocista dictatorship. In addition, the government will refrain from returning housing and small tracts of real estate (for home construction) to former owners that had been confiscated during the 10 years of Sandinista rule. The former president said the FSLN had agreed to create a commission to review his government's actions between the Feb. 25 elections, and the installation of President Violeta Barrios de Chamorro on April 25. Ortega said that if the commission determines that abuses occurred in the two-month period, "restitution" will be made. Government officials, and representatives of employer and labor organizations participated in the concertacion talks, initiated on Sept. 20. The talks are scheduled to resume Oct. 4. [On Sept. 30, at a meeting of private sector leaders in Masaya, Vice President Virgilio Godoy called on the government to prohibit the FNT's civic disobedience campaign. He said "only a few hours remain" to show the Sandinistas "we are capable of doing what we want to do." Godoy's speech was interrupted several times by supporters who shouted slogans calling for annihilation of the Sandinistas.] (Basic data from AP, 09/28/90; AFP, 09/30/90, 10/02/90)

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