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## **Costa Rica: Public Employees Protest Government Economic Policies**

*by Deborah Tyroler*

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June 19: Over 50,000 public employees commenced a two-day strike to protest government economic policies. The strikers were demanding a 25% wage hike, termination of public employee dismissals, price controls to reduce living costs, and participation in decision-making on proposed changes to the civil servant retirement system. The strike, organized by the Permanent Workers Council (CPT), included teachers, and workers employed in several government ministries, hospitals, mills, banks, and Costa Rica's oil refinery. President Rafael Angel Calderon asserted that he had no patience for public employees' complaints. He said, "The nation cannot continue paying for a government of the present size...The people will not tolerate more taxes..." Information Ministry spokesperson Guillermo Fernandez reiterated that the government cannot meet workers' demands due to lack of funds. As of mid-June, the government had offered public employees wage hikes ranging from 4 to 18%. Under an agreement with the International Monetary Fund, the Calderon administration is committed to dismissal of several thousand civil servants. July 1: In a TV and radio broadcast, President Calderon called on public employees to refuse to participate in a CPT- organized strike scheduled for the following day. July 2: Police tore down barricades obstructing traffic on major thoroughfares in San Jose. Hundreds of strikers and bystanders shouted insults and slogans at the police, but no violence was reported. According to the Agence France-Presse, most public employees stayed on the job. (Basic data from ACAN-EFE, 06/19/91; AFP, 07/02/91)

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