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Nicaragua: Update On Labor Conflicts

by Deborah Tyroler

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Oct. 16: About 90 workers at the Nicaragua Cigars plant in Esteli went on strike demanding higher wages, job security, and medical benefits. Oct. 24: In Granada, riot police used force to dislodge employees who had occupied the El Chamorro soap factory to protest dismissal of 10 colleagues. Interior Minister Carlos Hurtado asserted that the police action was justified because the demonstrators had thrown stones at plant administrators and placed explosives at the factory entrance. Oct. 29: The National Workers Front (FNT-Sandinista) submitted a complaint to the International Labor Organization charging the Chamorro government with violation of labor rights. According to FNT secretary general Lucio Jimenez, the Labor Ministry refused to grant recognition to a Sandinista affiliated union which was supported by 117 of 300 employees at the El Chamorro soap factory. Subsequently, Jimenez said, 54 employees were dismissed for their role in trying to organize the union. Over 5,000 employees of the German Pomares, Benjamin Zeledon, Javier Guerra, Victoria de Julio and San Antonio sugar mills launched a strike. The workers are demanding a minimum wage of US\$153 per month, ownership of 25% of company stock, and cancellation of plans to dismiss 1,500 sugar industry workers. In Managua, sugar industry workers occupied the National Sugar Commission headquarters (CONAZUCAR) demanding funds for equipment repair. Union leader Alberto Alvarez said the strike could seriously threaten the harvest, scheduled to begin in early November. Customs employees throughout the country threatened to strike. In Managua, Chinandega, Leon, Bluefields and other cities an estimated 1,250 court marshals, secretaries and guards employed by municipal courts launched an indefinite strike demanding a 33% pay hike and improved working conditions. The strikers said recent salary increases for judicial system employees were received by judges and magistrates only. Oct. 31: Supreme Court president Orlando Trejos said he is pushing for a release of funds from the Treasury Ministry in order to meet the demands of striking judicial system employees. Sugar industry workers ignored a government demand that they return to work. Union leaders said three of the five sugar mills where workers are currently on strike have been returned to former owners in a de facto fashion. The former proprietors are running mill operations through respective boards of directors. Dayton Caldera, president of the National Public Administration Corporation (CORNAP), said that CORNAP is studying mechanisms for privatization of the sugar industry and whether confiscated properties will be returned to former owners. He denied, however, assertions by union leaders that privatizations had already occurred. (Basic data from Central America Historical Institute (Georgetown University, Washington, DC) 10/17-23/91; AFP, 10/24/91, 10/29/91; ACAN-EFE, 10/29/91, 10/31/91)

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