

7-17-1992

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### Recommended Citation

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## **El Salvador: Summary Of Labor Conflicts & Related Events, July 9-14**

*by Deborah Tyroler*

*Category/Department: General*

*Published: Friday, July 17, 1992*

July 9: In a press release, the National Private Enterprise Association (ANEP) charged that the general strike planned for July 13 represented "a frank and shameful retreat from the peace accords," and would "bring about discontent and frustration." (See CAU, 07/03/92, for previous coverage of strike.) ANEP indicated a willingness to end its boycott of the social and economic "concertacion" forum, inaugurated May 11 as part of the peace accords, "so long as the forum is conducted within the framework of strict respect for the law." ANEP's participation in the forum was one of the demands issued by strikers. July 10: Communications Minister Ernesto Altschul told reporters that the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) was plotting to create disturbances during the general strike, including setting up road blocks, preventing public employees from entering their workplaces, interfering with air traffic, and suspending mail, running water and telephone services. Altschul indicated that the government, "although not normally in the business of repressing people," would not allow such disturbances to take place. In a communique, the FMLN condemned the government's "confrontational attitude" and "threats to use force." The Front described the strike as "timely, legitimate and a genuine effort to open the way for concertacion and defense of the peace process." July 11: In a paid advertisement published in local newspapers, the Intergremial, an umbrella group of trade union and professional organizations, said: "The underlying reasons for the war have not disappeared" but are being "aggravated by the government and the private sector, and as a result, the poor are becoming even poorer." The ad called for wage hikes, rejection of legislation for new sales taxes, and a freeze on public utility and transportation rates. In addition, Intergremial called for passage of the original version of a consumer protection law, which was unanimously approved in the National Assembly, and subsequently revised by President Alfredo Cristiani at the ANEP's request. July 12: During his weekly homily, San Salvador Auxiliary Bishop Gregorio Rosa Chavez called on trade unions to exercise "restraint and responsibility." The government was requested to abstain from any "act of repression or intolerance." Rosa Chavez said avoiding the strike altogether would have been preferable, but that the strike was understandable given that "more than half of the population is suffering from cruel and merciless poverty." July 13: Public sector employees began a two-day strike to demand higher wages and the participation of private sector representatives in the concertacion forum. Strikers blocked traffic in several areas of the capital. Intergremial spokespersons said workers from several coffee and sugar enterprises also joined the strike, and described the work stoppage as "a total success." They also accused authorities of "militarizing" certain workplaces and of using a variety of mechanisms to intimidate workers. Communications Secretary Ernesto Altschul asserted that 99% of the country's 100,000 public employees had reported for work. Labor Minister Mauricio Gonzales said the strike was "illegal and totally unconstitutional." Trade union leader Humberto Centeno said workers, government officials, and members of the Peace Commission (COPAZ) met on July 11 and 12, but were unable to reach agreements that would have headed off the strike. However, he added, meeting participants agreed to create a "mixed commission" of trade union and government representatives to seek solutions to future labor disputes. In a

communiqué, COPAZ called on all sides in the conflict to "seek channels of understanding," and asserted that the "concertación" forum is the "ideal mechanism" for the resolution of such disputes. COPAZ members said they would lobby in favor of private sector participation in the forum. July 14: Trade union leaders announced conclusion of the strike. Centeno said objectives of the strike had been achieved as the government was forced to take a "more sensitive" stance regarding trade union concerns and the need to resolve the country's social and economic problems through negotiation. Centeno also announced that the government had agreed to seek a commitment from the private sector to end its boycott of the concertación forum. According to Centeno, the government's "intimidation campaign," which included occupation of many workplaces by National Police officers, led many workers to refrain from participating in the strike. Presidency Minister Oscar Santamaria, who described the strike as a "failure," announced that the government had agreed to begin wage negotiations with trade unions on July 15. (Sources: Agencia Centroamericana de Noticias-Spanish news service EFE, 07/09/92, 07/10/92, 07/13/92, 07/14/92; Agence France-Presse, 07/11-14/92)

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