

Chilean Port Workers Strike over Labor Reform Bill



Santiago de Chile, June 20 (teleSUR-RHC)-- Chilean port workers have completed a 24 hour strike in industrial ports across the country. Workers belonging to the Ports Union (UP) are challenging a labor reform bill that is currently awaiting approval by the Chilean senate.

"We are the most affected by such measures, but we are left with no choice since the government has shown very little interest in dialogue with regards to the new labor reform, which is currently being reviewed by congress," Union leader Julio Castillo said about Thursday's strikes.

Chilean port workers are demanding modifications to the newly proposed labor legislation including clarification on a clause that would allow the termination of striking workers whom pose an alleged threat to damaging infrastructure, the environment, or health services.

Meanwhile, Chilean government claims that the bill would forbid companies from replacing striking workers, as well as raising unemployment insurance benefits, along with other possible changes to how often collective contract negotiations are carried out.

The legislative measure seeks to bring Chilean legislation in line with international labor laws and to overhaul negotiating mechanisms, as the current legislative framework – which dates back to the Pinochet dictatorship – places strict limits on collective bargaining rights and on union activities. According

to the Chilean Office of Labor, only 12 percent of workers are unionized, placing Chile well below the OECD average of nearly 30 percent.

The port strikes coincides with ongoing protests by students and teachers against the education reform bill. Teachers have been on strike since June 1.

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