

What the 24-Hour General Strike in Nicaragua Demonstrated

Havana Times, May 25, 2019

The threats of the regime failed: many schools and businesses closed, and most consumers stayed home.



Even in peak hours, the streets of Managua and the main cities of the country, offices and shopping centers looked visibly empty. Photo: Carlos Herrera.

“Considering that it was called from one day to the next, it was a remarkable success,” said Carlos Tunnermann, Ph.D.

By Ivan Olivares / Maynor Salazar (Confidencial)

HAVANA TIMES – The fourth one-day national strike against the dictatorship of Daniel Ortega called by the Civic Alliance for Justice and Democracy (AJCD)—a business, citizens and consumers strike—emptied the streets of Nicaragua on Thursday, May 23.

Most of the medium and larger companies, the main malls and commercial centers, and a variety of businesses and industries, remained closed in demand of the total freedom of all political prisoners and respect for the constitutional freedoms violated by Ortega.

Even at peak hours, the streets of Managua and the main cities of the country, the offices and shopping centers, we visibly empty, while the companies that did open and the stands at markets, saw a sharp decline of consumers.

Only governmental activity and public entities maintained their regular operations.

Despite the threats of the regime against the companies, the strike had the support of at least 80%, according to opinions of the members the Civic Alliance interviewed by Confidential.

Another defeat for the dictatorship

“This is a victory for the Nicaraguan people, and a defeat for the government,” said the scholar Carlos Tunnermann Bernheim, member of the Alliance negotiating team, explaining that it would not be possible to have a collective appreciation of the group because they decided not to meet on Thursday (because it implied going out on the street, and somehow violate the strike itself), although their telephone inquiries showed them that there was “a broad response.”

Although he was reluctant to use numbers to rate the success of the citizens’ response, the former diplomat also assessed that the response could have exceeded 80%, which he found to be “a remarkable success,” especially considering that “it was called from one day to the next.”

The private sector also confirmed the success of the call.



View of a normally busy avenue during the national strike called by the Civic Alliance, on May 23. Photo: EFE

Sergio Maltez, President of the Chamber of Industries of Nicaragua (Cadin), told Confidential that their monitoring system—carried out fundamentally through the

fourteen guilds that make up the Chamber—indicated that between 90 to 95% of the industries and their administrative offices remained closed.

In the case of industrial plants, a closure of 75 to 85% was estimated, both in Managua as in the departments, and for those that did operate, they did so because they yielded to the threats of the regime, or simply because it was impossible to close, “but they operated at a minimum expression.”

Although all recognize that the threats to withdraw licenses and cancel concessions; the auditing warnings of the Labor Ministry, the Social Security Institute or the General Directorate for Revenues, or the reminder that the law grants the State the possibility of fining the companies, stopped some of them. However, in the end the strike was successful, because that is what the citizens decided.

Three complementary strikes

According to Alliance spokespersons, at least three types of strikes coincided, beginning in the morning with the least media-showy of the three: “the school strike,” as Chamorro called it.



Traffic was thin in Managua during Thursday’s general strike called by the Civic Alliance. Photo: Carlos Herrera / Confidencial

From the day before the strike, social networks were filled with copies of circulars with which various schools and institutes informed parents that they were closing operations for a day. A list of Daniel Ortega’s supporters asked for reprisals against businesses that joined the strike, including at least seven private schools in the capital.

The other two strikes, of which most of the 80% mentioned by Tunnermann come from, was the business strike and the citizens' strike by consumers, which complemented each other, although the latter ended by conditioning the former in cases in which companies succumbed to blackmail.

"The business strike was effectively combined with the consumers' strike for the businesses that opened. Almost no private school opened," summarized Maltez.

"The most notable thing was the low circulation of people. There was bus and truck traffic, but very few people in the streets doing shopping or transactions, so those who did not close, had almost no customers. The decision of the people, added to the business strike, was the perfect combination to achieve these levels of success," said Juan Sebastian Chamorro, of the Civic Alliance.

"Those who opened did not receive customers, or had minimal presence (of users or clients), so they saw that it was better for them to close. This happened even in banking," detailed Tunnermann, while Maltez noted that "even if they force businesses to open their doors, the population has the last word."

"This shows that this government, with what it did last weekend, repressing and killing, is losing the battle, and is running out of international support, because the international community sees that there is a genuine rejection of the people against the regime," added the business leader.

Strategy of fear failed

When listing the pressures exerted by the regime against the companies, Tunnermann cited how the banks received an explicit note from the Superintendence of Banks, in which they were reminded that they could revoke their authorization to operate or impose fines of \$500 to 50,000 dollars.

"That led them to publish that they had received it, to justify that they had to open, but what they saw was a small or paltry assistance from clients," he said.

He recalled that the Government also made use of the fiscal threat, to order tax audits, to impose more obstacles in Customs to merchandise of the companies entering the county..." The Government used all the tools at its disposal so that companies would not close, but many closed anyway," he said mentioning the videos that show banks, markets and supermarkets empty.

The national strike extended to the main department capitals and municipalities of the country, such as Leon, Chinandega, Chichigalpa and El Viejo, in the West. In the East and South, Granada, Jinotepe and Rivas joined. Matagalpa, Jinotega and Ocotol in the north of the country. Juigalpa, Boaco and Camoapa in the central region. Nueva Guinea, in the South Caribbean Autonomous Region. And the municipalities of Ciudad Sandino and Tipitapa in the department of Managua.

Juan Sebastian Chamorro said the attitude of the government threatening to remove licenses or concessions, or by trying to force companies not to join the strike, "showed weakness."

“The Government isolates itself more and more every day, and the more it presses, the less it has results. The result of this strike was to show the unity of the people,” Maltez concluded.