

The Brunswickian International

National strike paralyzes Argentina

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (AP) - Millions of workers stayed off their jobs Friday in the largest national strike in years as a union-led protest against government belt-tightening measures virtually paralyzed Argentina.

Deadly violence erupted when a motorcyclist, angry at being blocked from crossing a bridge, shot dead a striker and wounded another in northeastern Chaco province as the 36-hour stoppage by the country's three most powerful unions claimed its first victim.

During the second day of the strike, protesters blocked roads and highways across Argentina with flaming tires. The strike forced schools and businesses to shut down, and transportation, energy and banking services were all closed.

The strike even hit Argentina's national passion — causing the postponement of soccer matches.

In Neuquen, 640 miles southwest of Buenos Aires, 15 youths looted a supermarket and injured a policeman who tried to arrest them, police said.

The Interior Ministry reported 34 arrests in strike-related incidents across the country.

The strike was a response to President Fernando De la Rúa's call for more economic austerity for a recession-bound nation where the unemployment rate tops 15 percent. It is the third and largest strike during his year-old presidency.

The strike was called 10 days ago, after De la Rúa announced a five-year public spending freeze, an increase in the retirement age and changes to the pension system.

The new sacrifices came on top of an earlier

austerity campaign that raised taxes, lowered salaries for state workers and reformed labor laws.

The measures are backed by international lenders who say they are needed if Argentina is to receive billions of dollars worth of fresh loans.

The protest began Thursday, when thousands of workers poured out of offices and factories, and union stalwarts blocked roads, beating drums and sending bottle rockets screeching overhead.

The strike climaxed Friday with the country's biggest union joined the strike, sending workers from hospitals, trains, gas stations, banks and garbage collection services onto the streets.

Despite the death and arrests, the government said it was satisfied the strike was mostly peaceful.

A heavy police presence across Argentina's 24 provinces discouraged violence.

Several union groups refused to comply with a government order that they provide "minimum services" during the strike.

In Buenos Aires province, bus services dropped well below the demanded 50 percent, with many drivers supporting the strike and others reluctant to incur the wrath of colleagues by working.

On Friday, De la Rúa took aim at the strikers, saying the stoppage had been "rejected and repudiated by the people."

Strike leaders, however, hailed the stoppage as a success that had the near unanimous support of workers.



Unemployed Argentines, holding a sign saying "Bread and Jobs," block a main highway leading into Buenos Aires during a workers' demonstration at the beginning of a 36-hour national strike, November 23, 2000.

From his Tokyo hotel room Fujimori won't rule out comeback

TOKYO (AP) - Alberto Fujimori had a busy, but hardly unusual, schedule the last time he left Peru: fly to Brunei for an economic summit, then a brief stopover in Tokyo on his way to Panama.

But that plan took a sudden twist in Japan. Instead of leaving, he holed up in a Tokyo hotel, claiming to have a bad cold. Days later, he announced his resignation as president of Peru. He is now the guest of one of Japan's best-known novelists. And though he says he expects to be in Japan for an extended stay, he has not ruled out returning to Peru someday.

Ousted Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori refused on Monday to rule out a political comeback.

"I don't know exactly what will be my political future," he said Monday.

Despite the conspiracy theories back home, Fujimori said his decision to relinquish the presidency and make an extended stay in his ancestral homeland came on the spur of the moment.

"I made the decision in Japan, all of a sudden," he said.

Fujimori was vague about why, saying only that he received "additional reports" from Peru that encouraged him to stay put. The shamed Peruvian President, Alberto Fujimori, has spoken publicly on Sunday.

Whatever the reasons, the move has made Fujimori Japan's most closely watched — and enigmatic — national house guest. Questions surround the

former autocrat, who arrived in Japan on Nov. 17. Speculation is rampant that he may attempt to take Japanese citizenship if he does not, as some say, have it already — to avoid returning to face any legal problems in Peru.

Fujimori said he was registered with the Japanese consulate in Peru when he was born, but the Japanese Foreign Ministry says it is unclear whether that entitles him to Japanese citizenship.

Then there is the question of whether he would ever try to make a comeback in Lima. He said Monday he is "reconsidering" a bid for the Peruvian Congress.

An eventual return to public life is not out of the question, he said. "We cannot say that this is the end of an era," Fujimori said. "I think that the so-called 'Fujimori-ism' will continue in some way or another." But a triumphant return to Peru is unlikely any time soon.

The Peruvian Congress ignored Fujimori's resignation and dismissed him last week instead, declaring him morally unfit to govern. A special prosecutor is planning to investigate him for possible money laundering, corruption of public officials and illicit enrichment.

Fujimori, who spent 10 years in office, blamed his former master spy, Vladimiro Montesinos, for his current political problems and the corruption allegations. He said his conscience was "tranquil and clean."

How would he like to be remembered? "As a decisive president who took actions in favor of the people of Peru," he said. "As a president who took the bull by the horns."

Sudan ex-leader back from exile

KHARTOUM, Sudan (AP) - Some 100,000 supporters of former prime minister and opposition leader Sadiq el-Mahdi filled the streets leading to Khartoum's airport Thursday to welcome back their leader after nearly four years in exile.

El-Mahdi's elected government was toppled in 1989 by a military coup led by current President Omar el-Bashir. He was jailed and then kept under virtual house arrest in Khartoum. In December 1996, he fled to neighboring Eritrea and then on to Egypt. He arrived in Sudan from Egypt.

"I will work hand in hand with the concerned parties to bring peace and stability to the country," el-Mahdi, leader of the opposition Umma Party, told state-run Khartoum television after his arrival.

El-Mahdi, who traveled with about 40 party leaders some of whom had spent 10 years in exile, thanked the government of el-Bashir and the people who flocked to welcome him.

Before his departure from Cairo, el-Mahdi told reporters that his return was not bound by any conditions.

"There is a reciprocal readiness for dialogue to activate the comprehensive political solution for Sudan," he said.

"Opposition from abroad has come to an end. We are heading toward a new chapter,"

said el-Mahdi, dressed in the traditional Sudanese long white robe and white turban.

He reiterated his objection to next month's presidential and parliamentary elections, saying, "We will take part in other coming elections." Most of Sudan's opposition parties are boycotting the elections they say will be illegitimate.

The Oxford-educated el-Mahdi is a veteran politician experienced in fighting the military regimes that have ruled Sudan for most of the 44 years since independence from Anglo-Egyptian rule in 1956. His return comes after Umma, one of Sudan's strongest opposition parties, dealt a blow to the Sudanese opposition when it broke last year with the National Democratic Alliance, an umbrella of southern rebels and northern opposition groups.

Umma says it disagreed with the alliance's strategy. While other opposition parties demand el-Bashir's removal, el-Mahdi believes in making use of the limited freedom in Sudan to work for democracy.

The main power in the alliance, the Sudan People's Liberation Army, has been fighting since 1983 for increased autonomy for southern Sudan's predominantly animist and Christian people, who feel dominated by the Muslim north. About 2 million people have died in the fighting and resulting famines.

Neo-Nazi march in Germany

BERLIN (AP) - A far-right march in Berlin sparked violent confrontations Saturday with counter-demonstrators who were kept away by police using water cannon and truncheons.

About 1,400 extreme rightists converged on the capital to protest government plans to outlaw the far-right National Democratic Party, known by the German acronym NPD. Marchers carried German flags and one hoisted a sign reading "Germans, defend yourself," an echo of Nazi hate propaganda against German Jews before the Holocaust.

Police in riot gear escorted the marchers on their route to central Alexanderplatz square, where leftist protesters blocked their way and showered them with taunts, rocks and bottles. Officers broke up the march and put participants on trains out of the city. Three far-right activists were arrested.

Some 3,000 people turned out for anti-racism rallies near the march route, including one at Berlin's red-brick city hall, backed by government politicians, labor unions and the capital's Jewish community.

Protesters carried greens balloons emblazoned with "No to neo-Nazis" and

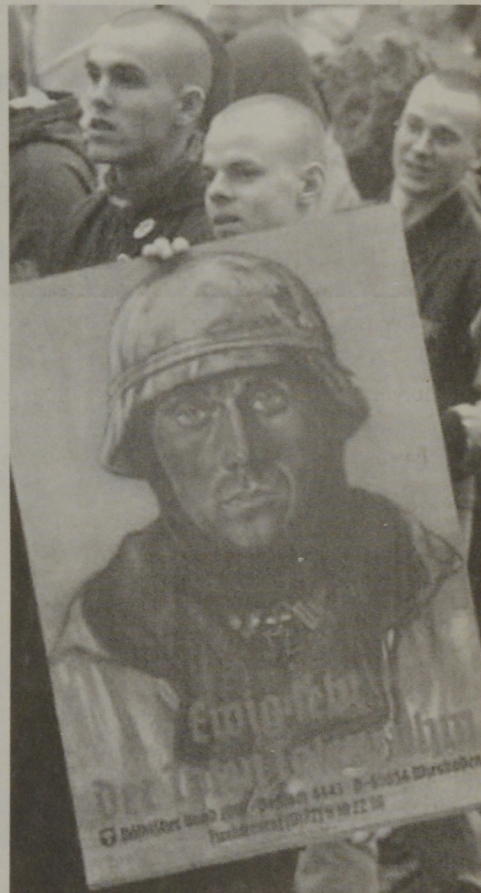
a sign saying "I want to live in a country where Jews don't need to have fear."

The far-right protesters had originally planned to march through the Brandenburg Gate, once used for processions by Nazi soldiers, but organizers changed the route under pressure from city officials.

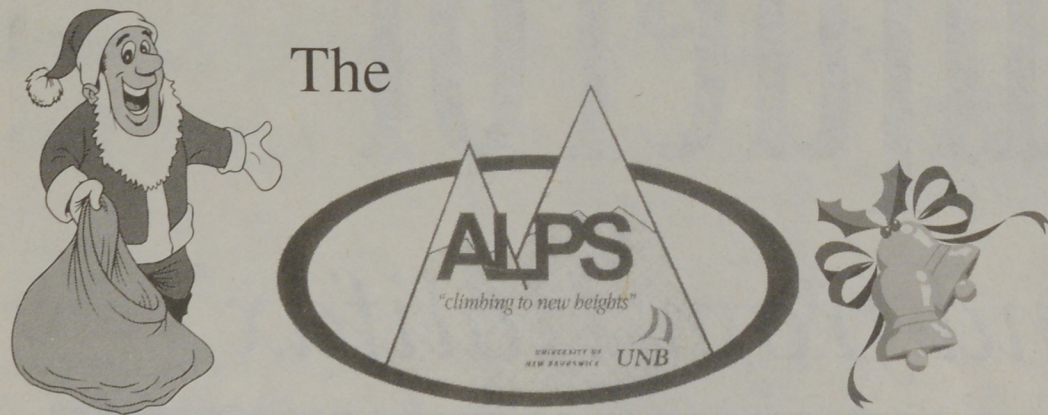
About 3,600 police were on duty in anticipation of clashes at the second far-right march in Berlin this month. Police sealed a central thoroughfare close to one of the capital's main shopping streets for several hours.

Calls to bar protests at the Brandenburg Gate and other far-right rallying points have grown since about 500 NPD supporters marched through the gate last January, arousing international outrage.

Faced with surging neo-Nazi violence, German politicians and Jewish leaders have been debating for months on how to combat attacks on foreigners and other minorities. Neo-Nazis have been blamed for at least three deaths this year, including the fatal beating of a Mozambican immigrant in June.



A neo-Nazi carries a placard showing a German Wehrmacht soldier of World War II through the streets of Berlin during a protest of nearly 2,000 neo-Nazis November 25, 2000.



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