
Bolivian President stages hunger strike for economic reform, 1984

- [included innovative organizational forms/communication forms](#) [1]

Timing

25 October

1984

to:

29 October

1984

Location and Goals

Country:

Bolivia

Location City/State/Province:

La Paz

[View Location on Map](#)

Goals:

To gain support for and implement an economic stabilization package to combat the Bolivian economic crisis during a political impasse in Congress

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)

Methods in 4th segment:

- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)

Methods in 5th segment:

- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)

Methods in 6th segment:

- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)

Segment Length:

Approximately 1 day

Classifications

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Democracy

Economic Justice

Group characterization:

- President

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Bolivian President Hernán Siles Zuazo

Partners:

Not known

External allies:

Not known

Involvement of social elites:

Roman Catholic Bishops

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

- Roman Catholic Bishops

Segment Length:

Approximately 1 day

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Opposition in Congress (shifts over time, but primarily the Historical Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNRH) and the Nationalist Democratic Action party (ADN)), labor unions and business associations

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Labor unions and business associations stage nationwide general strikes against unsolved economic conditions

in Bolivia

Campaigner violence:

Not known

Repressive Violence:

Not known

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

0 points out of 6 points

Survival:

0 points out of 1 point

Growth:

0 points out of 3 points

Total points:

0 out of 10 points

Notes on outcomes:

President Siles's method to use hunger strikes to galvanize support for reform succeeded in 1956 but failed in 1984, because by then the President had completely lost the support of all sectors of society. In 1954 the President's hunger strike mobilized supporters to back his economic plan, but in 1984, Bolivians, willing to accept an economic stabilization plan from future President Victor Paz Estenssoro, no longer had confidence in President Siles.

After a two year stalemate following the 1979 and 1980 elections, the Bolivian parliament elected the winner of the 1980 popular vote, Hernán Siles Zuazo, president on 10 October, 1982. The Siles administration was composed of a broad coalition of leftist parties known as the Popular Democratic Union (UDP), consisting of the Bolivian Communist Party, the Left Nationalist Revolutionary Movement, the Revolutionary Left Movement, and the Christian Democratic Party, as well as the support of three of the most powerful labor unions in Bolivia, the Central Workers Union, the Associated Miners' Union, and the Confederation of Peasant Workers of Bolivia. The new Siles administration still held a congressional minority, however, holding 36 percent of the seats. The opposition, comprised of the Historical Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNRH) and the Nationalist Democratic Action party (ADN), frequently blocked the administration's initiatives. Congress refused Siles the right to appoint his own cabinet ministers by removing ministers through Senate censure, repeatedly called for Siles's impeachment, and undermined the executive authority.

From 1982 to 1985, Bolivia faced a severe economic crisis: hyperinflation, mass unemployment, and general strikes. As persistent political opposition prevented the Siles Administration from tackling the crisis, Siles governed by decree to push legislation forward to stymie economic turmoil. He promised to resolve the crisis within 100 days of assuming power by implementing austerity measures, but each of the eight economic stabilization packages presented by the Siles administration were struck down when large-scale labor protests forced the government to step back. At first Siles attempted to reason with and appease the protesters by announcing a 40 percent tax reduction, 30 percent rise in mine workers' salaries, and price controls on basic necessities, but protests continued. The administration's refusal to suppress labor protests forced business leaders and associations to stage counter-protests, further damaging the Bolivian economy.

On 30 June, Siles was kidnapped as part of a failed coup d'état orchestrated by General Cayoja and two of Siles's former cabinet members. This was followed by an increased effort in Congress to remove the president "constitutionally." In September, 1984, ADN senator Heberto Castedo outlined to Congress three paths to

removing the president: voluntary resignation, early elections, and impeachment. The opposition attempted to impeach him with evidence that Siles had links to the drug trade, and threatened to start a Malfeasance Trial against him, but the Bolivian Supreme Court ruled on 20 September that the motion was without merit.

In order to galvanize the public to adopt his economic stabilization measures, end strikes, and shake the Congress to action, President Siles announced his intention on national television to go on a hunger strike to “restore a climate of peace and reflection by all Bolivians” on 25 October. Siles had used the method before, successfully as President in 1956 to galvanize support for necessary stabilization measures (see [Bolivian president hunger strikes to preserve economic policies, 1956](#) [2]), and unsuccessfully to protest a congressional decision he thought unconstitutional during the 1979 election stalemate. However over five days Siles’ physical condition worsened with no end to labor strikes or congressional opposition in sight. On 29 October, he announced that he had succeeded in his goals and accepted an offer by Bolivia’s Roman Catholic Bishops from the Bolivian Episcopal Conference and the Catholic Church to arrange a dialogue with the opposition in Congress on the condition that the President end his hunger strike and that opposition groups cease their political action.

On 14 November 1984, the Catholic Church organized another meeting between all the major political parties and labor organizations. During this time most sectors called for Siles’s resignation, including MNRH senator Jaime Arellano Castañeda, who indicated that in fact, according to the constitution, the August 1980 Congress had concluded its four-year mandate on 6 August, 1984, and new elections needed to be called immediately. Siles accepted the decision to shorten his mandate and, on 24 November, a majority of Congress agreed to hold early elections by July 1985. President Hernán Siles Zuazo was unseated from the presidency on 14 July, 1985 and an economic stabilization plan was only implemented by his successor to presidency and former legislative opponent, Victor Paz Estenssoro of the MNRH.

Research Notes

Sources:

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Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Susana Medeiros, 19/11/2012

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