



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

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## Peru workers use general strike to gain 8-hour work day, 1919

15 December

1918

to: 15 January

1919

**Country:** Peru

**Location City/State/Province:** *Cities throughout Peru, with negotiations and planning taking place in Lima*

**Location Description:** *cities involved: Huacho, Callao, Cuzco, Trujillo, Arequipa, Casapalca*

**Goals:**

To have a legally enforced eight-hour workday for all workers, and, in the case of the textile workers, a 30-50% wage increase.

### Methods

**Methods in 1st segment:**

- 098. Quickie walkout (lightning strike)
- 105. Establishment strike

**Methods in 2nd segment:**

- 105. Establishment strike
- 106. Industry strike

**Methods in 3rd segment:**

- 106. Industry strike

**Methods in 4th segment:**

- 106. Industry strike

**Methods in 5th segment:**

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions › *Asemblea de Sociedades Unidas declares support for the strike movement .*
- 106. Industry strike

**Methods in 6th segment:**

- 016. Picketing
- 117. General strike

## Classifications

**Classification:**

Change

**Cluster:**

Economic Justice

**Group characterization:**

- Peruvian workers

## Leaders, partners, allies, elites

**Leaders:**

Victor Raul Haya de la Torre, the Comite Pro-Paro General

**Partners:**

Students Federation, unions of Lima workers: bakers, leather workers, longshoremen, trolley car workers, millers, shoemakers, and construction workers, unions in other cities including: Cuzco, Trujillo, Arequipa, Huacho.

**External allies:**

Asamblea de Sociedades Unidas, newspaper El Tiempo

**Involvement of social elites:**

Not known

## Joining/exiting order of social groups

**Groups in 1st Segment:**

**Groups in 2nd Segment:**

**Groups in 3rd Segment:**

- Student's Federation

**Groups in 4th Segment:**

- Comite Pro-Paro General

**Groups in 5th Segment:**

- Asamblea de Sociedades Unidas

**Groups in 6th Segment:**

**Segment Length:** *Approximately 5 days*

## Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

**Opponents:**

Factory owners, police

**Nonviolent responses of opponent:**

Not known

**Campaigner violence:**

Not known

**Repressive Violence:**

Some police force during the first day and night of the general strike (Jan. 13, 1919)

## Success Outcome

**Success in achieving specific demands/goals:**

2 points out of 6 points

**Survival:**

1 point out of 1 points

**Growth:**

3 points out of 3 points

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Male textile factory workers at El Inca factory in Lima, Peru walked off the job in December of 1918 to protest the effects of a law that enacted an eight-hour workday requirement for women and children. The law was intended to protect the rights of children and particularly women laborers, but instead dissolved the set-up within the factories, slowing production and preventing the remaining male workers from meeting their quotas. The male workers did not want to withdraw support from a law that benefited their female co-workers, so after the first spontaneous walkouts, the workers decided that the legally required eight-hour workday needed to be extended to all workers.

After a few days of deliberation, on December 16, 1918, the workers sent their demands that “both satisfied the male textile operatives' concrete need to protect their incomes, and fit the broader agenda of their anarchist leaders” to the factory owners. The men asked for an eight-hour day for all workers and a 30 to 50% increase in wages to account for the shorter workday. The factory owners framed these demands as unreasonable by obscuring the reason for the wage increase and workday regulation, which the workers called for to maintain their living wage. The owners made public statements accusing the workers of asking for disproportionate benefits. Thus the public was unsympathetic to the workers’ demands.

Workers at Vitarte and El Inca factories in Lima called for strikes to achieve eight-hour days on December 20, 1918. Workers at other factories also began to strike throughout the next weeks. In the next ten days, textile workers from La Victoria, La Union, and El Progreso factories struck for eight-hour days and workers organized a general committee to regulate the strikes. Members of the Federacion de Obreros Panaderos “Estrella del Peru” struck on December 30. A delegation of agricultural workers from Huacho came to Lima to show solidarity with the strikes.

The strike committee appealed to the Students Federation for support, asking to use their headquarters as a meeting space and inviting students to be delegates on the committee. The Federation’s president, Felipe Chueca, promised that the students would give their full support to the strikers. On January 6, the strike committee was renamed the Comité Pro-Paro General (Committee for a General Strike). Three students, Victor Raul Haya de la Torre, B. Bueno, and V. Quesada, joined the strike committee as delegates and sat in on the first meeting held in the headquarters on January 7, 1919. Workers from various disciplines attended the meeting, including bakers, leather workers, millers, shoemakers, and more.

The committee sent out letters to other unions, entreating them to join the strike, which workers in many cities did. Members of the Asamblea de Sociedades Unidas passed a resolution supporting the strike on January 10. The police shut down the Student Federation building on January 12, so the Comité Pro-Paro General met in secret in a mutual aid society building. At this meeting, the members of the committee declared a 48-hour general strike, to begin the next day.

On January 13, workers arrived at their respective workplaces and found “well-organized militants” outside, urging them to

strike. People also picketed the main commercial center of Lima, encouraging businesses to shut down and join the strike. Lima was effectively shut down on the first day of the strike.

Workers continued their strike through January 15, when Manuel A. Vinelli, the federal minister of development, met with the Comité Pro-Paro General and its “student allies” and was convinced to support the demands for the 8-hour work day. He then convinced the president, José Pardo, to issue a decree instating this policy for all of Peru. The members of the Comité Pro-Paro General called off the strike in response.

The workers were successful overall: they organized and struck to demand an 8-hour work day for all workers. However, wage increases were not gained universally and was left to be determined by further consideration in the Peruvian Congress.

## Research Notes

### Influences:

This campaign's outcome was influenced by the sensationalist media coverage of strikes by Argentinian workers and the ensuing violence in Buenos Aires. President Pardo and many other Peruvian elites were afraid of the same thing happening in Lima and so were more responsive to the strikers' demands. (1)

### Sources:

Alexander, Robert J. (Robert Jackson), and Eldon M Parker. *A History of Organized Labor in Peru and Ecuador*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2007.

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Parker, D. S. (1995). Peruvian politics and the eight-hour day: Rethinking the 1919 general strike. *Canadian Journal of History*, 30(3), 417-438. Accessed through Proquest.

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

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