

Chilean government rejects bill to reduce labor week to 40 hours



Santiago de Chile, September 18 (RHC)-- Chilean Finance Minister Felipe Larrain has called legislation presented by Leftist lawmaker Camila Vallejo to reduce the weekly work hours from 45 to 40 hours "a bad initiative."

"It is a bad project because it will mean a reduction in the salaries of Chileans and a significant reduction in employment," Larrain said, adding that "this project is unconstitutional."

Nevertheless, he did not mention when President Sebastian Piñera administration's will present its own project to cut the working time to 41 hours per week. "The proposal will be entered when appropriate," the Finance Minister said regarding a possible project which would also seek to introduce mechanisms of labor flexibility.

According to a recent poll, however, 71 percent of Chileans agree with the reduction in working hours and 60 percent disagree with a possible presidential veto.

On March 8, 2017, the Communist Party lawmaker Vallejo presented a bill to reduce the current 45-hour labor week so as to allow workers more free time to spend with their families. Since then, right-wing politicians have been campaigning to discredit Vallejos' bill by generating fears about its possible effects on the domestic labor market.

Big companies have also been issuing alarmist messages to convince Chileans that reducing working hours would increase production costs and unemployment. "I don't think it will cause an increase in unemployment," the University of Santo Tomas' Law School director, Rodrigo Ruiz told BBC, recalling that Chilean elites deployed similar arguments in 2003, when his country reduced labour time from 48 to 45 hours per week.

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