

Chilean president revokes Santiago subway fare hike, curfew and state of emergency remain in effect



Santiago de Chile, October 19 (RHC)-- Chilean President Sebastian Piñera has announced that the Santiago subway fare increase that went into effect last Monday has been revoked after a week of tense protests by students and subway users against the price hike.

During a special announcement Saturday afternoon, President Piñera said that the subway price hike, issued by decree, has been eliminated, but that a law for the same issue will "soon be approved" by lawmakers.

The trigger for the protests was the 30 peso increase in the price of the subway tickets to 830 pesos, or \$1.20 U\$D at rush hour. Outrage around the second price hike this year was amplified when the Minister of Economy Juan Andres Fontaine said that passengers should get up early to take advantage of the lower fare in effect between 6:00 a.m. and 7:00 a.m.

The president also announced Saturday that he will meet on Sunday with the presidents of Chile's Chamber of Commerce, Senate and Supreme Court "to hear their proposals" regarding the matter, and "within a week with civil society organizations to come up with ideas and resolutions."

This week's mobilizations ramped up Friday when subway users jumped the ticket turnstiles, refusing to pay any fare in protest of the price hikes, calling it a "mass evasion" demonstration.

The National Police, meanwhile, used tear gas inside stations, in some subway cars and on the street against the demonstrators, the majority of whom are students. They say security forces are using excessive force and rubber bullets against them.

Metro Santiago is a private company in which the Chilean state participates. Chile has the most expensive public transportation rates in Latin America.

The subway fare protests also reflect overall public resentment against right-wing President Piñera and his administration that announced last March it was setting out to cut government expenditures by as much as \$500 million over four years. A survey released October 7th by Cadem Chile revealed that 53 percent of Chileans disapprove of Piñera's management of the government and 73 percent believe that the country's economy is stagnant or falling.

While announcing the elimination of the subway price hike, Piñera said that those who have vandalized parts of the Santiago subway system will be punished under the National Security Law, which will allow authorities to inflict harsher penalties on those found guilty of vandalism during protests.

The military says it will begin a 10:00 p.m. curfew in the Santiago neighborhoods of Santiago, Maipo, Central Station and Puente Alto beginning Saturday.

The state of emergency and militarization of the provinces of Santiago and Chacabuco announced late Friday night by the president remain in effect.

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