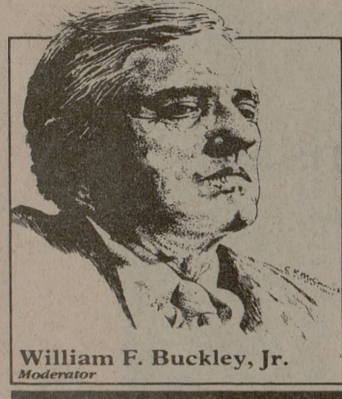


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Nationwide strike falters Panamanian stores open

PANAMA CITY, Panama (AP) — Supermarkets, pharmacies and small shops opened for the first time in 10 days Wednesday as a nationwide strike aimed at toppling Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega began to fall apart.

Despite the defections, Alberto Boyd, president of the National Council of Private Enterprise, said he and other strike leaders were not ending their effort to get rid of Noriega.

In Washington, the Reagan administration said it was considering new sanctions to force out Noriega, but it appeared no action was imminent.

The reopening of the capital's Gago, Rey and Super 99 supermarkets signaled the first crack in a work stoppage that closed an estimated 90 percent of the nation's business and industry.

Later, the city's leading pharmacies reopened, as did some small clothing and other dry goods stores in the central business district.

Traffic, extremely light for days, began to build again on Panama City's streets, with the usual jams of buses, taxis and private autos developing at major intersections.

Grocery stores were doing a brisk

but not extraordinarily heavy business. Customers were required to pay in cash and appeared to be buying mostly essentials.

The government said some of the nation's banks, closed since March 3, would reopen Thursday, but only to process old checks.

Even with a limited reopening of banks and some stores, there appeared to be no hope of a quick infusion of cash that would permit a return to normal commerce in the money-short nation.

Owners of the reopened grocery stores could not be reached for comment, but Angelica Guinard, a leader of the opposition National Civic Crusade leader, said they had been under strong government pressure to reopen.

She said the pressure included threats of confiscation of their goods and personal threats against themselves and their families.

However, an executive of the Gago supermarket chain, the city's largest, said his company's stores opened "because we have to pay our employees, and if we didn't open, we wouldn't have anything to do it with."

He spoke on condition of anonymity.

Panama's cash shortage was last month when Noriega fired Gen. Eric Arturo Delvalle, who eventually forced their closure.

The United States aggravated the crisis by imposing a number of economic sanctions, including the freezing of millions of dollars in Panamanian government funds held in U.S. banks.

The Reagan administration continues to recognize Delvalle, in hiding, as Panama's president.

White House spokesman Fitzwater told reporters in Washington on Wednesday that "efforts are being actively considered to force Noriega's ouster."

Sen. Alfonse M. D'Amato said Noriega's troops have been beaten and Panama Canal employees. "There is a continuing process of escalation" in Panamanian actions against the canal, he said in an interview on ABC-TV's "Good Morning America." He did not elaborate.

On Tuesday, Noriega confirmed the presence of the U.S. carrier carrier Okinawa on the Panama Canal. It is the first time since the canal was closed through the canal Tuesday that it has returned to its home port, San Diego.

Candidates speak against Jackson, compare credits

Associated Press

Michael Dukakis cautiously began speaking of differences between himself and Jesse Jackson on the Middle East and domestic policy Wednesday, signaling a delicate new phase in their struggle for supremacy in the Democratic presidential race.

Fellow presidential hopeful Paul Simon said he, too, has better credentials for the White House than Jackson, and spoke frankly about the dilemma that has plagued Democrats since Jackson moved to the front ranks of the presidential contenders. "You have to be careful. You don't want to be perceived as anti-black," he said.

Jackson, an outsider if there ever was one, broke bread with the inner circle of the Democratic party establishment in Washington. He said it showed that "old wineskins are expanding and making room for new wine." But a congressional supporter said he detected the beginnings of a "stop-Jackson" movement taking hold elsewhere.

The Democrats who met with Jackson said they wanted no part of that. But Florida party chairman Charles Whitehead said, "I would be less than honest with you if I didn't tell you there is absolutely an awful lot of apprehension out there among an awful lot of Democrats about the nomination of Jesse Jackson."

Jackson scored a landslide victory over Dukakis in the Michigan caucuses last weekend that stunned some party leaders.

Some of them say privately they fear that if nominated, the black, liberal former civil rights leader would lead Democrats to an election-day loss that might jeopardize Democratic control of the Congress. On the other hand, party leaders are afraid of offending the millions of black voters Jackson brings to the polls, knowing that their support will be needed to produce a general election victory.

Dukakis regained his footing with a victory in Connecticut's primary

Tuesday night by a margin of 2-1 over Jackson, and holds a narrow lead in convention delegates, 647 to 634. Gore trails with 364. It takes 2,082 delegates to win the nomination.

The Democratic maneuverings in advance of Monday's Colorado caucuses and Tuesday's Wisconsin primary contrasted sharply with the serenity on the Republican side.

Bob Dole reassumed the mantle of Republican Senate leader following his withdrawal from the presidential race. He went to the White House and told President Reagan he was "reporting back for duty."

In an interview, he said he made serious tactical mistakes in his campaign, but he added that the real problem was "you can't beat Ronald Reagan."

"I was running against Ronald Reagan Jr. in the South," he said in a reference to Vice President George Bush who campaigned as Reagan's right-hand man.

Bush campaigned in Wisconsin, but he hardly needed to. Former television evangelist Pat Robertson is his only remaining rival, and the only question left is when the vice president will garner the final delegates needed to clinch the nomination.

But there was enough twisting and turning on the Democratic side for both parties.

Dukakis, under pressure from party officials to develop a more compelling campaign message, spoke for the first time of differences between himself and Jackson.

"We have differences over the Middle East, we have differences about certain aspects of domestic policy, and how to build a strong economy, how to create good jobs and those will come out over time," he said on "CBS This Morning." He didn't elaborate.

Dukakis wasn't the only one jabbing at Jackson.

Sen. Simon clearly had Jackson in mind when he said, "I offer not only passion, but programs. I am here."

Jackson set to meet with party leaders

WASHINGTON (AP) — Jesse Jackson will meet Wednesday with the front rank of Washington's Democratic establishment for a summit session one day after he criticized him sharply in a "complete and total lack of experience needed to be president."

Sen. Albert Gore Jr. took a negative tack Tuesday in a letter from the general public, attacking Jackson opponents avoiding public criticism of him.

Massachusetts Gov. Michael Dukakis, who shares the delegate lead with Jackson, refused Tuesday to say anything about the civil rights leader.

Jackson arrived in Washington late Tuesday to begin a series of private meetings with leading figures in the party's establishment — which has been in turmoil since his smashing victory over Dukakis in the Michigan caucus over the weekend.

Facing the possibility that he could win the presidential nomination and be the first ever to head the ticket, Jackson has been keeping phone lines busy with conversations about what his party's course should be.

The big meeting Wednesday was, however, set up by White, a former party chairman even before the Michigan caucuses.

"Jackson showed an interest in meeting with the party and talking about the political world he might be familiar with," White said.

"This did not start until after the Michigan caucus," White said. "The idea was to get Jesse together with the Washington establishment to listen to them talk about the party and policies and then to ask any questions they might have about him."

Jackson's victory in Michigan put a new focus on the party on Wednesday.

"The meeting has ballooned in size and importance," White said after Jackson's Michigan victory.

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