

Wednesday, March 1, 1989

Government tries to restore order to Caracas

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — Rioting over price increases ravaged Caracas for a second day Tuesday as looting spread, and the government said that to restore order it was suspending constitutional guarantees.

Police estimated up to 50 people were killed and 500 injured in the worst violence in 30 years of democratic rule. Thousands of people have been arrested, authorities said.

Civilians exchanged gunfire with police and shop owners took up arms to protect their property in the wake of the riots, which began Monday in Caracas, the capital, and spread to up to seven other cities.

The month-old government of President Carlos Andres Perez announced it has decided to suspend constitutional guarantees to re-establish order, and it authorized the army to impose a curfew, although no hours were established. The Education Ministry ordered school and university classes suspended nationwide.

Caracas appeared empty Tuesday afternoon, with police units stationed on the main corners to control the few pedestrians who dared to venture out. Paddy-

wagons and trucks were filled with those arrested for rioting and looting.

Policemen fired shotguns and tear gas to disperse crowds trying to gather in nearby grocery stores. More than 300 shops and stores have been sacked in Caracas, according to official figures.

Looting also was reported Tuesday in the cities of Valencia, Barquisimeto, Carora, Puerto La Cruz, San Cristobal and Maracaibo. The casualty toll in those cities was not known.

Gun battles between police and residents continued into Tuesday morning in San Agustin, a shantytown in west Caracas.

Police failed to prevent mobs from sacking stores in the neighborhood, and one witness described how looters carried 50 cow carcasses from a butcher shop and hauled off the scales before police arrived.

Residents sacked and burned one of the city's largest shopping centers in the wealthy neighborhood of San Bernardino in a scene one TV reporter described as "collective madness."

"Some people brought cars and station wagons to

carry things away," a reporter for Radio Caracas Television said.

Army and national guard units patrolled the streets but could not stop the lawlessness.

"It is much worse than yesterday. Now we have several policemen injured and one commissioner died shot by rioters," Metropolitan Police inspector Omar Bolivar told The Associated Press.

Officer Jesus Mesa Isturiz was killed in a poor neighborhood where "rioters are better armed than we are. They have rifles, pistols, revolvers, even submachine guns out there," Bolivar said.

A National Guard officer said the death toll may be as high as 50 in Caracas and surrounding areas. "We have reports from different units that leads us to figure it out," said the officer, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Independent reports estimated damage nationwide to be in the millions of dollars. On some Caracas streets, virtually every store was looted.

Six owners of a supermarket in the wealthy Los Palos Grandes neighborhood stayed on the roof of their building armed with rifles and pistols, "ready to defend

our property," one of them said.

He said police had refused to protect his business and that he and his family decided to "fight the only way we can."

The riots began Monday with bus fare increases across the country — part of a sweeping economic reform package announced by Perez to breathe life into the stagnant economy and convince international bankers to increase loans to the country.

Officially, bus fares were to rise only about 30 percent — on urban routes, for example, from the equivalent of about a nickel to 7 cents. But Transportation Minister Gustavo Rada said some increases had been as high as 50 percent, apparently because of price-gouging by bus drivers.

Caracas residents said rising food prices also were to blame.

13017101 "It was about time something like this happened. People finally got fed up and came down from the hills to protest," said Josefina Vasquez, a neighborhood leader.

Others called the looters common criminals taking advantage of mass confusion.

7-Eleven owners plan protest against chain

WASHINGTON (AP) — John Watson was home asleep, he says, when Southland Corp. officials, accompanied by two uniformed, off-duty police officers, tried to take his 7-Eleven franchise store "by force" before dawn one Saturday.

Southland had given Watson three days' notice that he was in breach of his franchise contract when company officials swept into the store and tried unsuccessfully to take control of the safe and rip the door to his office from its hinges, Watson says.

A 7-Eleven franchise owner for about 10 years, Watson accuses Southland of "retail sharecropping." He is leading a bitter fight against

the giant Dallas-based chain by the Capital Area 7-Eleven Franchise Owners Association.

At issue is Southland's formula for splitting 7-Eleven profits. Watson and other owners contend it doesn't account for the costs of running stores in the inner city, where labor costs more, shoplifting is more frequent and managers have to contend with neighborhood violence.

Southland officials say they have considered the complaints and improved franchisers' terms.

Corporate officials also said they entered Watson's store before dawn to avoid interfering with business.

Kathleen Callahan-Guion, manager of the chain's Capital division, said

the safe had to be seized because Watson was in a "serious deficit position" and had become a "serious financial risk."

"We were trying to protect our security interests," Callahan-Guion said.

The District of Columbia City Council and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People have been drawn into the dispute, and the owners association plans a Capitol Hill march Wednesday to protest the corporation.

Franchise owners claim they aren't making enough money under their Southland contracts, which

give most franchise owners 48 percent of the stores' gross profits.

Out of that owners must pay wages and cover inventory losses from shoplifting and employee theft. Southland is responsible for leases, taxes, utilities and other expenses.

"Sometimes they (franchise owners) are getting 48 percent of nothing," said Fred Rasheed, national director of the NAACP's economic development program.

Callahan-Guion said the company has been making significant changes to help its D.C. stores, and about a third now get a 52 percent cut to Southland's 48 percent.

Survey shows decrease in level of drug usage among high schoolers

WASHINGTON (AP) — Drug use among high school seniors last year dropped to its lowest level since 1975, an annual survey released Tuesday said. Still, more than half of all students use an illegal drug at least once before graduating.

Researchers and health officials said they were particularly encouraged by results showing the second straight significant drop in cocaine use and the beginnings of a retreat in use of the smokeable and highly addictive form of cocaine called crack.

Alcohol is by far the most widely used of the substances, with nearly 64 percent of the seniors reporting they had had a drink within the previous 30 days. Cigarettes were next with nearly 29 percent having smoked within the previous month and 18 percent reporting they were daily smokers.

Some 16,300 high school seniors from 135 schools nationwide were polled in the survey. Lloyd Johnston, one of the researchers in the study, declined to

identify the schools, but he said they included public and private schools across the continental United States.

The survey, which has been conducted by the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research every year since 1975, found that the proportion of high school seniors who reported having ever used an illegal drug dropped to 53.9 percent in 1988. That's the lowest level recorded since the survey began, when the rate was 55.2 percent.

"The news is very encouraging," said Charles R. Schuster, director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, which sponsored the study.

"The problem is there are still pockets, primarily among those who have dropped out of high school, where drug use remains at very high levels," he said.

The continued decline in drug use suggests that anti-drug campaigns educating the young about drug use are being heard, Lloyd Johnston, a University of Michigan social psychologist, said.

Separatists in Canada struggle over languages

MONTREAL (AP) — It appeared the French and English languages could live together in Quebec after separatist fervor abated nearly a decade ago, but the struggle resumed in December and French appears to have won.

"Resigned is probably the right catchword," Donald Taylor, a psychology professor at McGill University, said.

Language is "a symbol of identity and it also is a resource that has associated power, and status, and success and access," he said. "So these apparently minor events evoke very primary feelings."

Quebec was a battleground of culture and language in the 1970s between the 81 percent with

French heritage and a minority with a cultural kinship to Ontario and the other English-speaking provinces.

Power shifted to the French-speaking majority in those years but the separatist tide ebbed after 1980, and with it the dispute over language, when Quebec voters rejected a sovereignty referendum.


Then came a ruling by the Supreme Court of Canada in December that a 1977 Quebec law requiring all signs to be in French was unconstitutional. The court said French could be required to predominate on all signs but other languages could not be prohibited.

The provincial government, which has broader powers than state governments in the United States, overrode the decision with new legislation for the language on signs.

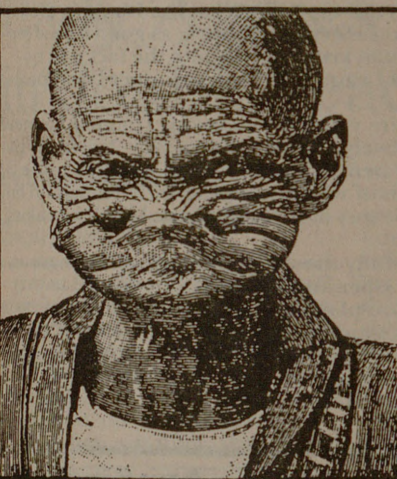
Bill 178, as it is known, requires that all outdoor signs still be solely in French, but for the first time since 1977 allowed bilingual indoor signs. Premier Robert Bourassa described it as a compromise.

Rallies by activists of both communities have accompanied the latest round.

Fewer street protests are held now, but the conflict continues as regulations under Bill 178 are interpreted to restrict indoor bilingual signs



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