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Colombia: Banana Plantation Employee Unions Decide To Strike

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On Oct. 10, nearly 24,000 employees of 240 banana production and marketing enterprises in the Uraba region (northwest Colombia) agreed to commence a strike on Oct. 11. Unions are demanding improved working conditions, and the resignation of Association of Banana Producers president, Juan Manuel Arias Carrizosa. A former justice minister, Arias Carrizosa openly supports the actions of paramilitary groups in the region, and is affiliated with the extreme right. Company owners estimate that for every day on strike, they lose $1 million in export revenues. Social conflict in the banana-growing region has been a constant in recent years. A large proportion of the banana industry labor force consists of migrant workers from the city of Medellin and nearby towns and villages. The presence of guerrilla columns in the area, and the acquisition of banana plantations by drug traffickers have intensified conflict. In 1987 and 1988, banana plantation workers were victims of large-scale massacres in 1987 and 1988, reportedly because they were accused of collaborating with leftist guerrillas. Many villages and towns in the Uraba area have become bastions of support for the Patriotic Union (UP), the political party formed in part by former guerrillas of the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC). In recent weeks, hired assassins (sicarios) have murdered three union leaders. (Basic data from Notimex, 10/10/89)

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