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On Nov. 1, unionized banana plantation workers on Colombia's Caribbean coast went on strike to protest the killings of two union leaders in October. The murders were attributed to rightist death squads. By Nov. 7, the strike had spread to several other districts, encompassing about 22,000 workers on 186 plantations. Tuesday was also the second day of a solidarity strike affecting the northern region of the country. In Apartado, a town of 100,000, leftist parties and guerrilla groups organized a march of 20,000 rural workers. Shop owners were forced to shut their doors, and employees joined strikers in the streets. Banana export companies have claimed they are losing $1 million per day because of the strike. In an interview published in El Tiempo on Nov. 7, president of the Association of Banana Companies, Jose Manuel Arias Carrizosa, asserted the strikes were organized by the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) and the People's Liberation Army (ELP), and constituted a "festival of terrorism." The strikers are now demanding pay hikes, medical care and shorter work hours. The average wage for a plantation worker is the equivalent of $79 per month for six-day work weeks of 10 hours per day. Arias Carrizosa, a former Justice Minister, is perceived as a partisan of the ultra-right, and has been linked to rightist death squads. In the mid-1980s, he resigned from the cabinet when the leftist Patriotic Union (UP) disclosed that he had imported a Rolls Royce valued at $125,000 at government expense, and then sold it to members of the Medellin drug mafia. According to Notimex, drug traffickers now own half of the 186 banana plantations in the Uraba region. (Basic data from Notimex, 11/07/89; AP, 11/08/89)

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