

7-27-1990

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Honduran President Offers To Mediate In Negotiations Between Chiquita Brands International & Striking Workers

by Deborah Tyroler

Category/Department: General

Published: Friday, July 27, 1990

On July 26, Honduran President Rafael Leonardo Callejas offered to mediate in negotiations between the US-based Chiquita Brands International (formerly United Brands), and striking workers' unions. Plantation workers and employees of the Tela Railroad Company walked off the job in late June. In paid ads placed in Honduran newspapers, the banana transnational said that the strike had thus far cost the company approximately \$25 million. Union spokespersons told Notimex that Chiquita's threats to leave Honduras do not worry them, "since the Europeans have called us to buy our bananas." During a meeting with union representatives on July 25, President Callejas said he would not declare the strike illegal as requested by Chiquita. He admitted Honduras is experiencing the worst economic slump since 1982, and that his government's economic policies negatively affect the poor. In 1990, said Callejas, the fiscal deficit will be reduced by 6% to 6.3%, and inflation is projected at between 24% and 30%. Consumer price inflation, he added, will decline to 15% in 1991, and to 8% in 1992. Treasury Minister Benjamin Villanueva announced price hikes for potable water, electricity, and telephone services. He said the price increases were necessary to obtain a bridge loan from the World Bank. (Basic data from Notimex, 07/26/90)

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