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Panama: Teachers, Physicians & Banana Plantation Workers Announce Plans To Strike

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Sept. 11 in Panama City, spokespersons for public school teachers, physicians and banana plantation workers threatened to launch strikes next week to protest one or more features of government economic policy. About 30,000 teachers, members of two union federations, decided over the weekend to launch a strike to pressure the government into paying \$6 million worth of back salaries and benefits, accumulated over the past 15 months. To the present, the national congress has approved payment of only \$1.6 million to the teachers. Medical professionals' major union, the Association of Physicians and Dentists (Asociacion de Medicos y Odontologos- AMO), announced plans to strike unless the government desists from plans to privatize the social security institute. The AMO is also demanding immediate repairs to at least five hospitals, replacement of surgical equipment, and payment of benefits and over-time as specified under collective bargaining agreements in force prior to the US invasion in December 1989. Next, the Pro-Rescue Committee of Bocas del Toro department, site of earthquake damage in April and flooding a month ago, reported that banana plantation workers will go on strike beginning Sept. 17 to protest the government delays in providing assistance to victims of the natural disasters. Fifty percent of Panamanian banana exports derive from Bocas del Toro. Restaurant owners and employees are also threatening to strike, in protest of a 10% tax on services. (Basic data from AFP, 09/11/91)

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