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Honduran Legislative Commission Rejects Timber Extraction Contract With Stone Container

by Deborah Tyroler
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On Feb. 19, a Honduran congressional commission voted to reject a contract signed in September 1991 between the US-based Stone Container Corporation and President Rafael Callejas. (See Update 02/07/92 for previous coverage of controversy surrounding the contract.) Under the contract, Stone would obtain exploitation rights for 40 years to a 1.2 million ha. area of pine forest reserves in northeastern Honduras. Deputy Oscar Najera, chair of the commission, told reporters that legislators were influenced by reports that Stone Container has caused extensive environmental damage in other countries. In addition, he said, the company's serious financial difficulties also played a part in the decision to reject. Although the commission recommends that the contract be dropped, the executive branch still has the option of requesting ratification via a floor vote. The president's National Party (PN) controls 71 of 128 seats in the legislature. Alongside a broad coalition of environmental, campesino and indigenous groups, several congressional leaders have already spoken out against ratification. (Basic data from Agence France-Presse, 02/19/92)

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