

Hello Friends:

On September 15th, the corteros de caña (sugarcane workers) of Valle del Cauca and Cauca began a strike involving some 18,000 workers. Their decision to strike came as the Sugar Cane Growers' Association (Asocaña) refused to negotiate with them for better pay (they earn roughly \$200 per month), shorter hours (they frequently work 14 hour days), a healthier work environment, better housing and educational facilities for workers and their families, and a formal work contract with labour and union rights (the workers are organized in 'associated cooperatives', the epitome of 'flexible' labour).

Their strike has been met with state violence, the militarization of the sugarcane plantations by the national police and private security to protect the interests of the mill owners. Paramilitary groups have threatened several workers. On the day the strike began, more than 100 corteros were left injured by state forces, who removed them from the mills. Government officials have recklessly claimed that insurgent armed groups were manipulating the corteros, which, in Colombia, constitutes a public death threat.

The agrofuel industry uses sugarcane to produce ethanol. Sugarcane growers have been proposing to expand crop production to meet growing demand in a lucrative but labour-intensive industry. Yet they refuse to improve the working conditions and fair pay. The corteros' attempts to organize and rally for their rights (especially in a country like Colombia) go beyond courage.

In this special edition of Week in Review, dedicated especially to the corteros, please find below a number of recent articles and communiqués compiled specifically to provide background and updates on the situation of the corteros and the courageous struggle they are now undertaking in Colombia - they will not be alone!

In solidarity,
La Chiva Collective

The corteros have a blog, where you can find information, in Spanish, directly from them: <http://corteros.blogspot.com/>

Nasa-ACIN (<http://www.nasaacin.org>), also in Spanish, is closely following the corteros and publishing a wealth of information on their strike and developments.

The Corteros' September 15 Communiqué

Sugar Workers Threatened in Valle del Cauca and Cauca
On August 25, 2008, the workers of the sugar cane industry in the Departments of the Cauca Valley and the Cauca held an assembly in the town of Candelaria, Valle, an assembly of more than 7,000 people. [...] After that event, the sugar mills of the region have been completely militarized: the workers are being escorted by motorcycles with armed men and with balaclavas; in some cases the armed men also climb onto the cars and travel with the workers.

La Corporación Humanidad Maestra Vida, www.corteros.com, translated by Stacey Schlau for Colombia Support Network, 15 September 2008

Articles (English)

Realization of "Threats" Put Colombian Popular Movement in State of High Alert

Recent events in Cauca and elsewhere point to a new wave of terror against social protest

By Mario Murillo, (see his blog MAMARadio), 2 October 2008

Canadian Labour Congress' Letter to Uribe in Support of Sugarcane Workers

President Uribe, your government has repeatedly claimed that respect for workers' rights in Colombia is improving in order to undercut opposition to the free trade agreement negotiated between the Canadian and Colombian governments. ... These actions on the part of your government are more evidence that Canada must not sign and implement a trade deal with Colombia.

Ken Georgetti, CLC, 22 September 2008

AFL-CIO: Support Colombian Sugarcane Workers

"The AFL-CIO stands firmly in solidarity with the sugarcane workers in their strike for respect and a fair wage," said AFL-CIO President John Sweeney in a letter to Colombian President Alvaro Uribe. "I call upon you to . . . strongly urge the employers to hire the sugarcane workers as direct employees and to immediately begin to negotiate in good faith with their elected representatives."

AFL-CIO Statement, not dated.

ACTION!

Witness for Peace: Support Colombian Sugarcane Workers Facing Violence - NO FTA!

Congress needs to send a strong message to the Colombian government: NO FTA while labor rights continue to be attacked in Colombia. The lives of sugarcane workers are on the line! Please take a moment to send a letter to your Representative, urging him/her to contact the U.S. State Department and Colombian government and to oppose the FTA.

Send a letter to US Congress:

http://org2.democracyinaction.org/o/5436/t/2467/campaign.jsp?campaign_KEY=538

Artículos (Español)

La Satanización de la Protesta de los 'Esclavos Modernos'

El derecho a la huelga y la protesta pública y pacífica siguen como letra muerta en la práctica social en Colombia: resulta un verdadero agravio al país y a su clase obrera decir que son "fuerzas oscuras", "la Far", las que motivan el justo movimiento de los corteros de caña.

Aurelio Suárez Montoya, La Tarde, Pereira, 30 de septiembre de 2008

Corteros del Cauca: Preparemos el paro por nuestros derechos

Estamos haciendo los contactos con todas las organizaciones sindicales, sociales y políticas de la región y del país para conseguir la más amplia solidaridad de todos

los trabajadores organizados, vamos a defender nuestro JUSTO PLIEGO DE PETICIONES con la razón y la fuerza de nuestras movilizaciones.
Por SINALCORTEROS, Nasa-ACIN, 13 de septiembre 2008

La industria azucarera no cumple con los requisitos laborales determinados por la ley. No se trata en este caso, de un modelo empresarial y cooperativo exitoso, basado en los principios cooperativos que han sido exitosos en el mundo, sino de un agrupamiento de los magros ingresos de los trabajadores en una operación de desmonte de las obligaciones laborales y de los derechos laborales individuales y colectivos consagrados en la legislación y los tratados internacionales vigentes en la materia.

Adriana A. Ferrer Medina, Corporación Humanidad Maestra Vida, 14 de septiembre 2008

Corteros de Caña en resistencia pacífica frente al nuevo feudalismo
Más de diez mil corteros de caña de azúcar, de unos nueve ingenios azucareros del Valle del Cauca, permanecen en cese de actividades esperando concertar con los empresarios y el gobierno un pliego de peticiones que contiene las principales exigencias de los trabajadores.
SIEC, Actualidad Étnica, Bogotá, 25 septiembre 2008

Senador Alexander López pide respeto y garantías para corteros de caña en huelga

En carta dirigida al Presidente de la República, el senador del Polo Democrático demandó garantías a "la integridad física y moral" y el respeto al "buen nombre y la honra" de los corteros de caña que desde el 15 de septiembre adelantan un cese de actividades para reclamar mejores condiciones laborales.

Senator Alexander López, Polodemocratico.net, 2 octubre 2008

Plain Text Attachment [Scan and Save to Computer]

La Chiva is a collective of people working in solidarity with Colombian and Canadian social movements and communities.

<http://www.canadacolombiaproject.blogspot.com>

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