

**“The United Fruit Company”**  
**A poem from *Canto general* (1950)**  
**by Pablo Neruda (1904-1973)**

When the trumpet sounded  
everything was prepared on earth,  
and Jehovah gave the world  
to Coca-Cola Inc., Anaconda,  
Ford Motors, and other corporations.  
The United Fruit Company  
reserved for itself the most juicy  
piece, the central coast of my world,  
the delicate waist of America.

It rebaptized these countries  
Banana Republics,  
and over the sleeping dead,  
over the unquiet heroes  
who won greatness,  
liberty, and banners,  
it established an opera buffa<sup>1</sup>:  
it abolished free will,  
gave out imperial crowns,  
encouraged envy, attracted  
the dictatorship of flies:  
Trujillo flies, Tachos flies  
Carias flies, Martinez flies,  
Ubico flies, flies sticky with  
submissive blood and marmalade,  
drunken flies that buzz over  
the tombs of the people,  
circus flies, wise flies  
expert at tyranny.

With the bloodthirsty flies  
came the Fruit Company,  
amassed coffee and fruit  
in ships which put to sea like  
overloaded trays with the treasures  
from our sunken lands.

Meanwhile the Indians fall  
into the sugared depths of the  
harbors and are buried in the  
morning mists;  
a corpse rolls, a thing without  
name, a discarded number,  
a bunch of rotten fruit  
thrown on the garbage heap.

---

<sup>1</sup> opera buffa: Italian comic opera

## **United Fruit Company**

- American produce company founded in 1899 when Boston Fruit Co. merged with other companies selling bananas grown in Central America, Colombia, and the Caribbean
- The company founder gained extensive land rights in Costa Rica in return for constructing railroads
- Became the largest employer in Central America and exploited workers
- Influence/exploited corrupt Central American politicians dependent on income from the banana business in the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century
- Called *el pulpo* (“the octopus”) in the Latin American press
- Became Chiquita Brands International, Inc. (the Chiquita bananas) in 1990. In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century the company focuses on produce, notably bananas and packaged salads.

## **Banana Republic**

- Pejorative term for a country with an extremely corrupt government, often a primitive economy, and sometimes its political environment controlled by a major power
- Based on the history of the extraction of wealth from Latin American countries via multinational corporations in the banana business

## **Trujillo** (full name: Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina)

- president of the Dominican Republic, 1930-1961

## **Tachos** (nickname for Anastasio Somoza García)

- president of Nicaragua, 1936-1956

## **Carias** (full name: Tiburcio Carías Andino)

- president of Honduras, 1933-1946

## **Martinez** (full name: Maximiliano Hernández Martínez)

- president of El Salvador, 1931-1944

## **Ubico** (full name: Jorge Ubico y Castañeda)

- president of Guatemala, 1931-1944