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Nicaragua: Fsln Directorate Criticizes Behavior Of Sandinista Labor Confederation

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In late August, members of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) directorate reprimanded members of the Sandinista Workers Central (CST) for their actions during recent elections of union representatives at two manufacturing plants in Managua. (See CAU 09/14/88.) The CST's status as one of the FSLN's "mass organizations" makes it subject to policy decisions by the party directorate. In the month of August, union elections were scheduled at the Tona beer plant, and at Macen, manufacturer of packaging materials. Candidates run by labor groups outside the CST won several posts in trade union councils in both factories. At Tona, the candidate from the Central de Accion y Unidad Sindical (CAUS), a confederation linked to the Communist Party, won the top leadership position on the council. At the Macen plant, workers elected a leader of the Workers Front (FO) to represent them. The FO is linked to the Popular Action Movement (MAP), a marxist-leninist party. The elections precipitated open confrontation between CST militants and those of other union confederations. The Macen management was pressured by CST members to fire FO leaders. CST militants organized workers from several factories in Managua who surrounded the Tona plant carrying pipes and sticks as a method to intimidate opposition labor confederation candidates. The situation at Tona deteriorated to the point that workers set up barricades inside the factory to protect themselves as a form of protesting CST intimidation. On Aug. 27, three members of the FSLN directorate, including Bayardo Arce and Luis Carrion, met with 300 CST militants to discuss developments at Tona and Macen. Arce was the most vocal in condemning CST pressure tactics and the use of physical violence or threat of violence. A minority of the CST representatives attempted to defend their "methods" used in the confrontation with competing unions, arguing that they were necessary to "maintain order." Conflicts between the CST and competing labor confederations derive from different responses to the government's economic austerity measures implemented this year. The FO and other opposition union centrals have demanded substantial wage hikes to compensate for the steep decline in workers' purchasing power. In contrast, unions linked to the CST have undertaken the onerous task of defending recent economic policies, i.e., demanding greater exertion from workers to increase productivity, and calling on workers to sacrifice individual interests for the benefit of the country as a whole. (Basic data from 09/19/88 report by Regional Coordination for Economic and Social Research of Central America and the Caribbean-CRIES, Managua)

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