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Panamanian Labor Confederation Leader Supports Noriega, But Demands Government Include Labor In Policy-making

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On Aug. 28, Panamanian Workers Confederation (CTP) secretary general Mauro Murillo said that most of the CTP's 265,000 members would go to the streets if the government does not implement policy changes responding to the "popular sectors" on or shortly after Sept. 1. In statements to Notimex, Murillo warned that the continuing absence of "dialogue" on the country's political crisis between the government on the one hand, and labor and other social sectors will aggravate social discontent, and aggravate the crisis. Murillo said that the CTP had proposed the formation of a provisional government on Sept. 1 that would include popular sector representation. He said a new formula for governing, or a national reconstruction program in which the working class has an important role, must emerge. According to the labor leader, workers have suffered the most from the economic crisis, created in part by US economic sanctions. He added that unemployment is very high, "at least 16%." CTP membership accounts for almost 40% of the national work force. Included are public employees in of communications, electricity, water, and transportation services. Private sector employees belonging to the confederation range from agricultural workers to teachers and other professionals. In an interview with Copley News Service on Aug. 30, Murillo said he is a strong supporter of Gen. Manuel Noriega. However, he said the government had thus far failed to consult organized labor on the composition of the new government. "We have made the most sacrifices in the last couple of years, and we deserve to be heard," he said. "Instead, we have been ignored." (Basic data from Notimex, 08/28/89; Copley News Service, 08/31/89)