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Panama: Political Opposition Protests Additional U.S. Economic Sanctions

by Deborah Tyroler

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Nov. 30: In a communique, the Civic Democratic Opposition Alliance (ADOC) asserted its opposition to additional US economic sanctions against Panama. In reference to President Bush's statements about sanctions, including barring Panamanian-registered ships from entering US ports, ADOC said that such generalized measures will aggravate widespread unemployment and impoverishment to "dramatic levels." The communique was signed by ADOC leaders Guillermo Endara, Ricardo Arias Calderon and Guillermo Ford. The three men were opposition candidates in the May presidential elections, annulled by the government. According to Notimex, the Nov. 30 communique marked the first time the ADOC has publicly declared opposition to US economic sanctions. Over 12,500 merchant ships carry Panamanian registration. According to Notimex, Panama would lose about \$75 million per year if Washington implements the prohibition in February 1990 as promised. Dec. 3: Finance and Treasury Minister Alexis Goodin told reporters in Panama City that a series of US economic sanctions the first of which were imposed in March 1988 more than halved the government's income. This year's revenues are expected to total around \$500 million. As a result of the government's revenue decline, said Goodin, 125,000 public employees will not receive the traditional "13th month" pay at Christmas this year, and paychecks are to be delayed about two weeks. The minister said government workers' paychecks total \$70 million per month. According to government figures, in 1988 Panama's economy declined by 20%, and 75,000 workers lost their jobs. Dec. 4: Finance and Treasury Ministry official Alexis Arias called the new US sanction "criminal and unjust." He said prohibiting the entry of Panamanian-registered ships in US ports violates the law of the seas, as well as trade norms and international agreements on the use of ports. (Basic data from Notimex, 11/30/89; AFP, 12/03/89; Xinhua, 12/04/89)

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