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HEADLINE: Iraqi **labor leader** calls for immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops

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BODY:

An Iraqi **labor leader** on Thursday called for the immediate withdrawal of coalition forces from his country, rejecting suggestions that a civil war would erupt without the U.S. military there.

"We don't expect any of that to happen, especially a civil war that they're talking about; that will not happen," Adnan A. Rashed, a member of the executive board of the Iraqi Federation of Labor, said at a speech at Stony Brook University on Long Island.

Rashed also said his countrymen are ready to immediately take over from occupation forces.

"There was an election for a general assembly, there is government and there are people who are responsible in government," he said. "We believe that Iraqis are more familiar with the country and they can take care of themselves and their country better than others."

Rashed is part of a six-member delegation of Iraqi **labor leaders** who have been touring the United States, explaining the plight of Iraqi workers. Their trip is sponsored by a coalition of American labor groups organized under the banner, "U.S. Labor Against the War."

The Iraqi labor officials contend that their countrymen are facing a 50 percent unemployment rate and those who do have jobs earn the equivalent of \$35 a week.

Rashed, who said he had to flee his homeland for two years during Saddam's regime because he was an underground union organizer, said instead of a U.S.-led invasion, "the best option we had was to enable the Iraqi people and Iraqi forces to get rid of Saddam's regime.

"We knew that the Iraqi people would have become the victim between Saddam's

and the foreign forces and that they would struggle and that's what's happening now."

When asked what an appropriate punishment for Saddam might be, he said, "If you look at the history of this man, who killed hundreds of thousands of people, what do you think the punishment should be?"

GRAPHIC: AP Photo

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