

## Panama Report by Carlos Wesley

### Anti-Panama line pushed on Bush

*The Establishment has moved preemptively to impose this dangerous policy on the incoming U.S. administration.*

**T**he week before Christmas, the U.S. Eastern Establishment got the incoming administration of George Bush to commit itself to the overthrow of the government of Panama, the removal of the head of that country's Defense Forces (PDF), Gen. Manuel Noriega, and to the dismantling of the PDF, before the end of 1989, even if that requires direct military intervention by the United States.

On Dec. 21, Eric Arturo Delvalle, whom the United States—and only the United States—claims is the President of Panama, was flown into Washington for high-profile meetings with Secretary of State George Shultz, and with President Ronald Reagan and President-elect George Bush. Those meetings took all of 15 minutes, hardly any time to discuss anything but how-do-you-do, and not once did Delvalle speak to the press, or even issue a statement.

Delvalle's fictitious presidency provides Washington with a thin cover of legality for its continued economic sanctions against Panama. And, as the *Los Angeles Times* noted Dec. 22, he is more concerned by the fact that the Panamanian government is auctioning off his thoroughbred race horses to recover some of its funds misappropriated by the United States with his complicity, than in returning to power. As one of his associates was quoted: "No more winning circles, no more owner's boxes. That will hurt more than being kicked out of office."

His visit to Washington was to serve as a prop for Bush to signal on Dec. 22 that he would acquiesce to the Establishment's demands: "I am as

determined as President Reagan to see that Noriega not continue in his dictatorial ways there in Panama," said Bush at a news conference. Bush refused to rule out the use of United States military force against Panama.

The Establishment's policy was spelled out in the latest issue of *Foreign Affairs*, the magazine of New York's Council on Foreign Relations. In an article written by James Chace, the CFR lays out a series of policy options for the incoming Bush administration to deal with the Panama question. First, says Chace, the Bush government should enlist the assistance of incoming Venezuelan President Carlos Andrés Pérez, a leader of the Socialist International. Second, "apply a full economic embargo—which would include a ban on all exports and imports, a revocation of Panamanian landing rights in this country, and a full ban on Americans traveling to Panama."

But, warns Chace, "neither of these approaches may work," and this may make necessary U.S. military intervention.

The Bush administration must act fast, since "it takes office at a culminating point in American foreign diplomatic history," he says. "The next President could well negotiate the terms of the post-cold war era." But Panama is a "grave foreign political problem," which "could derail the efforts of the new administration to explore the limit of a U.S.-Soviet rapprochement."

Another reason for fast action, says Chace, is that under the terms of the Carter-Torrijos canal treaties, the

United States is bound to name a Panamanian, selected by the government of Panama, as chief administrator of the canal by the end of 1989. There is also the fear that Panamanian nationalist forces associated with Noriega, or even Noriega himself, will win the presidential elections, scheduled for May 1989.

Chace makes it clear that the United States will not honor its treaty obligation to name a Panamanian administrator, even if Noriega leaves before the end of the year. Only if Panama's Defense Forces are dismantled, "could the transfer of the canal to the Panamanians and the withdrawal of the U.S. armed forces proceed peacefully."

Even before Bush signaled publicly in his Dec. 22 news conference that he was going along with the CFR, there were indications that in fact the CFR line had become official U.S. policy.

The current administrator of the Panama Canal, Dennis McAuliffe, said, according to the *Washington Times* Dec. 14, that anyone "who bears the Noriega imprint will never be acceptable" as his replacement at the end of the year.

On Dec. 27, the *Washington Post* complained that the Panamanian government was mistreating Roberto Brenes, a leader of the opposition Civic Crusade, created by John Maisto, an old "Philippines hand" who helped oust Ferdinand Marcos, and is now assigned to the American embassy in Panama. Brenes, said the *Washington Post*, "has emerged as a prime candidate to administer new U.S. National Endowment for Democracy funds" in Panama. The National Endowment for Democracy referred to is a private body financed by American taxpayers, the "legal" arm of Ollie North's Project Democracy, which, among other disasters, was responsible for the Iran-Contra arms for hostages scandal.