

'Will Americans swallow this?'

On Dec. 23, Elmo Martínez Blanco, Minister of Industry and Commerce in the Panamanian government loyal to Gen. Manuel Noriega, telephoned EIR's reporter from Panama, where he said the loyalist government was still functioning underground, and gave him a statement in English, parts of which appear below.

We wish naturally a Merry Christmas and a very Happy New Year to you. But today, we are filled with sorrow; we are also filled with anger, as you may realize. I feel sorrow for the many Panamanian civilians, especially children, who had died victims of the sophisticated American weapons, but I also feel anger, because Mr. Bush is not telling the truth to the American people. And the American people are not demanding the truth from Mr. Bush. I feel anger because the American people seem to be satisfied by beautiful, pseudo-patriotic, mellow words of praise to the soldiers and their families, and the families are not demanding the truth.

Here in Panama, by far more civilians have died than soldiers. Their lives have been sacrificed by the insanity of those who claim to be doing it in the name of democracy. I just saw a young American soldier. He was perhaps 19 or 20 years old. He was nervous and insecure, and I doubt that he has a chance to survive. I am sure that, like him, there are many asking themselves why they have come to this beautiful country to destroy, to kill, or to be killed.

I was just a moment ago myself wondering if, among them, there could be children of the many friends I have in the States, and that, of course, made me feel how insane the whole thing is.

It was repulsive to watch Mr. Bush a few days ago on television. He was facing the press, and therefore he was also facing the American people. And what he did, was to fill the American people with misleading statements, with praising words to the American soldiers, turning the issue away from the real meaning. He simply was treating the American people as a pack of naive children. Do the American people really swallow this? The cynicism reflected in some of his statements is an offense to the people of the United States.

The killing of an American marine, he said, that is a serious crime. That, and the alleged harassment of the wife of

a soldier, prompted the invasion of 25,000 soldiers, provided with the most sophisticated weapons. That is a poor theatrical excuse. Do the American people really believe this?

He never told the American people that the dead soldier was a Colombian, whose father had come to Panama to collect his body and take it to Cali, in Colombia, where he comes from. He did not tell the people that what he called three innocent American soldiers who got lost, were three men who had broken a barricade at high speed, who shot wildly around with automatic weapons, and wounded an eleven-month-old baby, two civilians, Rupert Galey and Elaine Betancourt, and one soldier, Alex Correa. Is it possible to believe that American soldiers, who certainly must know the city they are about to invade, came into the city unarmed and got lost, and came right in front of the army headquarters on a barricaded street that puts them just a few meters from the main entrance? Ask Mr. Bush how he really explains that.

Wasn't it perhaps one more act of provocation? Did Mr. Bush forget to tell the people that in this month there have been hundreds, and I repeat, hundreds of incursions deep into Panamanian territory—at times taking small towns, at times taking our national airport, our international airport, our water supply—and that in spite of our numerous protests, the only thing we found was the arrogance of power, with small answers that it was all "military maneuvers." But did Mr. Bush forget to tell the people of the United States how many Panamanian civilians died, because of these military maneuvers?

Demand the truth

The American people should demand the truth. It is their moral obligation. If not to favor us, at least to show respect to those who have died, and will die, because of the insane decision to bring to power a pack of semi-aristocrats who are obedient to the dictates of the American government.

Do the American people really believe that all these atrocities and the sacrifice of innocent lives are done for democracy? Why was it not done in the name of democracy in countries ruled by dictatorships friendly to the U.S., and where tens of thousands of people died at the hands of such governments? What about Argentina? Uruguay? Paraguay? Venezuela with Pérez Jiménez, Haiti with Duvalier?—all of them, and many more, cruel dictatorships friendly to the U.S. There was no invasion in the name of democracy there, and then. Ask Mr. Bush why not.

Ask Mr. Bush how many American lives have really been lost here in Panama. How many Cobra helicopters have really been shot down? Any decent man would feel outraged watching the choreography of the burial of soldiers he called patriots serving democracy, when he well knows that they are victims caught in a dirty war, conditioned by the most atrocious disinformation campaign conducted by the American government in this century. . . .