

U.S. sets up military dictatorship in Panama, as resistance spreads

by Carlos Wesley

President George Bush's attempts to consolidate a colonial protectorate on behalf of the drug cartels in Panama is facing growing resistance. According to a recent poll, 80% of the Panamanians rejected the invasion, and oppose the continued U.S. occupation of the country. The poll, conducted by "Cadena Millonaria" radio network, was the first expression of popular sentiment since the invasion, and belied Bush's claims—still being promoted by the liberal U.S. major media—that Panamanians "overwhelmingly" welcomed the invasion.

Americans who still buy that liberal media line, or the excuse that Bush was waging the "war on drugs," should be informed of the following realities, which are going unreported in the United States.

First of all, almost every day there are protest demonstrations. On Feb. 21, the Public Employees Union (FENASEP) rallied to demand the reinstatement of 3,000 of their members, fired by the quisling Endara government for political reasons. The same day, *La Estrella de Panama* published an open letter from doctors at the Social Security administration protesting "the inquisition" being carried out against their ranks.

Even the so-called "Civic Crusade," erstwhile supporter of the U.S.-installed regime, is threatening to become an opposition. Unless the regime gives in to its demands to fire experienced civil servants, to be replaced by members of the "Crusade," the group will take to the streets, said spokesman Raul Mulino. The Crusade was created, financed, and run by the U.S. secret government apparatus known as Project Democracy, to mobilize against the former nationalist government of Gen. Manuel Noriega.

There are rumors that the U.S. may soon replace Guillermo Endara, the President installed by the invading troops—a tool of the Cali Cartel of Colombian cocaine traffickers, as documented in *EIR* and even exposed, recently, on page 1 of the *New York Times*.

The puppet regime is unable "to sustain itself without foreign rifles," charged a manifesto issued Feb. 12 by several leading members of the PRD, the former ruling party. The manifesto (see *Documentation*) denounces the preventive detention of thousands of suspected opponents of the occupation, without due process. It adds: "Peace and security will be unattainable due to their incompatibility with the U.S. objective of justifying a permanent presence on national territory. With that objective, the invaders have devoted them-

selves to creating situations of instability, to make themselves indispensable for Panamanian peace of mind."

Democracy? What democracy?

New evidence obtained by *EIR* shows that the Bush administration has established a military dictatorship in Panama. Contrary to Bush's claims that the Dec. 20 invasion "reestablished democracy in Panama," the documentation shows that the day-to-day administration of Panama is in the hands of American officials. According to a table of organization of the Panamanian government prepared by the U.S. occupation authorities, every single government agency in Panama, from the presidency down to the mayors of provincial capitals, and each police precinct, is under the control of the U.S. officials.

The table lists two U.S. officials at the same level as alleged "President" Guillermo Endara, one of whom is John Bushnell, the second-ranking official at the U.S. Embassy in Panama. "First Vice President" Ricardo Arias Calderón, who is also the minister of government and justice, has two officials assigned to his ministry: a Colonel Pryor, who is identified as the "CA-CAT," and a Mr. Brownfield from the State Department. So does "Second Vice President" Guillermo "Billy" Ford, who is also the minister of planning and finance: Lt. Col. Harley and a Mr. Blackman from State. Similarly the Ministry of the Presidency is assigned to Lt. Col. Ely and to a Mr. Brownfield from State, Education is under the control of Captain Vargas and Mr. Wolfe from the Pentagon, and a Mr. Williams from State, and so on.

According to reports received Feb. 22, some 2,000 U.S. troops are arresting scores of political and labor leaders in the western province of Chiriquí. This repression is intended to erase the nationalist spirit fostered by Gen. Omar Torrijos, and continued by Noriega, so as to facilitate the imposition of a colonial regime, charged labor leader Mauro Murillo in a statement Feb. 14 (see *Documentation*). "This means privatization of the state companies; increasing reform of the Labor Code; suspending labor agreements; creating a new minimum wage scale; supplanting labor organizations with a Costa Rica-style formula; and the mass firing of public employees," said Murillo.

As part of the privatization policy, the government is even selling off the helicopters and other aircraft of Panama's Air Force, reported *La Estrella* on Feb. 22.

Panamanian labor leader: 'The fight goes on!'

Statement issued in Panama on Feb. 14, 1990, by labor leader Mauro Murillo, general secretary of the Panamanian labor federation CNTP, and vice-president of the Latin American Federation of Communication Workers.

During the Torrijos era, organized labor and the people in general lived moments of splendor, of advancement and of progress; the unions grew and achieved many collective bargaining agreements; we won a more effective and advanced Labor Code. Workers, peasants, and the whole population participated in the management of the state, because our opinions were consulted; the project of national liberation was consolidated, as was the fight for our sovereignty and for the eradication of the colonial enclave that wounded the heart of our Fatherland.

The dream of our people turned into a nightmare on Dec. 20, 1989, when the U.S. Army troops, in a cruel and cunning way, invaded our soil with every kind of war-fighting technology, massacring our army and our people. Genocide was committed in the name of democracy, under the pretext of capturing a man who opposed the United States' warlike and interventionist plans in Latin America.

To this day, we Panamanians are unable to determine how many Panamanian and American actually died as a result of the infamous invasion. Here, only those regular forces that fought the invader, are spoken about, but there is no mention of how many people were killed by the American shrapnel, by the fire, the bombs and the laser rays; women and children, the old and handicapped were victims of Yankee arrogance.

On the eve of the invasion, a government beholden to the geopolitical and economic interests of the United States was installed; a government which does not think with its own head, which does not walk on its own two feet, and which doesn't work with its own hands, because it sees in the United States for the solution to all economic and political problems. This means worsening the degree of dependency of our people, perpetuating the presence on our territory of American troops and military bases. That is why the Panamanian army was destroyed for the second time in our history.

The invasion worsened the sociopolitical and economic

situation of Panama: commerce was destroyed by looting; there is more unemployment than ever, and many people are now homeless because their homes—especially in Chorrillo and San Miguelito—were destroyed by the bombing and the fire. Since there is no protection, because the Panamanian Defense Forces were dismantled, the thieves and assailants are ravaging the barrios and neighborhoods; there is no night life, because of a curfew at 12 midnight; many media are running a campaign of persecution and slander against individuals who were linked to the previous government, for one or another reason. That is, political revanchism is being promoted; an environment presenting the previous government as entirely corrupt has been created.

The population is being distracted with this kind of campaign while a plan to allow the refinancing of the foreign debt is being cooked up. The structural adjustments of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, which we fought and halted in 1984, 1985, and 1986, will now be imposed. This means privatization of the state companies; increasing reform of the Labor Code; suspending labor agreements; creating a new minimum wage scale; supplanting labor organizations with a Costa Rica-style formula of "solidarism"; and the mass firing of public employees, of whom 2,000 have already been laid off. There is no program yet for agriculture; the state sugar harvest is in doubt; food prices have risen; and so on and so forth.

In conclusion, the people are already beginning to realize that between the famous "democracy" and the "dictatorship," there has been no change in their socio-economic status—on the contrary, they are worse off and there are no perspectives for a short- or medium-term solution; that the speeches of Panama's new rulers do not coincide with what their representatives and followers practice; the old rich families now rule, directly backed by American troops which represent the the government of the United States of America.

The people can be fooled once or twice, but not all of the time, and our people know how to fight in an organized way, as one fist, to expel the invading forces from our land, and to build a real and popular democracy that responds to the interests of all Panamanians, and not just to a single class; how to fight to prevent the entire Fatherland from being privatized, and how to prevent Panama from becoming one more star in the flag of the United States. We must fight to preserve our identity as a sovereign and proud nation: that the content, the spirit and the letter of the Torrijos-Carter Treaties be faithfully met; that the dictatorship of the parties be ended. We don't want any more governments of "elites"; we want a representative, democratic and popular government, a government where every class of people can feel represented.

History has taught us that you can persecute, jail, defame, torture, and kill a man, but never his ideals; and when the people share those ideals, there is no army nor class that can contain it. Our people experienced and savored a national

liberation plan, and will so again; what occurred on Dec. 20, 1989, rather than frightening us, outraged us by the way such barbarity was disguised and justified. Today our awareness is strengthened and our spirit magnified, because today we are suffering the arrogance of a powerful nation which has put in power a class that does not represent the interests of the people. Independent of the negative developments and excesses that could occur, this means we are moving in the right direction. Therefore, we proclaim that *the fight goes on!*

Manifesto to the national patriotic conscience

The following are excerpts from a manifesto published Feb. 12 by La Tendencia, a group within the Revolutionary Democratic Party of Panama, in its publication Quincenario Bayano. It is signed by members of the PRD leadership: Mitchell Doens, Jorge Montalván, Mario Parnther, Cecilio Simon, and Efraín Reyes.

The Panamanian people have been heroic in their difficult fight for sovereignty and authentic national independence, overcoming repeated interventions and military occupations, including the disarmament and dissolution of its armed forces. This time, with enormous war-making power and immense cruelty, the United States has tried to bury our historic aspirations forever. . . .

On the sad dawn of Dec. 20, the local oligarchy—represented by a triumvirate, and imposed by the bayonets of a foreign army and through the mourning and shedding of blood of thousands of Panamanians—reclaimed coveted political power from the U.S.'s Ft. Clayton military base.

Their statements of having been “notified of the invasion only five hours beforehand” and doing nothing to stop it, accepting and encouraging it, not only do not exonerate them as they would like, but incriminate them as directly to blame for the massacre, while defining their usurped role as illegitimate. . . .

This original sin of the regime—its inability to sustain itself without foreign rifles; thousands of dead, wounded, and disappeared; devastation and vendetta as its main political motivation—are among others the reasons why the regime cannot implement its slogans. Where is the reconciliation of Panamanians?

The trumpeted democracy is made a mockery by the political persecution and repression. The freedom of thou-

sands of patriots was trampled; they were confined to U.S. military bases and to inhuman concentration camps, where, crowded, manacled, and exposed to the elements, they were subjected to psychological torture, to the brutal sun and rain, and to lack of food and sanitary facilities.

The orphans, widows, and anguished parents who roam in search of their loved ones are denied the most elementary human right to information. They will never know to what common grave they can bring their prayers. The so-called defenders of human rights, in obvious complicity, have been unable to give clear figures on the number of victims. Nor have they denounced the occupying army's atrocities, who finished off the wounded with blows or by incinerating them; nor the sadism of those troops who ran their bayonets through the corpses left at the morgues to eliminate any possible hidden survivors, and the cremation of corpses to minimize the victim count in the bloody attacks on the poorest areas of Panama City, Colón, Arraiján, and La Chorrera.

The practice of harassing the citizenry with countless raids, at all hours of the day and night and without warrants, turns the watchword of legality into one more mockery. So too are the nominations to the Supreme Court, the comptroller, and attorney general's offices, which designations are illegal.

Justice based on legality becomes an illusion when there are no codes to back up legal proceedings. It is vendetta which promotes the insane wave of accusations and charges against every political adversary. And one cannot speak of justice and legality, when writs of *habeas corpus* go unanswered for weeks.

Without independence, the law cannot be applied justly, and there can be no independence when the censoring eye and the hidden veto is daily exercised by 400 U.S. intelligence agents installed in the public institutions, acting to safeguard their own interests, as is the common practice in a protectorate.

The thousands of politically motivated layoffs make “reconciliation” an empty word, except for the members of the Union Club, and expose the regime's demagogic nature.

Peace and security will be unattainable due to their incompatibility with the U.S. objective of justifying a permanent presence on national territory. With that objective, the invaders have devoted themselves to creating situations of instability, which then make them indispensable for Panamanian peace of mind. Similarly, by means of brutal humiliations (psychological, moral, and physical), they seek to eliminate the professional dignity of the Panamanian military and to shatter their national will by downgrading them to the mere role of orderlies, to keep them from guaranteeing security to citizens and protection to the Fatherland. It is obvious that the military before and during the invasion wore their uniforms with dignity, and will never resign themselves to playing such a sad role. This contradiction will always act against a lasting peace. . . .