

Panama Report by Carlos Wesley

U.S. aims at annexation

A proposal to formally annex Panama and give it commonwealth status bares U.S. colonization plans.

Panama would become part of the United States if a proposal made public by Howard Phillips, the head of the Conservative Caucus, gains acceptance. The plan would make Panama a U.S. commonwealth, having the same status as Puerto Rico, according to an Associated Press wire published by *La Estrella de Panamá* April 20.

Described as "small but influential within the U.S. conservative movement" by the press report, the Conservative Caucus provided cadre to the "conservative revolution" of the Reagan-Bush administration and was actively engaged in so-called "public diplomacy"—the job of selling the drug-running Nicaraguan Contras as "freedom fighters" to the American public. Now, it wants President Bush to abrogate the 1977 Panama Canal treaties, and to begin the process of annexation, "because it will make it easier for the U.S. to keep its military bases in Panama."

A poll of the Caucus membership found that most favor annexation but the majority does not want Panama to become the 51st state. Instead, Panamanians would be granted some self-government and U.S. citizenship "except the right to vote in U.S. elections," reported *La Estrella*.

The release of the proposal provoked an outcry in Panama. Reflecting the government's nervousness about popular reaction to the annexation plan, the pro-government daily *El Siglo* denounced it on April 24 as "madness." The newspaper, which most closely supports U.S.-installed President Guillermo "Porky" Endara (who is scheduled to meet with Bush in Washington on April 30), the least

powerful member of the governing troika, made the incredible assertion that *EIR* founding editor Lyndon LaRouche was behind the plan.

"Jaime Ortega, vice president of the [pro-government] Authentic Liberal Party, told *El Siglo* that the idea of making Panama into a commonwealth of the United States was hatched by [opposition legislator] Mario Rognoni and Lindon Larouche [sic], when they met during a conference at Harvard University," it claimed.

It is not clear what the government hoped to gain by this assertion, since LaRouche is well known in Panama and throughout Ibero-America as a staunch defender of Panamanian sovereignty. Nor are Panamanians likely to believe the unfounded charges against Rognoni, one of the most vocal opponents of the Dec. 20 invasion and of the continuing U.S. occupation of Panama.

While the Conservative Caucus might have revealed the annexation plan too soon, their proposal is Bush administration policy. Gen. Marc Cisneros, head of U.S. Army South, said on April 18 during a trip to Costa Rica, that the U.S. will renegotiate the treaties to retain military bases beyond the year 2000.

Cisneros, who is the U.S. military proconsul in Panama, has said publicly that he is out to remake the identity of Panamanians to make them more amenable to American domination. "They need to have a little infusion of Anglo values," he told the Jan. 20 *Los Angeles Times*.

To ensure the continued presence of the U.S. Armed Forces in Panama, Cisneros oversaw the dismantling of

Panama's Defense Forces. "The institution needed an enema," he told the *Times*. During his trip to Costa Rica, where he visited the remote town of Jabillos on the border with Nicaragua to "inaugurate 'civic action' projects built by U.S. soldiers," he told the press that the bulk of the American troops that have been conducting search-and-destroy operations and occupying all of Panama's nine provinces, will not be pulled back to their bases in the Canal area until June.

Panama's economy is totally dependent on the U.S. The country does not even issue its own money; the U.S. greenback is the only currency in circulation. At this point Panama has less self-government than Puerto Rico.

Appointments to the U.S.-installed Panamanian government are based on the recommendation of the U.S. Southern Command, according to its head and Cisneros's nominal boss, Gen. Maxwell "Mad Max" Thurman. "We give [the government] whatever information we have available, so that they can make their own judgment, as to who remains in what position or who has to go," he told the Panamanian daily *La Prensa* April 15.

The Bush administration is so pleased with the results of its Panama adventure that it now wants to extend its benefits to all of Ibero-America. Lt. Gen. Carl Stiner, who ran the Panama invasion, has been tapped as chief of the Pentagon's Special Operations division, which oversees all Special Forces of the Army, Air Force, and Navy. This command is in charge of implementing the Thornburgh Doctrine of sanctioned coups, murders, and arrests. On April 22, it was announced that a new U.S. military base will be built in Peru to help fight subversives, and a similar base is planned for Bolivia.