

EIR reporter speaks to scholars on Panama invasion

Executive Intelligence Review's Panama correspondent Carlos Wesley was one of the featured speakers on the panel on "The Impact of the Panama Invasion" at the 16th International Congress of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA), which took place from April 4-6 in Washington, D.C. LASA, which groups academics and other specialists on Latin America from universities, colleges, think tanks and similar institutions in the United States and elsewhere in the world, is currently celebrating its 25th anniversary.

Wesley was invited to ensure that a Panamanian perspective was presented to the conference after Marco Gándasegui and Raúl Leis, two scholars from Panama who were originally scheduled to speak, were forced to cancel their trip. Ostensibly, the cancellation was because of objections from "the donors." The Ford Foundation and the Interamerican Foundation provide LASA with the funds to finance the participation of scholars from abroad. Wesley spoke on the panel with well-known American author Philip Wheaton, who has just published a book on U.S.-Panama relations, and another American specialist on Panama, Dr. Coniff, a historian.

Wesley's assessment of where things stand in Panama today, 16 months after George Bush ordered the invasion on Dec. 20, 1989, shocked the audience, which has been for the most part uninformed by the U.S. media. Particularly upsetting to most, was the fact that almost daily, more information from U.S. law enforcement agencies

becomes available showing that the government which Bush installed in Panama after the invasion, presided over by Guillermo Endara, is tied to the drug cartels, a story blacked out by the American media.

He also documented that very little has been done for the victims of the invasion, mostly Panamanian civilians, or to rebuild that nation's war-torn economy. This evaluation, corroborated by the other speakers on the panel, gave rise to a heated debate during the discussion period. Panama's ambassador to the United States, Eduardo Vallarino, appointed by the Endara government, said that virtually "everything the speakers said" was false, that there "are two sides to every issue," and that he would be glad to provide "the other side" to everyone who wrote to Panama's embassy in Washington.

This proved too much for Panamanian political figure Arturo Griffith, who shouted at the ambassador: "What other side? There is no other side. Who speaks for the thousands who were killed in the invasion?"

Antonio Stamp, a Panamanian activist in the Washington, D.C. area, took the Endara government's envoy to task for not demanding that the U.S. government indemnify those Panamanians left homeless by the invasion.

But it is unlikely that Vallarino will provide the "other side" to anyone who writes requesting information. Two days after the LASA conference, Endara fired Vallarino as Panama's ambassador and gave the job to the brother of banker Guillermo "Billy" Ford, the second vice president and minister of planning and finance in the U.S.-installed government. Ford, who is a former co-owner of the drug money-laundering Dadeland Bank of Miami and a Bush favorite, already has a nephew appointed as head of the Colón Free Zone.

to remain in Panama beyond Dec. 31, 1999, and to permit the U.S. to act independently to continue to protect the Panama Canal."

The concurrent resolution, introduced in the House by Rep. Philip Crane (R-Ill.), is backed by Senate Minority Leader Bob Dole (R-Kan.), which means that the Bush White House is also behind it.

By one of those coincidences of history, on the same day, March 21, the U.S.-installed government sent a number of proposed amendments to Panama's Constitution to the National Legislature. The most important of those amendments would forever abolish Panama's right to an army.

It is clear that none of three main reasons Bush gave for the invasion, has succeeded. Far from combatting drugs, the invasion installed a more corrupt government in power in Panama, with predictable results: more drugs, and more drug money laundering. The invasion, in fact, put in a government

that has made Panama safe for drugs. Instead of democracy, Panama is now governed by a U.S. military dictatorship that does not allow a free press, ignores the rule of law, and has no respect for human rights. Insofar as the third assertion, to protect the integrity of the Panama Canal Treaties, the Bush administration has de facto torn up the treaties through the invasion and subsequent occupation, and it's now proceeding to nullify those treaties *de jure*.

So, every one of the aims of the invasion has been botched. One must conclude that either the Bush administration is the most incompetent bunch of buffoons ever to occupy the White House, or—and this is my own personal conviction—from the beginning, the Bush administration has approached Panama as a laboratory to perform the experiments in how to set up the new world order, the results of which we have now seen applied to Iraq, and will likely soon see extended to other nations of the Third World.