

## Panama Report by Carlos Wesley

### New outbreak of judicial terrorism

*Endara and his masters come down hard on critics. Are these guys thin-skinned or do they have something to hide?*

On July 22, the U.S.-installed government of President Guillermo Endara issued a warrant for the arrest of Prof. Cecilio Simón, for an alleged political killing that occurred 14 years ago! The arrest was ordered "on instructions from the U.S. military Southern Command," said a source in Panama's legislature. Two people now claim they saw Simón, in the dark, during a wild melee between Panama's Communist Party and the Trotskyite FER-29 in 1978 at the National University, which resulted in the death of one member of each group.

No warrants have been issued for members of either group. Simón, who belonged to neither, was fingered by a member of Panama's Communist Party. Moscow recently recognized the Endara government, the first time the two countries have ever exchanged diplomats, and Panama's Communists have endorsed Bush's Enterprise for the Americas.

The arrest order against Simón, who was the dean of the School of Public Administration at the National University until his removal by occupation authorities last year, caused former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark to write a letter to Endara on July 27, urging him to "make sure there are no abuses of prosecutorial power." The warrant against Simón, "for an offense allegedly committed many years ago, would clearly be intended to destroy freedom of speech, association, and political activity."

Clark reminded Endara that Simón's removal as dean "was universally seen as an attack on both aca-

demie freedom and academic excellence. Mr. Simón is a solid citizen of Panama," wrote Clark. "Cecilio Simón is no criminal."

Endara, in his July 29 reply, said: "I don't know—nor have I heard of—Prof. Cecilio Eduardo Simón. By what is contained in your letter, I don't believe I would be interested in knowing him either." He added sarcastically, "Simón . . . is not above the law, even if he has Ramsey Clark as his godfather. No one is persecuted in Panama for their beliefs or opinions." Because Panama has separation of powers, "a system of government you are familiar with, the Executive branch cannot get involved in the affairs of the Judicial branch," wrote Endara.

The response caused gales of laughter among Panamanians who recall that just weeks ago, Endara went on television to call for the firing and jailing of a judge who ordered the release on bail of Col. Marco Justines, the former chief of staff of the Panamanian Defense Forces, who has been held for 18 months without a trial.

The arrest order against Simón was part of renewed repression since the early-July return of José Blandón—he had been under the "protective custody" of U.S. Marshals at military bases. Panama's former Consul General in New York, on whom the CIA has a thick file documenting his dealings with Cuba, betrayed Gen. Manuel Noriega, and was listed as the U.S. star witness against him last year. Blandón's many contradictory statements have since discredited him.

His return now is most curious, as the U.S. Justice Department was supposed to bring charges against him for selling the "Noriega tapes" (which Blandón got from Justice) to CNN. Since his return, he has been meeting with Attorney General Rogelio Cruz, a partner of the Cali Cartel, and others, to find new ways to incriminate Panamanian nationalists.

Panama's National Committee on Human Rights leader, Olga Mejía, charged on July 24 that there is no "judicial independence in Panama" and accused the occupation government of fabricating cases, of presenting false witnesses, and of condemning innocent people without any evidence of guilt. She took to task Amnesty International, the U.N., the OAS, and others, because "they lack energy" in dealing with human rights complaints against the current regime. "They are not acting with the same energy as they did with the former government," she said.

She raised the case of Isabel Corro, whose arrest was ordered in July on charges of being the "intellectual author" of "painting slogans" in Panama City against the U.S. occupation. Corro is leading the fight to account for those killed during the 1989 U.S. invasion, and she was featured last September on CBS "60 Minutes" saying that at least 4,000 Panamanians were killed.

Corro's arrest was ordered as the administration rushed to keep the cover-up in place. U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Bernard Aronson told a congressional committee on July 30 that "there is no basis whatsoever to the reports that thousands of civilians died," and anyone saying otherwise is "demagogic." The Pentagon's Gen. James Harding singled out Mrs. Corro by name and insisted that there were only 272 confirmed dead.