

Panama Report by Carlos Wesley

Journalist beaten by officials

Had it happened under Noriega, the U.S. media would have yelled bloody murder, but under Endara, it is called democracy.

Journalist Luis de Janón, who writes the Ave Fénix column in *La Estrella de Panamá*, was brutally beaten on the evening of June 8, in a Panama City restaurant, by two brothers, Alvin and George Weeden. The Weedens are officials of the U.S.-installed Panamanian government of President Guillermo Endara, and both are linked to drug money-laundering, according to U.S. trial records dating back to the early 1980s and other documentation.

La Estrella de Panamá is Panama's oldest news daily, and one of the most respected newspapers in this hemisphere. Founded in 1853, just two years after the *New York Times*, it is the oldest continuously published newspaper on the west coast of both Americas, having begun life as the English-language *Panama Star and Herald* during the San Francisco gold rush.

Its reputation for objectivity is such, that during the previous government headed by Gen. Manuel Noriega, the paper maintained a studious neutrality, although some members of the publishing family had important roles in the government. Thus, the attack on De Janón has caused widespread outrage in Panama.

The Association of Panamanian Journalists condemned the "premeditated and malicious use of violence" against De Janón. "It constitutes an attack against freedom of expression," the group said. "We regret that the infamous practice of 'taking justice into one's own hands' is occurring with the complicit silence of the authorities."

Panama's Union of Persecuted

Journalists declared itself on "a state of alert" and asked for international solidarity from journalists and others.

"This is not the first time that a Panamanian journalist has been attacked, persecuted, and threatened by those who hold power," they said. They particularly condemned the fact that "presidential adviser George Randall Weeden Gamboa, in public statements on Panama's television Channel 13, bragged about this attack."

So far the U.S. media have responded with thunderous silence to the request for solidarity with their stricken Panamanian colleague. Had De Janón been beaten by Noriega's government officials, it would have been the lead item on every newscast of every network for days on end.

But, now that the war on drugs has been "won" with the invasion of Panama and the capture of Noriega, and now that Panama has become a "model democracy" under the continuing U.S. military occupation, the U.S.-installed regime of drug bankers led by Endara can pretty much get away with murder.

In Washington, a spokesman for *EIR* said that the violent assault on De Janón could be related to the fact that his recent articles have come to the defense of *EIR*'s founding editor Lyndon LaRouche, who has been under attack by the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith (ADL). On June 6, just two days before he was assaulted, De Janón cited *EIR*, reporting that "the ADL is under investigation, facing indictment by U.S. authorities for crimes including espionage on behalf of Israel and South Africa."

Although the Weedens publicly admitted that they assaulted De Janón, neither has been arrested. Endara made a joke about the incident, and Government and Justice Minister Juan Chevalier commented: "If an ass goes into the streets looking for a whipping, it is going to find it." Police at the scene said they could not enter the restaurant to carry out an arrest, "because it is private property." De Janón filed a criminal complaint, charging the Weedens with attempted homicide and conspiracy.

George Weeden, who weighs over 300 pounds, struck De Janón in the head and the mouth with his fist and a portable radio. He told reporters at the Presidential Palace, where he works as an adviser to the also rotund Endara, "I hit him in the mouth a couple of times, and I am extremely happy I did it." Weeden is currently a fugitive from Costa Rican justice, charged with fraud against "Borda Azul, S.A." He was first confirmed as a money launderer in 1983, when his Banco Weeden Internacional of Costa Rica laundered money for one Wayne Franklin.

Alvin Weeden, an adviser to Panama's Customs chief, Rodrigo Arosemena, said they attacked De Janón because his articles on the their drug ties were slanderous.

Shortly before the attack, De Janón announced that he would be writing an exposé about the involvement of Alvin Weeden and Arosemena in the case of several containers of ethyl ether that were consigned to the U.S.-run Panama Canal Commission, but ended up in the hands of Colombia's drug cartels. Ether is used to extract cocaine from coca leaves. Several American officials and former officials of the Canal Commission, including the former chief of its Logistics Division, Gerald "Jerry" Levecchia, are under investigation.