

# 'Secret government' finds Panama stooge

by Peter Rush

Panama's first Vice President Roderick Esquivel returned to Panama Sept. 16 from a one-week jaunt to Canada and the United States, and called a press conference and went on radio to boast of his "informal, extra-official" meeting with the U.S. Undersecretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, Elliott Abrams. This is the same Elliott Abrams who lost all credibility with the U.S. Congress when he was caught brazenly lying in testimony before that body on his own role in the Iran-Contra scandal.

Esquivel was anxious to tell Panamanians of Abrams' "concern" over "Panama's insults to the United States [sic]," such as Panama's treatment of David Miller, the commercial attaché arrested while demonstrating with Panama's opposition. Esquivel then trumpeted, "We are a totally discredited country around the world. Our image abroad is that there are no guaranteed rights for anyone here."

The U.S. media have indeed done a thorough job over the last months of painting Panama as an outlaw nation. But Ibero-America has not bought this Soviet-style disinformation campaign.

## Noriega welcomed in Mexico

Even as Esquivel was dropping his "bombshells," in Mexico, Gen. Manuel Noriega, the chief target of hatred by Panama's Opposition and the U.S. State Department, received the highest medal of honor the Mexican military can award, and was warmly acclaimed by the leaders of the military establishments of 20 Ibero-American nations. Noriega was in Mexico for the celebration of the 177th anniversary of Mexico's independence. In the award ceremony, Noriega was praised for his important role in the Contadora Group, the countries trying to bring about a peaceful solution to the Central American crisis.

Noriega, the head of the Panamanian Defense Forces, is known for insisting that the militaries of the region have a key role to play in the peace process.

Contrary to Esquivel's retail version of the U.S. government's slander of Panama, Panama has the strong support of the rest of the continent against the hamhanded efforts to destabilize the Panamanian government being run by the so-called "Project Democracy" apparatus in the United States, together with the "Bankers' Revolution" Opposition in Pan-

ama. Every nation of Ibero-America backed Panama in the vote in the Organization of American States last June against the blatant intervention into the internal affairs of Panama represented by the U.S. Senate resolution demanding the overthrow of the government of Panama. Nor has Ibero-America forgotten U.S. betrayal of hemispheric solidarity and the Monroe Doctrine, when the U.S. backed Great Britain against Argentina in the Malvinas War in 1982.

So what explains Mr. Esquivel's strange behavior? While in Ontario, Canada the previous week, Mr. Esquivel held meetings with representatives of the U.S. "secret government" at the founding meeting of the "Liberal International."

Specifically, he met with Democratic Party chairman Paul Kirk, and also with one Brian Atwood, executive director of the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), a think tank of the Democratic National Committee funded by the National Endowment for Democracy to carry out "sensitive" operations, that used to be carried out by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Atwood invited Esquivel to the United States on his return, which was the occasion for his talk with Elliott Abrams.

The network that has the ear of the hapless Mr. Esquivel was exposed in *EIR*'s March 1987 Special Report, "Project Democracy: the 'parallel government' behind the Iran/Contra affair," as the crowd around Lt. Col. Oliver North and his associates, infamous for arming the Ayatollah Khomeini's terrorists. This network's link to the CIA was spelled out in a 1984 syndicated column by the former top CIA official of 30-years experience, Cord Meyer: "When this controversial CIA funding was permanently ended in 1967 by a series of leaks to the press, all efforts to find a way of openly providing official American help to non-governmental organizations abroad initially proved unsuccessful. . . . Now that Congress has found a way, through the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), of openly funding beleaguered democratic forces overseas, it has been wise to proceed cautiously at first, in view of the extreme sensitivity of such intervention."

The NED is one of the "mother" organizations of the web of foundations and groups spawned by the Oliver North network to back their Contra operations, and to intervene in developing countries in general. The NED network has been heavily involved with the Panamanian Opposition, egging it on to destabilize the government.

The NED is also actively trying to influence officials in other countries. In mid-September, the deputy director of the NDI under Atwood, Kenneth Wollack, met with Peruvian Vice President Luis Alberto Sánchez in Washington, and Sánchez was hosted by the NED itself at an event attended by top Democratic Party officials and former officials.

As for Esquivel's Ontario puppeteer, Brian Atwood, he went as an "observer" to the Philippines in 1986, invited by the same State Department officials who overthrew President Marcos in 1986, and who invited several Panamanian Oppositionists there in 1987.