

IMF and the World Bank have demanded are accepted, the government would be committing political suicide.” He recommended that the national government “should have real planning, since this, in reality, hasn’t existed for a long time. A different criterion is needed with respect to the international credit organizations, since the debt can’t be paid, without putting in danger the very basis of our national existence,” he said.

### Strike? It was a lock-out!

On March 3, the opposition called off the strike they had begun on Feb. 29, declaring it a “complete success.” In reality, the strike was a lock-out by industrialists and major store chains. But as even the U.S. media had to admit, life in the non-elite areas went on as usual, with almost all stores open. The opposition Civic Crusade stated that they wanted to avoid the financial collapse of Panama, since it will “move the Panamanian people to violence.” The U.S. government and the Senate, however, seem to want exactly that. Crusade member Aurelio Barria stated at a news conference that while the Crusade approved of U.S. financial pressure on the government, they did not want the private sector of Panama to suffer the consequences of being denied funds.

On the morning before the owners called off their lock out, CONATO, the confederation of Panamanian trade unions, the public employees union, and the peasant federations jointly demanded that the government take whatever measures necessary to reopen factories and businesses. They rejected the “so-called strike,” as a prelude to an invasion by the United States. The communiqué stated that such an invasion would cost the lives of thousands of Panamanians, and it charged that the employers’ strike was being funded by the United States, which is trying to impose a docile government “willing to renegotiate the canal treaties, and extend the American presence in the Canal Zone.

“This political strike by the employers is affecting the wages of the workers . . . encircling with hunger the popular sectors.” They demanded that the government take over and reopen companies illegally closed, and called for all the workers of the closed businesses to assemble in front of the CONATO headquarters to begin to take measures to reopen businesses. The strike was later called off.

Whatever lies might come out of the U.S. State Department, it is obvious that the new government of President Solís Palma has massive popular support. On March 4, General Noriega addressed a rally of 15,000 supporters in the city of Colón. From there he will tour the interior of the country, where the local bases of the Torrijista movement have continuously supported the general, and his nationalist project. While the United States has the power to invade and to starve out the tiny Panamanian republic, the population will not easily reimbrace colonial status. Washington would do well to stop believing its own propaganda, and take a hard look at what’s really going on inside Panama.

## ‘Vesco International’ lashes out at Noriega

In a joint statement published on Feb. 27, three Ibero-American ex-Presidents joined the State Department’s campaign for Panama’s Gen. Manuel Noriega to resign: Colombia’s Alfonso López Michelsen, Venezuela’s Carlos Andrés Pérez, and Costa Rica’s Daniel Oduber.

The three announced that they had presented U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz, with a proposed strategy to achieve “Panama’s reentry into the community of democratic nations.” This requires, they stated, not only that Noriega resign, but that Panama be placed under “the supervision of the United States, Venezuela, Colombia, and Costa Rica.”

The activation of these three gentlemen in the campaign against Panama confirms *EIR*’s report that it is Robert Vesco’s drug mob which now seeks to take power in Panama (see Vol. 15, No. 10).

Consider the following:

**Alfonso López Michelsen** is a “long-term business associate” of Gabriel Lewis Galindo, the opposition chief just appointed “roving ambassador” by ex-President of Panama Eric Delvalle, according to Lewis Galindo’s old friend, William Jordan. What kind of business? Under López Michelsen’s Colombian presidency (1974-77), the financial mechanisms for drug money-laundering—no questions asked—were set up, with the creation of the well-named “sinister window” at the Banco de la República.

In 1982, the mafia repaid the favor—by supporting López Michelsen’s next presidential campaign with a 25 million peso check from Hitler-devotee Carlos Lehder.

In May 1984, barely one week after the Colombian mafia assassinated Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, López Michelsen met with Medellín Cartel chiefs Pablo Escobar Gaviria and Jorge Luis Ochoa in Panama. The mob proposed that López Michelsen mediate between them and the Colombian government, to arrange a truce: The government grants them an amnesty, they stop their war inside Colombia, and bring back their billions to help pay the debt. López Michelsen accepted the proposal. When President Belisario Betancur refused, he took the mafia’s proposal to the public. In a lengthy interview published by the Colombian daily *El Tiempo* on July 29, 1984, López Michelsen reported that he had met with the drug traffickers, outlined their proposal, and argued that Colombia should accept!

**Daniel Oduber** also works closely with Panama's opposition movement, through Nicolás Ardito Barletta, a fellow member of Sol Linowitz's Inter-American Dialogue. For two decades, ex-President Barletta has argued that the solution to Panama's economic problems is to turn the entire country into a free zone, so that Panama can replace Hong Kong as the drug and dirty-finance capital of the world, when the Crown Colony gains its independence from Great Britain in the 1990s.

Oduber is one of the Dialogue's most active members, selected along with Elliot Richardson after the Dialogue's 1987 meeting, to present the group's views to the U.S. Congress. Barletta and Oduber both signed the Dialogue's proposal that legalizing the consumption and trade of narcotics should now be discussed.

Oduber also worked closely with Carlos Lehder's partner, Robert Vesco. Vesco, who today lives in Havana, Cuba under the protection of Fidel Castro, is the chief financier of the Medellín Cartel. Vesco financed Oduber's 1974 campaign for the presidency—at least \$200,000 worth.

In his biography of the cartel financier, Vesco, Arthur Herzog relates other details of the Oduber-Vesco partnership as well. In May 1974, for example, two days before his inauguration, Oduber met secretly with Vesco, to get the crook's approval of a "carefully composed" letter which outlined Oduber's commitments to Vesco once he became President: "Oduber . . . said he would not permit Vesco to be extradited," because Vesco had brought "\$25-30 million of his own money to Costa Rica," as long as Vesco continued to invest in tourism, agriculture, and cattle, instead of newspapers, Herzog reports.

Vesco agreed. "Following Oduber's advice, he had taken himself out of sensitive investment areas like communications and transport and put himself into helping the Costa Rican government in its fiscal situation."

Later, Vesco and Oduber bought a small jet together, a Cessna Citation paid for with financing arranged by the son of former Costa Rican President José Figueres.

Figueres, President when Vesco first fled to Costa Rica in 1972, was Oduber's political mentor, and is still today Vesco's business partner.

The Cessna became part of the "air wing" Vesco set up on his 1,000 acre ranch in Guanacaste, Costa Rica. Vesco expanded the runway on the ranch to 4,000 feet, in order to accommodate small jets.

The Oduber-Vesco jet proved useful in 1976; it was used to carry a letter from President Oduber to President-elect Jimmy Carter, suggesting that Carter end the "Vesco matter" by pardoning his friend.

**Carlos Andrés Pérez**, currently a presidential candidate and vice president of the Socialist International, works closely with both the opposition Civic Crusade of Panama and Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Elliott Abrams. He, too, has been linked to the Medellín Cartel's Ochoa clan.

In the midst of corruption charges thrown out in Venezuela's current presidential campaign in February, came the news that Pérez had received a gift horse from the Medellín Cartel's Fabio Ochoa, as an expression of appreciation for having freed Ochoa's daughter when she was kidnaped by the narco-terrorist M-19. The charge was made by the secretary general of Venezuela's Christian Democratic party, Copei, Enrique Pérez Olivares, who sought thus to defend his candidate from drug charges.

Pérez admitted in a press conference on Feb. 24, that he had helped to free Ochoa's daughter, but claimed that he never received the horse, and that he felt very satisfied to have helped free the girl two years ago, "when the drug problem had not even awakened in Colombia. . . . My connections with Fabio Ochoa are indirect," he stated. "I never received a pace horse from Ochoa, but it would not have been anything special anyway," Pérez said. "He is a friend of all those in Venezuela who are involved with the breeding of pace horses in the country. I met him by chance at a fair in San Sebastián, where they introduced me to him, and beyond that I have never had any kind of relations."

Fabio Ochoa responded to Pérez press conference in a letter published in Colombia's *El Tiempo*: "It is very strange that ex-President Pérez says that he never received the animal. . . . He has the mare in his stable, and enjoys her every Sunday."

On Feb. 25, the Caracas daily *El Nuevo País* published an article reporting on a public letter from Fabio Ochoa to Colombia's President Belisario Betancur, published in 1983, in which Ochoa said that he lived in Venezuela for five years, and that much respect was paid to him there, "with beautiful speeches, among others by ex-President Carlos Andrés Pérez, my personal friend, since, during his term, I lived in his country, and I also planted the enthusiasm for horses in him."

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