

U.S. tries new dirty tricks against Panama

by Gretchen Small

The bankrupt U.S. government has found a new source of funds: According to a July 28 report in the *Washington Post*, the Reagan administration is using monies seized from Panama's government, to finance covert CIA operations inside Panama. Congressional sources have confirmed Panamanian opposition leaders' statements that they "already have access to some Panamanian government funds that have been frozen in U.S. bank accounts," the *Post* reported.

Evidently not convinced of the inherent failures of mercenary armies by the Nicaraguan Contra fiasco, the administration has set out to repeat the experiment in Panama. On July 27, the *Washington Post* broke the news that President Reagan had signed a Finding in mid-July, authorizing new covert activity inside Panama to oust Defense Force Commander Gen. Manuel Noriega, and overthrow the government of President Manuel Solís Palma.

Administration officials leaked details of the planned "covert" operations to all the media. The *Washington Post* reported on July 28 that the CIA will be in charge. *New York Times* sources said that operations will include "plans to further harm Panama's economy, funnel assistance to the civilian opposition and bolster dissident military officers who could eventually topple Gen. Noriega . . . [and] plans for 'psychological warfare,' like the sabotaging of Government broadcasts."

"Contra Take Two" has a new wrinkle, however: The money stolen from the government targeted for overthrow, will finance the operation! All Panamanian government money deposited in U.S. banks was frozen last March, by order of the U.S. State Department. The action based upon a legal scheme cooked up by Henry Kissinger's lawyer, William D. Rogers. To this day, the United States maintains that it is holding Panama's money on behalf of the non-existent government of deposed President Eric Delvalle.

Since March, Delvalle has hidden himself on a U.S. military base in Panama, leaving only once—to visit Miami and New York. Yet U.S. recognition of his "government" is also being used as an excuse for the United States to rip up the Panama Canal Treaties. In early July, the State Department moved meetings of the Panama Canal Commission (the binational body which administers Canal operations) to Georgia, refused to issue visas to any members of the Canal Commission designated by the Solís Palma government, and

then invited Delvalle's sole remaining representative, Juan Sosa, to represent Panama instead!

Lessons in leadership

The administration's problem is that even Panama's opposition movement is growing tired of playing charades with the United States. When Panama's Legislative Assembly convened in special session to debate changes in the election laws on July 25, all but one opposition party (Arnulfo Arias's Panameñistas) were in attendance, ending the opposition's boycott of any government initiative.

That included the faction of Delvalle's own Republican Party which had followed him into the opposition when he was deposed in February. Leaving the opening meeting of the Assembly's deliberations, former ambassador Dominador Kayser Bazán, a prominent leader of this faction, praised the current debate on electoral reform as "very healthy for the country."

With the growth of domestic peace inside Panama, the United States fears that the foreign ministers of the Group of Eight (founded by Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Peru, Venezuela, Colombia, Mexico, and Panama) will decide to reincorporate Panama as an active member when they meet in Brasilia on Aug. 13-14. Panama was suspended after Solís Palma was named President, until its internal situation was "clarified." If readmitted now, Solís will attend the October presidential summit of the Group, leaving the United States alone with its Delvalle charade.

Not waiting quietly, President Solís Palma has sought to turn his nation's crisis into an opportunity to organize an Ibero-American movement in defense of economic and political sovereignty. Most dramatic was the President's July 18 speech before the Legislative Assembly, broadcast on national television.

The speech addressed electoral reform, but rather than concentrating on procedures, Solís instructed the legislators to remember the real issue facing them: how Panama can secure its economic and political independence. "Panama's bitter drink" of crisis today, must become the "detonator of old Latin American aspirations: the integration of Latin America in a joint endeavor for development and progress for all our peoples," he argued.

He urged all Panamanians, to study Pope John Paul II's latest encyclical, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, because the Pope's message "encompasses such wisdom, such a generous understanding of countries such as ours, that its widest possible distribution in our country would be a magnificent contribution to the process of deepening democratization through social justice and equality for all." That encyclical shook the world banking community and Soviet imperialists alike when it was released in March 1988, because it demands that both liberal economics and materialist Marxism be replaced with a moral world economic order, to lift all of humanity out of poverty.