



Interview: Eduardo Ríos Molinar

Panamanians push summit against International Monetary Fund

In his inaugural speech last July 28, Peruvian President Alan García declared war on the International Monetary Fund and called for the convening of a summit meeting of Ibero-American heads of state to be held in the Republic of Panama, to forge a common front on the debt, to wage war on drugs, and to achieve continental integration. Panama's then President, Nicolás Ardito Barletta, rejected García's call. "García has jumped into a sea of sharks, and now he wants us to jump in after him," Barletta, a former World Bank official, told a meeting of Panamanian trade unionists. His anti-national stance and his push to collect the debt on behalf of his former employers with the blood, sweat, and tears of the people of Panama, cost Barletta his job. On Sept. 28 he was forced to resign the presidency. His successor, Eric Arturo Delvalle, announced that he was taking up the challenge posed by García, and would convene a summit meeting early next year.

One of the organizations that played a key role in convincing the new President to agree to the summit, was Panama's Council of Organized Workers (Conato). Our correspondent, Carlos Wesley, who arrived in Panama on Sept. 16, the day Delvalle made the announcement, interviewed Eduardo Ríos Molinar, an ordained minister who heads the national construction-workers union. Ríos is also one of the coordinators of the Schiller Institute Labor Commission, and is one of the leaders of Conato who was instrumental in getting President Delvalle to change the anti-summit policy established by the former President.

In the interview, Ríos recounts the process that led to Delvalle's historic call, and talks about the next steps that will be taken by the Panamanian labor movement to ensure the success of the proposed summit. The interview, excerpts of which we publish below, took place on Sept. 23.

EIR: All the news media here credit Conato with a victory for having convinced President [Eric] Delvalle to issue the call for the summit proposed by Peruvian President Alan García. How did Conato achieve this?

Ríos: Well, the process took place over three meetings. We first took part in a meeting to evaluate the recent events that had taken place in Panama, and to analyze the bombardment

against the country from abroad that was, and is, taking place in the wake of the resignation of former President Barletta. In that meeting, with the leaders of political parties of the governing coalition, I told them that there was a need—since we were now placed on the defensive—for the country to go on a sustained offensive, and that the only way to keep up such an offensive, given the circumstances, was to take on the challenge posed by Alan García's call for a heads-of-state meeting in Panama to discuss the problem of the foreign debt, the new international economic order, and the economic integration of Latin America. After an intense debate, we prevailed, and our proposal was finally accepted. Later, we went to a meeting with the President of the Republic himself, and after listening to a number of issues he wanted to present, we called him aside and told him of our concerns. We told him about the need for a summit meeting, and for Panama to keep on the offensive, that these were two parallel issues, and that, in our opinion, the best service he could render Panama and Latin America, and, at the same time make clear to the world that his was a different government, was to issue the call for the summit.

He discussed the issue with us for a while. He told us about some obstacles that could impede the summit, but we stressed that the basic issue was that in Panama and the world there prevailed the belief that Barletta had opposed the summit and that he had brought forth the same objections as an excuse not to convene it. We told him that he should make the decision in favor of the summit, and offer Panama as the venue, and commit the country to make the summit a success. He finally agreed with our arguments, and then the discussion turned to the question of the proper forum for him to announce his decision, since neither he nor we wanted the declaration to be treated lightly. We decided then that the best forum would be the regular business meeting of the directorate of the National Council of Delegates of Conato, that is, in front of the body that serves as the general assembly for all the country's labor leaders. The rest is known. He made the announcement at the meeting of the Council of Delegates in the same terms that we had proposed, and exactly as we had agreed.

EIR: Then, we can definitively say that it was the direct



Panama's new, anti-IMF President Delvalle, meets with the leadership of the CONATO labor confederation and announces his plan to call for a summit.

influence of Conato that led President Delvalle to issue his declaration of support for the summit meeting proposed by Alan García?

Ríos: That is correct. That is definitely the case, and President Delvalle himself admits it.

EIR: How have the Panamanian people received Delvalle's declaration?

Ríos: Among the workers, generally, the reaction is what you would expect, great joy. But more than joy, there is the commitment now to keep working on the second stage: to ensure that a successful summit is held.

In the press, the columnists of almost all of the country's newspapers have commented favorably on Delvalle's call and have praised his stance. Many, the great majority of them, credit Conato with what they have now taken to calling a triumph.

On the other side, there is the reaction of the opposition. Before, they were pushing for the summit, but, at the same time, they were saying that Barletta was beholden to the International Monetary Fund and, because of that, he would never convene that summit of heads of state. That it was a pipe dream to believe that such a meeting could take place under a sold-out President like Barletta. But now that Delvalle issued the call, they are saying that it is not convenient to hold the summit, that it is not an auspicious time, that it is impossible to hold that meeting. They have changed their

line. . . . Now, they don't want the meeting to take place. Before they were calling for it, but from a negative standpoint, to use it against Barletta, whom they argued, using the same arguments we did, was such a sell-out that he lacked the guts to convene the meeting. But now that Delvalle has agreed to host the meeting, they are saying that it is not proper to hold the meeting, and they are now attacking Alan García . . . proving that they never really wanted the meeting to take place. That has been the role of the opposition, but the people have now found out their true colors because of their flip-flops. . . .

EIR: You said before that Conato will have to remain on a permanent mobilization to ensure that the summit in fact takes place. What are the steps to be taken during this mobilization?

Ríos: First, we are drawing up a list of all the heads of state of Latin America and the Caribbean. From that starting point, we are contacting the labor movements in each of the countries, encouraging them to put pressure on their Presidents to take a stance on the summit. Are they for or against? This will cull the list and we can then concentrate our efforts on those Presidents that are most reluctant, those who are most opposed to the idea of the summit because of their cronyism with the gentlemen of the international banks, or because of their cronyism with some official of the U.S. State Department, which we definitely know is not in agreement with this

meeting, and which is going to attempt to sabotage it up to the last moment.

We also believe that Panama should send a good will delegation on tour throughout Latin America, beginning with Peru, and from there, together with another delegation, a Peruvian delegation, visit the rest of the countries of Latin America. Those delegations should include labor leaders . . . businessmen, government officials, and representatives of the military. . . . We are proposing that President Delvalle name such a delegation, and once we achieve that in Panama, we want the President of Peru to do the same, and for the two delegations to link up and tour the continent together as one. . . .

We are also calling for the labor movement of each and every Latin American country to send telegrams, resolutions, and so forth to pressure the diplomatic missions represented in their respective nations, so that those embassies can inform their governments of the support, and even of the pressure, that exists for the summit throughout the continent.

The other thing we are concerned with is with setting a definite date for the summit. . . . We believe that it should be held in January of 1986. . . .

. . . Those are the steps we will be taking to ensure that the meeting takes place.

In addition, we want the nations involved to start carrying out some sort of exchange of information about great economic projects. They have to start thinking—at least, that is how we in the Panamanian labor movement see it—about great development projects that would facilitate economic integration. We believe that that is important, because the integration of Latin America will have to take place through concrete, great development projects, where the projects themselves serve as the integrating vehicles. . . .

EIR: Earlier, you said that Panama is the target of “a bombardment” against it, of a destabilization campaign. Who is doing it and why?

Ríos: We believe that the [destabilization] campaign is being carried out by Central American oligarchic circles, together with groups such as the Nicaraguan Democratic Front (FDN), ARDE—and they have a lot of supporters in Panama—the Panamanian opposition forces, and I am not talking about the members of the opposition as such, but about those who control the opposition. The U.S. Department of State, we believe, is also involved in this. And what is their aim? It is to strike against the obstacle that they now have in Panama, which is the stance adopted by Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega regarding the Central American question. The campaign is aimed, almost in its entirety, against General Noriega. In our view, it has a lot to do with what is happening in Costa Rica, a country that, in our opinion, is virtually an occupied nation, that has been taken over by armed bands from several countries, including armed bands of Costa Ricans themselves, who are becoming a threat for our country, which has re-

mained outside the Central American conflicts.

What we have, then, is that Noriega has been trying to speed up the Contadora peace process, for which a deadline has now been set. The countries involved must sign the proposed peace treaty within 45 days.

So, it became necessary to set off something in Panama, an insurrection, or something like that, to destabilize it, thus creating a difficult situation for the front-line state of the Contadora Group, Panama, and within Panama, for the mainstay of the government, the National Defense Forces commanded by General Noriega. . . . Because, if you have a convulsion in Panama . . . then the Contadora process gets stalled. Mainly, it provides an excuse for the two governments that are reluctant to sign the peace treaty, Honduras and Costa Rica, two governments that are under the gun of the armed bands and occupied by American troops. . . .

To carry out an invasion of Nicaragua, the United States would have to invade three countries. It cannot invade Nicaragua alone; it would have to invade Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Costa Rica at the same time. It would not have to invade Panama because it already has troops stationed here. But to provide logistical support for a military intervention once the invasion took place, they would have to employ the military bases that they have here in Panama. The Torrijos-Carter treaties forbid that . . . and if the bases are used for that purpose, then there would be a confrontation between the American government and the Panamanian government, especially with the National Defense Forces, which would take measures to prevent the bases from being used to provide logistical support for an intervention in Central America. . . . That is why there is an effort to destabilize the Panamanian government and its Defense Forces, employing supposed opposition groups within the country, which are not a true political opposition, but groups that are working within the framework of a plan to bust the Contadora peace process . . . before the 45 day deadline for the signing of the treaty is up. . . .

EIR: Any other observations for the readers of *EIR* in the United States and throughout the world?

Ríos: We are at a time when we need solidarity, support, and understanding. We ask people to come to Panama to see our true situation for themselves. We have taken on this struggle, and we are not going to abandon it. We believe that we are going to win it, because it is not only a struggle for Panama, but for Latin America and for the world. I believe that we are in a transition stage. A stage in which, for the first time in many years, the people of our nations, jointly, are standing up against those policies—successfully, and employing the right methods—that have kept us in a state of constant uncertainty. But I believe that within five years or so, this tempest will be over and there will be a new world economic order that would allow us to co-exist in peace, just as is written in the first chapter of the *Book of Genesis*.