

Bills seek to grab Panama Canal for U.S.

by Gretchen Small

The introduction of two resolutions calling for the abrogation of the 1979 Panama Canal Treaties, presented on Aug. 10 by Rep. Philip Crane (R-Ill.) and Sen. Steven Symms (R-Idaho) in their respective chambers of Congress, opens a new and dangerous phase in the United States' crazy crusade against Panama.

In presenting the resolution, Crane insisted that the United States has sovereignty not just over the Canal, but over the internal affairs of Panama. The 1903 Treaties (granting the United States rights *in perpetuity* in Panama) and the DeConcini Reservation to the 1979 Treaties, express what U.S. policy must be, he argued.

The DeConcini Reservation, which declares that the U.S. has the right to intervene in Panama "unilaterally, without a prior request by the government of Panama and, if necessary, against the opposition of the government of Panama," was never accepted by any government of Panama.

Joined by the activation of various anti-treaty lobbying committees, the resolutions signal that the U.S. Establishment has decided to gear up a political mobilization on the Canal question, to prepare the ground for U.S. military action to remove Panamanian Defense Forces Commander Gen. Manuel Noriega from power, and reassert perpetual U.S. sovereignty over the Panama Canal.

The Establishment is counting on mobilizing U.S. Conservatives who never faced up to the fact that, since a U.S. right in perpetuity over the Canal will never be accepted in Panama, insisting on such claims can never secure the defense of the Canal.

Defending the Canal is not the concern of those in the Establishment running the current anti-Panama war, however. Their idea, spelled out by the Council on Foreign Relations' Richard Falk in a Spring 1978 article in *Foreign Policy* magazine, was that "ambiguities" in the Canal Treaties would inevitably lead to war between Panama and the United States, just as differences over the 1954 Geneva Accords "culminated in the Vietnam War."

U.S. military intervention over the Canal runs the risk of embroiling the United States in more than an unwinnable war inside Panama, however. All too few in Washington have considered the prospect that any such intervention might turn into a war against a unified Ibero-American fighting force. Those who have not, would do well to study the documents issued at a recent conference in Panama City on continental

integration, published on page 37.

Crane's resolution, and an Aug. 13 *Washington Post* article reporting that a U.S. interagency planning group is studying the option of military invasion of Panama, were quickly reported in the Ibero-American press. On Aug. 14, Peru's *La Crónica* put the news together. Crane's actions were discussed at the conference in Panama, *La Crónica* reports, and "unanimous" support was given to Panama's sovereignty over the Canal. "The temperament of the delegations is that any aggression against Panama, is an aggression against all Latin America, because it would set a precedent which could be repeated in any of our countries," the daily concluded.

Keep friends, or lose the Canal

Delegates to that meeting, as well as the international press, got a taste of the mood in Panama at the annual Aug. 12 military parade, held for the past four years to celebrate the founding of the elite Panamanian Battalion 2000, which will guard the Canal come the year 2000. Most U.S. media were so fixated on whether General Noriega would announce his resignation from the Defense Forces and/or declare his candidacy for the presidency (he did neither), that there was little reporting of what actually took place.

This year, the Aug. 12 celebrations were renamed an Act of Resistance for the Sovereignty and Dignity of the Nation. Panama's newly created citizen-militia, the Dignity Battalions, joined the Panamanian Defense Forces (PDF) in their parade, while General Noriega warned that Panama will fight if the 1979 Treaties are overturned.

In his speech at the ceremonies, President Manuel Solís Palma decried foreign efforts to create "a fight between the military and civilians. . . . The PDF, the soldier and the civilian, are part of a nation with the joint responsibility of making it advance. . . . Panama is one, composed of military and civilians." He added that Panama has been free from the war afflicting the rest of Central America thus far, because its armed forces believe that security requires securing the development of a nation, and the welfare of its citizens.

How long that peace can be maintained depends in large part on Panama's ability to revive economic activity. According to the Aug. 14 *Washington Post*, the Reagan administration is considering prohibiting shipments of U.S. cash to Panama (the dollar is used as Panama's national currency), or, one better, "undermining public confidence in government checks," by putting the U.S. government into the business of counterfeiting National Bank of Panama checks!

The resurgence of the U.S.-directed civilian insurgency, quiet for months, around the Aug. 14 funeral of Nazi and former President Arnulfo Arias, may prove more important, however. When an estimated 100,000 turned out for Arias's funeral service, which turned into a march against the government, opposition leaders regained confidence that they have a chance of organizing an opposition movement more lasting than their Civic Crusade.

From Noriega's speech

Here are excerpts from Gen. Manuel Noriega's Resistance Day speech, delivered in Panama City on Aug. 12.

. . . For the first time in the Republic's history, representative units of our armed forces are marching together with the Dignity Battalions, which are the people armed for survival. We have armed these people, and those weapons will not be taken back, because they belong to the people. These are the people armed for survival against aggression. . . .

We insist: Not even the largest army in the world can defend the Canal, as Gen. [Wallace] Nutting used to say, as Gen. [Paul] Gorman repeated, as Gen. [John] Galvin stated: They cannot defend the Canal, even if they post U.S. soldiers inch by inch along the Canal from the Atlantic to the Pacific! The Canal can only be defended by those who live along its banks, by its owners, by those who gave it birth, by the Panamanian people!

And today, just as U.S. law permits the truth to be known after 10 years, we want to report that if they had not approved the Torrijos-Carter Treaties, Torrijos would have blown up the Canal. These men who are here were going to blow up the Canal. . . . They were already in the heart of the Canal, and these men were moved to tears when they were told to halt, that the order is not to blow up the Canal, because the Canal is now Panamanian. . . .

Yesterday we said: Respect Panama; take your hands off Panama. And we are saying it again today, in the presence of the aristocracy of talent which accompanies us in the summons Toward the Second Amphictyonic Congress. We repeat: Take your hands off Panama. . . .

They have wanted to impose on us a democracy, patented *Made in USA*. With what right do they demand a democracy, when they wish to deny us the right to have an independent, free, and sovereign nation—without which democracy is not possible? Because without a fatherland, no political system is viable. The nation comes first: The territory, the single flag, and sovereignty are what permits the selection of a democracy reflecting the image and profile of the people. . . .

Noriega is not the problem. Noriega did not exist in 1968 and in 1970, when Torrijos faced the empire. Nor did Torrijos exist in 1952 and 1955, when Gen. Remon Cantera faced the empire. . . . The problem is a people, and this people is called Panama. . . . So forget about Noriega. Perhaps Noriega is the last "nice guy" left. If not, ask [Maj. José Hilario] Trujillo and [Maj. Luis] Córdoba. It is preferable, then, that you put up with Noriega.

Democracy can no longer exist here without including

the peasant who works the land and the worker who works for hours in the shop or the factory, and who have equal rights to those who invest capital or who apply technology and the knowledge learned in their professions. This concept of participation is what avoids violence, the armed struggles whose example we have very nearby, in other brother countries. . . .

Far from retreating, frightened by those who attempt to become our masters, we wish to continue being worthy of the peoples who struggle against underdevelopment and dependency. . . .

Many Panamanians naively believed that with the new 1977 treaties, Panama and the United States were going to begin a permanent honeymoon, forgetting that for the United States, a treaty is nothing but, as Torrijos said, a useful but ephemeral act. That the best of treaties can only be judged at the time they are signed, and that the United States signs treaties knowing full well that it is going to violate them blatantly. . . .

From the beginning of the Republic, the United States has intervened directly and indirectly in Panama with the objective of achieving the establishment of a government that would be docile to the interests of that power. . . .

Several strategies are used for this purpose: popular urban insurrection . . . the buying of consciences, with a \$100 million fund . . . rented rebellions, with the goal of fostering a split in the armed forces. . . .

Today there is a new destabilization strategy, which consists of . . . a change in the structure of personnel in charge of the Canal, in order to give authority and responsibility for command to the secretary of the Board of Directors. The Canal will be run by remote control from Washington, eliminating the authority of the administrators. . . . Lowering the Panama Canal Commission budget, which will decrease the funds allocated for maintenance, personnel training, and probably result in a reduction of the labor force. . . . The purpose of this is to turn workers against the government. . . .

Canal revenues have been transferred to aid the Contras—that's why they refused to allow the Canal books to be examined. . . .

I want to tell you that Washington invested more than \$100 million in this war. . . .

From here, from this land free of colonialism, I am telling the world that no soldier or dependent of the U.S. armed forces, male or female, has been killed, injured, kidnaped, or reported missing. . . . The international community must know that throughout this entire period of crisis, the Panama Canal's operation has not been in any way hindered or jeopardized. . . .

You can rest assured that the next President of this country will come by legitimate consultation with the ballot boxes, and will not be imposed from the barracks of the Defense Forces, nor the Union Club bar, nor Washington's sullied air of scandals and deals. . . .