

Panama leads battle against limited sovereignty

by Carlos Wesley

The government of Panama was forced to annul the results of its May 7 national elections because of a massive fraud and vote buying operation run by the United States. In a decree issued May 10, Panama's Electoral Tribunal charged that uninvited foreigners came into Panama "whose evident purpose was to back the thesis of electoral fraud proclaimed to the world by the U.S. government long before the elections." The decree charged that there was widespread "stealing of ballots from the electoral precincts, vote-buying by political parties and especially the lack of tally sheets and other documents which make it absolutely impossible to determine which candidate won."

U.S. President George Bush responded to the Panamanian decision May 11 by ordering 2,000 troops into Panama, supposedly "to protect American lives" and to "defend the right of the people to have their will respected"—the same arguments used by Hitler to annex the Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia in 1938. Just as Hitler claimed that the "lives and the rights of the German people" in the Sudetenland had to be protected from Czech leader Benes, and that if only Benes would leave everything would be resolved, Bush claimed that if only the commander of Panama's Defense Forces (PDF), Gen. Manuel Noriega, were ousted, there would be no more problems between the U.S. and Panama. And just as British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and his French counterpart, Daladier, went along with Hitler for the sake of "peace in our time," Carlos Andrés Pérez of Venezuela and Alan García of Peru, both members of the Socialist International, have ganged up with Bush against Panama.

The decision to send in the troops to Panama came after consultations between Bush and his former fellow Trilateral Commission member, Jimmy Carter, to impose on the coun-

tries of Latin America a Trilateral concept long in the works: "limited sovereignty." The U.S.-created Panama crisis provides a convenient excuse to sell this policy, which is against the real interest of the West.

This was made clear by top U.S. officials, who told Reuters May 11 that the crisis in Panama will force Latin America to admit that it "must loosen its interpretation of the non-intervention principle, if multilateral policy is to have any success in addressing threats to security and democracy." Secretary of State James Baker affirmed "limited sovereignty" as the administration's policy during a speech earlier this month. "If the peoples and governments of Latin America and the Caribbean ask the United States to forego unilateral initiatives"—such as a military intervention into Panama—"then I think it is only fair for the peoples and governments to join with us in good faith to turn the promise of that diplomacy into reality," he said.

Agreement on the Trilateral Commission's concept of "limited sovereignty" was reached with the Soviet Union during Baker's recent visit to Moscow. This was confirmed May 9 by Soviet spokesman Gennadi Gerasimov, who said that talks on Central America had been the "warmest and most productive" of those held by Baker and his Russian hosts.

The Socialist International, which marches in lock-step with the Soviets on most questions, has signed on to the new policy. "By all means, no question at all, the Bush administration has a deal with the Socialist International on this," said a high-level source in Europe May 11.

In order to use Panama as the test-case to impose "limited sovereignty" on all of Ibero-America, the American and world publics have been systematically brainwashed by a Trilateral

media barrage that Noriega is “a drug dictator,” when in fact, according to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and other authorities, Noriega is one of our best Latin American allies in the war on drugs. This past March 29, for example, Attorney General Dick Thornburgh and DEA chief John Lawn praised Noriega’s PDF during a televised news conference for its role in Operation Polar Cap, which shut down the largest drug-money laundering operation ever in the United States. Half a ton of cocaine and \$45 million in drug funds were confiscated, and 127 drug traffickers were arrested, thanks to Noriega’s cooperation.

This is in sharp contrast with the people the Bush administration financed to “bring democracy to Panama.” One is Carlos Eleta Almarán, owner of the opposition’s largest television station, arrested in Georgia last month on charges of conspiracy to smuggle 600 kilos of cocaine into the United States, and the Central Intelligence Agency-financed Democratic Opposition Civic Alliance (ADO-C) second vice-presidential candidate in the May 7 election, Guillermo “Billy” Ford. Ford, who was elevated to martyrdom by the U.S. media after he was bloodied in a melee with pro-government supporters May 10, owns two banks caught laundering drug funds by authorities. In fact, one of his banks, Dadeland National of Miami, was the center of operations for a drug trafficking ring headed by Steven Samos, caught by U.S. authorities in 1984, and who was also one of the key players in the Iran-Contra scandal. Ford’s major campaign plank was that he would prevent any changes in Panama’s bank secrecy laws, a major advantage to drug-money laundering.

U.S. tries to heist elections

Long before the first vote was cast in Panama, Bush said that the United States would not recognize the election results unless they brought to power the opponents of Noriega. “Let me be clear: The U.S. will not recognize the results of a fraudulent election engineered to keep Noriega in power,” said Bush in a May 2 speech to David Rockefeller’s Council of the Americas.

In fact, as *EIR* warned in its April 28 issue, it was the U.S. which was preparing to heist the elections by employing practices so fraudulent that they would have made an old-time Chicago ward-heeler envious.

Estimates of the amount spent by the CIA and other agencies to disrupt the Panamanian elections range from the \$10 million which the administration leaked to *U.S. News and World Report* in its May 1 issue, to as much as \$120 million. The money was used to set up a clandestine radio and TV network, run by CIA operative Kurt Frederick Muse; to purchase prime television time for ADO-C on RPC television, owned by accused drug trafficker Eleta Almarán; and to buy votes and electoral officials outright.

“They were buying votes at \$50, \$60, \$100 a piece,” said one observer on the ground about the CIA financed ADO-C. “Since the pro-government forces had no money even to

provide lunch to the poll watchers, the ADO-C provided lunches to everybody: their poll-watchers, and those of the pro-government parties. Right under the plate, there was a \$50 bill. Of course, when the ADO-C people would come up with voters with fake cards, nobody was willing to question them.”

Electoral officials who were supposed to deliver the tally sheets to the election board, got there hours, and even days, after they were supposed to, in many cases with altered tally sheets. Some never got there. Two days after the polls closed, the national election board was still issuing calls for the tally sheets to be delivered for counting. ADO-C first vice-presidential candidate, Ricardo Arias Calderón, bragged to the *Washington Post* May 9 “that the opposition still retained ‘a great number’ of tally sheets that would prove their victory.”

Blatant U.S. meddling in Panama prompted the Mexican official daily *El Nacional* to editorialize May 10 that for Panama, “it was not even worth holding the elections because it is the President of another country (Bush) who appointed himself as Panama’s Electoral College.”

The decision to annul the elections, was praised by *El Nacional* as “an act of political realism.” In an editorial May 11, the Mexican government-owned daily warned “that for the well being of our continent and the future of the nations that share the region, no one should forget that just one crack is enough to bring to an end sovereignty and self determination. It is the Panamanians, and no one else, free from outside pressures, who should determine their future.”

Just as *EIR* warned in its April 28 issue, unless power was handed over to the candidates of the Democratic Opposition Civic Alliance (ADO-C), financed by the CIA, the Bush administration would set in motion immediately after the elections “strikes and street disturbances” within Panama, “organized by Panamanian agents of the United States with the intent of provoking a violent confrontation with the PDF” to provide an excuse for military intervention.

EIR also warned, that the Bush regime would pressure the nations of Ibero-America to:

- Join in proclaiming Panama’s elections fraudulent;
- suspend diplomatic ties with Panama;
- have the Organization of American States (OAS), the Ibero-American Group of Eight nations, and other Ibero-American forums vote to censure Panama.

EIR warned that the shock waves from these developments would extend throughout Ibero-America, most immediately into Argentina, where Peronist presidential candidate Carlos Menem held a commanding lead over Eduardo Angeloz of the Radical Party of socialist President Raúl Alfonsín in the May 14 elections.

So far, developments have been exactly what *EIR* said they would be. As U.S. troops were being deployed into Panama, the Bush administration began “to pressure the Latin American countries” through Venezuelan President Carlos Andrés Pérez, a member of Jimmy Carter’s Council of Free-

ly-Elected heads of Governments (COFEHG), reported the *Journal do Brasil* May 12.

Multilateral action

Pérez, who was described by an official of Brazil's Foreign Ministry as "a spokesman for the United States," got the Organization of American States to agree to an extraordinary foreign ministers' meeting on Panama for May 17, by arguing that it was preferable to "unilateral U.S. action." The *Journal do Brasil* noted that "with Latin American support in its pocket, the White House decided to reduce the fire-power of the troops to be sent" to Panama.

"What we are interested in is that the U.S. acts within the OAS," said Pérez May 11. In fact, that was also what the United States wanted. One of the first calls for enacting limited sovereignty was a proposal to set up an international tribunal to oversee national elections under the auspices of the OAS. This was first floated at a meeting March 30 at the Carter Center in Atlanta, attended by Pérez, U.S. Secretary of State James Baker, and David Rockefeller, among others. The proposal was adopted despite the objections from the Mexican representative, who argued that it was an attack on national sovereignty.

Panama agreed to the OAS meeting on the condition that it take up "the constant interference in its internal affairs by the United States, to bend the nation's sovereign will and in this way obtain benefits for its own interests," in violation of the OAS charter. However, said Soraya Cano, Panama's alternate ambassador to the OAS May 10, "The Panamanian elections are a matter of internal jurisdiction, based on the principle of self-determination," and not subject to OAS action.

The Panamanian government also warned the OAS delegates that the "complex variable of so-called U.S. national security interests could well lead, at any moment, to the precedent that they are attempting to set in Panama being used against any political person in Latin America or the Caribbean . . . to impose changes according to their convenience or whim."

The U.S. reply was that unless the Latin Americans were willing to go along with "multilateralism," and agree to pressure Noriega to leave and impose a government of U.S. choosing in Panama, then it will unilaterally use military force against Panama and tear up the canal treaties. "If three months down the line Noriega is still in power, the United States would feel justified in taking direct action," said a "former U.S. policy maker," according to Reuters May 11.

American troops were not expected to engage in any immediate military confrontation against Panama's Defense Forces (PDF) commanded by General Noriega—although the possibility cannot be ruled out. Instead, the administration was betting that the show of force and the Latin American diplomatic offensive would persuade Noriega to leave voluntarily or to encourage a coup against him within the PDF.

Based on past performance, the General was not about to leave voluntarily, since he understands that the U.S. wants him out in order to renegotiate the canal treaties, and extend the right to U.S. military bases in Panama, past the year 2000.

As to a coup, on May 11, Panama's Defense Forces charged that Carlos Andrés Pérez had attempted to bribe four high-ranking officers to kidnap Noriega. In a document released to the press, the four said Pérez had promised them "abundant financial aid for the country, reincorporation of Panama into the Group of 8, and promises of international recognition" if they were to arrest Noriega, turn him over to the U.S., annul the May 7 elections, and install a provisional government.

If "multilateral" efforts to oust Noriega fail, Bush—who has put the prestige of his administration on the line—will have to face the prospect of ordering military action *alone*. Despite the overwhelming superiority of U.S. forces, Panama, unlike Grenada, will not be a cakewalk, and the U.S. is likely to find itself mired in a strategic disaster which the Soviets will exploit, regardless of any promises Baker thinks he got from Gorbachov. And the apparent Ibero-American support will disappear.

Latin support is smoke and mirrors

- Argentina's Raúl Alfonsín will be a powerless lame duck after May 14.

- Peru's Alan García is facing unrest from his military, because his anti-militarism has allowed the narco-terrorist Shining Path and MRTA guerrillas to achieve virtual dual power during his term. His anti-militarism, however, does not extend to Communist Nicaragua, which regime he enthusiastically supports.

- Venezuela's Pérez is facing tremendous unrest at home because of the debt crisis. Last March, some 1,000 Venezuelans were killed for protesting against Pérez's imposition of International Monetary Fund (IMF) austerity. On May 18, he faces another test when Venezuela's labor movement stages a general strike against his economic policies.

- The continent's biggest powers, Brazil and Mexico are not likely to go along with U.S. multilateralism for long. Brazil is waging its own fight against limited sovereignty against United States pressure to put the Amazon under supranational control, and Mexico, long wary of U.S. interventionism, also feels threatened by the U.S.-Mexican Binational Commission, co-chaired by Henry Kissinger's partner, Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger's call in 1988, for "binational government" over sweatshop, free-trade zones, on the U.S. Mexican border.

The Mexican establishment daily *Excelsior* charged May 13 that, "by encouraging Noriega's overthrow," Venezuela's Pérez was acting "as the proconsul of the Empire." "Pérez is an agent of the CIA," said *Excelsior*, calling on the Mexican government to act to prevent the U.S. from repeating in Panama "100 years of threats and invasions."