

## Panama Report by Carlos Wesley

### New lies on Noriega: sour grapes

*It's the U.S. government-financed "opposition," not the Panamanian Defense Forces, that runs drugs.*

At an extraordinary session of the Organization of American States (OAS) in Washington, D.C. on Aug. 23, the foreign ministers of the nations of Ibero-America rebuffed demands by the United States that they back the U.S. push to oust the commander of Panama's Defense Forces, Gen. Manuel Noriega, and to replace the current Panamanian government with the U.S.-backed Democratic Opposition Civic Alliance (ADO-C). The foreign ministers failed to reach a consensus on any of the resolutions proposed to settle the Panamanian crisis.

Instead, the OAS presiding officer, Colombia's Foreign Minister Julio Londoño, issued a statement calling on the Panamanian government and the opposition to continue negotiations mediated by an OAS special mission that has been working on the Panama question since May.

One reason given by the OAS for rejecting American demands, was the high-handed U.S. behavior in Panama. The OAS mission to Panama cited the "negative effects caused by the maneuvers conducted by the United States Armed Forces" in Panama. The OAS mission also recommended that the United States "normalize bilateral relations" with the current Panamanian government. That would be tantamount to recognizing the government, with which the Bush administration refuses to deal.

In a last ditch effort to sway the OAS vote, and to provide a justification for a U.S. military intervention in Panama under the pretext of fighting drugs, a new charge was fabricated against General Noriega: that he had turned Panama into a haven for the

drug mafias that murdered Colombian presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galán. The charge surfaced the day before the OAS meeting in Rev. Sun Myung Moon's *Washington Times*, which often serves as a leak sheet for the administration.

Panamanian President Manuel Solís Palma denounced the report as "false and tendentious," in a letter of condolences on Galán's murder to Colombian President Virgilio Barco on Aug. 23. Galán's assassination, Solís Palma said to Barco, "is being used by third parties to continue committing acts of aggression of all sorts against" Panama. "Be assured that we will continue to collaborate closely with your country's authorities to prevent our territory being used by those criminals to flee the arm of justice," the letter said.

Although State Department officials "were unable to confirm the report" that the drug lords had been given refuge in Panama by Noriega, according to spokesman Richard Boucher, that did not stop Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger, formerly of Kissinger Associates, from charging at the OAS that "Noriega has turned Panama into a haven for drug traffickers, and a center for money laundering and the transshipment of cocaine. . . . We intend to do what we can to bring it to an end." Eagleburger then said that if Noriega was not out by Sept. 1, "then the Noriega regime would have declared itself to be an outlaw among civilized nations and we should treat it accordingly."

Panama's representative Rómulo Escobar told Eagleburger that if the U.S. has any proof that Noriega is in-

involved in drug trafficking, it should have been presented to the OAS. Escobar demanded that the United States account for the money it stole from Panama under the economic sanctions and warned that implicit in Eagleburger's speech was the threat to use military force against Panama. He added that a peaceful solution could be found as soon as the U.S. allowed the ADO-C to accept the offer to join a provisional government that would call new elections in Panama.

That offer has been refused by the Bush administration, which wants the ADO-C to be given power outright because of its willingness to renegotiate the 1977 Canal Treaties, to allow the U.S. to retain its military bases in Panama past the year 2000. The Bush administration's collaboration with ADO-C, shows the hypocrisy of its "war on drugs."

ADO-C is run by Panama's "narco-oligarchy," the bankers, such as Carlos Eleta, who manage Panama's offshore financial center. Last April, Eleta, who at the time was working with the U.S. government to bring down Noriega, was arrested in Macon, Georgia for conspiring to bring 600 kilos of cocaine a month, valued at \$300 million, into the United States. Just a few weeks ago, the Bush administration came to the defense of the Panamanian Broadcasting Company RPC, which is owned by Carlos Eleta and his brother Fernando, after it was declared bankrupt by the government on Aug. 16 for failing to pay \$5 million in taxes.

Eleta's RPC also pocketed millions of dollars from U.S. taxpayers earlier this year, given it by the Central Intelligence Agency to publicize the electoral campaign of ADO-C in the presidential elections held May 7. Those elections had to be annulled by Panama because of U.S. interference.