

## Panama Report by Carlos Wesley

### No surrender on right to Army

*A "no" vote would be a vote for Noriega, Panamanians were told. On Nov. 15, most voted "no." Now what?*

**P**anamanians defeated a proposed amendment to the Constitution that would have forever abolished their nation's right to have an Army. That question was the key issue among 50-odd proposed constitutional reforms that were overwhelmingly rejected in a plebiscite on Nov. 15.

Voters' refusal to endorse the destruction of the Panamanian Defense Forces that was carried out in the wake of the 1989 invasion ordered by George Bush, represented a major setback to the plans of "new world order" advocates to destroy Ibero-America's armed forces. Former Costa Rican President Oscar Arias, the 1987 Nobel Peace Prize winner who campaigned unsuccessfully for the reforms, bemoaned the fact that the armed forces retain much credibility in Ibero-America. "The struggle for demilitarization is not easy," Arias said in an interview with IPS.

"Efforts have to be renewed and the world has to be prepared for a big educative task." Referring to the U.S.-installed government of drug banker Guillermo Endara, he continued, "If a system exists which does not respond to the needs of the people, it is not strange that they long for the dictator of the past," He added that throughout Ibero-America, "in opinion polls, armies are viewed as lesser evils than political parties."

Millions of dollars, reportedly including money from Germany's Christian Democratic Konrad Adenauer Foundation, were spent on a massive television blitz to get people to say "yes" to the reforms to the Constitution that was adopted in 1972 by nationalist leader Gen. Omar Tor-

rijos. The Christian Democratic Party of First Vice President Ricardo Arias Calderón, temporarily set aside its feud with Endara to promote the changes. Its line was that a vote against the reforms was a vote "for" Gen. Manuel Noriega.

The amendment would not have demilitarized Panama; more than 10,000 U.S. troops are occupying the country. "We need an Army to defend the canal," said one Panamanian, referring to Dec. 31, 1999, when the United States is supposed to withdraw from Panama to comply with the terms of the canal treaties.

The vote was a repudiation of the narco-government installed in power when Bush invaded the country and captured Noriega. "We are worse off now than under Noriega," is the prevailing sentiment. (Noriega has just been determined to be a POW of the U.S. government by federal Judge William Hoeweler in Miami, Florida.)

About 60% of the electorate (the highest ever) abstained, either to express their disgust with the current regime, or because the government discouraged them from casting a ballot to keep down the number of "no" votes.

Arias Calderón blamed the defeat on Endara's incompetence. "It has absolutely nothing to do with my government," riposted Endara, whose government is drowning in sleaze. In the weeks before the vote, new drug charges were raised against Attorney General Rogelio Cruz, who was the target of a bombing attempt said to have been a settling of accounts among drug mafias; murder charges were leveled against the chief justice of the Supreme Court, Carlos Lucas

López, a drug banker; and Endara himself was accused of complicity with the assassins of former Chilean Foreign Minister Orlando Letelier.

Counting abstentions, only slightly more than 10% of the total electorate voted with the government, which lost its only real support with Bush's electoral defeat. Cabinet members and former supporters of the regime joined the "no" forces. Half of Endara's own Arnulfista Party joined the opposition and accused him of "only helping the rich and powerful." There are now universal calls for his ouster, to be replaced by a provisional government and a constitutional convention.

Opponents used information from *EIR* and other publications associated with U.S. statesman Lyndon LaRouche to remind voters of the drug ties of the regime. The revelations reportedly lost I. Roberto "Bobby" Eisenmann, publisher of *La Prensa*, \$30 million from a U.S. agency for a hotel complex, the president of Panama's Hotel Association said in a Nov. 6 radio interview.

It is clear that *La Prensa* became less strident in calling for demilitarization. It was also forced, under Panama's law of reply, to give coverage on Nov. 6 to a letter from this correspondent, refuting a number of falsehoods published by columnist Guillermo Sánchez Borbón.

Although LaRouche "had to campaign from jail, he won North Dakota during the Democratic Party primaries. His independent campaign, in which his vice presidential running mate was the Rev. James Bevel, one of Martin Luther King's lieutenants, helped to consolidate a permanent and growing movement of American patriots, on which Panamanian patriots can rely for help in their struggle to achieve Panama's independence and development without military occupation troops," it read.