

## Panama Report by Carlos Wesley

### Peru rebuffs Panama's blackmail

*The U.S.-installed drug regime has now turned its ire against political prisoners and women.*

**T**he Supreme Court of Peru rejected a request from the U.S.-installed drug-banking government of Panama, for the extradition of Carlos Wittgreen, and ordered his release from prison. Wittgreen, a friend of Panama's Gen. Manuel Noriega, who is now a prisoner of war of the United States, had been in jail since Feb. 8, while the Peruvian court considered the Panamanians' demand to hand him over.

In its April 7 ruling, the high court said that the Panamanians had not presented any evidence to back up the charge that Wittgreen was behind the 1989 torching of the yacht *Casimiro II*, belonging to Gabriel Lewis Galindo, the Panamanian drug-money-laundering banker who ran Project Democracy's "Civic Crusade" against Noriega from Washington. The yacht's security guard, Félix Augusto Vásquez, died during the incident.

It was the second time since Wittgreen took up residence in Peru, following the U.S. invasion of Panama, that the Peruvians have rebuffed demands to hand him over to the Panamanians, in exchange for restoring diplomatic relations. Peru was believed to be particularly vulnerable to the Panamanian blackmail, because of its precarious economic situation, which is largely due to the economic warfare being waged against it by the same Project Democracy apparatus that organized the invasion of Panama.

In fact, while the Panamanian regime spawned by Project Democracy was pressuring Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori to hand over Wittgreen, inside Peru, the operatives of

Americas Watch, the Inter-American Dialogue, and other arms of Project Democracy, were using the case to go after Fujimori for allegedly violating Wittgreen's rights.

The sudden concern for Wittgreen's fate by the self-proclaimed "human rights" lobby did not fool anyone, least of all Wittgreen himself, who said he would formally ask the Fujimori government to grant him asylum in Peru. "Despite everything, its people and its representative institutions have treated me with affection," he said. Wittgreen said he did not feel any resentment toward the Peruvian government for the two months he spent imprisoned. "This was an extradition process and things had to run their course. The Peruvian system of justice did what it had to do," he said. "The problem lies with some in the Panamanian regime who have unleashed an unrelenting political persecution against me."

The Panamanian regime of Guillermo "Honeybuns" Endara, a drug-money-laundering banker, vowed to pursue the case on which it has already expended thousands of dollars. Asked by a reporter if the money could not be used instead to alleviate the problems of the over 50% of Panama's population living below the poverty line, Foreign Minister Julio Linares said it could not. Linares, who had been bragging for weeks that Wittgreen would be handed over this time, has gone on a rug-chewing fit since the ruling.

The ruling "is an absurdity, based on lies, and dishonors the court," Linares said during a Panamanian congressional hearing on April 14. He ac-

cused the Peruvian justices of being prejudiced, and "not upholding the truth," and threatened that "this absurd ruling is another element to further stagnate relations between the two countries." The next day, Linares lost his cool when a TV interviewer asked him about problems facing the country, such as the Group of Eight refusal to readmit Panama to full membership. "I will only talk about the Wittgreen case, nothing else," said Linares, as he picked up his papers and walked out of the studio.

The regime has launched a campaign of intimidation to prevent the National Legislature from passing a law granting amnesty to the scores of civilians and officers of the former Panamanian Defense Forces officers taken prisoner by the U.S. invading forces, who are still languishing in Endara's jails, and as many as 35,000 others who are being politically persecuted, many of whom have sought exile or gone underground. On April 14, John Hogger, a government-employed medical doctor, so intimidated a woman who was lobbying for passage of the amnesty, that she died of a stroke. Dr. Hogger resisted giving first aid to the woman, Josefina Dennis de Torres, 57. "She shouldn't have been out demonstrating in her condition," he said.

The same day, *La Estrella de Panamá* reported that representatives of the Panamanian Union of Persecuted Journalists held the first of several meetings with foreign diplomatic representatives in Panama. The journalists, led by Julio Ortega, said that since the invasion, they have been subjected to trumped-up judicial processes that do not seek to establish the truth, but just to intimidate. . . . This constitutes a flagrant violation of human rights and a violent attack against freedom of speech and freedom of the press."