
Panama

Labor support breaks U.S. stranglehold

by Robyn Quijano

Panama's Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega cut short rumors that he had made a deal with the State Department to leave office, when he addressed a gathering of international trade union delegates on April 30. The general promised that the only negotiations he would undertake would be with the constituencies of Panama, and warned that the Reagan administration is out to impose a puppet government "in the image of the U.S. establishment." He charged that the war against Panama was being carried out as an experiment, and that other Ibero-American nations would sooner or later suffer similar aggression, if the economy and sovereignty of Panama were destroyed.

U.S. press reports the previous week that the State Department had decided to "permit" Noriega to stay in his own nation after leaving his position as Commander of the Defense Forces, were shown to be inventions designed to cover the fact that the Reagan administration had lost this round with the tiny Central American nation.

As the *Financial Times* of London commented April 29, the Reagan administration's effort to get rid of Noriega has become "a botched job bordering on a debacle." "The chief target of criticism" is Assistant Secretary of State Elliott Abrams, they state, quoting a Latin American diplomat, "Nobody wants to bail out Elliott." To the *New York Times*, the problem has been one of "style." The "bullying, snarling style of Abrams risks antagonizing Latins," their April 27 editorial warned. The economic blockade of Panama was correct, but it was imposed "recklessly," they complain.

Key sectors of the U.S. establishment have either tried to blame it all on the hideously incompetent Abrams, or on the "street fighter" finesse of the "master in psy-war" Noriega.

In truth, while Abrams deserves to be thrown to the piranhas, and Noriega has been demonstrated to be a most competent adversary, the U.S. foreign policy debacle is due to an immoral and strategically insane policy, the real popular support for the Panamanian nationalist project that Noriega inherited from Omar Torrijos, and the increasing resistance of key sectors in Ibero-America.

Vernon Walters, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, touring South America to get governments there to oust Noriega, also took aim at Abrams. According to Brazil's *Veja* magazine Walters said, "I don't want to get into a debate with Mr. Abrams, who is several posts below me. In my

opinion, the ruler of a country should be judged by his compatriots." Walters's job is to hold the line against other nations joining Mexico in full economic and moral support of President Manuel Solís Palma and the nationalist project he and Noriega represent. On cue, Venezuelan Foreign Minister Germán Nava Carrillo took up Walters's line, and stated that as long as the current situation in Panama prevails, Panama will not be represented in the Group of 8, the Contadora Support Group, which suspended Panama for not being a "democracy" when Eric Delvalle was voted out of the presidency by the National Assembly for taking orders from a foreign power.

Walters was in Venezuela, and met with both President Luisinchi, and ex-President Carlos Andrés Pérez, who is seeking to return to office. Pérez stated that the U.S. "has recognized its error." "I now think that it is possible for the good offices of Latin American governments to bring about a peaceful and negotiated solution to the crisis." Opposite from the Mexican approach of backing Panamanian sovereignty, Pérez is running the Socialist International's game of ousting Noriega so the Reagan administration can withdraw "from the center of action." He is pushing the Vernon Walters line that it is the Group of 7, once the Group of 8, that should "mediate." According to the Venezuelan press, Pérez was once an intimate of the Medellín Cartel's Ochoa clan, and received a pace horse from Fabio Ochoa named "Porcelana."

"Mexico is the first country to demonstrate its solidarity with the Panamanian people, in a concrete act, by not cutting the supply of oil and providing payment facilities," announced Mexico's ambassador to Panama, Carlos Plank Hinojosa. Mexican Foreign Minister Sepúlveda, when asked about General Noriega said, "The so-called crisis has been made to revolve too much around personality questions. We find it a highly dubious practice, that foreign powers presume to decide, who should rule in another country."

Trade unions back Panama

Trade union delegates from seven Ibero-American nations drafted a document of support for the Panamanian government for the 150 delegates from 25 nations who participated in the "Solidarity with Panama" trade union conference that ended on April 30.

The document was presented to the conference by Dom-

ingo Petrecca, a labor leader from the "62 Organizations" of Peronism, representing the Panama solidarity committee of Argentina. The trade unions demanded that their governments come up with immediate credits, medicine, and food to meet the emergency, and to start the process of economic recovery. The document also clearly states that the support for Panama must come from Ibero-America, the subject of a pamphlet written by the Schiller Institute, and distributed by the organizers of the conference.

The first international guest to address the Panama Trade Union Conference was José Sosa, a high-ranking leader of the Mexican Petroleum Workers, one of the most powerful unions of the multimillion-member Confederation of Mexican Workers. This show of support, along with the Mexican government's breaking of the U.S.-imposed economic warfare by supplying oil to Panama, radically shifted the correlation of forces in the region.

The Communist World Federation of Trade Unions sent delegations from all over the world, but was able to dominate neither the conference nor the committee that wrote the final document because of the strength of the democratic union delegations, in particular from Mexico, Argentina, and Colombia.

After the conference, a May Day rally was held, which demonstrated the broad support the Solís Palma government enjoys. Over 30,000 workers rallied in a show of support for the government that was not covered by the U.S. media. The same media that has trailed handfuls of opposition demonstrators, never managed to film the May Day rally.

The real support for the Torrijista nationalist project inside Panama, that the State Department continues to pretend does not exist, is also responsible for the U.S. policy debacle. U.S. policymakers believed all their own lies, and thought that if they controlled enough of the international media, reality would go away. Happily for the potential future existence of the nation-state, reality has a stunning capability of asserting itself.

People's Unity Front (FUP) to express solidarity with the sister peoples and government of Panama and against imperialist aggression, resolve:

1. To report and reject intervention in the internal affairs of Panama, and the U.S. imperialist economic, political, and military aggression against the Panamanian people and government.
2. To demand from the U.S. government respect for Panama's self-determination and sovereignty, and the immediate elimination of the economic measures against Panama.
3. To demand that the U.S. government strictly complies with the Torrijos-Carter Treaties, which obligate the United States to deliver the Panama Canal in good operating condition and to withdraw U.S. Armed Forces on December 31, 1999.
4. To report to our governments, organizations, and peoples that the aggression against Panama is an important part of the strategy to prevent the independent economic and political development of our peoples and to secure the domination and exploitation of Latin America as its strategic rearward.
5. To establish committees and other forms of solidarity with Panama with the fundamental objectives of reporting the imperialist aggression and organizing the urgent dispatch of contributions of food, medicine, money, and any other kind of help.
6. To urge all labor unions and regional and international organizations to urgently effect greater and more effective solidarity with the Panamanian people and their people's movement. We also extend this appeal to all youth, intellectuals, women, peasants, and other organizations throughout the world.
7. To ask the governments in our countries to approve special credits, deposits, aid, energy resources, and food to help the Panamanian people and government, according to the needs and requirements of the Panamanian government.
8. To support FUP and its proposal that a national government of unity and commitment should be established as a political solution to the crisis. This government should be headed by Manuel Solís Palma and be composed according to the FUP proposal, which guarantees the completion of the decolonization process and guarantees a decision regarding the command headed by General Manuel Antonio Noriega—respecting the national interest and Panama Defense Forces Law 20—without U.S. imperialist intervention.
9. To support the Panamanian government in all its efforts before the organizations and highest international courts to defend its sovereignty and the compliance of the Torrijos-Carter Treaties. . . .
11. To declare ourselves in permanent solidarity with the Panamanian people and government until we defeat the imperialist aggression.

"Latin America's revival must not be hampered; it should be supported to encourage peace. A new awareness is being

Documentation

Final and general resolution

The resolution, excerpted below, is entitled, "Governments should do what the people want" :

Labor organizations representing 400 million workers from throughout the world, meeting on April 28-30 at the Atlapa Convention Center in Panama City at the invitation of the

created among Latin Americans, and there will be peace only when we allow this awareness to follow its own path. Whoever opposes this attitude is creating the hostility that promotes the existence of conflicts. If we are prevented from making peaceful changes, we are pushing our people to promote violent changes"—Omar Torrijos Herrera, U.N. Security Council, March 15, 1973.

General Noriega's closing remarks

Speech by General Manuel Antonio Noriega, Panama Defense Forces commander in chief, to the closing session of the International Trade Union Solidarity Congress of the Atlapa Convention Center in Panama City:

Gentlemen; friends; brothers of the Panamanian cause . . . Panama receives you . . . with love, receives you with solidarity, and makes of this historic moment, the moment and the hour of Latin America and the world, the hour of the peoples, the hour of not one step backward.

Those who believed that "not one step backward" was just rhetoric made their mistake right there. . . .

The habit of buying friends is the norm guiding imperialism . . . which forgets that Rome does not pay traitors and that 20 centuries ago another imperialism regretted the sad experience of its immoral behavior. . . .

. . . We want to tell the whole world that Panama is being treated as an experiment . . . the results of which will be applied in other Latin American countries, maybe next year, maybe in two, four, for six years. This is true of Panama today. Tomorrow it will be true of Honduras. The day after tomorrow it will be Argentina, and later it could be any other Latin American country because of the experience gained in Panama.

The experiment in Panama also involves the economic sector. Even though other countries do not use the dollar as their currency, the dollar will be precisely the one which strangles their national currency through the subterfuges that have been tested in Panama to obstruct clearinghouse activities and freeze deposits in New York and Boston. The Latin American countries, presidents, and governments that timidly watch the Panamanian cause and problem today should know that when their times come they will be dealt with in the same way.

The political experiment is being tested in Panama. Whenever it [the U.S.] needs to install a docile government in its own image to guide the flock, it will create a house, an island, a place, a Quarry Heights so that the government may use it as a hideout to attack its own country! All the Latin American countries have their own Quarry Heights, gentle-

men! Quarry Heights is a military base. That is where the [U.S. Armed Forces] command is located. That is where they have given shelter to the president that they want to impose on Panama. . . .

Concerning international affairs, we have seen attempts at conditioning Latin American peoples and countries against one nation. We have seen the visit paid by Vernon Walters—I am going to mention this case because I am acquainted with it—to Argentina when General Galtieri took the Malvinas. He and Alexander Haig traveled at once to Buenos Aires and they threatened Galtieri to stop the Argentine people's liberation struggle. And today that very same individual goes to Argentina to demand that the Argentine government crush and oppose Panama. . . .

In the military sphere, we also see the same attempts being made. According to them it shows a lack of education to speak the language of the Panamanian Armed Forces. According to Poindexter, the loftiness, the speed, the tone, the doctrines of a Panamanian Armed Forces captain or lieutenant are a bad example.

In that military sphere, we feel proud of these armed forces. During a secret visit by friendly officers of other armed forces, they told us: We feel proud of you Panamanians and we bring a message of solidarity to you, but we cannot make it public because they have us by the balls.

Gentlemen, it is important that you take this realistic concept and analysis of the Panamanian situation back home with you. This is not exclusively a situation of Panama versus the United States. This is a situation of Panama being treated as an experiment, for which Panama is paying the price. Above and beyond that experiment, however, there is the very real urgency [for the United States] to have a new government, one without the popular forces, come to power in Panama in the year 1989; a new government without the desire for liberation, without the thirst for sovereignty, and without the patriotic goal of reaching the year 2000 without foreign presence; a new government that will appoint a subservient man to the Panama Canal Commission, a man made in the image of the U.S. "Establishment." The attempts to prevent us from getting rid of the colonialist remnants that must be gone in 1989 lead to these attempts at destabilization. . . .

These patriotic people have taken over the streets and will never give them up. These people already know where the country's rifles are and already know at whom these rifles must be fired. These people have already made a list of their friends and also a list of their enemies. These people do not want to be left out of the dialogue because they are no longer passive participants in their own drama. There can be no dialogue here, either national or international, unless the popular forces negotiate their own security. This commander is prepared to talk, but with the popular forces, for the destiny of the popular forces, for the benefit of the popular forces. If this commander has a price, only the popular forces know what that price is. . . .