

Panama Report by Carlos Wesley

Panama readies for long haul

The nationalists do not expect a change in policy from the incoming Bush administration.

President Manuel Solís Palma of Panama denied Nov. 21 that the U.S. had sought to reopen talks to settle the dispute between the two countries. "Officially, we have not received anything," said the Panamanian leader, replying to reports from an American TV network that U.S. officials are seeking a resumption of talks with Panama to propose negotiations. According to the U.S. government's Foreign Broadcast Information Service, he added, "We have always been open to any understanding with the United States government," but any negotiations must be based on "respect for the Panamanian government, our sovereignty, and our dignity."

It is by no means clear that the United States is prepared to do that. President Reagan is reportedly preparing an offer to Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega, the head of Panama's Defense Forces (PDF), to drop trumped-up drug charges against him, in exchange for his giving up command of the PDF. According to *Newsweek*, which reported the story in its Nov. 28 issue, Reagan is willing to take the blame for this deal in order to clear the decks for the Bush administration.

To soften up Noriega, the magazine reported, his Panamanian opponents are being put up to stage a new wave of "destabilization," including street demonstrations, which will be steered from Washington by ousted PDF Col. Eduardo Herrera Hassan and other opposition leaders on the payroll of the State Department and the so-called Project Democracy, the government-within-the-government that

runs U.S. foreign policy.

Joining Project Democracy in the war on Panama is the Socialist International and, for its own reasons, the U.S.S.R. The Panamanian government dismissed its ambassador to Venezuela, Marcel Salamín. Salamín, the reputed "adopted son" of Venezuelan presidential candidate and Socialist International bigwig, Carlos Andrés Pérez, had unsuccessfully tried, on Pérez's orders, to prevent a conference on Ibero-American unity—known as the Amphictyonic meeting—from taking place in Panama last August. He was also known to favor a plan to oust Noriega prepared by Panamanian Benedict Arnold, José I. Blandón, now on the Project Democracy payroll.

The Soviets, who want the U.S. out of Panama in order to take over the Panama Canal, signaled that they were willing to help Washington get rid of the Panamanian government and nationalist military as a step toward their goal. Their plan, as revealed in the August issue of *América Latina*, the journal of the Soviet Academy of Sciences Latin American Institute, is to "internationalize" and "demilitarize" the Panama Canal. Security for the canal would be provided by "international peace-keeping forces."

This sent the local communist party—called the People's Party—into conniptions, since they nominally support the government. Moscow had to send Soviet Communist Party International Department honcho Karen Brutents to Panama in September to cool things off. So when *EIR* exposed

the Soviet plot, the local communists responded by trying to kill the messenger. In mid-November, the Panamanian communists devoted a full page of their newspaper *Unidad*, to attacking "the LaRouchites" and *EIR*, accusing this publication of distorting the Soviet position and of taking quotes out of context. When confronted with actual copies of the Soviet publications that retailed the State Department's line against Panama, the Panamanian communists sputtered: "Well, that is the personal opinion of the writers. It does not represent official Soviet policy."

Although there is the hope, as Solís Palma has said, that the new U.S. administration will have "the good sense" to change "its Panama policy, because it is not what it should be," there are no illusions. "Panama must not expect a change in U.S. policy," stated Foreign Minister Jorge Ritter after Bush's triumph. "The new U.S. administration will not change its fundamental policy toward Panama because it has a strategic interest in remaining in Panama beyond the year 2000," he said, referring to the deadline set by the Carter-Torrijos treaties for Panama to take over the Panama Canal, and the U.S. to leave its military bases.

In a speech Nov. 24, Noriega said: "Our people are not enemies of the American people. We want the American people to know that while they celebrate Thanksgiving—a celebration that represents the determination to build a free and sovereign nation, which was the inalienable right of the Pilgrims, who in 1620 abandoned the British Crown in search for their freedom, because they did not want their freedom to be like the British version of freedom—the Panamanian people are being besieged by hunger," brought on by the U.S. economic sanctions against Panama.