

Panama Report by Carlos Wesley

Will Bush un-recognize Endara?

By the standards applied to Lithuania, the U.S. may be preparing to declare Panama's puppet government illegal.

On March 13 President George Bush said that he would not recognize Lithuania's Declaration of Independence from the Soviet Union, because he is not sure that the new Lithuanian government "controls the territory there." If the President applies the same criterion elsewhere, he will have to withdraw recognition from the narco-government installed in Panama by the U.S. invasion.

Echoing *EIR's* earlier reports, the Mexican daily *Excelsior* on March 11 reported that "the Bush administration has installed personnel from the Pentagon and the State Department as controllers for each member of the Panamanian government." Cecilio Simon, Dean of the School of Public Administration, University of Panama, said, according to the article, that since its installation, the governing troika has proven "it lacks popular support, credibility and the ability to govern."

Crime in the streets is running out of control since the invasion. Security, to the extent it exists, is provided by U.S. troops, who patrol accompanied by a Panamanian cop (he translates). Patrols are carried out in recovered stolen vehicles that the American-run police forget to return to their rightful owners.

So pervasive is the U.S. military, that even the government-run Panamanian press is grumbling that the Commander of U.S. Army South, Gen. Marc Cisneros, is "a dictator, just like Gen. Manuel Noriega." A discomfited Cisneros told reporters, "it is not fair that I am being compared with Noriega," reported *La Estrella* on March 10.

According to Cisneros, the current

role of U.S. forces in Panama is to cooperate with the Endara government and the police to "fight against common criminals." This is the pretext for daily search-and-destroy operations against "high crime areas"—areas where opposition is strongest to the U.S. occupation and the narco-government.

On March 13, U.S. troops launched one of those sweeps against San Miguelito, a working-class district in Panama City, detaining hundreds. The operation continued for two days. A similar operation conducted March 9 against Curundu resulted in the detention of over 700 people, many of them women and children who were innocent of any crimes, as Leslie Loaiza, the head of Panama's secret police, admitted.

On March 13, too, 15 people were wounded by shotgun pellets fired by anti-riot police to break up a demonstration to demand compensation for their losses by war refugees from El Chorrillo, a neighborhood leveled by the invading forces.

Meanwhile, a fight has broken out between factions of the narco-government. Acting Attorney General Rogelio Cruz, a partner of Cali Cartel kingpin Gilberto Rodríguez Orejuela, has been reluctantly nominated by President Guillermo "Porky" Endara, a partner of Medellín Cartel laundromat Banco Interoceánico, to stay in the post. But the nomination faces opposition in the National Legislative Assembly from the majority Christian Democratic Party of First Vice President Ricardo Arias Calderón, whose family links are with the Cali Cartel, and who wants to impose his own Attorney General.

Americans have been kept ignorant of these events by the liberal media. Instead, in recent weeks, the media have reported that Congress is stalling on a "generous" \$1 billion aid package proposed by Bush for Panama. The package is *not* generous. There is, in fact, no "aid," just a boondoggle to support drug trafficking at the U.S. taxpayer's expense. And the White House, not Congress, is foot-dragging.

"The March 11 *New York Times* editorial says that Mr. Bush's \$500 million Panama aid package is meandering through Congress," said Rep. Sam Gejdenson (D-Ct.), during hearings at the House on March 16. "Well, as of 20 minutes ago, we did not have a Panama aid program from the administration," said Gejdenson.

At these hearings, Rep. George Crockett (D-Mich.) noted that most of the money requested by Bush is going to subsidize Panama's white "elite" bankers and big corporations and to pay Panama's foreign debt. "Of the total aid that the administration is asking the U.S. taxpayers to secure, only \$42 million . . . is slated as humanitarian aid," said Crockett. "Of that \$42 million, \$12.3 is slated for the Panamanian police forces; \$22 million is slated for housing, and \$7.7 million are for public works."

Where is the money coming from? The administration proposes to cut several congressional pet projects in the defense budget, plus domestic programs. But, "We cannot ask Americans to get in line behind Panamanians and Nicaraguans, and East Germans and Romanians," said Gejdenson. Chances are that if the defense budget is cut to fund the package, the cuts will come from the wages and benefits of those same soldiers who are risking their lives, and Panamanian lives, under the false pretext of "fighting drugs."