

Panama Report by Carlos Wesley

Noriega trial a political bombshell

The U.S. holocaust in Panama might cause the Noriega case to be dismissed, and may cost Bush the presidency.

Attorneys for Gen. Manuel Noriega asked a U.S. court in Miami that the drug case against the former head of the Panamanian government be dismissed because the U.S. government acted in a manner "shocking to the conscience of the court" when it invaded Panama last Dec. 20. "This is a unique situation. This is the first time the U.S. has invaded a country and leveled it to arrest one man," said Frank Rubino, who leads the defense team.

"It is like talking about the Holocaust," said attorney John May, who prepared the defense motion to dismiss that was the subject of the April 2 hearing by District Judge William Hoveler. "Our government knew before the invasion that there would be many civilian casualties. What happened was immoral," said May. "Essentially, we're arguing that nothing General Noriega is accused of justifies such a wanton taking of human life," he said.

"The facts of this case are so egregious, so at odds with the norms of civilized conduct that dismissal of the charges is warranted," stated the defense motion.

The defense cited several precedents where courts have ordered defendants released because they found the manner in which they were captured "shocking to the conscience of the court." One such case was that of Francisco Toscanino, whom a U.S. appeals court ordered had to be freed, if it were true that he was beaten and kidnaped in South America to be brought to the U.S. to stand trial on drug charges, reported the *Wall Street Journal* on April 3.

Former U.S. Attorney General

Ramsey Clark, who conducted a fact-finding tour of Panama in January, testified before Hoveler that the civilian victims could number in the thousands, far above the 220 deaths admitted by the U.S. government. Clark said he had heard estimates of 3,000-7,000 dead. "We were told of trucks zooming in and bringing bags, body bags," said Clark. "There were many reports of disposals of bodies. It would seem to be designed to prevent their being counted."

Clark had made similar charges during a Panama City news conference Jan. 6, when he accused the U.S. government of engaging in a "conspiracy of silence." At that time, the U.S. media proved him right, by virtually ignoring his charges, though they were widely publicized in Europe and Ibero-America.

However, this time there was widespread coverage of his testimony and of the entire proceedings of the hearings in Judge Hoveler's court. For example, CBS News's coverage on April 2 included an interview with Clark and graphic scenes of a mass grave and the devastation caused by the U.S. bombardment.

The evidence of the mass killing in Panama is so overwhelming that it has become impossible for George Bush to sustain the coverup. In a series of articles in the Mexican daily *El Día* starting on March 28, Argentine journalist Stella Calloni, who witnessed the invasion, described it as "a mini-Hiroshima." The Pentagon, she said, "imposed tight controls on the international press, including detaining all the correspondents, to prevent filming of scenes of the massacre. They even

murdered in cold blood Spanish photographer José Rodríguez of Spain's *El País*." According to Calloni, the invaders used new, sophisticated weapons, and "used Panama, just as Hitler used Spain as a proving ground for the weapons he would later employ in World War II." Those weapons included the super-secret F-117 Stealth fighter, reported Carmen Lira in another article series begun the same day in the Mexican daily *La Jornada*.

There might be other reasons why the U.S. media are changing coverage of the invasion. As we reported in the Jan. 5 issue, *EIR's* founding editor Lyndon LaRouche noted that the invasion might prove to be the beginning of the end of George Bush's presidency. "What I suspect we will be seeing is a President being put to the test. If he does not change—and I speak of typically the liberal Establishment, which will give him a little time and a chance to learn his lesson after he has been slapped in the press and elsewhere—then they will crush him," said LaRouche.

There was also widespread coverage on April 2 of General Noriega telling the Independent Commission of Inquiry on the U.S. Invasion of Panama, that the invasion was caused not because of the false allegations of drug trafficking against him, but because he refused to allow Panama to be used as a staging ground for U.S. military operations against Nicaragua.

That report came out on the same day that a Washington jury began deliberations in the Iran-Contra trial of Adm. John Poindexter, former national security adviser. It was Poindexter who delivered the ultimatum from the Reagan-Bush administration to Noriega on Dec. 12, 1985, that Panama join the war against the Sandinista regime of Nicaragua—or else.