

## Panama Report by Carlos Wesley

### Holocaust still active issue in U.S.

*Try what he may, Bush cannot rid himself of the albatross of the U.S. massacre in Panama.*

More than 100 days have passed since President George Bush ordered his attack against Panama last Dec. 20. In the first flush of an easy victory over a country about the size of Delaware which has an army smaller than the New York City Police Department, the President's popularity rating zoomed. But now that the euphoria has passed, Americans are beginning to wonder if the capture of one man, Gen. Manuel Noriega, an ally of the U.S. war on drugs whom the government now alleges is a drug trafficker, was worth the cost of destroying Panama.

Despite Bush's desire to put Panama behind him and the Establishment media's complicity in covering up what really happened, U.S. citizens are anxious to learn the truth.

This was evident on April 5 when an overflow audience of 1,600 people—twice what organizers expected—crowded New York's Town Hall for "Voices from Panama," a forum organized by the Independent Commission of Inquiry on the Invasion. Hundreds more, unable to enter the packed hall, listened to the meeting on loudspeakers outside.

Olga Mejia, president of Panama's National Commission on Human Rights who traveled from Panama to participate in the event, moved many to tears as she described how "people, running away from the fires and the bombs, were machined-gunned by U.S. troops."

Mejia said that the Red Cross was not allowed to pick up the wounded and the dead. Many cadavers were thrown into the sea, while others were incinerated with chemicals or buried in mass graves. "This crime should

never be repeated," she said, comparing the wanton killing with Lidice, the Czechoslovakian village that was destroyed by the Nazis in retaliation for Czech resistance actions.

Legislator Mario Rognoni said he had come to help bring democracy to the U.S. Democracy depends on people being informed of the truth, and you certainly have not been given the truth by the media, he said.

"We used to have one view of the U.S. Army," Rognoni said, "now we have another." The invading troops behaved like "looters, thieves, and mercenaries. . . . They went into homes and stole the jewelry and the silverware," he said. "I saw a soldier who was so afraid that he was pointing a machine-gun at a 4-year-old girl." Rognoni said the issue was never Noriega, but the deliberate destruction of the Panamanian Defense Forces, because they had become "too nationalistic and too independent."

Attorney Graciela Dixon, who represents the war refugees, described the concentration camp conditions under which the refugees are being kept. They are only provided two meals a day, they need permission to use toilet facilities, and they are not allowed visitors without the written consent of Gen. Marc Cisneros, head of U.S. Army South. Alberto Barrows, of the Black Panamanian Congress, said that most of the victims of the invasion were non-white and that the great majority of the war refugees are black. Only 5% of Panama's total population is white, he said, yet the U.S.-installed government is almost completely white. The U.S. "has reestablished a system of apartheid in Panama," said

Barrows.

Hector Aleman, head of Panama's 100,000 member Public Workers Union (FENASEP), said that 12,000 state employees have been fired since the invasion "for the crime of fulfilling their constitutional obligation of taking up arms to defend their country." He said that 55% of the work force in the city of Colón and at least one-third of the labor force in Panama City and the rest of the country is currently unemployed. Edilma Icaza, a Kuna Indian, said that she, her husband, daughter, and her son have all lost their jobs because they supported the former government. She said that Panamanians put up a courageous resistance, but were overwhelmed by a massive force armed with sophisticated weapons. Those included the Stealth F-117 fighter which was employed, for the first time ever, against Panama.

Dean Cecilio Simon, of the University of Panama's School of Public Administration, the first black ever to be elected as a dean of the University, said that Bush has installed a "narcology" and a military dictatorship as the new government. Most senior officials, including the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, are tied to drug money-laundering banks. Even elected officials, he said, require a pass from U.S. General Cisneros to travel across Panama.

"The people of the U.S. have a moral obligation to demand as thorough an account of the deaths as possible," said former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark. "Doesn't anyone care how many people died in Panama?"

To judge by the audience at Town Hall, the American people do. Not so the media. Not one television station or one newspaper, including the "newspaper of record," the *New York Times*, saw fit to print a single word about the event.