

## Panama Report by Carlos Wesley

### Guns and drugs, but no butter

*Far from bringing democracy, the military occupation is covering for drug-runners and drug banks.*

Gen. Marc Cisneros, head of U.S. Army South in Panama, said that the American troops that invaded Panama will withdraw in June. But General Cisneros said that even after that, a certain number of U.S. soldiers will remain assigned to each police precinct in Panama, according to the Panamanian daily *Crítica* of April 4.

The announcement must come as a surprise to those Americans who rely only on the administration and the Establishment media for their news. Since President George Bush announced in February that the invading troops had been withdrawn, most people probably assumed that Panama was now governed by the U.S.-installed troika of Guillermo Endara, Ricardo Arias Calderón, and Guillermo "Billy" Ford—all of whom are linked to drug-money laundering.

Instead, General Cisneros is running a military dictatorship. During Holy Week, he visited Las Tablas, a town in the Central Provinces, to instruct authorities on how to carry out their functions.

The U.S. military has also retaken installations that had reverted to Panama under the 1977 Carter-Torrijos canal treaties, including Fort Amador and Fort Cimarron. According to sources in Panama, the U.S. is also establishing new military installations in the country, including an electronic monitoring center on the penal island of Coiba in the Pacific Ocean, similar to the existing espionage center on La Galeta Island in Panama's Caribbean.

Borrowing a page from the Vietnam War, Cisneros's occupation troops are carrying out their own ver-

sion of Operation Phoenix, the program under which suspected opponents of the U.S. war effort were exterminated. On April 5, a squad of American rangers in Chiriquí detained Dr. Manuel Pardo, the former provincial director of health services, superseding Panamanian judicial authorities who had planned to let him free on bail.

On April 11, Panamanian secret police, who are being "advised" by the FBI, twice raided the home of Dr. Orville Goodin, former minister of finance, who is being sought on trumped-up charges. That same day, radio commentator Balbino "Nino" Macías, an opponent of the invasion, was shot and wounded by the bodyguard of a pro-government spokesman, and four-year-old Melquiades Rodríguez, grandson of Col. Marco Justine, chief of staff under Gen. Manuel Noriega, was kidnaped and held for ransom.

Balbina de Perinián, an opposition member of Panama's National Legislative Assembly, expressed fear that other supporters of the former government may be subjected to similar terrorist pressures. Mrs. Perinián said the U.S. Southern Command would be responsible for any such attacks against her family, "because they are the ones currently governing the country."

Meanwhile, the war victims, whose homes were destroyed during the invasion, and who have since been living in concentration camp conditions at abandoned hangars at Albrook Field, an old U.S. air base, were told by Housing Minister Raúl Figueroa that they have to wait at least another

four months for permanent housing, because the United States has not provided the promised economic assistance. In any case, most of the money proposed by Bush would go to bail out the banks, not to the war victims. U.S. Ambassador Deane Hinton warned Congress that it had better approve the aid package soon. "If it were a six-month delay, that would be a real danger," he said, according to Reuters on April 17.

How goes the war on drugs, which was the pretext for invading Panama? On April 17, U.S. Attorney General Richard Thornburgh announced that as part of "Polar Cap," the administration has ordered scores of U.S. banks to produce records on 750 accounts used to launder almost \$400 million for the Colombian cocaine cartels. In announcing the move, administration officials bragged that it was yet another "dividend" of the invasion.

But fully a year ago, in a press conference on April 28, 1989, the same Thornburgh *praised* Colombia and Panama's law enforcement, for their assistance in Operation Polar Cap, which enabled the U.S. to shut down a \$1.2 billion money-laundering enterprise. At that time, Panama's law enforcement was run by General Noriega.

Not that the latest stage of "Polar Cap" will do much to advance the war on drugs. Officials said that the banks will not be prosecuted, because they didn't solicit the drug business.

Among those cited are Bank of America, First National Bank of Chicago, Chemical Bank, Chase Manhattan, Marine Midland, Citibank, and Wells Fargo. Most of these banks had Panama branches, and many have previously been cited for drug-money laundering and gotten off with slaps on the wrist in plea-bargaining agreements. Their wrongdoing is now being blamed on Noriega.