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## **Summary Of Recent Critiques Of Panama's Government & Opposition To U.S. Occupation, Influence**

*by Deborah Tyroler*

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May 4: On behalf of the Civic Crusade, Tomas Herrera called on all political parties and government officials to establish a "truce," and cease their squabbling, exchange of insults, and tendencies to self-destruction. The Crusade is comprised of businesspersons, professionals and students. After criticizing President Guillermo Endara's administration for a continued lack of a "coherent plan of government," Herrera proposed the creation of a special commission to discuss the existence, nature and functions of the public security forces. Herrera said that after Endara assumed power, he promised to do away with the military forces. Subsequently, the president created the "public force," made up largely of former members of former Gen. Manuel Noriega's army. Members of the new police force have been accused of obstructing investigations of former government officials (misappropriation of government-owned goods and funds), and of kidnapping and murdering the grandson of a former Noriega official. May 11: At a press conference, Panama City Archbishop Marcos Gregorio McGrath demanded compensation from the US for persons who suffered damages during the invasion. He also called on the President Guillermo Endara's government not to return to "the small-minded practices of distributing positions and opportunities, as if they were political prizes." Next, the archbishop expressed his wish to know the exact number and identities of Panamanians who died in the invasion. After asserting there is no evidence for claims of 5,000 to 6,000 fatalities, McGrath said that the Church's earlier estimate of 655 dead may be increased. Regarding discussion of the Panamanian situation in the US Congress, McGrath said that a senator's statement on the "strategic importance" of Panama to the US "is painfully inopportune...after decades of having injected this country with militarism, using [Panama] as a base for its military presence in Central and South America." May 21: Catholic newspaper Panorama published an editorial asserting that five months after the invasion, Panama is experiencing an "institutional crisis," while Endara's government fails to fulfill political pledges and exhausts itself with "internal quarrels." The Church attributed the current crisis to the "parsimonious slowness (of the US) in supplying economic aid, and the prolongation of foreign presence in the administration of the republic." Endara's government, said Panorama, has not yet managed to organize "administration of the state," and continues dismissing public employees every day, including "persons of modest means..." The newspaper pointed out that Endara had pledged he would not "exercise vengeance, nor persecution for political reasons." The National Public Employees Federation (FENASEP) has denounced the firing of 12,000 civil servants since the invasion, and their subsequent replacement with government officials' family members, and members of ruling political parties. Panorama said, "The Catholic Church cannot endorse the [government's] failure to meet its promises and obligations." The newspaper also criticized government plans to privatize state-run companies, since public coffers have been depleted not by the inefficiencies of such companies, but rather because of private sector subsidies, and paying interest on its debts. May 24: Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) legislator Gerardo Gonzalez described the government of President Guillermo Endara as a "perfect disaster," after pointing out that five months after the US invasion, Panama continues to be occupied by US troops. Considered

to be an expert on Canal treaty issues, Gonzalez told La Estrella de Panama that if the Panamanian army is eliminated by law as intended by the national congress, "the possibility opens up for the renegotiation of the presence of US military bases" in Panama beyond the year 2000. June 5: Several civic organizations, the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD), the Socialist Workers Party (PST) and the Workers Revolutionary Party (PRT), established the National Front of Patriots (FNP) to "expel the [US] occupation forces from Panama." In a communique, the FNP said Front is open to all, having no distinct ideological orientation. The FNP statement said the organization will struggle to "save the country" from the subordination of President Guillermo Endara's government to US objectives and whims, and to obtain compensation for persons who suffered damages in the US invasion. June 6: In statements published by La Estrella de Panama, PRD legislator Gerardo Gonzalez said President Endara's government "is a circus that never ends, because it has nothing to offer to resolve the country's problems." After asserting that the government's infrastructure has deteriorated, Gonzalez said the \$420 million in US aid for Panama's economic recovery is "ridiculous." According to Gonzalez, "The government has placed all its confidence in US aid, which is insignificant in comparison with the economic damage suffered by the country during two years of economic aggression and then the invasion...and its aftermath." According to Panamanian businesspersons, the sanctions applied by the US in mid-1988 caused losses estimated at over \$2 billion, while damages resulting from the invasion are estimated at about \$5 billion. (Basic data from Notimex, 05/04/90, 05/11/90; AFP, 05/21/90, 05/24/90, 06/05/90, 06/06/90)

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