

Bernal, a distinguished university professor and popular radio commentator, who repeatedly has voiced his negative opinions on the referendum, and has made allegations concerning government excesses and wrong-doings, has now been indicted by the state attorney after he had suggested that the National Police had bungled an ongoing case in which four prisoners had been decapitated. Though Dr. Bernal has long been viewed as a perpetual irritant by the authorities (just as he had been under the Noriega regime when he was forced to flee into exile) for his outspoken criticism of corrupt government practices, official Panamanian sources predict that the new charge against him may again result in enforced exile.

Dr. Bernal's case was suspended by the judge at the end of its June 19 preliminary hearing due to a motion presented by defense attorneys requesting that legal basis of charges against the defendant be declared as unconstitutional. The trial will be postponed indefinitely until a higher court rules. Although the defendant's highly visible profile and fame drew wide support for him, the average Panamanian dissident could never hope for such a crowd and such widespread attention. This is why the final disposition of the Bernal case is so important to the future of Panamanian democracy.

Despite the fact that the Panamanian constitution guarantees freedom of expression, that same document also contains clauses which the authorities intentionally entered into it in order to silence its would-be critics. For example, article 33 allows for the State to "fine or arrest any person who offends or shows disrespect to them [government officials] when they are in performance of their duties or because of their performance of the same." In the country's Penal Code, a charge of "slander and offense" can bring about fines or imprisonment. Long controversial Law 67 of 1978 forbids the practice of journalism by people who do not have "professional competence."

#### REMOVING THE CHECKS AND BALANCES

On February 5 of last year, Perez Balladares signed a bill creating a new office, "Defender of the People" (Human Rights Ombudsman). This official, even though working on a pathetically meager budget, was initially given broad powers to investigate accusations of human rights abuses and to disseminate his findings. The terms of the position also allowed the ombudsman to step in and negotiate complaints having to do with the Attorney General's office, and the proper functioning of the Electoral Tribunal. But, in a troubling ruling by the Court last February, his latter powers were revoked. The Perez Balladares government originally had set up the Human Rights Ombudsman office as a way to placate international human rights groups, but as time passed, more and more of its powers have been yanked away. The ombudsman, (constitutional law scholar Italo Antinori), now must learn to cope with hundreds of complaints, a low budget, and an office whose powers largely have been retrenched.

#### PEREZ BALLADARES' EYE ON THE PRIZE

Though the transfer of the canal is certainly on the minds of U.S. government and Panamanian officials, this issue does not exhaust their bilateral agenda. Slow negotiations over a multinational anti-drug center still must be successfully concluded, the legality of the proposed referendum allowing for Perez Balladares to seek reelection confirmed, and the accusation that basic civil rights are being trampled on must be resolved. A long list of brutality charges against the National Police remain to be investigated; a Supreme Court, which according to the State Department is "subject to

corruption and political manipulation," must be reformed and governmental links to drug cartels and money laundering schemes investigated. Perez Balladares' current mildly anti-U.S. stance is being seen as a form of self-serving demagoguery, in which he artfully wraps himself in the nation's flag to gain support for his August referendum from the nationalist core of his party's rank-and-file. Thus far, he has turned down U.S. transitional assistant funds for the canal, preferring to accept aid from Asian or EU sources, in order to lessen Washington's presence and influence. Regardless, if current practices remain, any ongoing mismanagement of the canal could result in a huge disappointment for the country, both in terms of shortfalls in shipping revenue, and also due to impediments to the Canal's tourist and industrial development potential. Any slowdown in growth could also present a springboard for his many political adversaries to savage any dreams he might have had of reelection.

#### IN RECOGNITION OF COLONEL RANDALL T. SMITH

#### HON. RALPH M. HALL

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 25, 1998

Mr. HALL of Texas. Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to pay tribute to a truly exceptional Marine: Colonel Randall T. Smith, who will be retiring on October 1, 1998, after more than 26 years of service to this great nation. His dedication and professionalism have earned him the respect of his seniors, peers and his subordinates.

Colonel Smith is a graduate of East Texas State University with a Bachelors Degree in Business Administration. He was commissioned a Second Lieutenant upon graduation from Officers Candidate School in May 1972, and completed the Basic School in November 1972. After graduating from the Aviation supply Officer's Course in February 1973, Colonel Smith was assigned as Squadron Supply Officer with VMAT-203, MCCRGT-20, Marine Corps Air Station, Cherry Point, North Carolina, in March 1973—during which the squadron received its first AV-8A Harrier. He was promoted to First Lieutenant in April 1974.

Colonel Smith next served in various H&MS-12 Group Supply Department billets, until he was transferred to the 4th Marine Aircraft wing in August 1976. He was promoted to Captain in November 1976 and served as Officer-in-Charge of the Marine Reserve Aviation Supply Training Unit in New Orleans, Louisiana, until July 1978.

After graduating from Amphibious Warfare School, Marine Corps Base, Quantico, Virginia, in June 1979, Colonel Smith reported for duty with H&MS-13, Marine Air Group-13, Marine Corps Air Station, El Toro, California. There, he served as the Group Aviation Supply Support Center Officer, and subsequently, as Group Supply Officer. Colonel Smith, then, transferred to H&MS-24, Marine Air Group-24, Marine Corps Air Station, Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii in August 1981, for duty as the Group Supply Officer where he was promoted to Major in June 1982.

From August 1984 to June 1985 Colonel Smith attended the College of Naval Command and Staff, Newport, Rhode Island, and also was awarded a Master of Science De-

gree in Management from Salve Regina College. Following graduation from the Naval War College, he was ordered to Naval Air Systems Command, Washington, D.C., where he served as the Naval Aviation Logistics Command Management Information Systems (PMA-270) Deputy Program Manager. In January 1988, Colonel Smith transferred to Headquarters, Marine Corps (Department of Aviation) for duty as the Aviation Supply Support Officer for the Marine Corps.

In September 1988, Colonel Smith reported to Navy Supply Corps School, Athens, Georgia, for duty as Marine Corps Representative for Northeast Georgia and Head Marine Corps Training Division, where he was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel in April 1989. Colonel Smith, then, reported to Marine Air Logistics Squadron-29, Marine Air Group-29, Marine Corps Air Station, New River, North Carolina, for duty as Squadron Executive Officer in September 1991. There, Colonel Smith served as Commanding Officer of Marine Air Logistics Squadron-29 from February 1992 until June 1993.

Colonel Smith was assigned as Assistant Chief of Staff (ALD), 1st Marine Air Wing in August 1993 and was promoted to his present grade of Colonel in July 1994. He later assumed command of Marine Wing Support Group 17 on January 28, 1995.

Colonel Smith's awards include the Meritorious Service Medal (with one Gold Star), the Navy commendation Medal, the Navy Achievement Medal, the Meritorious Unit Commendation, the National Defense Service Medal (with one Bronze Star) and the Sea Service Deployment Ribbon (with three Bronze Stars).

During Colonel Smith's career, he and his family have made many sacrifices for our country. I would like to thank them all—Randall, his lovely wife Donna, and their four children, April, Sara, Derek and Brett—for their contributions to the Marine Corps and to our national security.

Mr. Speaker, Colonel Smith is a great credit to the United States Marine Corps and the country he has so faithfully and honorably served. As he prepares to depart for new challenges, I know that my colleagues on both sides of the aisle join me in wishing him every success, as well as fair winds and following seas. When we adjourn today's session, let us do so in honor of this great American.

#### TRIBUTE TO LIEUTENANT COLONEL DAPHNE D. SAHLIN, U.S. ARMY

#### HON. AMO HOUGHTON

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 25, 1998

Mr. HOUGHTON. Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute today to an outstanding American at the close of her career as an officer in the U.S. Army.

On June 30, 1998, Lieutenant Colonel Daphne D. Sahlin retires after completing over 20 years of service to her nation and the U.S. Army. Daphne hails from Louisiana, and was graduated from Rice University with a degree in history. She came to the Army's officer corps from the ROTC program there. She later completed a master's degree in management.