P.S. to the NEWS

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HUMAN RIGHTS & PANAMA

The plot and cast of characters involved in the Panama Canal scenario grow more interesting with every passing week.

Our chief negotiator is Sol M. Linowitz who was a registered agent for the pro-Communist government of Salvador Allende when he controlled Chile. Until very recently, Linowitz was a director and member of the executive committee of Marine Midland Bank in New York, which is on the Federal Reserve Board's "problem list" of banks that have overextended themselves with large loans that may be uncollectable.

Marine Midland Bank has made large loans to Panama, which is now ruled by an unelected, insolvent dictatorship. It is doubtful whether Panama will be able to pay its debts unless it somehow gets control of the U.S. Canal and the fees paid by the ships that use it.

When Linowitz met recently with the House Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee, Congressman Robert Dornan-tried to ask him about the Marine Midland connection, but Linowitz would not discuss it except to say that he would resign from the bank board.

The secrecy which has enveloped the negotiations that Linowitz and his co-negotiator, Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, have been conducting with Panama was rudely broken recently when one of the Panamanian negotiators revealed what has already been decided.

Carlos Alfredo Lopez told the press: "The [Cana1 J Zone could be olf-' of existence before the end of 1977. We have finished negotiating about 60 percent of the treaty, and we have agreed that when the treaty goes into effect the American Zone wi11 go out of existence."

Lopez's revelation was a big shock not only to Americans who had no idea

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that our diplomats were planning to surrender this valuable U.S. property so soon, but especially to the 3,500 American citizens living in the Canal Zone.

They are understandably frightened at the prospect of living under Panamanian criminal law which does not recognize basic legal rights. Those accused of crime can be arrested by dictator's Torrijos' soldiers and imprisoned for months without bail or seeing an attorney.

The experience of four U.S. Navy seamen is a good example. While walking about 10:00 P.M. on the street that divides U.S. and Panama property, they were accosted from behind by Panamanian policemen, handcuffed, and thrown in the back of a truck.

With no explanation of what offense they might have committed, they were thrown in a compound with at least 800 other prisoners. One sewer drain in the center was the only latrine facility. An old man sold dirty newspapers at 10¢ per copy to sleep on.

The American seamen were denied any use of the telephone. No one spoke to them in English. In the morning, a naval liaison officer appeared and told the seamen that they were charged with "peace disturbance" because they had walked on the Panama side of the street.

The naval officer advised them that, if they pled not guilty, their ship would not wait for them, the trial would not take place for at least a month, and that in Panama prisoners are responsible for all their own food and necessities which are presumed to be sent in by friends and relatives. Since the American seamen had none, they were advised that it would be "prudent" to plead guilty and pay the fine, which they did.

If President Carter is so interested in human rights, he might start by de fending the 3,500 American citizens who live in the U.S. Canal Zone. If we abandon them by turning over the Canal Zone to Torrijos, they will lose all their human and civil rights.

However, Marine Midland Bank will be able to collect its loan.

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