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Дана стаття присвячена одному з найяскравіших політиків Латинської Америки ХХ століття – генералу Омару Торріхосу. Незважаючи на свою ключову роль у політичному житті Панами, він ніколи офіційно не був президентом країни. Життя Омара Торріхоса і сьогодні надихає багато людей на соціальні зміни.

Ключові слова: Омар Торріхос, Панама, Панамський канал, реформи, Джиммі Картер.

Данная статья посвящена одному из самых ярких политиков Латинской Америки ХХ столетия – генералу Омару Торрихосу. Несмотря на свою ключевую роль в политической жизни Панама, он никогда официально не был президентом страны. Жизнь Омара Торрихоса и сегодня вдохновляет множество людей.

Ключевые слова: Омар Торрихос, Панама, Панамский канал, реформы, Джимми Картер.

The article is dedicated to the one of the XXth century Latin America's brightest politicians, general Omar Torrijos. Despite his key role in Panama's political life, he was never officially a president of the country. Omar Torrijos' life still inspires many people from all over the world to do some social changes.

Key words: Omar Torrijos, Panama, Panama Canal, reforms, Jimmy Carter.

Omar Torrijos (Omar Efraín Torrijos Herrera) was born on the 13th of February, 1929 in a small town of Santiago de Veraguas. He was the sixth child in the family. Omar was educated at a local school. At the age of 18, he won a scholarship to the famous military academy, School of Americas in Salvador. After graduating in 1952, Torrijos decided to join the Panamanian Defence Forces (PDF). Because of his great talent and leadership qualities, Torrijos' career was progressing like a shot, and in 1966 he became Executive Secretary of PDF. In 1968, Omar Torrijos with his comrades decided to organise an overturn of Panama's president Arnulfo Arias. Arias was recently re-elected for the third term. But in fact, he falsificated results of elections and he was a cruel, tyrannical president. So, Arias was overturned at night on the 11th of October, and Omar Torrijos gained power in Panama [5: 54]. Of course, Panamanian people weren't upset with this. Moreover, they supported Torrijos, because he was from a poor family, he knew people's problems and was a real patriot of Panama. But there were some controversies at the new government, and not all members of it were happy with the new Panamanian leader. At night on the 14th of December 1969, a group of militaries, which included Head of Joint Staff R. Silvera, colonels P. Fabregas and A. Sanhur, made an overturn. At this time Torrijos was visiting Mexico. When he heard about the overturn, he phoned to all high officers; found out who stayed loyal to him and flew to the Panamanian province Chirica in a small plane. Staying in this province, he collected all loyal troops and went onto the

capital. On the way many ordinary people joined Torrijos. The army took capital without a fight; Torrijos returned a power, and all the conspirators were deported from Panama [5: 72]. Soon, this day, the 16th of December, became a national celebration.

Despite being a militarist, Torrijos was a democratic leader and was supported by Panamanian people's majority. He made a lot of reforms in important spheres [5: 127]:

1. Agricultural reform: according to the new law, rich people had to pay high taxes for uncultivated land. So, they had to give land to landless or land-hungry peasants. Government helped to organize more than 250 collective farms – “asentamiento”. These farms increased revenue of peasants and country.

2. Financial reform: Panama created the most advantageous conditions in Latin America for foreign banks and investors which allowed attracting huge amount of money to the country. By 1973, there were about 50 offices of big international banks.

3. Special governmental commission accepted new Labour code in 1971. By this document, government established minimum size of wage, 8-hour working day and 13th salary. Workers were given a right to go on a strike legally and employers couldn't fire them without giving a reason.

4. In 1972, National Assembly of Panama accepted new Constitution. By it, legislative, executive and judicial branches of power had to work “in harmonic cooperation”.

5. For the first time in Panama's history, a state organised a Ministry of healthcare; within a couple of years death decreased twice (!).

6. Torrijos organised big educational reform which consisted of two parts. Firstly, Panamanian adults' majority were illiterate. After just a few years, number of illiterate adults decreased to 35%. Secondly, there were few schools. As Torrijos said, “no Panamanian child should spend more than 30 minutes on a trip to school”. Soon these words became reality.

After all these reforms, Panama became a country with the highest per capita income in Latin America. What about the international politics of Omar Torrijos, it was very diverse. Panama established friendly relations with American countries' majority and many third-world countries. Torrijos initiated Panama's joining Non-Align Movement, organisation of countries which weren't aligned with or against any power bloc [1: 151].

It should be noted that Panama had friendly relations with a number of socialist countries, especially with Cuba (but not with the USSR). Omar Torrijos and Fidel Castro were known as big friends. Torrijos once said: “Fidel Castro is the only politician, who never told me what I should do” [5: 143]. But Torrijos was neither a communist nor a socialist. In these words he expressed his point of view as to this ideology: “I don't like Communism because it hands out wealth through rationing books”. But Panama had not only friends among different countries. It had also a powerful enemy – the United States of America. If we cast a retrospective look at the previous history of Panama, we will see that it wasn't an independent state but it was the USA colony.

It sounds ridiculously but Panama never obtained Panama Canal Zone. By humiliating Hay – Bunau-Varilla Treaty, signed in 1903 without agreement of the Panamanians, Panama Canal Zone was an American property and the USA had right to interfere into the internal policy of Panama [1: 20]. So it's not a wonder that White House's administration didn't want Panama headlined by a strong leader who potentially could cause some trouble for their dominating in Panama. Omar Torrijos succeeded in his life goal – giving Panama control under the Canal Zone [2: 198]. After the years of difficult conversations with different USA presidents, Torrijos finally reached agreement with Jimmy Carter's

administration. On the 7th of September 1977, Torrijos and Carter signed the so-called Torrijos-Carter Treaty. By this treaty, the USA gradually gave Panama control over the Canal and after the 31st of December, the USA forever leaves Panama Canal (despite American invasion in Panama in 1989, the USA actually left the Canal Zone in 2000) [3: 11]. What's interesting, Torrijos never rejected a possibility of war against the United States if conversations failed and the treaty was not signed.

It is impossible to overrate the importance of this event for Panama and for the rest of the world. To have control over the sea route between the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans is to have influence on the whole American continent and strong maritime companies. So, Torrijos-Carter Treaty changed balance of power in the whole world. In 1978, according to Article 277 of Panamanian Constitution which was dedicated to Omar Torrijos personally, Torrijos ceased to be the Maximum Leader of Panamanian Revolution. But he still continued to consult Panamanian politicians, received visitors from other countries and, in general, defined internal and external politics of Panama [5: 213].

Omar Torrijos once said "Those who dedicate their lives to fighting with social injustice had to weigh their choice. They had to realize that they are unlikely to die from senility in bed". Unfortunately, these words were prophetic. Omar Torrijos died in an air catastrophe on the 31st of July, 1981. His plane crashed into a mountain near the city of Penonomé. This air catastrophe was very strange, and we still don't know what caused the tragedy. Many people suggest that Torrijos' death was organised by CIA. There are two main arguments for this version [4: 208]: 1. New USA president, Ronald Reagan, wanted to strengthen his influence in Latin America, and Panama Canal was crucial for controlling the region. Also, Reagan didn't like Jimmy Carter's politics, and always tried to make decisions conversely to his predecessor. 2. Two months before Torrijos' death, Jaime Roldós, his friend and a president of Ecuador, died. Roldós also had controversies with Ronald Reagan, and also died in an air catastrophe.

Anyway, Omar Torrijos' death was a big tragedy for the Panamanians. They lost a person who made Panama a modern, prosperous country. His successor, Manuel Noriega, didn't have such talent and charisma. Omar Torrijos once said: "I don't want to go into history; I want to go into the Canal Zone". But I'm sure that he succeeded in both.

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