



Introduction and discussion with press photographer and Panama expert Hinrich Schultze

- Free of charge -

On 27.11.2024, 8 pm in Lecture Hall D of the Philosophenturm (Von-Melle-Park 6)

## „The Panama Deception“

A film by Barbara Trent  
(USA, 1992)

The election of Donald Trump as US president causes the share prices of major banks, tech companies and the defence industry on Wall Street to explode. His ultra-reactionary, authoritarian and racist chauvinism is not deterring European heads of government from repeating their values-based allegiance to the self-proclaimed beacon of 'freedom and democracy' in the world.

The rest of the world, on the other hand, has been well aware for decades that the Western incantation of 'freedom and democracy' is synonymous with the power-political enforcement of vile economic profit interests and often means war. The same phraseology has been used to crown each of the countless military invasions of the NATO bloc and especially the USA in the countries of the so-called Third World since 1945, in violation of international law, with seemingly higher honours.

The Republic of Panama, which had been formally independent since 1903, was no different in 1989, although it received little global attention. 20,000 US soldiers landed in the largest cities of the Central American country on the night of 20 December following targeted propaganda and media preparations. They occupied the Canal Zone, the strategically most important transport routes, radio stations, television stations, newspaper editorial offices and universities, arrested head of government Noriega, smashed the Panamanian military, set entire neighbourhoods on fire and pursued any protests against the occupation with bloody violence.

The Oscar-winning documentary film 'The Panama Deception' by US directors Barbara Trent and David Kasper impressively illuminates the real background, context and consequences of this military invasion, which were either hushed up in the media or glorified as a heroic action to liberate the Panamanian people from the corrupt military ruler and drug dealer Noriega.

Through numerous interviews with US military personnel, embassy staff, government advisors and intelligence service employees involved, with Panamanian representatives of the opposition and government as well as with those affected from the

civilian population and on the basis of extensive archive material, it becomes clear that the US administration of Ronald Reagan, together with the later President George H. W. Bush Sr., was concerned with maintaining its control over the Panama Canal and its economic and geostrategic supremacy in the region from 1980 onwards. To achieve this, General Noriega, who had previously been recruited by the CIA to depose the former ruler Torrijos and support the USA via his drug trafficking network in the fight against the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua, had to be removed. Despite all the financial support from

the USA, Noriega had refused to revise the treaty negotiated in 1977 between US President Carter and General Torrijos following massive student and worker protests, which had provided for the complete return of control over the Panama Canal to the Panamanian authorities in 1999 and the closure of the 14 US military bases in the country, the US Southern Command jungle warfare training centre and the notorious 'School of the Americas' torture training centre. The shipping route and the military presence in the centre of Latin America were (and still are) too important for the profit margins of the US economy to be left to the Panamanian people's statutory right to self-determination.

With profoundly humanistically motivated, investigative educational work and historical-critical realism, the film sheds light on this chapter of US foreign policy and at the same time makes it undeniably clear that the reason why the world did not become more peaceful with the disappearance of the real socialist states after 1989 is essentially to be found in the crisis-ridden, imperialist, long-established expansionist policy of the USA.

Peace, disarmament and the global realisation of international and human rights, social welfare development and the democratic and enlightened development of the many require the fundamental overcoming of those social forces that have an economic interest in the opposite. Any commitment in this respect is worthwhile and is needed in a new way. An X is not a U. International solidarity - an end to austerity!

*'The Danes are stingier than the Italians. Spanish women indulge in forbidden love more easily than Germans. All Latvians steal. All Bulgarians smell bad. Romanians are braver than the French. Russians embezzle money. None of this is true - but it will be printed in the next war.'*

Kurt Tucholsky, 'Nationales', 1924.

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