

Panama: George Bush's narco government

The following is excerpted from EIR's Special Report "Bush's Surrender to Dope, Inc.," issued in April 1991. It sheds light on the Bush administration's "Just Cause."

In March 1985, Panamanian authorities intervened against First Interamericas Bank, S.A. (FIB), shutting it down for "failure to heed Panamanian banking laws" and for unexplained transfers of funds abroad—that is, for laundering drug money. The two majority stockholders in First Interamericas were Rodríguez Orejuela and his partner, Jorge Luis Ochoa, both of whom were by that time sitting in a Madrid jail cell. Managing the bank at the time of its seizure was former UTC treasurer and Colombian Workers' Bank director Antonio Beltrán.

Even more interesting were some members of FIB's board of directors, who today are running the new U.S. Army-installed government of Panama. Puppet President Guillermo Endara has named Carlos Lucas López Tejada as Chief Justice of Panama's Supreme Court, Rogelio Cruz as Attorney General, and Mario Galindo as Treasury Minister. All three—López Tejada, Cruz, and Galindo—sat on FIB's board of directors. Cruz remained loyal to Rodríguez Orejuela to the end. Even after it was made public that Rodríguez Orejuela was the owner of First Interamericas, Cruz continued to appeal the government's decision to shut down the bank. The appeal was turned down in April 1985.

President of First Interamericas was Jaime Arias Calderón, the brother of Endara's first vice president, Ricardo Arias Calderón. Ricardo's banker brother is also one of the owners of Banco Continental, which has served as a conduit for financing the election campaigns of Ricardo's party, the Christian Democrats. In 1985, a captured Colombian drug-runner confessed that he had laundered some \$40 million for Colombian drug cartels through the Banco Continental—with the full knowledge of another opposition leader, César Tribaldos, who sat on the board of Banco Continental.

Named to run the Colón Free Zone by the Endara regime was Jaime Ford Lara, nephew of Panama's Second Vice President Guillermo ("Billy") Ford. According to the *Miami Herald* on Jan. 5, 1990, convicted Medellín Cartel money-lauderer Ramón Milián Rodríguez "laundered millions of dollars in drug money in the early 1980s through a Panamanian company in which Ford's brother Henry was an officer." The *Herald* added that Milián Rodríguez, currently serving a 43-year racketeering sentence, said that "Guillermo Ford

was also involved with laundering money through Corporación Ford."

EIR also reported on Jan. 5, 1990 that "Second Vice President Guillermo 'Billy' Ford is up to his elbows in drug money laundering." Ford and two political associates—Carlos Rodríguez, named by Endara as Panama's ambassador to Washington, and Roberto Eisenmann, publisher of Panama's leading pro-government newspaper, *La Prensa*—own the Dadeland National Bank in Miami, Florida. That bank was revealed in 1985 to have served as a laundromat for one of the largest marijuana-smuggling rings ever caught in the United States, that of Antonio ("Tony") Fernández. Eisenmann also sits on the board of Banco Continental.

Guillermo Endara himself is business partner to a leader of Panama's former opposition who was caught red-handed in the dope trade, CIA bagman Carlos Eleta Almarán. Besides being the corporate attorney for the Eleta family's considerable interests, Endara owns significant stock in, and sits on the board of, Harinas Panama, S.A.; Carlos Eleta is the company's president and founder. Eleta had served as the intermediary of the U.S. campaign to buy the 1989 Panamanian elections, with \$10 million given him by the Central Intelligence Agency.

Eleta was arrested in April 1989 in Macon, Georgia by the Bibb County sheriff and DEA personnel, and charged with conspiring to import 600 kilos of cocaine per month into the United States, and planning to set up shell companies in Panama to launder the estimated \$300 million per month in drug profits.

Justice Department charges against Eleta were suddenly dropped on Feb. 13, 1990 for "lack of proof," despite claims of the authorities who had conducted the arrest that proof certainly did exist, including audio- and videotapes of Eleta's efforts to set up the dummy corporations for money laundering. Asked why the indictment was dropped, the police answered that "that decision was made by the U.S. Attorney General and by the federal prosecutor of Georgia," Ed Ennis.

Eleta's lawyer in the case was Gregory B. Craig, who has significant links of his own to the U.S. intelligence community. Craig is a partner in the Washington law firm of Williams and Connolly, the firm of Oliver North's counsel Brendan Sullivan.

One question that has recently arisen concerning Craig's role is whether the Bush administration used Panamanian government funds to get the drug-trafficking Eleta off the hook. According to official U.S. documents, Craig was a registered agent of the fictitious Florida-based "government" of Eric Delvalle, and in that capacity had received in 1989 tens of thousands of Panamanian government dollars that had been illegally seized by the Bush administration as part of its economic warfare against Panama. The Delvalle "government" fiction had, in fact, been kept alive, among other reasons, to provide a conduit for funneling Panamanian monies to U.S. cronies and agents inside Panama.