

## Panama Report by Carlos Wesley

### Accused narco was CIA bagman

*The Establishment admits EIR's charges that the CIA was financing drug traffickers against General Noriega.*

United States government officials have admitted that the CIA used accused drug trafficker Carlos Eleta Almarán as a bagman to conduit funds to opponents of Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega, according to the *New York Times* of Jan. 14. The article, "Drug Arrest Disrupted CIA Operation in Panama," cracks the virtual blackout by the Establishment media of the explosive implications of the Eleta case, which *EIR* has covered extensively since his arrest on drug charges on April 6, 1989.

Eleta, one of Panama's wealthiest men, was busted in Macon, Georgia by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) in a joint operation with the Bibb County Sheriff's office, and charged with conspiracy to import 600 kilos of cocaine per month, worth \$300 million, into the United States, and with planning to set up shell companies in Panama to launder the drug profits.

Arrested with Eleta were Manuel Castillo Bourcy and Juan Karamañites, both of whom have since pleaded guilty to lesser charges of drug conspiracy in a plea-bargaining agreement. Eleta remains free on \$8 million bail until his trial, scheduled to start in February.

According to the *Times*, Eleta's arrest brought an abrupt end to a covert CIA program "to support political opponents of General Manuel Antonio Noriega." Further, "American officials said his role in the covert program for the elections was as a 'banker,' distributing money to others helping with opposition political activities." Eleta's job was to manage \$20

million approved by the U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee, at the request of the Bush administration, to be given out in two installments of \$10 million each for the CIA's operations against Panama. "The arrest of Mr. Eleta on April 6, 1989, caused the committee to refuse to approve the second \$10 million installment, Government officials said."

The *Times* article went on to claim that the case against Eleta "appeared to weaken substantially" after Castillo Bourcy and Karamañites, filed affidavits claiming to have lied when they stated that Eleta knew that the "sports-betting venture" that the three of them were planning to set up in Panama, was really a front for laundering their drug profits.

Despite these affidavits, Bibb County Sheriff Ray Wilkes believes the case against Eleta will hold up. The testimony of the two alleged co-conspirators is not the only evidence. As *EIR* reported June 9, 1989, "Eleta's arrest came as the result of a series of meetings in Miami and elsewhere with undercover agents of the . . . DEA. Videotapes of these meetings show Eleta . . . seeking to establish a new drug-smuggling route into Georgia."

The effort to weaken the case against Eleta appears to be an attempt at damage control, as the coverup of the drug connections of the government installed in Panama by Bush's invasion begins to unravel. Eleta has extensive connections with Henry Kissinger's circles, through Kissinger's lawyer, William Dill Rogers. Eleta and his brother Fernando own a sub-

siary of Phillip Morris company, interest in thoroughbred horse racing, and a number of other businesses, including the Panamanian subsidiary of General Mills, Harinas de Panama, S.A. This makes him a business partner of the U.S.-installed "President" of Panama, Guillermo Endara, a major stockholder and member of the board of directors of Harinas de Panama, S.A.

The world's media have begun to report on the links to the drug cartels of the Endara government, including Endara's own partnership with Eleta. Nor has it gone unnoticed that Endara's two "vice presidents"—Ricardo Arias Calderón and Guillermo ("Billy") Ford—his Attorney General, several members of the cabinet, as well as the new "chief justice" of Panama's Supreme Court, are linked to the Colombian drug cartels.

Even the *New York Times* was forced to report on Jan. 17 that there are "unconfirmed . . . reports that a former law partner of President Guillermo Endara handled drug profits for clients and that a brother of Second Vice President Guillermo Ford was associated with a Miami accountant who laundered millions of dollars for the Medellín drug cartel."

In a further effort to keep the lid on the CIA's drug ties, the Bush administration let off the Bank of Credit and Commerce International without even a slap on the wrist when the bank agreed to plead guilty on Jan. 17 to laundering \$14 million in drug monies. Lawyers for the bank, which allegedly handled General Noriega's accounts, threatened that if prosecutors brought Noriega's activities into the case, they would request government documents that "demonstrate that much of the money in the accounts in question came from United States government agencies, not drug transactions."