

## Panama Report by Carlos Wesley

### Noriega opponent arrested for drugs

*With Washington backing the real drug traffickers, a clean election will mean victory for Noriega's candidate.*

**T**alk about embarrassment. For over two years, the United States has been waging a campaign to oust the head of Panama's Defense Forces (PDF), Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega, screaming that he is "a kingpin of international drug trafficking." On April 6, President George Bush notified Congress that the United States is in a "state of national emergency" to defend itself from the "unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States" posed by Panama and Noriega.

But it turns out that it is the political opposition to Noriega who are the real drug traffickers.

The same afternoon that Bush renewed the emergency decree against Panama, the owner of Panama's main opposition television network, RPC, Carlos Eleta Almarán, was busted on drug charges in Macon, Georgia. Eleta, who has been working with the U.S. Embassy to "bring democracy to Panama," was arrested for conspiring to import 600 kilos of cocaine per month, worth \$300 million, into the United States. Bail was set at \$8 million, \$3 million of it in cash, and he is forbidden to leave the United States. Arrested with Eleta were his long-standing associate, Manuel José Castillo Bourcy, 52 years old, whose appointment he once arranged as Panama's ambassador to Belice, and Juan Karamañites, 35.

In an interview with this news service, Bibb County, Georgia Sheriff Ray Wilkes said that Eleta was lured to Macon in a joint operation by his office and the Drug Enforcement Administration. "I will say that these people were high in the structure of drug trafficking in Panama," said

Wilkes.

Panamanian officials charged April 8 that the money from the drugs was intended to finance the electoral campaign of the U.S.-supported anti-Noriega Democratic Opposition Alliance (ADO) in the upcoming national elections May 7. The sources noted that Eleta is a partner in several businesses with ousted President Eric Delvalle, whom the United States supports, and with Samuel Lewis Galindo and his brother Gabriel, who has been working from Washington with the State Department in the anti-Noriega campaign.

Nabbing Eleta hits at the top of the Rockefeller business networks in Ibero-America. Eleta belongs to the grouping which, among other things, controls the communications media and includes the brothers Gustavo and Oswaldo Cisneros in Venezuela, Manuel Ulloa in Peru, and the Alemán family in Mexico.

Juan B. Sosa, whom the United States claims is "Panama's ambassador to the United States," representing the nonexistent Delvalle government, said that Eleta "is regarded as a political enemy of Noriega," reported the *Atlanta Constitution* April 8. Sosa said that the drug charges against Eleta are "very hard to believe. I would not rule out anything at this point, including a frameup," he said.

Also defending Eleta was Willy Cochéz, a leader of the opposition Christian Democratic party, who frequently travels to Washington to coordinate anti-Noriega operations with the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs. Cochéz said April 12 that Eleta's arrest was the result of a "setup" arranged by Norie-

ga—as if Noriega runs the Bibb County Sheriff's office.

Besides his television network, Eleta owns a subsidiary of Philip Morris, interests in thoroughbred horseracing, and a number of other businesses, including the Panamanian subsidiary of General Mills.

This, of course, makes him a business partner of the U.S.-backed ADO presidential candidate, Guillermo Endara, a major stockholder and member of the board of directors of the company. In an interview published in the *Christian Science Monitor* April 12, Endara said that he "consults with U.S. Embassy officials two to three times a week."

Endara's running-mate on the ADO slate—handpicked by the U.S. Embassy in Panama—second vice-presidential candidate Guillermo "Billy" Ford, was a co-owner of Dadeland Bank of Miami. Dadeland was determined, by a federal court in Florida, to be involved in drug money laundering. What's more, one of Ford's partners in Dadeland Bank was drug trafficker Antonio "Tony" Fernández, currently serving a 50-year drug sentence. Ford, also a co-owner of Continental Bank of Panama, another bank caught in drug money laundering operations, recently told the members of Panama's Banking Association that if elected he would prevent any changes in Panama's bank secrecy laws, which make money laundering possible.

It was when Noriega agreed to back a modification of these laws, and the Noriega-led PDF dealt a major blow to bank secrecy with Operation Pisces in 1987, that the campaign to oust him was launched in earnest.

Given the sleaze the U.S. is backing, it is no wonder, as the *Christian Science Monitor* reported on April 12, that "a clean election would give [Noriega's] candidate a victory."