

Bush names drug mob capos to rule Panama

The new "government" sworn into office by the U.S. Army in Panama at midnight on Dec. 19, is headed by three opposition leaders connected to the drug trade.

Named President by the United States was Guillermo Endara. Endara is a business partner of a leader of the Panamanian opposition caught red-handed in the dope trade, Carlos Eleta Almarán. Endara owns significant stock in, and sits on the board of Harinas Panama, S.A.; Eleta is the company's president and founder. Eleta was arrested on April 1989 in Macon, Georgia by U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration 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 in drug profits. Two associates of Eleta's who were arrested in the same scheme, have since pleaded guilty to all charges. Eleta remains free on \$8 million bail pending trial.

Sworn in as First Vice President was Ricardo Arias Calderón, secretary general of the Christian Democratic Party, whose brother is one of Panama's prominent bankers, Jaime Arias Calderón. The Arias Calderón connection to drug money centers around the now-closed First Interamericas bank owned by Colombian drug kingpin Gilberto Rodríguez Orejuela, and Banco Continental de Panamá.

First Interamericas was ordered closed by Panamanian banking authorities on March 1, 1985, after the bank was caught laundering drug money, when it was discovered that Rodríguez Orejuela was the major shareholder.

Jaime Arias Calderón is also one of the owners of Banco Continental, which has served as a conduit for

financing the election campaigns of the Christian Democratic party headed by his brother Ricardo Arias Calderón. In 1985, a captured Colombian drug-runner confessed that he had laundered some \$40 million for the Cali, Colombia cocaine cartel through the Banco Continental with the full knowledge of another opposition leader who sat on the board of Banco Continental.

Completing the governing team the United States installed in office on Dec. 19, is Second Vice-President Guillermo "Billy" Ford, a banker who is up to his elbows in drug money-laundering. Ford and two political associates, Carlos Rodríguez and Roberto Eisenmann, own the Dadeland National Bank in Miami, Florida, a bank which was revealed in 1985 to have served as a laundromat for one of the largest marijuana-smuggling rings ever caught in the United States. (Ford's associate, Eisenmann, also sits on the board of Banco Continental).

Dadeland National's ties to the dope mafia came to light during the trial of the Antonio ("Tony") Fernández drug syndicate, a ring which confessed to smuggling more than 1.5 million pounds of marijuana into the United States. The Fernández ring began buying stock in Dadeland National as far back as 1976; by 1984, the gang owned 9,900 shares of stock in Ford's Dadeland bank. One of the gang's money launderers, Iván Robles—a political associate of Guillermo Ford since the mid-1970s—was employed as an assistant at Dadeland National Bank during the period he served as the mafia's courier. He testified at the trial that he and others had also stashed part of their dope earnings in a lock box held at Dadeland National.

Earlier in 1989, U.S. authorities announced a list of American banks under investigation for money laundering activities. Among the banks listed was Dadeland, co-owned by Ford, Eisenmann, and Carlos Rodríguez.

Rodríguez, who continues to be the chief executive officer of Dadeland, was personally greeted Dec. 22 by President George Bush as Endara's envoy to the United States.

These operations consisted of reducing the surrounding blocks to a condition that one ABC News reporter described as "like Berlin in '45"—complete rubble. Combat operations were not halted in order to dig out the dead and wounded civilians, which the Pentagon refused to even mention.

As-house-to-house fighting began, the artillery bombardment was replaced by A-7 fighter bombers and the awesome firepower of AC-130 gunships (known as "Puff the Magic Dragon" in Vietnam), which were brought in to provide tactical air support for the urban skirmishing.

The amount of property destroyed and lives wasted by

this strategy was foreseen by responsible military commanders who opposed the plan, including former JCS Chairman Adm. William Crowe, who deplored the prospect of American boys coming home in body-bags, and Gen. Frederick Woerner, who was fired as head of the Southern Command because of his opposition to an invasion. His replacement, Gen. Maxwell Thurman, has taken credit for "selling" the strategy. Ironically, he is famed for his success as a marketing specialist, having recruited the volunteer Army with the slogan, "Be all you can be," a phrase that will have new meaning in Ibero-America.