

Panama Report by Carlos Wesley

Another narco given top job

Bush's frantic efforts to cover the drug ties of the puppet regime come unglued.

Panama's U.S.-installed regime has appointed yet another partner of the drug cartels to a high government post. Alvin Wedeen was named chief magistrate of a new tribunal established by the illegal regime of Guillermo Endara, "to investigate misappropriation of funds by officials of the former government."

Wedeen is a dirty-jobs man for the drug syndicate, whose appointment, announced Feb. 13, further confirms that the U.S. "war on drugs" is a sham. It also confirms that the main qualification for serving in the Bush-installed government of Panama is to be a member of the drug cartels.

Wedeen personally transported more than a half-million dollars for drug trafficker Antonio "Tony" Fernández, sentenced in 1985 to 50 years in jail in the famous Dadeland Bank of Florida-Steven Samos money-laundering case. In 1985 Alvin and his brother, George Wedeen Gamboa, who runs the family's bank, Banco Wedeen of Costa Rica, laundered \$10 million, \$4 million of that just in the month of September.

Alvin was also the attorney for Hugo Spadafora, a Panamanian mercenary who was part of the Nicaraguan Contra operations financed by drug financier Robert Vesco in Costa Rica. Spadafora, who was involved in arms smuggling and, reportedly, in drug trafficking, was killed in 1985 after he misappropriated funds intended for insurgents in Central America, and after too many people became convinced that he was a CIA agent.

Wedeen's appointment may unravel frantic U.S. efforts to prevent

further damage from the public exposure of the drug ties of the troika of Guillermo Endara, Ricardo Arias Calderón, and Guillermo "Billy" Ford, installed as Panama's government by the Dec. 20 invasion. After many exposés in *EIR* and other media, the *New York Times* reported Feb. 6 that "Endara has for years been a director of a Panamanian bank used extensively by Colombia's Medellín drug traffickers," Banco Interoceánico de Panamá. It also cited Ford's ties to "Dadeland Bank of Florida, which was named in a court case two years ago as a central financial institution for one of the biggest Medellín launderers, Gonzalo Mora."

The *Times* also reported the links of Rogelio Cruz, the Attorney General, to Gilberto Rodríguez Orejuela, one of the bosses of the Cali drug gang in Colombia, and that the families of Vice President Ricardo Arias Calderón and Finance Minister Mario Galindo are also heavily involved in banking. It added: "Mr. Endara, a corporate lawyer before becoming President, is a close friend of Carlos Eleta, a Panamanian businessman who was arrested in Atlanta in April on charges of conspiring to set up a major cocaine smuggling ring. Released on bail, he is now awaiting trial."

Following the *Times* exposé, Endara's envoy to Bush, Carlos Rodríguez, chief executive of Dadeland Bank, resigned his ambassadorial post, possibly to avoid more damaging revelations. Dadeland has received much unwanted publicity for its role in the cases of drug trafficker Fernández, of Gonzalo Mora of the Medellín Cartel, and for its ties to

BCCI, a bank convicted of money laundering.

On Feb. 13, the *Times* printed a "correction" saying that Vice President Ford is not a partner of Dadeland bank. That is true. But he was a partner at the time Fernández was using it to launder drug money. Nor has Ford mended his ways. On Feb. 15, he was quoted in a *Wall Street Journal* article, "Panama's Hong Kong Vision," saying: "We are going to push private enterprise here in every way, shape and form."

The Bush administration also announced on Feb. 13 that it had dropped all drug-trafficking and money-laundering charges against Endara's business partner and CIA agent, Carlos Eleta, for insufficient evidence. The undercover investigation that led to Eleta's arrest included audio and video tapes showing him agreeing to set up "shell corporations" to launder the money, law enforcement officials confirmed Feb. 15. So why were the charges dropped?

"That was a decision taken by the U.S. Attorney General and the U.S. Attorney for Georgia," Ed Ennis, said one law enforcement official. Asked why the government had not proceeded with the case given the filmed evidence, another law enforcement official said "talk to Ed." Calls to the office of U.S. Attorney Ed Ennis were not returned.

The case against Eleta was undercut when two of his accomplices, who pleaded guilty, recanted their testimony. In affidavits given Eleta's lawyer, Gregory Craig, they swore that Eleta, the bagman for the CIA's illegal funds to buy Panama's 1989 elections, did not know the money-laundering scam involved drugs. Craig is a partner in the Washington law firm of Williams and Connolly of the late Edward Bennett Williams, who had extensive links to the CIA.