

## Panama Report by Carlos Wesley

### Bush gives green light to cartels

*The real purpose of the invasion was to make Panama safe for the drug traffickers.*

**A**gainst the lies retailed by the Establishment's liberal media and the Bush administration, *EIR* has been insisting that the Dec. 20 invasion of Panama was not really to fight drugs, but to make Panama safe for drug traffickers. Once again *EIR* has been proven right.

The *Miami Herald* of Feb. 22 ran the headline, "U.S. quits war with Panama bankers; Drug money can hide out with ease." According to the article, "American negotiators have given up efforts to change bank secrecy laws that have made Panama the most notorious drug money-laundering center in the hemisphere.

"The move dismays U.S. drug enforcement officials and some lawmakers who had hoped the costly invasion of Panama last December would open wide the doors of Panama's banks" to drug investigators. A State Department official told the *Herald*: "We don't want to alienate the Panamanians. . . . Rather than tell them whether their laws are sufficient, we'll let them decide."

Who is he kidding? Panamanian officials of the narco-government installed by the U.S. invasion are not allowed to decide anything. As *EIR* reported March 2, official U.S. documents show that every single government agency in Panama, from the presidency on down, is under the control of American officials who are in charge of the day-to-day administration of the country.

The *Miami Herald* admits that "under Gen. Manuel Noriega, [drug] deposits sometimes were seized by Panamanian officials." But adds, "U.S. investigators received so little

cooperation that the Drug Enforcement Administration withdrew its unit from Panama City in 1988."

The last is typical of the lies fed to the gullible American public by the liberal media. The truth is that the DEA fought tooth and nail against the administration's decision to shut down its operations in Panama and to end its collaboration with Noriega. More than once, DEA officials said publicly that Panama under Noriega was the one place in the hemisphere that gave its unquestioned collaboration to U.S. anti-drug efforts.

In fact, Washington decided to go all out against Noriega when he and the DEA moved against the drug-laundering banks in 1987 with "Operation Pisces." The destabilization operations against Noriega were launched exactly one month after "Pisces" seized \$10 million from 54 accounts in 18 banks, and resulted in the arrests of 58 American and Colombian drug dealers

At the time, in an unusual development, the *New York Times* reported the truth about the reasons for the operations against Noriega. "The political crisis follows closely what bankers here saw as a serious breach of bank secrecy regulations," wrote the *Times*, in an article published on Aug. 10, 1987.

It is those drug bankers that Bush installed as the government of Panama. As U.S. officials know, Guillermo Endara, whom Bush named President, is a director of Banco Interoceánico, a favorite of the Medellín Cartel. Most other senior officials of the U.S.-installed government are also involved in drug banking, including

First Vice President Ricardo Arias Calderón, who has family ties to the money-laundering Banco Continental and to the Cali Cartel's First Interamericas bank; and Second Vice President Guillermo "Billy" Ford, who was a director of Dadeland National Bank of Florida at the time that bank was being used by convicted drug-trafficker Antonio Fernández as a drug money laundromat.

Since the drug ties of the puppet government have been heavily publicized, it was expected that the Bush administration would at least make some cosmetic changes. But Panama's economy has been destroyed by the invasion and the more than two years of economic warfare which preceded it, and promised U.S. aid has not materialized. Nor will it. "I assure you that [the \$500 million aid package for Panama] will not be approved," Sen. Patrick Leahy said in an interview published by *La Estrella de Panamá* on March 1.

Unable and unwilling to provide the money to rebuild the economy, the Bush administration has determined that even cosmetic changes would be too costly to Panama's drug banks. "Only foreign depositors freshly assured of confidentiality are likely to return to Panama," according to the *Miami Herald*.

The economic crisis has increased the fragility of the government, which is facing growing resistance. Residents of El Chorrillo who were left homeless by the U.S. bombing, closed down the Panamerican highway on March 1 for more than four hours to demand compensation for their losses. Even Endara, whom the Mexican press has taken to calling "Porky the Pig" because of his corpulence, in a demagogic move designed to win popular support, announced on March 1 that he was going on a hunger strike to protest the lack of U.S. assistance.