

10-11-2001

Nicaraguan President Aleman and Canosa Battle

LADB Staff

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen>

Recommended Citation

LADB Staff. "Nicaraguan President Aleman and Canosa Battle." (2001). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen/8892>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in NotiCen by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.

Nicaraguan President Aleman and Canosa Battle

by LADB Staff

Category/Department: Nicaragua

Published: 2001-10-11

On Sept. 7, Miami businessman Ricardo Mas Canosa accused Nicaraguan President Arnoldo Aleman in a Nicaraguan court of misappropriating US\$2.5 million in campaign funds donated to him in 1996 by the anti-Castro Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) based in Miami. Aleman never spent a penny of it on his campaign but put it in a foreign bank account, Mas Canosa said. With a warrant out for his arrest, Mas Canosa is now in hiding. Mas Canosa claimed that Aleman asked him in 1995 to transfer the campaign donation to the Panamanian company Robles and Associates Management Investigative Services Corp from where it went into a Panamanian bank account. The three men listed as partners in the company are front men covering Aleman's involvement, Mas Canosa said.

Mas Canosa's brother, the late Jorge Mas Canosa, was CANF'S founder and director. Aleman has close ties to Cuban exile businesses and anti-Castro organizations in Miami. Mas Canosa's charges have not resulted in court hearings because no court can remove Aleman's immunity from prosecution. The National Assembly could vote to remove it, but the president's Partido Liberal Constitucionalista (PLC) holds enough seats in the legislature to prevent the necessary two-thirds vote. The Aleman-Mas Canosa quarrel stems from the latter's interest in the state-owned telecommunications company Empresa Nicaraguense de Telecomunicaciones (ENITEL), which was partially sold in September to the Swedish-Honduran consortium Telia Swedtel-EMCE (see NotiCen, 2001-09-27).

Mas Canosa has engaged in a long-running series of charges, countercharges, and lawsuits with former ENITEL executives Gabriel Levy and Jorge Solis (see NotiCen, 2001-03-01). He has a claim against ENITEL because it suspended a contract with his Elite Telecommunications of Miami to run a teleport connecting Nicaragua with the US. The dispute heated up when the Aleman administration approved the ENITEL privatization. Mas Canosa insisted that the bidding was not transparent and that the sale, for US\$83 million, was fraudulent. He calculated that the real sale price was only the initial payment of US\$33 million, because the remaining US\$50 million is to be paid to the government during the next five years out of ENITEL profits. He has threatened to sue Telia Swedtel-EMCE affiliates in the US to recover damages from the alleged breach of contract.

During the past several months, Mas Canosa has accused Aleman's confidential advisor Jaime Morales Carazo of slander for having called him a "rabid dog" and suggesting that he was crazy and a drug addict. Mas Canosa has repeatedly called Aleman corrupt and asked publicly how the president could have acquired his fortune so fast after becoming mayor of Managua in 1990. "Having gone around in a truck selling eggs and charcoal, the man is now a multimillionaire and has no business," said Mas Canosa. "Where did he get his fortune?"

Aleman said Mas Canosa was a "mercenary" who was guilty of committing fraud in several countries, and he suggested that the opposition Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional (FSLN)

was scheming with Mas Canosa to damage the president's reputation. Aleman said he would not let Mas Canosa leave the country until he proved his accusations about the US\$2.5 million in court. Mas Canosa retaliated by challenging the president on Sept. 13 to stop him from leaving the country. He said he would be at the airport accompanied by someone from the US Embassy. "[Aleman] thinks this is a coffee plantation where he hires and fires employees," Mas Canosa said. Aleman then ordered the Interior Ministry to detain Mas Canosa.

On Sept. 15, Immigration Director Rene Ruiz Tablada personally detained Mas Canosa and US Embassy official David Sebastrof at the airport. Ruiz Tablada had no court order for the detention, but he said he was obeying the direct orders of Interior Minister Jose Marengo Cardenal. As he was being blocked from entering the departure area, Mas Canosa called out for Nicaraguans "to get rid of these scum with your vote." Mas Canosa was then allowed to leave the airport. Sebastrof said the embassy would help Mas Canosa, who is a US citizen. Mas Canosa's lawyer, Jose Dolores Talavera, said he would file a suit against Marengo Cardenal and Aleman for abuse of authority.

Mas Canosa goes into hiding

While Mas Canosa went into hiding with a group of private guards, Criminal Court Judge Ileana Perez issued a warrant for his arrest. Ruiz Tablada said that Marengo Cardenal based his request for the warrant on the grounds that Mas Canosa had violated his immigration status as a tourist by engaging in political activities. Electoral official Blanca Salgado followed up with more charges against Mas Canosa for making defamatory remarks against Aleman. Salgado explained that electoral authorities had jurisdiction in the matter because there is an election campaign underway. She said that, in his remarks at the airport, Mas Canosa had urged Nicaraguans to vote against Aleman's party, thus intervening in Nicaraguan political affairs. Prosecutor Veronica Reyes Vega said Mas Canosa could make the comments he did as a resident of the country but not as a tourist.

The daily El Nuevo Diario reported on Sept. 20 that Aleman had mounted a "ferocious" effort to locate Mas Canosa so that he could be deported. Attorney Talavera said that if the most wanted man in the world was Osama bin Laden, in Nicaragua it was Mas Canosa. However, a police official said that Mas Canosa was shielded from arrest by a court order and that police were interested only in protecting him. But Talavera said the court order was worthless against Aleman's "diabolical and perverse" determination to arrest and deport his client. Police officials told the local press that Mas Canosa had fled to Honduras, but he denied the report, telling the daily La Prensa by telephone that he would only leave Nicaragua legally. He took the occasion to accuse Aleman and Marengo Cardenal of selling passports to terrorists so they could enter the US.

-- End --