

Drug gangsters prepare coup for Venezuela

by Gretchen Small

On Feb. 14, U.S. customs officials in Hollywood, Florida seized a Venezuelan Lear jet after a search of the plane, uncovered an undisclosed amount of cocaine hidden in a life-preserver float, *Diario de Caracas* reported Feb. 17. On Feb. 21, U.S. Customs Service officials revealed that the jet belongs to a wholly-owned subsidiary of Pepsi-Cola of Venezuela, whose President is Oswaldo Cisneros Fajardo.

The jet in question is one of a fleet of planes frequently used by Cisneros and his wife, including on hush-hush trips to Cuba where the couple has met with Fidel Castro.

Only two weeks earlier, the Cisneros family went wild over publication by *EIR* of an updated, Spanish-language edition of the bestselling book, *Dope, Inc.*, detailing those "above suspicion" who run the international drug trade. Featured in the book (*Narcotráfico, S.A.*) is the Cisneros family and their ties to the mob's international bankers, with special attention given to Oswaldo Cisneros's reputed ties to Cuban drug networks. Noted is the fact that Oswaldo's wife, Ella Fontanals de Cisneros, is the sister of José Fontanals, a director of the National Bank of Cuba.

Using all the influence that liberal use of their renowned checkbook could buy in the press, judiciary, and police of Venezuela, the Cisneros threatened the government of Venezuela: If *EIR* were not kicked out of the country and circulation of *Narcotráfico, S.A.* stopped, the very foundations of Venezuelan society would be made to tremble, and perhaps collapse. *EIR* was kicked out and the book is currently banned.

Pepsi's coke connections

New evidence now indicates that the Cisneros' violent reaction to *Narcotráfico, S.A.* reflects a larger plot by the

international drug mob to overthrow the government of Venezuela in order to secure that country as a major safehouse for their drug empire.

On Feb. 17, news broke of a plot to sow terror and chaos in Venezuela, financed by Colombian drug king Carlos Lehder Rivas. In this version of the plot, corrupted Venezuelan military layers were to carry out a wave of assassinations of political leaders, including congressmen and the justice minister, creating the conditions of chaos propitious for a coup.

In early February, Lehder announced in a televised interview broadcast to Colombians from "somewhere in the jungle" that he was forming a half-million man "army" to overthrow the government of that country as well. In that same interview, Lehder commented that fugitive financier Robert Vesco, currently based in Cuba and the Bahamas, was one of the "business associates" who helped him make his fortune.

Then, on Feb. 20, a political "gossip" column in *Caracas' El Mundo* reported that Vesco plans to set up shop in Venezuela, and has begun approaching Venezuelan businessmen and politicians with a proposal. If he is allowed "to establish himself on the island of Margarita," a Venezuelan island already operating as a freeport, Vesco promises to bring in "big monetary concessions" and investments in hotels and casinos, and to beat back competitors in the casino business from Aruba and Curacao who want to "become hegemonic in Venezuela."

Vesco's Venezuelan collaborators are not named, but U.S. investigators familiar with the "Vesco file" indicate that the Cisneros family are "good bets" as partners in Vesco's latest deal. It is well-known, as *El Mundo* noted, that Vesco "became good friends with Rodrigo Carazo and Jose 'Pepe'

Figueres during his stay in Costa Rica." Figueres is a charter member of the Rockefeller family's old Caribbean Legion, an organization which gave Gustavo Cisneros his start.

The Cisneros' hysterical reaction to *EIR*'s book brought the family's activities under more intense scrutiny internationally. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration's files reportedly already contain much more dirt on the family than has yet become public. In Spain, at least one senator has officially questioned his government on the connections of the Cisneros to drugs, in light of the family's current investments there.

The plane seizure

With the Florida incident, Oswaldo's cousin Gustavo, head of the Organization Diego Cisneros, which centralizes family holdings, is reportedly furious that his cousin's carelessness may soil the clean image wanted for his projected business plans. In the family division of labor, it is said, Gustavo tries to handle only "the bills."

As this publication's spokesman commented Feb. 21, "Cisneros-linked media in Caracas denounced—but never refuted—the *EIR* book's charges, saying that they were so slanderous that they shook the very foundations of Venezuelan society. They carried out a media witchhunt and vilification campaign against *EIR* that led to the deportation of four *EIR* journalists from Caracas on Feb. 7, arguing that *Narco-tráfico, S.A.*'s facts couldn't conceivably be true. Now, a Cisneros-linked airplane has been busted for running drugs. The facts speak louder than words."

U.S. Customs seizure document #85-5203-00049 records the Pepsi plane incident, Customs sources say. According to that report, two female and three male passengers were detained, including pilot Rafael Roman.

The Anti-Narcotics Commission of the State of Florida is investigating the case in order to determine if this is an isolated incident or part of a "permanent drug-running operation," *Diario de Caracas* reported. Customs' public information office in Miami reports that the plane was released Feb. 20 after a \$2,000 fine was paid, and that none of the passengers were arrested because "only 50 grams of cocaine" were found on board.

Another 'cocaine coup'?

The international drug cartel has clearly escalated its war in the Western Hemisphere, including ordering hit squads into the United States itself during February to assassinate or kidnap anti-drug officials here. The mafia knows that to survive, it must break apart any continental coordination of the war on drugs. It also knows that Venezuelan President Jaime Lusinchi, with his close working relations with the presidents of the United States, Mexico, and Colombia, is key to the success of the war on drugs.

From the beginning of his administration one year ago, Lusinchi has fought to internationalize the war on drugs. His

personal efforts led to the declaration by the Andean Pact nations that narcotics trafficking is a "crime against humanity." That declaration was an important setback to those who argue that drug "legalization" might bring economic benefits to these starving nations.

Domestically, the Lusinchi administration drafted and passed one of the toughest bodies of anti-drug legislation on the continent, stiffening penalties for all aspects of the drug trade, including consumption, production, and trafficking.

Next on the government's agenda was passage of laws dealing with the financing and laundering of the profits of this evil trade—the leading activity of the international drug mob in Venezuela. When hearings of the Venezuelan Congress were scheduled for March to study drafts of an "Anti-Mafia Law" which reportedly is to include required "financial transparency" for all investment in Venezuela—forcing any investor to reveal the *source* of his monies—the mafia's bankers knew they had to move quickly, before any such "dangerous" controls on "free enterprise" could be enacted.

One Lehder plot centers around a plan to assassinate a number of leading Venezuelan figures "with the goal of sowing terror and creating conditions for a general destabilization of the system," *Diario de Caracas* reported Feb. 17. The plot has been dubbed the "Plan Machado," the paper said, taking its name from the former director of military intelligence (DIM), Gen. Rafael Arturo Machado Santana, who is accused of maintaining a "private army" in Venezuela and directing the destabilization plot.

Machado, wanted by Venezuelan courts for administrative corruption, currently operates out of several bases in the Caribbean, including Aruba and Miami. According to some sources, Machado traveled to Colombia during February to meet with Lehder's people near the Venezuelan border, there finalizing details for the operation which was to be carried out over the succeeding 90 days. The Colombian mafia reportedly then put out its first payment for the job, some \$250,000.

Diario de Caracas named five people believed to be on the mafia hit list, including the president of the National Congress, Reinaldo Leandro Mora, Congressman Vladimir Gessen, and Justice Minister Manzo González. Government security agencies had already placed increased security protection around Gessen and the justice minister the previous week, after receiving information that the mafia had put out contracts on both their lives.

One person on the mafia list has already been killed. Two days after the Cisneros launched their war on *EIR* (Feb. 7), lawyer Juan Luis Ibarra Riverol was found dead in his office, three bullet holes in his head. Ibarra Riverol was the attorney for a Venezuelan military officer who has charged three former defense ministers with corruption and dealing with arms-traffickers. One of those ex-defense ministers, reports *Diario de Caracas*, has close family and business ties to General Machado.