

Lehder capture puts U.S. on the line in anti-drug war

by Valerie Rush

In what has been termed the single greatest event to date in the war on drugs, Colombian authorities on Feb. 4 captured Robert Vesco's business partner Carlos Lehder Rivas, and shipped him to the United States to stand trial.

The Lehder extradition comes as Colombia's government is expanding its anti-drug drive to target the "citizens above suspicion," the drug-money-laundering big banks which are the core of Dope, Inc. It puts the Reagan administration on the line to get serious about the war on drugs. While Mrs. Nancy Reagan is offering American youth flooded with cheap "coke" the placebo of "Just Say No," the U.S. government under Donald T. Regan has cut 25% from the anti-drug budget, disarming our Ibero-American allies in the face of a well-armed, ruthless, and Soviet-backed drug mafia.

Who is Carlos Lehder?

Lehder, 37-year old cocaine czar and logistics officer of the "Medellín Cartel" responsible for smuggling an estimated 75% of all cocaine into the United States, epitomizes the Nazi-communist alliance which finances its terrorist activities by revenues from illegal drugs. He is named in *EIR's* 1985 book, *Dope, Inc.*, as the critical person to knock out if there is to be a serious war on drugs. According to the book:

"Carlos Lehder is one of the rich new gangsters that made their fortune in the drug trade, together with Pablo Escobar Gaviria and the Ochoa and Rodríguez clans. He hired and financed the assassins of Colombian Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla. Lehder and his accomplices have also financed housing, sport stadiums, public and private zoos, and both municipal and national electoral campaigns. Lehder was about to launch his own candidacy for the Colombian senate, but Lara Bonilla was named Minister of Justice and launched his bold campaign to stop the mafia from taking power in Colombia. Lehder is not only a part of the Vesco operation, run

from Cuba, but from Armenia, his native city, runs his own national Latin Civic Movement. His newspaper published a eulogy to Adolf Hitler in June 1983, in the same issue in which he compared his own Latin movement with the Green Party of West Germany. Lehder considers Hitler one of his heroes.

"In an interview in Bogota, Lehder was asked 'Do you admire Hitler?' To which he responded, 'Logically. Adolf was one of the greatest men in our history. A man who has been deformed by the Jews and imperialists.'"

To stop the extradition treaty with the United States, Lehder's drug army murdered thousands, including Colombia's Justice Minister Lara Bonilla in 1984, 12 Supreme Court justices in the November 1985 terrorist seizure of the Justice Palace in Bogota, and the ex-chief of the narcotics police in November 1986. Ex-Justice Minister Parejo barely escaped an attempt on his life this January, in Hungary.

Carlos Lehder has been the business partner for more than a decade, of world-class embezzler Robert Vesco, who lives under the protection of Fidel Castro in Havana. One of his more notorious public statements was that "cocaine is Latin America's atomic bomb against the United States."

After the Lara Bonilla murder in 1984, Lehder went underground, but his fascist "National Civic Movement" has remained legal and functioning to this day. Perhaps Lehder will decide to sacrifice some of his more prominent business contacts, in exchange for leniency.

'The Virgin is with us!'

When Lehder was captured, along with 14 of his bodyguards, at a ranch on the outskirts of Medellín, the police lieutenant who led the raid called his superiors and exulted, "The Virgin is with us! Lehder has been nabbed!" In a matter of hours, Lehder was taken by military helicopter from a

military base in Medellín to the international El Dorado airport in Bogota, where 100 well-armed police guarded his transfer to a waiting U.S. Air Force jet that took him to the United States via the Guantanamo Bay naval base in Cuba. The next morning, a heavily guarded Lehder was arraigned before a federal judge in Tampa, Florida on multiple counts of drug-trafficking, racketeering, and murder, charges stemming from a range of indictments, some of which date back 10 years.

In anticipation of massive and bloody reprisals from the mafia, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration has placed all of its personnel and their families worldwide on special security alert.

Lehder's capture comes in the wake of stepped-up attacks on President Virgilio Barco's anti-drug campaign. Inside Colombia, the mouthpieces of the drug lobby have been especially vocal. Exemplary are the columns of Colombian journalist Antonio Caballero, a relative of the mafia-linked former President López Michelsen, which heap scorn on the government's anti-drug efforts and demand that the drug trade be legalized.

Less candid but to the same effect, the *Los Angeles Times* of Feb. 1 complained that Colombia's drug war "is raging out of control." No jail in Colombia can hold the traffickers and no lawyer will prosecute nor judge sentence them, says the *Times*, which laments the lack of "tangible victories" in Barco's anti-drug war.

The *Los Angeles Times* article also notes the outrage of Colombian officials who have seen their country's finest citizens mowed down by mafia bullets, while the U.S. government cuts back financial aid. Interior Minister Cepeda Ulloa is quoted: "Why are we bleeding alone?" Bolivia, a country as tormented by the drug trade as it is by financial insolvency, is asking the United States the same question. In December 1986, U.S. financing for helicopter gunships donated to Bolivia's anti-drug war dried up, grounding Bolivian Air Force operations. On Jan. 1, Bolivia's government was stunned to learn that \$300 million in promised U.S. aid had shrunk to a "projected" \$75 million. Foreign Minister Bedregal decried the Reagan government's "unseriousness."

Going after the banks

In a recent statement, Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr., a Democratic candidate for the U.S. presidency in 1988, blasted the Reagan administration for inadequate support to the global war on drugs. Ibero-America's governments, said LaRouche, "would be much more successful [in fighting drugs] with increased technical assistance from the United States. If we are wise, we know that we cannot afford *not* to provide them with increased assistance; the drug plague is costing our nation hundreds of billions of dollars."

Among the points LaRouche recommends, are "tracing the flows of revenues from the drug-trade through financial institutions, and through administering crushing penalties to

institutions whose negligence fosters the existence of channels of laundering of drug revenues." Indeed, the Colombian government has come to recognize that its survival not only depends on crushing the narco-terrorist army, but in rooting out and destroying the financial networks which keep Lehder in operation.

President Virgilio Barco was emphatic when he told the assembled diplomatic corps in Bogota Jan. 29 that eliminating drug-money laundering by banks and financial institutions was a key element in the war on drugs: "While the consumer countries do not adopt effective measures and the sale of narcotics continues as if it were an item of necessity . . . while the producer countries lack the capacity to eradicate plantations . . . or while some countries continue to permit financial and banking institutions on their territory to serve as refuge for blood-stained money, the profit of crime, the battle against this scourge will not be won in Colombia."

Even more specific were the Feb. 2 statements made by former Colombian Justice Minister, now ambassador to Hungary Enrique Parejo González—the man who signed the 1984 petition for Carlos Lehder's extradition to the United States—to a meeting of the U.N. Anti-Narcotics Commission in Vienna. Parejo, who barely survived a mafia assassin's bullets three weeks earlier and came out of the hospital to chair the meeting, told a cheering assembly, "As long as I live I will continue to battle the drug trade, because it is the worst scourge facing the world today."

Parejo went on: "The consumer nations, through financial and banking institutions—as President Barco said it so well—are the refuge of the drug multinationals. . . . Each country should have a specialized anti-narcotics police force that can impose more severe penalties—not only against the drug traffickers, but against the financial institutions which lend themselves to crime and which until now have gone unpunished. The states must establish mechanisms for punishing the drug trade. . . . Controlling . . . the economic power of those who produce, consume, and distribute drugs requires imposition of severe penalties, economic penalties. . . ."

Colombian Attorney General Mauro Hoyos told the national daily *El Espectador* Jan. 31, that laws for investigating illicit wealth are being considered. He said, "With police measures alone one cannot conduct a war against the drug trade. . . . It is time that the government began to consider economic measures for detecting [the traffickers'] funds . . . that tend to analyze and investigate those kinds of funds which were made from one day to the next . . . to see what is the origin of those funds. . . . When people see that the state has determined to take on [the drug trade] in all its implications, the country can begin to breathe more easily, since the proper solution will have been chosen."

Days later, Colombian Cardinal Alfonso López Trujillo—also the archbishop of the drug-infested city of Medellín—told an audience that the Catholic Church fully endorsed the attorney general's call.