

# Colombia's 'Project Democracy' mafia takes it on the chin

by Valerie Rush

When Colombian President Virgilio Barco granted legal status to the new 800,000-member Unified Workers Confederation (CUT) April 13, he did so despite the stalling and protests of two successive labor ministers, and of the leadership of the ruling Liberal Party which elected him. He also did so in defiance of Project Democracy's "invisible government" in the United States, whose tentacles reach deep into Colombian labor and political circles.

The CUT was created in 1986 out of a series of schisms in the Colombian trade union movement, which had over the previous decade been increasingly corrupted by a drug mafia in cahoots with the agents of Project Democracy's American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD). Veteran trade unionist and former Labor Minister Jorge Carrillo pulled the majority of the captured labor federations' rank-and-file out of the clutches of the mob and into a new mass institution. The CUT now represents 80% of Colombia's organized labor.

Barco's decision to legalize the CUT came in the wake of an historic settlement, engineered by Carrillo, of a labor dispute in the violence-torn banana region of Uraba, in northeastern Colombia. Carrillo, known for his philosophy of seeking a "harmony of interests" between business and labor, was universally expected to fail; his methods were mocked, and his enemies warned that the Communists would move into the breach. Instead, Carrillo won a guaranteed eight-hour day, limits to mandatory overtime, a mutually acceptable wage increase for 50,000 banana workers—and President Barco's gratitude.

## The dispossessed

The howls of protest were not long in coming from the suddenly dispossessed AIFLD-mafia forces. The UTC, of which Carrillo had been vice-president, whined that the CUT was "the unionized arm of the guerrillas, seeking the reelection of [ex-President] Belisario Betancur, and being run by the Communist Party in the service of the Soviet Union." Another AIFLD mouthpiece, president of the nominally "independent" Metallurgical Workers Federation, charged that the CUT was "jointly financed by the Soviet Union and the Schiller Institute," the latter founded by Helga Zepp-LaRouche, wife of Lyndon LaRouche.

The remnants of the abandoned labor federations were then pulled together into the National Council of Labor Sol-

idarity. Behind the attempt to breathe life back into AIFLD's dead horses is a longstanding asset of Project Democracy in Colombia, Liberal Party chairman Ernesto Samper Pizano. Samper, the political heir to mafia godfather and former President Alfonso López Michelsen, is also a top contender for the 1990 Liberal presidential nomination. With López, he is a public relations mouthpiece for the drug trafficking "Medellín Cartel," and top drug legalization lobbyist.

On April 21, Samper addressed a student forum at Bogotá's Central University, where he was asked why he had apparently retreated from his pro-legalization crusade of the 1970s. Samper replied that he fully stood by his proposal for marijuana legalization, involving state purchase of Colombia's marijuana crops, for sale or exchange with the United States. He warned that if this were not done, "the day could arrive" in which Phillip Morris would be selling reefers to Colombia.

## The coup de grace?

If the legalization of the CUT was a body blow to Project Democracy in Colombia, recent public denunciations of Samper as "the son of political decadence in Colombia" could be the *coup de grace*. Senator Iván Marulanda, a leader of the New Liberalism dissident faction within the Liberal Party, shattered the "mutual non-aggression pact" among Colombia's political elites in an April 12 interview with the newspaper *El Espectador*, where he laid bare both the personal and institutional corruption of the "official" Liberal Party, singling out Samper as the epitome of that corruption.

Although Marulanda did not receive unanimous support from his New Liberalism colleagues, he may have succeeded in halting the dissolution of his movement implied by its ongoing "unity talks" with the Samper crowd. A week after Marulanda's statements, New Liberalism head Luis Carlos Galán sent a message from London in the form of a letter to President Barco, in which he rejected a proffered ambassador's post and reaffirmed his movement's ideological independence.

Galán also urged that "transparency" of all electoral campaign funds be imposed. Since Samper is universally known to have accepted campaign bribes in 1982 from cocaine czar Carlos Lehder, it was not difficult to figure out that Galán was suspending the "unity talks," at least for now.

Marulanda's statements also upset the plans of the Sam-

per mafia to buy up the municipalities in Colombia's first-ever mayoral elections in March 1988, elections which are expected to determine the outcome of the 1990 presidential contest. In his April 12 interview, Marulanda stressed that those elections must lead to political change. "To take power so that things remain the same is not worth it," he said, appealing to the more diffident leaders of his own movement to join his battle for morality in politics.

The CUT, too, is already "campaigning" for those mayoral elections, the first time organized labor will be deploying itself in a show of political strength. In an April 24 speech, excerpted below, Carrillo declared: "The right to life is not only the right to exist as a living being, but as a human being. The right to life is also a right to spiritual development, culture, education, to the participation of each human being in the political decisions that affect us all."

On May 1, the CUT will hold a mass Labor Day march to Bogota's huge Plaza Bolívar, where Carrillo will offer a program for job creation and economic growth, based on greater government support for industry, and for construction of "great projects" to bring Colombia's transportation, energy, irrigation, and other infrastructural needs into the 21st century.

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## Documentation

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*Speech of the president of the Unified Workers Confederation (Central Unitaria de Trabajadores, CUT), Jorge Carrillo Rojas, before the Fifth Colombian Forum on Human Rights.*

Dr. Alfredo Vásquez Carrizosa, president of the Permanent Committee for the Defense of Human Rights, Members of the Committee, Distinguished Guests.

I have the high honor and great privilege of offering this Fifth Forum for the Defense of Human Rights the fraternal greetings of the 800,000 workers who today make up the Unified Workers Confederation (CUT) of Colombia, and who, like yourselves tireless defenders of human rights, are demonstrating that just causes can succeed if defended with unity and decisiveness.

From the day of its inception, the Unified Workers Confederation embraced the principle of defense of life as the fundamental objective of its struggle. This forum meets at a time when man's most important right holds no sway in our country. We Colombian workers stand with you in this most noble cause, just as we are sure that you are accompanied by millions of righteous Colombians and patriots of integrity.

During his visit to Colombia, Pope John Paul II said from the presidential palace: "From this House of Nariño where

we stand once came the traditions and ideas of the rights of man which were the essence of your nationhood. Be ye also pioneers for the rights of man, who is the image of God." The Pope then said: "A genuine peace must be well rooted in the dignity and inalienable rights of man. A true peace cannot exist unless serious and determined commitments to apply social justice are made. To work for peace means making the commitment to promote justice and to defend and protect the fundamental rights of man."

The Unified Confederation defends the right to life in its broadest sense. A child's right to birth and nourishment so that it does not die; the right of the elderly to medical care and to a decent life after having given their active years; the right of citizens not to die of diseases such as malaria, yellow fever, and others for which humanity has already found a cure or means of prevention.

In Colombia, 10% of the population is severely malnourished, and 43% is undernourished. Malnourishment has to do with levels of family income. In 1980, 25% of children under five years of age belonging to families with less than 40,000 pesos yearly income, were malnourished, and 50% of these same children showed stunted growth due to poor nutrition. This right to life and health is also the right to decent housing with at least running water, sewage, and electricity. In 1981, 14 million Colombians had no running water. Worse still is that these problems daily grow more acute, because the State cuts the budget appropriations for these needs and instead increases allocations for foreign debt service.

The right to life is not only the right to exist as a living being, but as a human being. The right to life is also a right to spiritual development, culture, education, to the participation of each human being in the political decisions that affect us all. We have the right to freedom and thus the right not to be enslaved by the foreign debt.

Before Christ there was the inhuman custom of enslaving people who couldn't pay their personal debts. Solon of Athens was the first ruler to ban this custom. Under the Roman Empire, children inherited the debts of their parents; today, the private international banks and Monetary Fund have re-established these pagan customs. On the one hand, we have a situation in which our rulers act as if they were slaves of the bankers, and politicians decide who will hold a post but cannot decide on economic policy because this is determined from abroad. As things are going, our children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and even further generations are going to be paying Colombia's foreign debt. We demand an immediate suspension of payments of the foreign debt; we must recover the right to decide our own economic policy.

As Colombian workers, our commitment to the defense of Human Rights is total. We believe that we can only defeat the enemies of peace, life, and democracy if all Colombians agree on any given day to halt our labors, in defense of man's most precious gift: life.