

Antonio Navarro Wolf: 'New Age' enforcer

When Colombia's voters went to the polls to choose a new head of state last May, they overwhelmingly rejected a number of presidential candidates who had made the end of extradition, negotiations with the country's murderous cocaine traffickers, and legalization of the drug trade the top agenda items in their electoral platforms. Instead, the voters selected a candidate who promised to win the war on drugs, and who claimed to come out of the tradition of anti-drug fighters Rodrigo Lara Bonilla and Luis Carlos Galán, both fallen heroes in that war.

It was with horror, then, that Colombians learned of President Gaviria's first act in office: His appointment of the narco-terrorist M-19 chieftain Antonio Navarro Wolf to head the Ministry of Health. While Gaviria lamely described Navarro as "highly competent" and "having one of the best resumés of any member of the cabinet," the bitter joke that immediately began circulating among medical layers, was that the only experience with medicine Navarro had was the 60 days he was hospitalized after losing a leg in a 1985 terrorist grenade attack. Navarro resigned the ministry a few months later to head up the winning M-19 slate of candidates to the Constituent Assembly.

Terrorism and Gnosticism

Who is Antonio Navarro Wolf, and what is the M-19 he leads? A former "sanitation engineer" who did his postgraduate studies at London School of Economics on a Rockefeller Foundation grant, Navarro joined the M-19 in 1978, when the largely student-based movement was heavily into Gnostic mysticism and Castroite rhetoric, and financed itself through kidnappings. Navarro Wolf's mentor was M-19 leader Jaime Bateman, the son of a Gnostic magician who wove "invisible chains" to keep him immortal. Bateman died in an airplane crash in 1984, while reportedly smuggling a large quantity of illegal drugs out of the country.

Before his death, however, Bateman told the Peruvian magazine *Caretas* that the secret to a successful guerrilla insurgency is magic: "I believe that our work needs more passion right now than reason. When people reason, they become pathetically slow, afraid. . . . Science stultifies the world, and stultifies thinking. . . . The traditional left refuses to acknowledge the importance of cults, magical thought, religious manifestations."

Navarro Wolf took over the M-19 after Bateman's de-

mise, but never abandoned the Gnostic mysticism and "New Age" outlook of his mentor. In a 1985 interview with the Mexican magazine *Cuadernos Políticos*, he endorsed Bateman's "philosophy" as the key to recruiting children to the M-19's cultural warfare strategy: "What Bateman said is true: You don't need so much to win over the minds of the people, as you have to win their hearts. . . . Very rapid social dynamics are needed in countries with . . . a youth without hope, which expects nothing from the future. . . . For example, in the [guerrilla] camps, we worked with *gamins*, abandoned children who do not have parents and live in the streets: Thousands of children aged 10, 14, 16; these are the worst of human marginality, because they are marginalized in childhood. Organized in the camps, these children become a factor of tremendous dynamism in the popular struggle. . . . To what do you call all these people? To something quasi-magical, audacious, novel, vital."

Under Bateman and Navarro Wolf's joint leadership in the 1980s, the M-19 became an adjunct of the Medellín-based cocaine cartel. In 1981, cocaine trafficker Jaime Guillot Lara was arrested by Mexican authorities and confessed to being a major arms supplier for the M-19, which used cocaine shipments to finance its weapons purchases. That same year, according to Navarro Wolf's own public admission, a non-aggression pact was signed with the Medellín Cartel. In 1984, M-19 leader Iván Merino Ospina called a Mexico City press conference to endorse the cocaine cartel's threat to "kill one American for every Colombian extradited." Said Ospina, "These threats should be carried out throughout the world against the representatives of rapacious imperialism."

How Navarro Wolf deals with judges

In November 1985, forty M-19 terrorists stormed the Colombian Justice Palace. They sought out and cold-bloodedly executed every member of the Supreme Court who had taken a stance in favor of extraditing drug traffickers. They destroyed every legal dossier containing drug trafficking charges and/or extradition proceedings. They demanded a public trial of then President Belisario Betancur, to be carried out by the M-19. They were reportedly paid \$5 million by the Medellín Cartel for their bloody siege, which led to the deaths of 100 people and the gutting of the Justice Palace. Navarro Wolf, in Cuba at the time of the attack, today claims he gave no authorization for the narco-terrorist siege.

And yet, as the M-19's 1990 presidential candidate, Navarro Wolf called for an end to extradition, the legalization of the drug trade, and the conversion of marijuana and cocaine production into "a legitimate agricultural activity." Said Navarro, "If there are no serious solutions on the global level, at least we should aspire to coexist with the problem in the most civilized manner possible."

After the May presidential election in which he took third place, Navarro told the press, "Doubtless this means that we are going to take power in the short term."