

'Surrender' of Medellín drug lord means the moral kidnaping of Colombia

by Robyn Quijano

When Pablo Escobar, the world's most wanted drug criminal, surrendered June 19 to the luxury jail he built for himself in his home town, guarded by his own bodyguards, the world asked, "Who surrendered to whom?" Escobar, the assassin of thousands, including justice ministers and presidential candidates, is likely to spend less than three years in his luxury jail, and leave with a law degree, ready to run for the Colombian Senate, and with his multibillion-dollar empire intact. The illegally convened Constituent Assembly, dominated by the narco-terrorist M-19, which did Escobar's dirty work in November 1985 when it seized the Justice Palace and murdered most of the Supreme Court Justices, not only dissolved the duly elected Congress, but banned extradition, the key demand of the drug mob, and changed the laws for running for political office to remove all impediments to a takeover of all "democratic" institutions by drug runners and terrorists.

On June 24, *El Espectador*, Colombia's courageous anti-drug daily which has campaigned against President Gaviria's deal with Escobar's Medellín Cartel, ran an article by its co-director, Alfonso Cano Isaza, headlined " 'Operation Surrender' as viewed by Guillermo Cano." Alfonso Cano Isaza quotes a Nov. 2, 1986 commentary by Guillermo Cano, the newspaper's martyred director, written just one month before he was killed by Escobar's hitmen, for his campaign in favor of extradition, and for a total war against narco-terrorism. The elder Cano had expressed his anger at the lack of resolve taken by the government five years ago when there was still a war on drugs, with all its limitations. His words then were fatefully prescient. "There remains but one step to be taken in this distressing picture: that all the judges, without exception, abdicate their power to judge; that the legislators change the laws to accommodate the demands of the criminals; that the rulers look the other way in the defense of the lives, honor, and goods of the citizenry. Then the final word will be spoken. And that word, on the lips of the drug traffickers, will be: We Win!"

There is no doubt that with these steps now taken, the Medellín Cartel believes it won. Former Colombian Justice Minister and Ambassador to Switzerland Enrique Parejo González, who was himself a victim of narco-terrorism back

in 1987, has just resigned as ambassador, protesting the Gaviria government's surrender to the drug cartel.

Two days before Parejo's resignation, he wrote, "What has been the new strategy employed to 'submit' the drug traffickers to justice? In the first place, a lowering of the sentence in favor of those who surrender, forgetting that drug trafficking is, by its extreme seriousness, a true crime against humanity. In the second place, the state made the commitment not to hand them over to foreign judges who seek them for crimes committed outside Colombia, assuring them thus . . . a high probability that such crimes will go unpunished. . . . One cannot see either in the government's measures or in the decisions of the Constituent Assembly a concern over the enormous fortune amassed by the drug traffickers with the blood of illustrious Colombians and of humble folk. . . . It would not be far-fetched to think that, even should they be convicted, they would leave jail after a short time to enjoy their immense, blood-stained fortune, which would permit them to continue corrupting national life. . . . After all this, can one honestly speak of the surrender of the drug traffickers to the state? Wouldn't it be more precise to speak of the submission of the state to the will of the criminals?"

This hideous capitulation by the Gaviria government to narco-terrorism can be traced directly to the refusal of the Bush administration to assist Colombia's war on drugs when Bogotá begged for aid two years ago, and to Bush's sabotage of Colombia's legal economy by refusing its request for lower U.S. tariffs on its principal legal exports, coffee and flowers. Last year, U.S. assistance to Colombia to combat drugs was \$85 million, while 90% of Colombia's estimated \$2-3 billion in cocaine exports is consumed in the U.S.

Bush looked the other way

Not only did the Bush administration set the stage for the Gaviria surrender, but during the entire period of negotiations leading up to the Escobar deal, the Bush administration never protested the plea-bargaining arrangement with its most wanted "extraditable."

Former U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration chief Peter Bensinger wrote in the June 24 *New York Times* that "Mr. Escobar should be on death row, not in a posh mountain

retreat. . . . The State Department regrets Colombia's decision. What baloney (other words come to mind). . . . This action was shocking; it is not a surprise. For months we have heard about Mr. Escobar turning himself in for a light sentence and no extradition. The U.S. should have made it clear that such a deal was unacceptable. . . . We looked the other way, instead of preventing the disaster."

Escobar's "surrender" is viewed by experts as a move to protect, rather than dismantle, his so-called Medellín Cartel. Narcotics officers in Colombia and abroad are certain that Escobar's trafficking network will continue to operate—none of his properties or bank accounts have been touched, and none of his laboratories, smuggling fleets, etc., have been surrendered. Escobar also has freedom to meet or speak with whomever he chooses—his mother visits him at any time, the home town mayor reportedly watches television with him in his luxurious "cell," and no one can even enter the "prison" who isn't first approved by his own bodyguards.

Legalization on the agenda

Before his surrender, Escobar gave an interview to Colombia's RCN radio suggesting that drug trafficking—the only offense he is likely to confess to—could well be legalized before long. And prominent criminal lawyer Jorge Cordova Poveda, interviewed by *Hoy por Hoy* magazine on Escobar's possible sentence, cautioned that prejudging the case was impossible. After all, he said, "We don't know if the drug trade will be legalized in two or three years, do we? The judicial process is so uncertain—in the case of Escobar—we can't even be sure he'll be convicted."

Indeed, proposals for legalization are inundating Colombia. The National Constituent Assembly is debating a proposal by former minister Jaime Castro for legalization of the production, sale, and consumption of drugs. *Hoy por Hoy* devoted several features to the subject recently. A prestigious think tank, the Institute for Liberal Studies, founded by Development Minister and drug legalization lobbyist Ernesto Samper Pizano, has just issued a new proposal for legalizing cocaine. And widely read journalist Jorge Child has just written that "as long as the new culture of drug legalization is not imposed worldwide—and Colombia should begin by promoting it, as delegate Jaime Castro has proposed—we will remain enveloped in the satanic repression of the Holy War."

Behind this drumbeat for legalization is the commitment on the part of President Gaviria's government to George Bush's "free trade ethics," which de facto embrace the legalization of drugs under the concept of the "open economy." Not accidentally, just three days after Escobar's surrender, the Gaviria government decided to shut down its infamous "sinister window" at the central bank, which laundered drug dollars, and in its place opened up the entire banking system to a "free exchange" of dollars for pesos, no questions asked. Drug dollars have begun to flood the country, sparking fears

of an inflationary surge.

The narco-terrorist-dominated Constituent Assembly will probably not write drug legalization into Colombia's new Constitution. However, its dissolution of the National Congress and the redefinition of the qualifications for congressional candidates have probably paved the way for a new Congress more amenable to the idea.

Documentation

The following are excerpts from a statement written by former Colombian Justice Minister and just-resigned Ambassador to Switzerland Enrique Parejo González, who was himself a victim of narco-terrorism back in 1987 for his strong stance in favor of the extradition of drug traffickers. His statement was submitted by the brother of murdered presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galán to the National Constituent Assembly on June 19, 1991, on the eve of the Assembly's vote to constitutionally ban extradition.

. . . We are dealing with an international crime which transcends national borders and which in some states, among them our own, poses a serious threat to democracy. To combat this crime, international mechanisms are required. It is thus inadvisable to deprive the ordinary legislator of the opportunity to establish, when public circumstances demand it, that instrument of society's defense against one of the worst forms of organized crime that has confronted humanity in all its history.

Colombian society and its ruling class have the duty to declare themselves against the absurd attempts of the drug traffickers to impose their criminal will on the country. Under the worst dictatorships, citizens live in fear of the dictator's ability to repress whomever acts or expresses opinions against his omnipotent and arbitrary power. In our country, which prides itself on being a democracy, the drug trade seeks to exercise a still more ominous dictatorship against the state itself, and against the citizenry, to prevent—by means of crime and terror—that Colombians dare act or express their opinions or feelings against such criminal activity. There is an imposed silence, resulting from fear of death which, implacably, the drug traffickers order against anyone who opposes, by word or by pen, their criminal designs.

Fortunately, the country still has men of the moral caliber of a Guillermo Cano, of a Luis Carlos Galán, of a Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, of a Carlos Mauro Hoyos, of so many officials and agents of our Armed Forces and of the citizenry in general, who have died in their fight against crime and in defense of public morality. Men who prefer, like them, to face any risk so as not to suffer the enslavement of their consciences. *The country cannot permit itself to be morally kidnaped.*