

## EIR Feature

# Dope mob buys Colombian presidency

by Valerie Rush

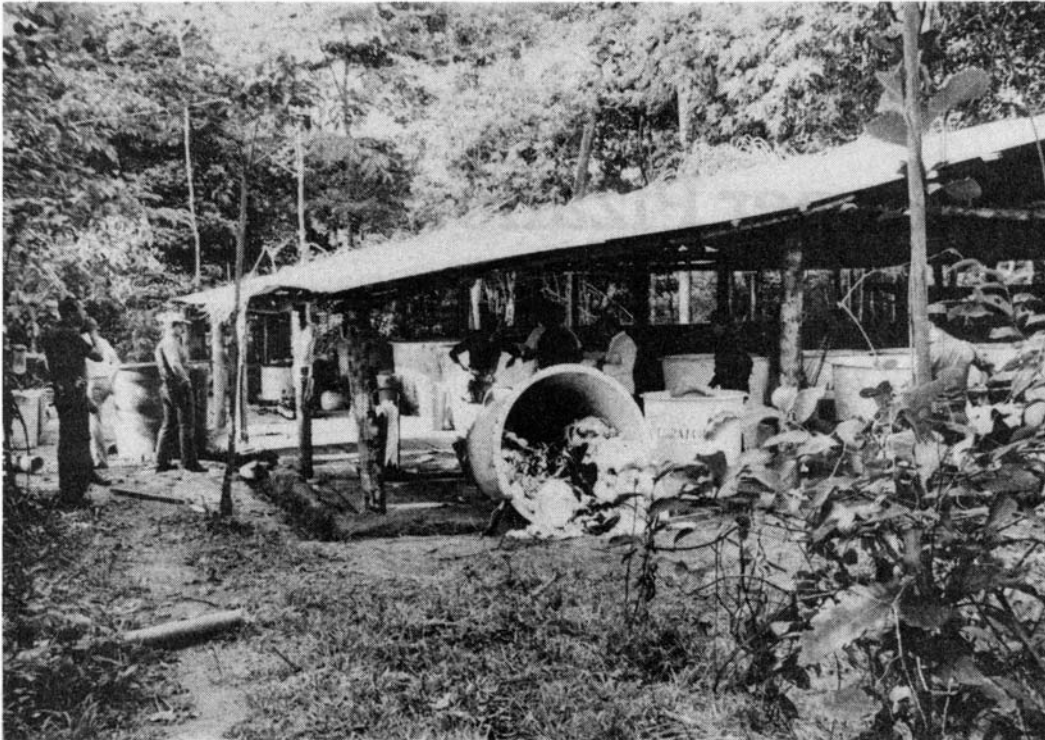
Presidential elections in Colombia on June 19 delivered the highest office of the land into the hands of the world's largest cocaine-trafficking organization, the Cali Cartel. Members of the cartel publicly announced that they were celebrating their victory. President-elect Ernesto Samper Pizano, a wholly owned creation of the cartels and chief lobbyist for drug legalization for nearly two decades, began preparing his victory tour of the United States and Europe, to culminate in his Aug. 7 inauguration. Outgoing President César Gaviria, whose Liberal Party sponsored Samper's candidacy, confidently began preparing his transition to the post of secretary general of the Organization of American States.

A "narco-democracy" was born.

But was it stillborn? On June 21, two days after Samper's election victory, the Gaviria government was forced to release to the media the transcripts of a series of tape-recordings it had had in its possession for nearly a week. The tape-recordings were of conversations between Cali Cartel chieftains Miguel and Gilberto Rodríguez Orejuela and one of their public relations employees, "journalist" Alberto Giraldo. The dialogue deals with the cartel's financing of Samper Pizano's electoral campaign, to the tune of millions of dollars, in exchange for at least five cabinet posts. "The presidency is in your hands," one hears Giraldo tell one of the Rodríguez Orejuela brothers after cartel funds are pledged.

It was later learned, according to *Time* magazine, that the U.S. State Department had also had those tapes in its possession since before the Colombian election, and yet had refused to release them, allegedly in order to avoid "interfering in the internal affairs of another country." *Time* quoted one disgusted Drug Enforcement Administration official, "No one did anything. They allowed this travesty to take place. Everybody, including the U.S. government, is participating in this coverup."

Why? Because Samper's presidency is designed to serve as the first crucial step toward legalizing the drug trade in Ibero-America and in the United States, as *EIR* has warned. And without those hundreds of billions in drug dollars, the financial bubbles puffed up by the International Monetary Fund and the banking



*In 1984, a combined deployment by the Colombian government and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration raided the cocaine city of Tranquilandia (one of its laboratories is shown here), the biggest cocaine-producing complex ever discovered. Today, the cocaine cartel has bought the election of a President; but the widespread exposure of this travesty threatens to derail the cartel's strategy of drug legalization.*

elites in order to keep themselves solvent, must pop. The scandal of the tapes has therefore hampered, if not outright sunk, the Samper presidency, and the legalization lobbies inside Washington, such as the Inter-American Dialogue and the Drug Policy Foundation, are chewing the rug right now.

The scandal of the tapes not only constitutes a major blow to the political networks inside Colombia who sponsored Samper's rise to the presidency, but it also has the potential to turn the spotlight on the networks regionwide whose political fortunes are interwoven with the drug trade. Former Venezuelan President Carlos Andrés Pérez is already in jail due to such exposure, and his entire criminal apparatus of narco-bankers and corrupt politicians is starting to crumble. Pérez's colleagues, like former Colombian President Alfonso López Michelsen and Francisco Peña Gómez in the Dominican Republic, may not be far behind.

### **Who's behind the exposé?**

The big question is, who tapped the cartel conversations? There are several well-founded rumors in Colombia and Washington which suggest that the high-tech recording job was done by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and/or by Colombia's elite Search Squad, a joint Army-police crack team set up last year to hunt down Medellín Cartel boss Pablo Escobar. *EIR* has not confirmed these reports, but they appear to be credible in light of the outrage with which honest law enforcement and security entities in both countries view the "creeping legalization" of the drug trade in Colombia, and the continued erosion of anti-drug efforts in Washington.

The complicity of elements of U.S. governments with the drug cartels and with their political and financial sponsors, is nothing new. George Bush and Oliver North's Contra supply operation in the 1980s, which was proven to be integrally linked to the trafficking activities of the Colombian cocaine cartels, is but one example.

Inside the United States, the fight over drug policy is raging close to the surface in the wake of the State Department coverup. Assistant Secretary of State Alexander Watson, on a European tour, publicly described Samper as a personal friend "for many years," at the same time as two deputy assistant secretaries were visiting the Colombian President-elect in his New York hotel room, coldly interrogating him on the charges against him.

What the outcome of the Samper scandal will be is as yet unclear. Colombia's political establishment is doing its best to pretend it never happened, and has attacked Andrés Pastrana, Samper's Conservative Party presidential rival who received the tapes from an anonymous source and turned them over to the government, for "sullyng Colombia's image abroad." Pastrana answered, "It's not the soap, but the body, that's dirty," and called on the authorities to release incriminating other tapes known to be in their possession.

While President Clinton ponders whether the United States should have a "free-trade" pact with cocaine traffickers, Colombians looking to recover their national dignity need look no further than next-door Venezuela, whose President has recaptured control of the banking system from the drug bankers.