

## Former aide to Mark Richard indicted in drug crackdown

by Jeffrey Steinberg

The Clinton administration's move against the Colombian Cali Cartel holds the promise of not only launching a real war on drugs, but of cleaning out the corrupt networks in government that have sabotaged anti-drug efforts for years.

On June 5, the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Florida, Kendall Coffey, unsealed a nine-count, 161-page indictment against 59 top officials of the Cali Cartel, charging them with importing over 80% of the cocaine that has been smuggled into the United States since 1984. What was historic about the indictment was the targeting of six prominent American attorneys, including three former Justice Department prosecutors, as leading fixtures in the cartel's operations in America.

The best-known of the attorneys indicted in the case is Michael Abbell, who served in the Department of Justice for 17 years, and rose to become the chief of the Office of International Affairs before his abrupt retirement in 1984. Within six months of his departure from the federal government, Abbell was representing Gilberto Rodríguez-Orejuela, the chief of the Cali Cartel, in a successful effort to block his extradition from Spain to the United States.

In his post as chief of the International Affairs Office (1981-84), Abbell was in charge of all extradition cases for the department, and reported directly to Deputy Assistant Attorney General Mark Richard. Abbell, in effect, shaped the very U.S. government extradition program targeting the major international narcotics traffickers that he then turned around and subverted. Despite this apparent conflict of interest, in early 1985, while battling to block Rodríguez-Orejuela's extradition, Abbell was able to obtain a written waiver from the department certifying that there was *no conflict of interest* in his representation of the Cali Cartel.

### A bigger scandal to unfold?

The indictment of Abbell and two other former Assistant U.S. Attorneys, Donald Ferguson and Joel Rosenthal, as agents of the Cali Cartel, comes at a particularly trying moment for some of the most powerful of the permanent bureaucrats at the Department of Justice. Washington sources have told *EIR* that the Clinton administration is anxious to clean out some of the permanent bureaucracy inside the department that has been responsible for some of the most outrageous instances of governmental abuse of power in recent decades.

Among the more notorious of the recent instances of abuse: the disastrous FBI assault on the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas on April 19, 1993, which left more than 80 people dead; the Reagan-Bush-era theft of computer software from the Washington firm Inslaw, and the coverup of that crime by an illegal attempt to force the company into bankruptcy; the denaturalization and extradition to Israel of retired Cleveland autoworker John Demjanjuk on bogus war crimes charges that nearly resulted in his execution; and the Oct. 6, 1986 paramilitary raid on the Leesburg, Virginia offices of companies affiliated with Lyndon LaRouche, and the subsequent railroad prosecutions of LaRouche and a score of his political associates. In the latter three cases, federal judges ultimately ruled that prosecutors had committed fraud upon the court in order to obtain convictions.

The Abbell arrest now raises some new, potentially devastating questions about this permanent apparatus. Who inside the department was responsible for whitewashing Abbell's initial bolt from the U.S. government to the Cali Cartel? Abbell's main selling card to the Rodríguez-Orejuela brothers was his intimate knowledge of the Justice Depart-

ment and his long-standing contacts inside the department. Did Abbell provide the Cali Cartel with a window into the federal anti-drug effort? Are there "moles" still in place inside the permanent bureaucracy?

### **A detailed bill of indictment**

The indictment strongly suggests that the Cali Cartel was privy to inside information about federal investigations. Although Abbell is not directly named as a source of inside information, another Miami attorney indicted along with him is accused of passing along secret information about federal wiretap orders and pending grand jury indictments. That attorney, William Moran, is also accused of providing the Cali Cartel with the name of a confidential government informant who had helped secure the indictment of cartel employee George Morales. On Oct. 14, 1990, the informant, Rafael Lombrano, was assassinated in the presence of a top cartel figure.

The indictment accuses the six attorneys of a wide range of crimes, including drug trafficking, money laundering, securing knowingly false sworn statements, and obstruction of justice. Abbell and Moran are accused of delivering threats to arrested cartel employees and of paying off family members to secure their non-cooperation with federal agents.

Three of the attorneys named in the court papers, Francisco Laguna, Joel Rosenthal, and Robert Moore, have already pled guilty to a wide range of charges, and this poses a serious problem for Abbell, Moran, and Ferguson. Laguna was Abbell's law partner, running the Washington, D.C. law firm Ristau and Abbell's Miami office. Laguna pled guilty to conspiracy to import cocaine and obstruction of justice. The other two attorneys admitted to money laundering.

Laguna was brought into the Abbell law firm after he had accompanied the former Department of Justice official to Cali, Colombia for private meetings with the cartel's so-called chief executive officer, Miguel Rodríguez-Orejuela, beginning in January 1988. Abbell was eventually retained as a personal attorney representing Miguel Rodríguez-Orejuela's interests in the United States.

Since the unsealing of the indictment on June 5, the Department of Justice has been emphasizing the role of the attorneys in the cartel's illegal operations. A Department of Justice press release describing "Operation Cornerstone," the Miami-based task force that targeted the Cali Cartel, began:

"After a lengthy investigation, six criminal defense attorneys, including a former chief of the Office of International Affairs at the Department of Justice, and two former Assistant U.S. Attorneys, and 56 other individuals have been charged in Miami federal court with various criminal offenses." The press release charged the cartel with importing over 200,000 kilograms of cocaine into the United States.

Department of Justice officials are apparently well aware of the mine field they are crossing by targeting prominent members of the criminal defense bar. Deputy Attorney Gen-

eral Jamie Gorelick commented on the indictment: "The conduct of the attorneys goes far beyond zealous legal representation of a client. These attorneys are charged with conduct aimed at corrupting the legal system for the benefit of one or two individuals and the operation and vast wealth of one of the largest drug trafficking organizations in the world."

### **Beating the cartel in the tech-wars**

In 1985, following the kidnapping and assassination of Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agent Enrique Camarena in Guadalajara, Mexico, Lyndon LaRouche issued a 15-point program for conducting a hemispheric war on drugs. The plan emphasized the marshalling of all of the technological resources of the United States to out-gun the dope apparatus on their most vulnerable flanks, especially their vast money-laundering operations.

In the course of "Operation Cornerstone," federal agents, principally from the DEA and the U.S. Customs Service, were able to intercept some of the Cali Cartel's most sensitive communications, including cellular telephone conversations, and even phone discussions arranged via an ostensibly foolproof secure method. Many of the cartel's financial transactions were also tracked, and dozens of front companies identified and shut down.

Sources familiar with the low-key, upscaled anti-drug effort that has been under way ever since the beginning of the Clinton Presidency, report that special units like the Treasury Department's FinCen (financial intelligence center) are now capable of tracking even the most sophisticated, high-speed computer wire transfers all over the globe.

The apparatus is now in place to beat the dope cartels in the crucial high-technology wars. LandSat and other commercial satellites are capable of identifying the locations of even the smallest coca, marijuana, and opium fields, making it possible to carry out drug eradication efforts before the illicit crops are ever fully cultivated.

But, above all else, such a serious anti-drug effort requires an unambiguous commitment to take on Dope, Inc. from the top down, regardless of how many prominent bankers and lawyers—"citizens above suspicion"—have to be hauled off to prison.

It is in this context that the indictment of Abbell and the other lawyers, along with the Cali Cartel's entire command structure, represents a landmark step forward in the U.S. anti-drug effort.

Given the Clinton administration's continuing "war and a half" against the British House of Windsor and Club of the Isles, a U.S. assault against the highest levels of the international narcotics cartel could not come at a better moment. Since the mid-19th-century British Opium Wars against China, the illicit drug trade has been synonymous with the Windsors and the Club. "Operation Cornerstone" is probably sending chills down the spine of some very prominent people in London as well as in Cali.