

Drug Mob Escalates Drive for Legalization

by Valerie Rush

There was a time when proposing the legalization of narcotics could get you politically lynched in Ibero-America. But when former Colombian President Alfonso López Michelsen insisted, in an April 16 interview, that the nations of the world either legalize drugs “or we’ll go to the devil,” no one was scandalized.

Indeed, López Michelsen is but the latest in a string of Ibero-American “personalities” to embrace drug legalization. Last year, Uruguayan President Jorge Batlle publicly called for drug legalization, and revealed that he had discussed this proposal in a number of forums, and privately with former U.S. President George Bush. Diego García Sayán, currently Peruvian Justice Minister under the caretaker Valentín Paniagua government, is an avid defender of drug legalization. Then, too, Peruvian Presidential frontrunner Alejandro Toledo, whose campaign was advised by García Sayán until the latter entered the Paniagua government, leans in that direction, which helps explain recent revelations that Toledo’s activities, have been financed to the tune of at least \$1 million, by the moneybags behind the global campaign for drug legalization, mega-speculator George Soros.

And in a March 18 interview in the Mexican daily *Unomásuno*, that country’s President, the free-marketeer Vicente Fox, proposed that worldwide drug legalization is the only way to “end the criminality generated by the illegal drug trade.” Fox was echoing a call, issued days earlier, by the director of Tactical Support of the Mexican Federal Police, Miguel Angel de la Torre, who insisted that legalized drug consumption is “the most efficient weapon for combatting the drug trade.” Fox’s Foreign Minister, Jorge Castañeda, has put his name to Soros’s published appeals for drug legalization, along with Peru’s García Sayán and others.

Far from being scandalized by the Mexican President’s call for legalizing drugs, President George W. Bush has granted Fox the honor of being the first head of state invited to visit Washington under the new government. All of which brings to mind the loud whispers coming out of the British and U.S. pro-drug lobby, that it will be a “pragmatic conservative” rather than a “liberal Democrat” in the White House, who will eventually embrace drug legalization and abandon the “failed” war on drugs.

In his interview with *El Tiempo* editor Enrique Santos Calderón, the octogenarian López Michelsen is convinced that drug legalization is just around the corner: “The profit-

ability of the trade is due to the fact that it is prohibited, and the day it is decriminalized and there is a free market in drugs, the price will fall through the floor. I believe the United States itself is paving the way. . . . I don’t know what form it will take, whether gradual decriminalization or what, but I believe that in a few years we will see drug regulation other than by repression.”

No one should be fooled by López’s venerable image. The former President and banker’s son is known among political insiders in Colombia as “The Godfather,” for his pivotal role in turning Colombia into a drug-trafficker’s paradise. It was under his 1974-78 administration, that the Central Bank mechanisms known as *financieras* and the *ventanilla siniestra* (literally, “left window”), were created to launder the dirty money that would fuel the drug cartels’ speculative ventures and create a “cocaine boom”—the quintessential “free market.”

López was also the mentor of “economist” Ernesto Samper Pizano, who started his career as a drug legalization lobbyist and ended up as Colombian President (1994-98), bought and paid for by the drug cartels. López’s own bid for the Presidency in 1982 proved a dismal failure, but not for lack of support from the Medellín and Cali drug cartels, whose interests he served.

The Godfather Echoes the Drug Cartel

It comes as no surprise, then, that López’s pro-legalization arguments are identical to those held by Colombia’s largest drug cartel, the narco-terrorist Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Last June—precisely one year after New York Stock Exchange President Richard Grasso visited Colombia to discuss “mutual investment opportunities” with the FARC—the Andrés Pastrana government and the FARC co-sponsored an international conference, held deep in the protected cocaine zone in Colombia’s south known as FARC-landia, where delegates from more than a score of nations were harangued for two days on why “peace” in Colombia could not be won through a war on drugs.

The FARC conference was nominally dedicated to discussing how the war on drugs violated the rights of the “peasantry” (read, coca and poppy growers) and ruining the “environment” (read, coca and poppy plantations). However, the real agenda of the conference was global drug legalization, as confirmed by an open letter sent to the Clinton Administration by the FARC several months earlier urging a global initiative for drug legalization, and again just before the FARC-landia event, at a legalization conference in Spain featuring FARC leader “Raúl Reyes.”

Another outspoken legalization advocate is Bolivia’s Evo Morales, who has taken a page from the FARC handbook, and is currently heading an uprising of Bolivian coca farmers, who are threatening acts of violence, unless the Bánzer government agrees to their demand to end its highly effective coca eradication program.