

Colombia drug battle boils over

Financial leaders demand legal pot exports to the U.S.

The now-public debate over whether or not to legalize Colombia's marijuana traffic is one of the hottest issues in that country and one which is intimately tied to its political future. As the *Executive Intelligence Review* has previously reported, the current threat to constitutional government in Colombia and campaign of generalized repression directed by Conservative Party leader Alvaro Gomez and his military allies, has as its major purpose reorganizing Colombia's social and economic structure to function as a legalized drug economy.

Gomez's frequent and public calls for the legalization of marijuana as the basis for the country's new economic "bonanza" have now been joined by several other prominent Colombian spokesmen, among them the director of the large financial association ANIF, leaders of the coffee industry, the director of the national industrialists' association ANDL, and the president of one of the country's most prestigious banks, the Banco de Bogotá. In the case of ANIF, employees of that association admit they are receiving information directly from organizations like the Washington-based National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML) and other representatives of Washington's "pot lobby" organizing for marijuana's decriminalization or legalization in the United States.

Although the technology exists to halt the traffic of marijuana leaving Colombia's Guajira Peninsula, easily and efficiently, as well as eradicate the weed itself, most of the prodrug spokesmen in Colombia and the U.S. insist that the drug traffic is "too big" to stop; that any attempts to repress it only make it more profitable to the drug mafias, and that legalization offers a viable solution. At a forum he recently sponsored in Bogotá, Ernesto Samper Pizano, director of the National Association of Financial Institutions (ANIF), argued at length that legalization could bring Colombia's marijuana traffic under control — by making it a government monopoly — and ensure a steady flow of "cannabis dollars" into the country for investment in "development projects." This of course assumes that the North American market will continue to "grow" steadily, thanks to the efforts of NORML, its advisors like Senator Jacob Javits of New York, and numerous other politicians in

Washington including Senator Edward Kennedy, Senator Charles Percy, and Congressman Benjamin Rosenthal of New York, among others.

Samper's strained arguments hide some simple facts: the connections of individuals like Javits and Kennedy to organized crime and drug networks are well documented, and their stand in favor of drug proliferation is easily understood. Similarly in Colombia, entities like the Banco de Bogotá, the Banco de Colombia and other financial or industrial groupings which have endorsed legalization, are also suspected of involvement in the drug trade.

Drugs and dictatorship

In his protest over the negative effects of illicit drug trafficking on the formal economy (legalizing drugs would ease these effects, he argues) and "concern" for poor peasants who are "repressed" by the antidrug program of Liberal President Julio Cesar Turbay, Samper is speaking for those political forces who stand to benefit financially from a legalized "free trade" in drugs. These are the same factions who have sanctioned widespread repression of the population at the hands of the military, imposition of increasingly harsh austerity, and encroachment of constitutional rights by military justice.

Since a legal drug economy could only be imposed by force in Colombia, the qualitative escalation this past week of repression, and particularly the arrests of leading members of the Communist Party — in Colombia, a mass-based organization one of whose major roles is the mobilization of the membership of Turbay's Liberal Party in defense of democratic rights — means that the threshold for an actual coup attempt in the country has been significantly lowered. Alvaro Gómez returned from a trip to Chile last week lauding the "advances" of that country's economy and calling on Colombians to "have the courage to take risks" in the area of "free trade." The Forum on Democratic Liberties, held in Bogotá on March 30-31, detailed innumerable cases of torture, assassination and expanding repression — especially in rural areas — attributed to the military under the command of right-wing Defense Minister Camacho Leyva.

This is the background behind the forum sponsored

on March 15 and 16 in Bogotá by ANIF director Samper. For the last several months, the youthful financier has worked closely with NORML in a major publicity campaign favoring marijuana's legalization. The forum was to have been the culmination of the drive in which Samper provided the justification for legalization through a carefully orchestrated and "objective" discussion on "The Myths and Reality of Marijuana." Although antidrug spokesmen like Colombia's attorney general Gonzalez Charry, and representatives of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) were invited, Samper also included spokesmen from NORML and the drug magazine *High Times* to give "expert" advice on how the U.S. population views the drug problem. Dr. Norman Zinberg, an early advisor to NORML and advocate of the use of psychoactive drugs for "recreational" and medical use, was also invited but did not attend.

No human rights on drugs

But, reports *Executive Intelligence Review's* Bogotá correspondent Carlos Cota, who attended the forum, it did not quite turn out the way Samper planned. Instead, the forum turned into a demonstration of deep sentiment against drug legalization and a drug-based economy by Colombian citizens. On hand were representatives of the Andean Labor Party (PLAN), a fraternal party of the U.S. Labor Party, who evoked an excited response from members of the forum audience with presentations detailing Samper's close relationship

to NORML and U.S. political factions associated with Sen. Kennedy. Other members of the audience charged that Samper's call for legalization of drugs was a violation of human and constitutional rights. And several attendees began their own discussions on the establishment of a Colombian Antidrug Coalition.

Says Cota: "It appears that, in Colombia, the opposition to drugs could become integrally linked to the growing opposition to human rights violations and the role of the military. Following the forum, the Communist Party's weekly *Voz Proletaria* reported on the ANIF forum and emphasized that any attempt to legalize marijuana it would be 'the same as a military coup'."

Also significant is the coverage given the PLAN's antidrug organizing and its support for the Colombian government's antidrug efforts in the leading Liberal daily *El Tiempo* on March 16. The paper reported on the PLAN's opposition to ANIF and other financial groups favoring drug legalization, and took particular care to include the Labor Party warning that "an economy based on drug trafficking means the end of democracy, as it can only be enforced by the military." The article also included the PLAN's discussion of the creation of the new European Monetary System and its denunciation of the "appropriate technology" policies defended by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund which "promote a state of permanent backwardness in the countries of the Third World."

— Cynthia Rush

ANIF head: why Colombia should grow more marijuana

The following are excerpts from a statement by Ernesto Samper Pizano, director of the National Association of Financial Institutions, calling for the legalization of marijuana in Columbia. The statement was issued prior to the March 15 and 16 forum on drugs sponsored by Samper in Bogotá.

Consumption in the United States

...the problem in the United States is becoming less and less of a problem. Fifteen years ago five out of every 100 people said that they knew someone who used to smoke it, today 70 out of 100 say so without fear.

Millions of North Americans whom it is said we are corrupting, spend \$360 million a year for the consumption of a few marijuana cigarettes a day ... they have decriminalized the consumption of marijuana in eleven states of the Union; it is no longer a crime but

merely a misdemeanor, like illegally parking your car.

The marijuana economy

It is no mystery to anyone that the Colombian economy is facing a complex situation which could bring about the collapse in its activities during 1979 and symptoms of recession next year. The reduction in the price of coffee will represent for this year and in respect to foreign income... a fall of \$650 million; it is difficult to believe that this decline can be compensated by greater amounts of untraditional exports or through services, whose growth today is virtually stagnant.... We are confronted with a painful energy crisis due to the shortage and high cost of fuel, of which we will import close to \$420 million worth in 1979... new justification to consider a more just treatment of the marijuana economy.

Colombian Communists against drugs

The Communist Party of Colombia (PCC), facing heavy armed repression, has undertaken a campaign to prevent the legalization of drugs in that Latin American nation, a proposed measure which the Communists have linked to the threat of a military coup. In this fight, every American should support the Communists with more than a sympathy derived from dislike for drug-pushers.

The Colombian Communist Party, although a "third party" by comparison with the two major Conservative and Liberal parties, is a principal reason that the people of Colombia today are not ruled by a military dictatorship, like most of Latin America. For this reason, forces in the Colombian government and armed forces who are committed to establishing a military government, and who are committed to using a military government as an instrument for planned collapse of the nation's productive agricultural and industrial economy, have made the Communists the first target of a bloody wave of repression that could crush Colombia's tenuous republican tradition.

The repression, which has even begun to leak into the U.S. press, does not find the PCC utterly defenseless.

Nearly \$1.4 billion entered Colombia from the sale of marijuana last year. The distribution of this income prompts one to consider the effects of marijuana on the general economy.

If marijuana had been legalized, and even supposing that such legalization produced strong effects of lowering prices and decreasing the market — which if I am not mistaken is what is wanted now with the ongoing repression campaign (against drug traffickers — ed.) — the government would have been able to get direct or indirect taxes totaling close to 6 billion pesos this year, a little less than what it is costing us to repress the activity. Colombia needs the pesos that it is losing by not legalizing marijuana and that it is laboriously spending to avoid legalization to repress it ... This is an irrefutable economic truth, not a value judgment.

A hard-line, pro-Soviet Party with a basic cadre force of 10,000, the PCC has a mass base among the urban wage-earning class signified by Communists occupying leading positions on the National Labor Council which includes Liberal and Conservative unionists as well.

The PCC is not now, nor has it ever, wielded its forces in a quest for a "Dictatorship of the Proletariat." The party's slogan is "Democracy Not Despotism" and it has acted according to that slogan. In large measure, the survival and effectiveness of the prorepublican factions of the Liberal Party—including Colombia's current president Turbay—have depended on the PCC's willingness to enter into "united fronts" with them to stave off the rapacious aims of a latifundist oligarchy—a major limiting factor in Colombia's economy—and attached elements of the armed forces. This catalytic role the Communists have played in preserving Colombian democracy and realizing whatever capitalist development Colombia has experienced (at latifundist expense) makes them the key to human rights and human opportunities in their nation.

It is a harsh fact that the Carter Administration, as it throws mouthfuls of human-rights rhetoric in Latin America's direction, is shipping more arms to the Colombian military during this wave of repression than to any other Latin nation.

If the Colombian CP is crippled or destroyed, Colombia's Liberal Party will soon collapse as a force independent of the latifundist oligarchy. If Colombia's CP is destroyed, the latifundist-military oligarchy will strangle industry and agriculture, as it legalizes marijuana (and cocaine) for a transition to an economy pouring drugs into the United States. That is the IMF's prescription for Colombia to generate foreign exchange.

If this occurs in Colombia, the direct impact on the USA will be measurable in terms of our own decay, as the effects of Britain's "Opium Wars" against China were measurable.

What the Communists say about drugs

The following are quotes from two articles carried in the PCC's weekly newspaper, Voz Proletaria. The first is by Constanza Vieira, daughter of PCC secretary general Gilberto Vieira:

Colombia has been submitted, for several decades, to the administration of systematic mass dosages of con-

centrated militarism. Yearly 18.6 billion pesos are invested in repression ... It should not surprise us therefore that at the recent symposium called by ANIF, alongside the praise for the "bad weed" there was frequent praise for that other drug traffic: that of the growing war budget... Thus the unbridled cynicism of the ANIF head emulated the brazen language of the man from Washington. But both aim to convert Colombia into an object, either for their profit or for longer term plans. It is necessary to say no to the enthronement of drugs, whether they are called marijuana or they are called high military costs. The weed has become the pretext for sowing the country with military detachments, from which the kapos of the mafia, linked to the military kapos, make their fortunes...

This second article is by Manuel Cepeda, central committee member of the PCC and editor of Voz Proletaria:

Today, the Association of Financial Institutions, ANIF, again put its cards on the table. And all those sectors of the press which for some dark motive support the legalization of marijuana, published (ANIF chief) Samper Pizano's position in quotes and without comment, like a spoiled brat of the bourgeoisie who is allowed to blabber...

And we can only think how it is possible that a military power with the sophisticated technology of the United States cannot prevent the traffickers from violating the air space of that nation and can at the same time permit ships loaded with the weed to violate its territorial waters? ... Is it not that in the North American administration there are also interests..., that there are links between the mafias and the monopolies? Why did a representative of the U.S. government who came to Colombia last July categorically insist that there were no prolegalization lobbies in his country while at the (ANIF) symposium the existence of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML) was denounced, an organization which lobbies for the suppression of antimarijuana laws in the U.S., and which has as its best defenders the Zionist representatives in the gringo Congress?

Capacity exists to shut down smuggling

It is a well maintained myth among certain U.S. government circles and the prodrug lobby in the U.S. that the flow of drugs coming from Colombia and other Latin American and Southeast Asian countries is so large that it is physically impossible to stop. The solution, according to this myth, is to create a legal U.S. market, so that the government will presumably have the incentive to set up an effective monitoring machinery.

The fact is that with off-the-shelf systems currently in use by U.S. military intelligence agencies, a radar net could be deployed along the gulf coast of the U.S. which could monitor every ship movement into U.S. territorial waters. On this kind of radar net, the so-called "mother ships" which load marijuana onto smaller craft for smuggling past U.S. customs authorities would stand out like sore thumbs. A serious crimp could immediately be placed on these large-scale drug smuggling operations. In the case of a country like Colombia, where nearly all of the daily traffic departs from a 120 mile coastline off the Guajira province, the entire coast could be efficiently monitored with only a few units, and air and ground traffic could be picked up from as far as 90 miles inland.

The system in question is Grumman aircraft's Mohawk equipped with Side Looking Aerial Radars (SLARS). This system, used extensively by the U.S. during the Vietnam War, is currently still in use by military intelligence agencies and is used for aerial reconnaissance as well as in support of an array of ground-mapping missions including mapping of forests, rivers, etc. It is estimated by qualified sources familiar with the system that apprehension rates of drug traffickers moving across U.S. borders or into territorial waters could be increased by at least 40 percent. Moreover, this would not require that the American taxpayer pay increased costs, since the system is fully operational and would require merely an executive decision to order the coordination necessary between the military agencies currently operating the system and civilian law enforcement agencies like the Drug Enforcement Administration.

—Sixto Mendez