

State Dept. attempts to bar antidrug leader from U.S.

The U.S. State Department crassly underscored its role in protecting drug and crime networks operating in Latin America, when it attempted this past week to bar Fausto Charris Romero, a leader in the fight against drug proliferation in Colombia and internationally, from the United States. Charris, the 29-year-old secretary general of Colombia's National Agrarian Federation (FANAL), had been invited to address a June 24 meeting in New York City of the New York-New Jersey Anti-Drug Coalition on the battle to rid Colombia of marijuana production and allow the country to enter an era of modern industrial development. When Charris applied for a visa at the consular offices of the U.S. embassy in Bogota on June 22 and again on June 25, he was told there was "insufficient evidence" to prove that he intended to return to Colombia—despite the fact that he would be traveling to the U.S. in his official capacity as FANAL's secretary general and had letters of invitation from the New York-New Jersey Coalition—and was denied a visa on the grounds of "financial insolvency."

An intense mobilization of members and supporters of the New York-New Jersey Anti-Drug Coalition, and its allies around the U.S., forced the State Department to reverse its decision after a flood of telegrams and calls of protest to Washington and Bogota. Charris will be speaking at the June 24 event as scheduled.

However, the attempt to deny Charris a visa was not, as one State Department spokesman lamely explained, a "misunderstanding" or "everyday occurrence." A Mr. Lyn W. Curtain of the Bogota consular office admitted to one caller that there were "other reasons" for the visa's denial that he "was not at liberty to discuss."

The "other reasons" are these. The State Department policy makers including Cyrus Vance, Luigi Einaudi of the Policy Planning staff, and Undersecretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Viron Vaky, support policies of genocide and drug proliferation. This is reflected by their determination to prevent by any means necessary, the destruction of the Nicaraguan National Guard—to maintain intact the drug and gun-running apparatus set up in Central America by "Dope Incorporated" decades ago. Similarly in Colombia, the State Department has sat back and watched Alvaro Gomez Hurtado, a proponent of marijuana legalization and military dictatorship, systematically replace constitutional rule with military "justice" and a widespread campaign of torture and repression.

A respected leader

In his capacity as the secretary general of FANAL, and

as a respected leader in Colombia's organized trade union movement, Fausto Charris has aggressively attacked Alvaro Gomez's proposals for making Colombia a legalized producer and exporter of marijuana—an "export" which would largely flood the United States—and has identified these prodrug forces as the leading proponents of a de facto or de jure military takeover, for which Charris has come under vicious attack within Colombia, as well as the State Department through its attempt to deny him entry to the U.S.

Colombia's Labor Minister Marin Bernal, a political ally of Alvaro Gomez who is backed by Gomez-linked factions within the organized labor movement, recently revoked FANAL's juridical status on phony legal grounds and granted it to a rump grouping also calling itself FANAL. The leaders of the latter grouping, financed by Jesuit circles within Colombia and abroad, answer to Alvaro Gomez, as indicated by their stated support for marijuana legalization "to help Colombia's peasantry" and for the labor-intensive agricultural policies Gomez advocates.

The case is now being appealed before the Colombian Council of State, and no decision has yet been handed down. However, the U.S. spokesman at the consular office in Bogota was quick to cite as reasons for the visa denial the charges by Alvaro Gomez's followers that Fausto Charris had misrepresented his job and legal status. While Fausto Charris was finally granted a visa, in the time since then he and his family have been subject to harassment outside their home; and the Bogota offices of the two airlines on which Charris had reservations confirmed in New York informed him on June 23 that both flights were "sold out."

The clearest proof of where the Vance State Department's involvement in this case is the following. Shortly, Ernesto Samper Pizano, director of Colombia's large financial association ANIF, will be traveling to the United States in order to promote marijuana legalization for both Colombia and the United States. According to the State Department's Colombia desk officer, Samper—who evaluates the U.S. drug problem on the basis of reports received from the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws—is a "respected economist" in Colombia. She added that since the Department was not responsible for the "personal views" of individuals seeking entry to the U.S., Samper could not be barred from the U.S. on that basis.

—Cynthia Rush