

Reveal plan for U.S. pot legalization

A plan for the U.S. government to buy the entire marijuana crop of Colombia and distribute it under government monopoly to states where the drug has been decriminalized or legalized for so-called medicinal purposes, is now under serious consideration by high officials in the Carter Administration. This is one of the more shocking aspects of U.S.-Colombian policy on the drug question that was revealed in an interview with Colombia's leading advocate of drug legalization, Ernesto Samper Pizano, made available to *Executive Intelligence Review* by journalistic sources in New York.

Mr. Samper Pizano is the president of Colombia's National Association of Financial Institutes, a research thinktank funded by Colombian banks—he, in fact, compares it to the U.S. Brookings Institute. He arrived in the U.S. this month for a six-month stay, during which he intends to lobby among congressmen, senators and other public figures for legalization of the production, export, and consumption of marijuana in both Colombia and the United States.

Samper Pizano was invited to this country by the U.S. State Department in June—the same time that State was attempting to deny an entry visa to Fausto Charris, leader of the National Agrarian Federation of Colombia. Despite State's attempted interference, Charris obtained his visa, and has just completed a five-state tour of the United States at the invitation of the New York-New Jersey Anti-Drug Coalition.

The fight in Colombia

In meetings with congressmen, mayors, union leaders, police chiefs, religious leaders, and others, Charris conveyed the message that the Colombian people want development—nuclear technology, farm machinery, heavy industry—and not a drug economy. Speaking in New York, Chicago, Detroit, and Los Angeles, Charris said that “the greatest resource of the United States is the minds of its population, its science and technology ... and these resources are vital for the development of the Third World—we cannot allow them to be destroyed.

Samper's message is quite different. In the name of “morality and ethics,” Samper proposed that his country be converted into a legalized drug producer. Samper has granted an interview to the drug-culture magazine

High Times; he is in contact with the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML), Professor Norman Zinberg of Harvard University, who proposes to legalize all drugs, and other individuals and groups of similar repute. He thinks that Senator Edward Kennedy is the best man to do the job of legalization on the U.S. side, and intends to step up his contacts with Washington in the fall.

The administration connection

At the suggestion of White House Advisor on Drug Abuse Lee Dogoloff, Samper Pizano met with Ralph Duncan, United States representative to the Inter-American Development Bank. In a July 3 meeting, Samper put forth his legalization proposal. “He [Duncan] said to me that he was 100 percent in accord with my legalization program,” Samper reports.

Reached at his Washington, D.C. home this week, U.S. delegate Duncan called the proposal to buy the Colombian marijuana crop “something serious to explore.”

“It would be very interesting to see what the total cost of interdiction is,” Duncan said, “including not just budgeted costs, but things like overhead on Coast Guard ships that never get accounted; and see how it relates to the total price paid the farmers now. If the cost were lower it might be smarter for interdiction to go that route.”

Asked what the U.S. Government would do with the drug harvest, Duncan replied, “Some could be destroyed, some could be used for licit purposes.”

Duncan also hinted that the idea was being considered at high levels of the Treasury Department. “If you really want to do a story on this,” he told a reporter, “I suggest you call up Treasury. Now, don't go below the level of, I'd say, deputy assistant secretary, and ask if it was ever considered. Don't ask if the government is funding a study of this. You're not going to get anybody to tell you that. But propose the idea that it might be cheaper to simply buy up the whole crop instead of spending the huge cost of interdiction ... I wouldn't be talking to you now if there wasn't something serious to explore. The interdiction system we have now is nowhere.”

—L. Hecht