

# Banks, mafia agree: Legalize dope trade!

by Gretchen Small

Two years ago, American diplomats based in Colombia warned their superiors that the narcotics cartel was planning a dramatic new offensive for 1986-87. The cartel's goal, the diplomats reported, was to legalize narcotics trafficking worldwide, from production to consumption. In Colombia, they would try to set the precedent, by forcing the state to legalize narcotics trafficking. But to win, the cartel must ensure that other nations, and particularly the United States, do not move to crush the state that legalizes. If that can be assured, worldwide legalization will soon follow.

To prepare the ground, the mafia set out to turn legalization into an "acceptable" idea. Thus it is indispensable to show how the legalization lobby functions, in order to crush the cartel as a whole. Indeed, whoever espouses the legalization of narcotics, must be investigated as part of the narcotics cartel.

Legalization advocates claim that their right to propose legitimizing the narcotics trade, is guaranteed by "democratic free speech." Their role as the mafia's "fifth column" within democratic societies, however, was demonstrated with a vengeance in Colombia during the past three months. There, the mafia has been murdering those who oppose their "democratic right" to legalization.

On Dec. 2, 1986, Samuel Buitrago, President of the Council of State, a constitutional monitoring body, put forward the mafia's plan. The state itself should take over control of the trade and use of narcotics, he stated in a national television interview. Calling Colombia's extradition treaty with the United States—the treaty which made it possible for Carlos Lehder to be whisked out of Colombia following his arrest, to stand trial in a Miami prison—"unpatriotic" and "repulsive," Buitrago accused the Colombian government of playing the role of "useful idiot" to the United States, because of its war on drugs.

Colombia's elite reacted sharply. "The state cannot dedicate itself to producing something which leads to the degeneration of the species," Justice Minister Suescun Monroy replied. Buitrago's "unexpected and shocking" proposal contributes to the "demoralization" of a population already wracked by violence and poverty, and, in effect, would legalize the mafia's assassinations of its opponents, *El Espectador* newspaper warned in a Dec. 5 editorial.

*El Espectador's* publisher, Guillermo Cano, had used his

editorials to warn that legalizing would be to "coexist with" and "accept" organized crime. On Dec. 17, a mafia hit squad murdered Cano in Bogota.

Meanwhile, the dope mafia escalated its campaign inside the United States. In January 1987, three major articles arguing for legalizing drugs were published by the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*. And in each case, their arguments and authors lead back to the mob.

The first appeared in the *Washington Post* on Jan. 6. It is "too late" to beat the awesome power of the drug mob, a correspondent for Colombia's *El Tiempo* newspaper, Cecilia Rodríguez, wrote in a guest commentary. She offered several "new steps," all taken from the text of the Medellín Cartel's latest "offer" to the Colombian government, which had been published in Colombia. She urged "government acceptance of a recent proposal by the leading *narcotraficantes* to pay off the country's \$13.5 billion foreign debt," and "legalization of the production, trafficking and use of cocaine and marijuana, not only in Colombia, but also in the United States."

On Jan. 25, the *New York Times* opened its pages to another of *El Tiempo's* legalization lobbyists, Daniel Samper Pizano. "Already it is considered morally and intellectually acceptable to suggest that Colombia is paying too high a price in the fight against what is considered an American vice," Samper wrote. Citing the Buitrago call for "legalizing commerce in narcotics," Samper argued that "if the smell of gunpowder vanishes, a new attitude may prevail."

The most important article, however, appeared in the *New York Times* on Jan. 24. Under the careful title, "A Three Front War on Drugs," former U.S. Attorney General Elliot Richardson and Harvard Kennedy School of Government lecturer Gregory F. Treverton made the campaign for legalization, the Eastern Establishment's demand.

"Drug-related corruption . . . is eating away at the fabric of fragile democracies. . . . An honest evaluation of anti-drug programs is imperative," they wrote. "Any approach to evaluation must distinguish from the outset two distinctly different evils. One is the human waste caused by drug dependence. The other is the crime and corruption fostered by making the drug business illegal. . . . *Would limited legalization . . . by reducing the economic incentive to promote addiction, also reduce dependence?* Without answers to these questions, there can be neither a convincing assertion of victory nor *an honest admission of defeat* [emphasis added].

## The Establishment and the mafia

Elliot Richardson provides the key to understanding how the cream of the U.S. Liberal Eastern Establishment works with Carlos Lehder and the rest of the Medellín Cartel. Any law enforcement official familiar with the *1986 Report of the Inter-American Dialogue*, issued in April, will recognize that Richardson's argument was lifted from that report.

Established in 1983 by President Jimmy Carter's envoy Sol Linowitz, the Inter-American Dialogue brings together

60 top Establishment policy makers from the United States, Canada, and Ibero-America, "to meet regularly to discuss and offer recommendations on major hemispheric issues." Richardson is a member of the group, along with the top rung of the U.S. banking community. The "chairman" of the Eastern Establishment, McGeorge Bundy, is a member, along with former World Bank president Robert S. McNamara ("Mr. Vietnam"); Jimmy Carter's Secretary of State Cyrus Vance; Chase Manhattan's Theodore Hesburgh (also president of Notre Dame University); Chemical Bank Executive Vice President Terry Canavan; and the chairman of Marine Midland Bank, John R. Petty.

Like Samper Pizano, members of the Inter-American Dialogue urged that "fresh approaches" toward the narcotics problem be considered for the Western Hemisphere. "Selective legalization" should now be discussed, the report argued, because "the war against narcotics in the Hemisphere will be long and difficult"—perhaps unwinnable.

Legalizing "does not reduce the number of users, and would in fact probably increase them," the 1986 report admits, adding that "by one estimate, as many as 60 million North Americans might become cocaine users, although not necessarily addicts, if the drug were legal." But, while Colombian officials refused to promote this "degeneration of the species," Dialogue members like Richardson couldn't care less. "The illegality of drugs . . . makes the damage greater for both the addicts and the societies of the Americas," states the report.

Grounds for investigating Richardson have already appeared in other areas of his work. A Boston Brahmin, Richardson served as lawyer for the Marxist government of Angola, as well as for the late Iranian gun-runner Cyrus Hashemi. His participation in the 1981 founding of a Lima, Peru-based narcotics-linked lobby, the Institute for Liberty and Democracy, also bears investigation.

### Closing the circle: López Michelsen

Joining Richardson et al., in the Inter-American Dialogue, are others who have played key roles in arranging the laundering of narcotics money. These include Pedro-Pablo Kuczynski, the former energy and mining minister of Peru, who now co-chairs Crédit Suisse's New York partnership, the First Boston Corporation, a firm interlinked with White Weld of Boston and Donald Regan's Merrill Lynch. Panama's former President Nicolás Ardito Barletta, is another example. This former vice-president of the World Bank set up Panama's international offshore financial center in the 1970s, ensuring that it would be "more secret than Switzerland," shortly before South America's cocaine boom took off.

Another case is Rodrigo Botero Montoya, a co-chairman of the Inter-American Dialogue. Here, the connection between the Dialogue, and Carlos Lehder and the Medellín Cartel, comes full circle.

A member of the Ford Foundation and Aspen Institute,

Botero was finance minister of Colombia from 1974-76, under President Alfonso López Michelsen. Botero's claim to fame as finance minister, was the establishment of a black market window at the central bank, where dollars could be exchanged for pesos—no questions asked. Everyone knew Botero's window, called the *ventanilla siniestra* (literally, the sinister window) in Colombia, was set up to allow dope dealers to launder their money into the "legitimate" economy.

For his part, López Michelsen, the friend of Fidel Castro known as the "Godfather" of Colombia's dope trade, made

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*The New York Times and the Washington Post are opening their editorial pages to advocates of the legalization of narcotics—to people who are themselves linked to the Ibero-American dope interests.*

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himself the public spokesman for the drug mafia. On May 6, 1984—one week after the mob murdered their courageous opponent, Colombian Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla—López Michelsen met in Panama with two Medellín Cartel chiefs, Pablo Escobar and Jorge Ochoa, to discuss the Cartel's "offer" to repatriate \$3 billion and turn over their airstrips and processing laboratories to the state, in return for a full amnesty for the Cartel members.

López Michelsen transmitted the offer to President Belisario Betancur upon his return. When Betancur refused to act, López Michelsen took the mafia's campaign to *El Tiempo*, the newspaper with which his family has long been linked. On July 29, 1984, *El Tiempo* published a full-page interview with López Michelsen, where he reported on his meeting with the mob, gave the terms of their "offer," and argued that the mafia's plan "was a coherent plan. . . . If these gentlemen want to surrender their laboratories, landing strips, and plantations, and sell their planes, then I think the road to reducing the narcotics traffic is probably easier through some form of arrangement than by the more difficult path to reach the same goal," he stated.

López Michelsen's longstanding ties to the mob close the circle on the legalization lobby. In 1982, Carlos Lehder contributed 25 million pesos to López Michelsen's second bid for the presidency. Accepting the "contribution," was López Michelsen's campaign manager, Ernesto Samper Pizano, the head of Colombia's drug-legalization lobby for more than a decade, and brother of that Samper Pizano who brought Lehder's demands to the pages of the *Washington Post* on Jan. 6, 1987.