
Colombia

Liberals accused of 'political AIDS'

by Valerie Rush

Colombian political society was stunned by the April 12 statements of Sen. Iván Marulanda Gómez, one of the five directors of the New Liberation faction inside the ruling Liberal Party. In an interview with the anti-drug daily *El Espectador*, Marulanda declared that the drug trade had successfully closed the mouths of Colombia's political parties, the Church, the judicial branch of government, and private enterprise. He specifically named Ernesto Samper Pizano, head of the Liberal Party's National Directorate (DLN) and mooted presidential candidate for 1990, as "the son of political decadence" in Colombia, and accused the entirety of the mafia-linked DLN of having "political AIDS, for which there is no antidote."

Marulanda pulled no punches in identifying Samper's links to the drug mob: "Samper is a child of crisis, of political decadence. . . . He's the type that sits down with contrabandists when it is in vogue and helps them to protect their business. And when the drug traffickers are in fashion, he goes to a five-star hotel and meets with them. . . . To the marijuana growers, he says legalize. . . ."

Samper's sole response to Marulanda's accusations thus far has taken the form of an appeal to "Liberal dignity" and a warning to presidential hopeful Luis Carlos Galán, head of New Liberalism, against adopting Marulanda's views. Samper's gangster colleague on the DNL, Alberto Santofimio Botero, similarly blustered that "the dignity of the Liberal Party is not negotiable." Marulanda answered: "It is the dignity of the nation which is at stake."

Violating the pact

Marulanda's accusations have landed like a ton of bricks on a decrepit political structure renowned for its "mutual non-aggression pact." Other leaders of New Liberalism expressed horror at Marulanda's breaking of the rules, and rushed to issue a statement insisting that he was speaking solely in his own name. Galán, the man for whom Marulanda's moral challenge was in fact intended, is in Europe and has not yet commented.

Marulanda's denunciations appear at a moment of unprecedented political crisis in the country. Leaders of the new leftist political party, Political Union (UP), are being assassinated literally by the hundreds, driving many of the amnesiated guerrillas that make up its ranks back into armed insur-

rection. The cynical Conservative Party, like the Democrats in the United States, is sitting with folded arms, in hopes that the Barco government's problems will give them a better shot at the presidency in 1990.

The "official" Liberal Party, ruled behind the scenes by former president and mafia godfather Alfonso López Michelsen, boasts a five-man directorate made up of the country's most degenerate political gangsters and mafia public relations mouthpieces.

Unable to exercise total control over President Virgilio Barco, who has waged an anti-drug war against deadly odds, López has determined to put his political heir, drug legalization lobbyist Samper, into the presidency in 1990. López has also reportedly tried to woo New Liberalism's Galán back into the official Liberal Party fold, with offers of a Galán presidency in 1994. To that mooted possibility, Marulanda declared:

"There is a norm here which says, 'This is all true, but one cannot say so.' We have a hypocritical establishment which does not allow the country to face up to its crisis. Identifying the problem is the first step toward its solution. . . . [Galán] is the key and foundation of this whole process. We are now trying to come to power under conditions that will allow the transformation of this society. . . . Taking power so that things remain the same is not worth the effort."

Bravery in isolation?

Marulanda's courageous statements, which have made him a high-profile target for mafia assassins, have been compared by some with those of Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, the anti-drug justice minister and collaborator of Galán who was murdered by the drug mafia in April 1984. *El Espectador* columnist María Jimena Dusan observed April 21 that, like Marulanda, "Rodrigo Lara Bonilla remained alone in his fight because he said what he thought. . . . This open, frank attitude did not find sufficient backup within his own movement. Yet today, his solitary denunciations are one of the battle cries of New Liberalism. . . . Iván Marulanda's statements are inopportune for certain members of New Liberalism, who have very concrete bureaucratic aspirations. . . ."

However, Marulanda's efforts to purge the country of mafia influence are not alone. In early April, President Barco granted legal status to the newly formed Unified Workers Confederation (CUT), thus putting an end to the stalling tactics of two consecutive labor ministers who had yielded to mafia pressures. The CUT, representing 80% of Colombia's organized labor, was founded in 1986 as an alternative to the mafia-corrupted federations financed by the U.S.-based Project Democracy's American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD). It has already announced plans to form a "workers party" to combat mafia influence in politics. In granting legitimacy to the CUT and its president, former Labor Minister Jorge Carrillo, Barco was sending a message to the López/Samper forces that the field is no longer theirs.