

Andean Report by Peter Rush

A call for surrender

Colombia's attorney general defines his anti-drug strategy: If you can't lick 'em, join 'em.

In the most shocking capitulation to the international drug mafia yet to come from a high-level government official, the new interim attorney general of Colombia, Alfredo Gutiérrez Márquez, asserted on Feb. 19 that "the fight the world has waged against this scourge [drugs] . . . has been useless and fruitless," and called for legalizing the drug trade, not only in Colombia, but worldwide.

Gutiérrez Márquez said the problem of how to deal with the drug mafia wasn't a moral or social question, but a "logical question, since if one cannot defeat the enemy, it is best to join him." He added that the state, rather than the drug mob, should reap the profits of the drug trade.

Since first stating his views at a Bogota press conference to foreign correspondents on Feb. 17, neither President Virgilio Barco, who appointed him less than one month before, nor any other member of Barco's cabinet, has yet uttered a word of repudiation. Should the attorney general's proposal represent official policy, it would place Colombia in a virtual outlaw status with respect to the rest of the non-Communist world.

In his remarks, Gutiérrez Márquez spat on the grave of his predecessor, Carlos Mauro Hoyos, who advocated no compromise with the drug mafia—for which offense the mafia assassinated him Jan. 25, and to whose murder Gutiérrez Márquez owes his present position.

At his press conference, Gutiérrez Márquez told reporters, "If the fact is

that Colombia's fight against drug trafficking is absolutely sterile, why continue prosecuting it? . . . The government must determine if this is the time to legalize drug trafficking. . . . If the conclusion is reached that the universal fight against the plague of drug trafficking has been a failure, we must legalize it." Moreover, since the fight against drugs involves all nations, he said, "likewise, legalization would have to be implemented in all countries."

Echoing the view recently voiced by several Colombian bishops, he said that "public order is the exclusive responsibility of the government. . . . Whatever measures should be taken to guarantee the peace are the responsibility of the President," and should the government consider it necessary to "dialogue" with the drug traffickers, to obtain peace, "I would have no objection."

Lest anyone think his stance is simple defeatism in the face of a powerful enemy, Gutiérrez Márquez made clear in a Feb. 20 interview with *El Espectador* newspaper that he views drug use as inevitable, because, in his view, the human being "has always been depraved," and "vice is the essence of the human soul."

"Just like wine in Catholicism," he said, "in many cultures drugs have been part and parcel of the practices and daily activities of men." Citing centuries-long cocaine and marijuana use by Indians, he said that drug use "is a fetish of our nationality, and cultural reality is a factor that must be

taken into account, because each country has its personality."

Finally, he called for the state to enrich itself from drug use. "The only alternative" to a useless fight "is to legalize the drug trade and profit from its profits. . . . It is better that these economic profits go to the state and not to the Medellín Cartel."

Within Colombia, the strongest reaction so far has come from Fabio Echeverry Correa, president of the National Industrialists Association, speaking at a meeting of the major business associations Feb. 22. He flatly rejected any dialogue with the drug traffickers. To adopt Gutiérrez Márquez's logic, Echeverry Correa said, would be like a husband who is betrayed by his wife and who, deciding it is impossible to defeat his rival, invites his enemy to take his own bed as well. "I don't believe that if one's wife plays around, one has to have a *ménage à trois*, just because one is incapable of resolving a problem," he said.

Abroad, there has been an ominous silence, broken in the United States, only in a few instances. A spokesman for the State Department, while decrying the proposal, said that the U.S. "has no plans to protest" since it "doesn't appear to be reflecting official policy."

Most notable was a feature in the *Washington Post* Feb. 24, detailing that the cocaine mafia has become as powerful as a nation, complete with an army and its own foreign policy. The article reported Gutiérrez Márquez's call for legalization, leaving the impression that this ought to be considered seriously.

This raises the possibility that the pro-legalization lobby in the United States, whose spokesmen include Milton Friedman, the Cato Institute, and other "free enterprise" fanatics and libertarians, may be about to find new allies in their pro-legalization efforts.