

## Gaviria Trujillo: No dialogue with drug traffickers

On Aug. 24, the news director of Caracol television interviewed César Gaviria Trujillo, the presidential candidate of the Galán forces.

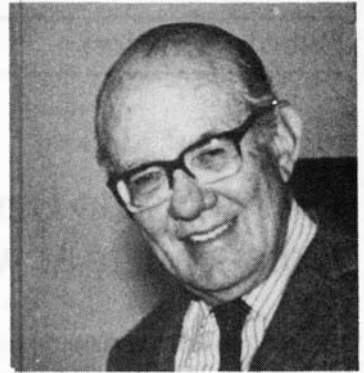
**Q:** What is your position on the issue of public order?

**A:** That violence cannot be tolerated. Regarding the guerrillas, we shouldn't even speak or negotiate with them without getting something in return, without their clear assumption of commitments to peace, to reconciliation, and to reintegration into civilian life. . . . I believe in political solutions and I believe that a society should preserve the possibility of finding political solutions. But an attitude of weakness with the guerrillas . . . is to give the guerrillas political breathing space. . . .

I think the worst error that could be committed in the country is to give the impression that political changes are undertaken here because they are demanded by violent means. I would say it is very important to stay within these principles, and if then the government, at any point, decides to speak with the guerrillas, it is because it has imposed conditions. Because talking with the guerrillas is a concession that civil society grants the guerrillas, and not vice versa. I, for example, have great reservations about those initiatives . . . to hold talks and think about negotiations which are not preceded by certain completely clear conditions on what is sought. The guerrillas should not be given political breathing space in exchange for nothing. That is an error that society is committing. If I were President, I would not commit such an error in any way.

**Q:** Is César Gaviria prepared to back the thesis of dialogue with the drug traffickers?

**A:** I will answer in a general way. In civilized society and in a democracy, there can be no dialogue except with respect to political crimes. Regarding organized crime, common crimes, there can be no dialogue. Because that would be to cheapen the concept of justice. We cannot continue to de-institutionalize justice. And the proposal that anyone who commits a crime, no matter how serious, has the right to evade application of the laws and the Constitution, and instead to establish a political dialogue with the government, is just a way of doing away with the institutions. That is the de-institutionalization of the country. It is to completely shatter the administration of justice along with any grounds for co-existence. . . . The path we must follow is to guarantee that the state has a monopoly on force. The path we must take is to achieve solidarity with the authorities. That the authorities recover respect, acceptance, so that they can fight against criminal activities.



Alfonso López Michelsen:  
He made sure that  
Colombia was "friendly  
terrain" for the drug  
traffickers.

## Cui bono? The case of López Michelsen

by Valerie Rush

The drug mafia's assassination of favored presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galán on Aug. 19 not only sent a bloody warning to Colombia's political classes to submit to the drug cartels "or else." It also boosted the political fortunes of its longstanding political asset and ally, former President Alfonso López Michelsen. Specifically, it helped to clear the decks for Lopez Michelsen's chosen presidential candidate, Liberal Party senator and drug legalization lobbyist Ernesto Samper Pizano.

López's 1974-78 presidency in Colombia oversaw the mushrooming of the drug trade, which quickly supplanted the traditional role of coffee as Colombia's principal export. These were the years of soaring drug consumption inside the United States, given impetus by the pro-drug policies of the Carter administration and by the successful government/army crackdown against drugs in Mexico which spurred traffickers to move their operations to friendlier terrain.

López made sure Colombia was that "friendly terrain" by:

- reforming the Colombian banking and financial system to allow for an orgy of drug-laundering and related speculative operations. By the early 1980s, the *financieras* set up by the López Michelsen reforms provided "a link between the classically conservative Colombian establishment and the subterranean parallel economy, drawing funds from contraband and drug smuggling. They flourish in an atmosphere of high interest rates, lax controls, and feverish speculation." This evaluation, according to the London-based *Latin America Weekly Reports*, July 9, 1982 issue.

- directing then Finance Minister Rodrigo Botero Montoya (currently, a vice chairman of the Inter-American Dia-

logue) to establish a *ventanilla siniestra* (black market window) at the Central Bank, to bring drug dollars into the aboveground money flows of the country, with “no questions asked.” This window continues in operation today; it was temporarily shut down under the presidency of Belisario Betancur (1982-86).

- following an avowedly Friedmanite “anti-inflation” policy which choked off legitimate business activity and investment in real production.

- boosting the fortunes, through lucrative government concessions and privileges, of cousin Jaime Michelsen Uribe, the head of the Grancolombiano financial and business conglomerate (also known as “The Octopus”). Michelsen Uribe was forced to flee Colombia in early 1984 when President Betancur called him on the carpet for his extensive illegal financial operations. He returned to Colombia this year, and was immediately jailed.

### **López campaigns for the mob**

López Michelsen’s administration may have endeared him to the cocaine cartels, but not so to the Colombian people. His bid to retake the presidency in 1982 proved a dismal failure, despite—perhaps because of—generous funding by known drug traffickers. His campaign treasurer at the time was Santiago Londoño White who, along with his brother Diego, were publicly named as “investors” in the Medellín Cartel. Londoño was also the power-broker who, in May 1984, set up the now infamous meeting in Panama between López Michelsen and the heads of the Medellín Cartel.

López’s 1982 campaign manager was Ernesto Samper Pizano. Samper, spoiled and pampered son of the Colombian oligarchy, got his start as president of the National Association of Financial Institutes (ANIF), a financial think tank created and financed by López Michelsen cousin Jaime Michelsen Uribe. In 1980, ANIF issued a pamphlet authored by Samper and entitled “A Proposal to Legalize Marijuana.” That same year, Samper was brought onto the board of directors of the ruling Liberal Party by López Michelsen to help secure the Liberal presidential nomination for his mentor. Samper then took on the job of López’s campaign manager; one year later, he was forced to publicly confess to having accepted over 20 million pesos in campaign “contributions” from fugitive drug czar Carlos Lehder Rivas, now serving a life sentence in a U.S. prison.

Another major financier of the 1982 López campaign was Félix Correa Maya, whose vast banking and investment empire amassed during the López years was built—according to Drug Enforcement Administration records—on dealings with the dope mob. Correa’s financial house of cards collapsed during an investigation conducted during the Betancur era, and the would-be Meyer Lansky ended up in jail where he remains today.

López Michelsen’s electoral disaster in 1982 should have ended his usefulness to the drug cartels right then and there.

But the former President had more political capital to play. On April 30, 1984, dedicated anti-drug fighter and Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla was gunned down by mafia hitmen on the streets of Bogotá. The nation was stunned and President Betancur called for “war against the drug traffickers to rescue the national dignity.” A state of siege was declared. One week later, on May 6, 1984, Alfonso López Michelsen met secretly in Panama with the men who had ordered Lara Bonilla’s assassination. López and the mafia chiefs discussed what kinds of terms they could offer that would succeed in buying the country out from under Betancur’s control. They pledged to pay off the national foreign debt in exchange for an amnesty from the government. President Betancur rejected the offer out of hand, and Colombians were outraged to learn of the meeting.

López’s next move was to give an interview to the daily *El Tiempo*, on July 29, 1984, in which he asserted that “people of ill will ask, while Rodrigo Lara’s corpse is still so warm, how could I talk to people who could be his murderers?” In self-defense, López explained that the traffickers had protested their innocence of the Lara killing, that he was merely serving as a “mailbox” for delivering a message to the President, and that anyway, one shouldn’t mix morality with the concept of law:

“I understand, as regards those who met with me, that at that time there were no arrest orders issued against them. There are people who, in justifying the talks, attempt to establish a parallel between talks with the guerrillas and this conversation with the drug traffickers. This is true in law, but not morally. It’s not even true by the law, because these people were neither indicted nor sentenced, whereas among the guerrillas there are people who have not only been indicted but also sentenced by the courts. . . . In reality, liberal thought’s greatest conquest, five centuries ago, was to establish positive law as a rule of coexistence for citizens, where each judge or each citizen cannot say, ‘This is so, but morally it is otherwise.’ ”

Asked if he found the discussions with the mobsters useful for Colombia, López Michelsen responded: “I think it has been useful. . . . If these gentlemen wanted to surrender their laboratories, landing strips, and plantations, and sell their planes, then I think the road to reducing the narcotics trade is probably easier through some form of arrangement than by the more difficult path to reach the same goal.”

On Aug. 27, 1989, Juan Guillermo Cano, son of murdered newspaper director and anti-drug activist Guillermo Cano, wrote a column in the daily *El Espectador* lauding the President’s decision to retake the helm of the nation, but warning that there are some—López Michelsen, for example—not happy with Barco’s declaration of war, because “he is reminded by the [mafia’s] message of death of his evil mediation in Panama. It is not clear if López is happy with Galán’s death, or with the message of death. One can expect anything from him. . . .”