

Drug legalizers assail Colombian President

by José Restrepo

The latest effort by the forces of Dope, Inc. to sabotage the Colombian government's anti-drug offensive and force the legalization of drugs, is an ongoing effort to force the government of President Virgilio Barco from office. Forces associated with Conservative Party chieftain and former President Misael Pastrana are accusing the Barco administration of having conducted secret negotiations with the cocaine cartel for more than a year.

The charges were denounced as "deliberate misinformation" by the government, which firmly stated that it "has not, is not, and will not hold dialogue with the drug mafia." Just one week earlier, President Barco's National Security Council had issued a statement warning that the mafia would combine terrorism with slander "to saturate public opinion so as to cause exhaustion and intolerance, to force society to react against the government and demand a different strategy."

A striking aspect of this newest attempt, labeled "Barco-gate" by the pro-drug elements of the Colombian press, to topple President Barco, is the surfacing of Henry Kissinger's name in the affair. It appears that the spokesman for the cocaine traffickers' Medellín Cartel in the alleged negotiations is one Joaquín Vallejo Arbaláez, a former government minister who claims to have urged the cocaine cartel to hire Henry Kissinger to lobby inside the United States on its behalf. Vallejo has been touted in the press as "The Godfather's Godfather," a reference to the fact that the respectable Vallejo is the legal godfather to Medellín Cartel chieftain Pablo Escobar Gaviria.

While Kissinger Associates has responded to inquiries on the matter with a nervous "no comment," there certainly is a precedent for such a business relationship. On Oct. 2, the *Washington Post* revealed that U.S. lawyer Michael Abbell, a former high-level official in the U.S. Department of Justice, has been working on behalf of the Cali-based cocaine cartel of Gilberto Rodríguez Orejuela since at least 1986. According to that article, Abbell considers his clients "business people" with whom one can make a deal, a recommendation that coheres precisely with Vallejo's attempts to smooth a deal.

Conservative Party treason

The scandal was launched Oct. 7 when Conservative Party presidential candidate and Pastrana intimate Alvaro Leyva

Durán leaked documents to the daily *La Prensa*. Run by ex-President Pastrana's eldest son, *La Prensa* has been the leading mouthpiece for the pro-drug, anti-extradition forces in the country. Those documents purport that Germán Montoya, the secretary general to the presidency, had been holding meetings with cartel spokesman Vallejo Arbaláez since at least September 1988, for the purpose of negotiating a deal with the cocaine cartels to "end the violence." *La Prensa*, which claims that it has authenticated the documents, asserts that the government-cartel contact meetings continued up through the mafia assassination of anti-drug presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galán on Aug. 18 of this year.

Vallejo himself then took to the pages of *La Prensa* on Oct. 10 to confirm the "authenticity" of the newspaper's revelations. Claiming to lament the leaking of the documents, Vallejo nonetheless went into great detail elaborating the cartel's offer to dismantle its drug-trafficking machinery and bring home its drug dollars in exchange for an end to the government's war on drugs, specifically the extraditions to the United States, the raids, and the arrests—and an amnesty for themselves and their assets.

The cartel's proposal to legalize its operations is contained in a document hand-written by Vallejo himself and published in facsimile form by *La Prensa*. The document concludes with a cartel offer to "facilitate" a deal whereby the United States legalizes cocaine consumption, and the Colombian government gets the monopoly on export of the drug. Vallejo's comment on the entire cartel proposal: "Ethical considerations aside, they have reached practical solutions."

In his interview to *La Prensa*, Vallejo says that he explained to his cartel buddies that any deal between the Barco government and the cartels to suspend the extraditions must necessarily include the United States government, and that he therefore urged them to contract a high-level U.S. intermediary to do their lobbying in Washington for them. "Even Kissinger's name was thought of," said Vallejo. "They knew what Kissinger costs. However, they said they were ready to take on those costs for the purpose of convincing the American government of the appropriateness" of such a deal.

The anti-drug daily *El Espectador*, which has been given an ultimatum by the drug cartels to shut its doors or "face the consequences," immediately responded to the Pastrana-inspired scandal. In an Oct. 12 editorial, *El Espectador* suggested that *La Prensa*'s exposé was designed "deliberately and against the national interest to pressure in favor of a deal with the drug traffickers." The editorial questions the motivations of the Conservative Party in "inflating the emerging scandal" and those of Vallejo in proposing that the mafia's blood money should be accepted and their crimes forgotten, just so that "they don't keep killing us." The editorial then demands an intervention by President Barco, concluding, "Border treaties against the drug trade are worth little if our own house is eroded from within."