

Andean Report by José Restrepo

Carter's drug policy Bourne-again

Jimmy Carter's former drug czar urges Colombia to "rescue its sovereignty" by legalizing the drug cartels.

Peter Bourne, Jimmy Carter's former drug adviser, who was forced to resign his post for illegally prescribing quaaludes to his staff, has called on Colombia's outgoing President Virgilio Barco to suspend that country's anti-drug war, legalize cocaine, and bring the drug cartels into respectable society as a way of rescuing Colombia's national sovereignty.

Using a writing style virtually indistinguishable from that of the Medellín Cartel, Bourne released his "open letter" to Barco on June 4, during the Colombian head of state's two-day visit to Washington, D.C. In it, Bourne argued implicitly for a military surrender to the drug lords, saying they "have more than sufficient funds and enough access to the international arms market to compete in any arms race."

Bourne was writing in his capacity as chairman of the board of the left-liberal Council on Hemispheric Affairs. "You don't need a war on drugs," Bourne insisted. "You need the reverse: a carefully orchestrated plan of de-escalation and disarmament. Suspend the extradition program and make a good-faith effort to reintegrate into society leaders of the cartel."

Bourne wrote that fighting drugs is "anti-democratic," because it gives too much power to the military. "In the name of the drug war, human rights violations have dramatically risen in Colombia and democracy itself is severely threatened. . . . U.S. military aid to your country's armed forces, allegedly to fight drug trafficking, will in all likelihood end up

mainly escalating repression."

Explaining his letter to the press, he further pushed the line of the free-market extremists that the Colombian economy should be based on cocaine, not industry. "It's in the interest of Colombia to make cocaine part of the legitimate economy," said Bourne on June 9. "If cocaine were part of the legitimate economy, it would transform the economy of Colombia dramatically for the better. If Colombia were able to negotiate an arrangement where cocaine was taxed, was made part of the legitimate economy, was legalized, it would immensely benefit the economy of the country."

Bourne also supported the efforts of former President Alfonso López Michelsen, known as the drug cartels' political godfather, to force a pact with the drug lords, under U.N. auspices. "I think that proposal is along the right lines, that I would support," said Bourne.

President George Bush compounded Bourne's insults by sending his Colombian colleague home without even a promise of the assistance Colombia urgently needs to fight the drug lords. In fact, Barco's efforts to extract trade concessions from the Bush administration, as a means of easing the financial burden of his anti-drug measures, were rudely rebuffed. U.S. Special Trade Representative Carla Hills was reportedly lobbying to get Colombia placed on a "watch list" of unfair trading partners, causing one Colombian official in Barco's retinue to comment, "Carla Hills is becoming one of the most difficult foes of the drug war."

Barco's visit, in the company of both his own economic advisers and those of President-elect César Gaviria, was focused on winning U.S. approval for the application to Colombia of a special "subsidies code" that grants preferential export subsidies to Third World countries. Colombia had the backing of almost all the countries belonging to General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, except the United States. One day after Barco's departure, the U.S. rejected Colombia's appeal.

The U.S. Congress was little better. The House Foreign Affairs Committee opened its doors June 7 to so-called human rights activists dedicated to the dismantling of Ibero-America's military institutions. They were headed by the executive director of the Washington Office on Latin America, Alexander Wilde, who insisted that U.S. support for the Colombian Armed Forces was a terrible mistake, which would "deepen, not diminish, the problem of narco-terrorism," and would "fuel further the crisis of human rights abuse and undermine political stability."

Wilde, who conveniently ignored the fact that Colombia's anti-drug victories have been entirely military, and *not* legal or economic, told this reporter that the "ideal model" for Colombia should be Costa Rica, where there is no army and where U.S. security forces are the only protection.

The support offered Wilde and his ilk at the hearings by Democratic congressmen suggests that the miserable \$80 million in military and civilian aid the Bush administration provides Colombia may yet be further reduced. Between the Democrats' "human rights" pretexts, and the Bush "free-trade" obsession, Colombia's anti-drug President-elect, César Gaviria, may be left high and dry when he assumes office on Aug. 7.