

Andean Report by Andrea Olivieri

Drug legalizer named to cabinet

Colombia's incoming government is undermining its own credibility in the war on drugs.

The first four ministerial nominations of the incoming César Gaviria Trujillo government are in, and the odds are not in Colombia's favor. The most striking is that of Ernesto Samper Pizano, a former presidential contender who garnered considerably fewer votes than the narco-terrorist candidate of the recently amnestied M-19, but whose political mentor is former President and Liberal Party stringpuller Alfonso López Michelsen.

Samper, an economist by profession and avid proponent of drug legalization, was given the Development Ministry, a political porkbarrel which has leaped into prominence of late as the government liaison to George Bush's "Enterprise for the Americas" plan.

Samper's appointment is no surprise, given the deals that were struck in the aftermath of Gaviria's election last May. However, it is a shock to those Colombians who chose the anti-drug Gaviria over several better known candidates—including Samper—all of whom pledged to legalize drugs as their "solution" to the narco-terrorism ravaging the country.

The July 14 lead editorial of the anti-drug daily *El Espectador* went out of its way to sharply warn President-elect Gaviria against giving Samper the coveted Foreign Ministry to which he aspired: "One of [Samper's] defects was underlined in the past when he said it was necessary to legalize drugs. That proposal would weigh heavily against Colombia in the international sphere when it were to exhort the industrialized nations in

such forums as the U.N., OAS or EEC to collaborate in the war on drugs. His position, in this sense, is opposed to that of Gaviria."

After his appointment, Samper stated that he planned to "work closely with the Foreign Ministry in matters of international trade." Foreign Ministry appointee Luis Fernando Jaramillo, a former banker, has obligingly stated that his ministry's priority would be to "internationalize" Colombia's economic structures, an International Monetary Fund euphemism for eliminating Colombia's protective barriers and opening the economy to Bush's latest looting scheme.

Samper's influence in the Gaviria government goes far beyond his ministry post, however. The Colombian media report that Samper also controls most of the Congress as well, having placed his men into the presidencies of both the Senate and House, the vice presidency of the Senate, and the Comptroller's office. Horacio Serpa Uribe, a former communist tied closely to the pro-terrorist Amnesty International, who resigned from Barco's Interior Ministry earlier this year to manage Samper's presidential campaign, is strongly mooted for the Attorney General's post under Gaviria. All of this not only gives Samper control over internal congressional appointments, travel, and even office assignments, but also a veto capability against the Executive.

Samper's political godfather expressed his satisfaction with Gaviria's choice, describing Samper as representative of the "new style" of government he has long advocated. What

that "new style" is remains to be seen, but López's personal commitment to negotiating an amnesty for the drug cartels and delivering the Colombian economy to the bankers are known to have the sympathies of his protégé.

In addition to the Samper nomination, Gaviria has chosen one Rudolf Hommes, a regular consultant to the World Bank, as his finance minister. Hommes was also director of public credit during the 1974-78 López Michelsen administration, and was a close collaborator of then-Finance Minister Rodrigo Botero Montoya, the architect of the so-called "sinister window" at the Central Bank which took in all dollars, no questions asked. Hommes was a founder, together with Botero and María Mercedes Cuellar (a niece of López Michelsen and currently development minister under Barco), of the arch-monetarist magazine *Estrategía*.

It was under Botero and Hommes that the Colombian financial system was revamped to permit narco-dollars entry into the economy while triggering a whirlwind of speculative ventures which undermined the productive economy. Botero today is a prominent member of the Brandt Commission, the Aspen Institute, and the Inter-American Dialogue, which has gone on record promoting "selective legalization" of drugs.

Hommes's first statements as incoming finance minister were to promise "shock" methods and "belt-tightening" against public expenditure. He also pledged to alter the current Exchange Statute which has been the nemesis of the advocates of "internationalizing" the economy.

Rumors that narco-terrorist M-19 honcho Antonio Navarro Wolf would get the Health Ministry, and that López Michelsen's son, Alfonso López Caballero, would get Agriculture, remain to be confirmed.