

Bush wants drug-money laundry in Colombia

by Javier Almario

A May 9 conference in Bogotá on George Bush's Enterprise for the Americas Initiative provided a unique glimpse into the neo-colonialist mentality behind the plan to turn all of America into one giant "free trade zone." Specifically, it provided a forum for an official U.S. endorsement of legalizing the profits of the drug trade.

A key speaker, Inter-American Development Bank official Alejandro Scopelli, urged that Bogotá be turned "into an international financial center, like Montevideo is today." This, he explained, would allow Bogotá to "attract, without any restrictions whatsoever, dollars, marks, yen, and other currencies." Montevideo, the capital city of Uruguay, is universally acknowledged as *the* "hot-money" laundry for all of Latin America.

Scopelli's proposal is, however, already being implemented by the César Gaviria government, precisely to attract that infamous "other currency," the narco-dollar. In fact, thanks to reforms that have been approved under Gaviria's presidency, the so-called "sinister window"—the Central Bank function which launders the profits of the drug traffickers, "without any restrictions whatsoever"—has taken in \$876 million in the first quarter of 1991, a 126% increase over the same period a year ago.

The May 9 conference was organized by the U.S. Embassy, the Bogotá Chamber of Commerce, the Colombian Development Ministry under drug legalization advocate Ernesto Samper Pizano, and the prestigious Javeriana University. Scopelli's proposal was in the context of a discussion of the role his Inter-American Development Bank will play in Bush's "free trade" plan for the continent. U.S. Ambassador to Colombia Thomas McNamara elaborated that the IADB was the "second pillar" of Bush's proposal, and that a pitiful fund of \$1.5 billion had already been created over five years, which would be lent out under Bush's initiative, on condition that more "structural adjustments" would be forthcoming.

According to McNamara, the first pillar is the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), and the authorization for fast track negotiation of the Mexico-U.S. Free Trade Agreement by the U.S. Congress. The third pillar, he explained, involves debt-for-equity and debt-for-nature swaps.

McNamara was explicit in backing Gaviria's reforms, which will assure an ever-increasing flow of drug money into government coffers. "Colombia has already embarked on an economic and structural adjustment reform through its

apertura [opening]. The investment climate in Colombia at the present time is one of the best in Latin America," said the ambassador. "And this has improved even further due to the recent reforms of the exchange statute, of taxes, of investment, and of the labor code." It was reform of the exchange statute, combined with Gaviria's policy of abject capitulation to the drug cartels, which turned the Central Bank's aptly named sinister window (*ventanilla siniestra*) into a gold mine.

McNamara explained that for Bush's Enterprise for the Americas Initiative to succeed, Ibero-America would require "new structural reforms in many countries, to win a return of national savings that were sent abroad as flight capital, and to attract new capital." In Colombia, "repatriation of capital" is a worn diplomatic euphemism for luring drug money back home.

McNamara also revealed the mechanism by which U.S. financial and business elites hope to appropriate Ibero-American companies and territory. The debt these countries have with the United States would be partially reduced. "Interest payments on the remainder of the debt would be made in local currency, to an environmental fund in said country," and that money would be used for environmental projects such as purchase of Amazon lands that would be important to "conserve." Another part of the debt could be "sold to facilitate debt-for-nature or debt-for-equity barter," he explained.

Purging 'negative attitudes'

McNamara showed the only real emotion during his entire speech when he spoke of the "non-economic obstacles" to Bush's neo-liberal project. According to McNamara, it was necessary to take advantage of the collapse of Marxism in the East in order to eliminate "thoughtless nationalism," "negative attitudes toward foreign investment," and "destructive protectionism," which continue to prevail in Ibero-America.

McNamara insisted that to the extent that nations attempt to defend their sovereignty, they are revealing the "Marxist influence" in Ibero-America, which he said was "stronger than in the Marxist states themselves." Any resistance to the Bush administration's neo-colonial policies were the result, according to McNamara, of the "Leninist concept of imperialism."

The U.S. ambassador attacked the Alliance for Progress, brainchild of the late President John F. Kennedy. "The Alliance for Progress, an effort to withstand the tide of poverty in Latin America and to halt the Marxist march, was in itself an unwitting acceptance of Marxist ideas."

Many offended "nationalists" in the audience were left asking themselves upon what basis the United States—itsself sinking deeper into economic and moral bankruptcy by the day—had seen fit to send its representative to lecture Colombians on economic policy and the new order.