

## López Michelsen on the hot seat

On July 26, 1984, Colombian anti-drug fighter Patricia Paredes de Londoño was abducted on the streets of Bogotá, Colombia and subjected to druggings and "Patty Hearst-style" brainwashing techniques by figures linked to the drug cartels. Londoño, editor of the magazine *Guerra a las Drogas (War on Drugs)*, is married to Maximiliano Londoño, vice president of Colombia's National Anti-Drug Coalition. Following an intense mobilization from anti-drug forces worldwide, including the efforts of this publication, Mrs. Londoño was freed on Aug. 1.

In mobilizing to win Londoño's release, anti-drug forces targeted the so-called "citizens above suspicion" who stand behind the drug cartels, such as former Colombian President Alfonso López Michelsen. It was perhaps no accident that just prior to Londoño's kidnaping, López had given a major press interview revealing his role as "political godfather" to the cocaine cartels. In that interview, López was asked why the country's drug traffickers had sought him out as a mediator for conducting negotiations with the government, to which López revealingly responded: "Ex-Presidents . . . are a kind of mailbox. I get all kinds of tragedies and people's problems here. *From a woman who quarrels with her husband, to some-*

one whose home is about to be auctioned at the bank" (emphasis added).

Significantly, Londoño's captors later told the police that she had willingly gone with them following "a quarrel with her husband." López was to repeat that formulation.

Immediately following Londoño's release, López announced that he was leaving Colombia for an extended stay of at least three months in Europe. On Aug. 21, 1984, then-President Belisario Betancur made public the text of a telegram sent to him by López Michelsen from Paris:

"In Panama, New York, Copenhagen, and presumably all over the world, an *Intelligence Executive Review* [sic] story is being circulated, according to which I have been in the service of the drug mafia, threatening Your Excellency, and sponsoring the so-called kidnaping of Mrs. Paredes de Londoño, who is supposedly married to the president of the Andean Labor Party and the Anti-Drug Coalition, and who has emerged to explain her absence as a dispute with her husband. . . .

"I think that I—as an ex-President of Colombia and friend of your Excellency . . . have the right for my honor not to be so damaged universally and in newspapers such as *ABC* of Madrid, in the face of the indifference or silence of the agents of the Colombian government, whatever their political affiliation might be."

López today is protesting that his honor is being damaged by Carlos Lehder. Perhaps no one has told him there is no honor among thieves?

of López Michelsen and vice president of the Socialist International, sought and received George Bush's permission to whisk López out of the country on a Venezuelan jet.

But not before López issued a furious denunciation of the U.S. plea-bargaining system: "What is inexplicable is how U.S. justice encourages these kinds of statements, offering reductions of sentences for people who break the record for slanderous allegations . . . criminals in the process of saving their skins." Ironically, López was personally instrumental in the Colombian government's adoption of a U.S.-modeled plea-bargaining system earlier this year, through which Lehder's former associates—Pablo Escobar, the Ochoa brothers, and others—were induced to "surrender" to Colombian authorities, *under terms they themselves have dictated!*

Although President Gaviria was quick to issue an official statement decrying the "false charges" against López, and describing the former President as a "fervent partisan of social justice and untiring worker for Latin American unity," the Colombian population knows otherwise. During his 1974-78 presidency, López established the banking and tax "reforms" which opened the Colombian economy to the drug trade. When he departed from the presidency, he left behind

a political machine inside the Liberal Party which has fought "untiringly" for more than a decade to legalize drug trafficking.

In 1984, *less than one week* after the Medellín Cartel stunned the nation by sending assassins to murder justice minister and anti-drug warrior Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, López Michelsen traveled to Panama to meet with the fugitive chieftains of the cartel, and to convey their offer of billions of dollars in drug profits in exchange for an amnesty by the Colombian government. According to Lehder's recent court testimony, Lara Bonilla was murdered precisely to prevent him from revealing López's relations with the cartel.

In February 1987, López called on then-President Virgilio Barco to begin negotiations with the cartel. Again, in 1989, López charged that it was the Barco government's refusal to negotiate a deal with the cartel that was responsible for the narco-terrorism ravaging the country. In a Nov. 3, 1989 address, just a few months after the cartel assassination of front-running anti-drug presidential candidate and López nemesis Luis Carlos Galán, the Godfather argued, incredibly, that "the so-called war against drugs [constitutes] a new element of destabilization" against Colombian society. And