

Andean Report by Javier Almario

Talk of legalizing drugs in Colombia

Narco-terror escalates while the government's favorite presidential candidates push drug legalization.

The murderous remnants of Pablo Escobar's Medellín Cartel have Colombia in the grip of escalating narco-terrorism, while the ruling elites, exemplified by President César Gaviria, continue to play the negotiating game with the nation's worst criminals. Simultaneously, Gaviria's favored candidates for next year's presidential elections are shamelessly urging drug legalization as the answer to both narco-terrorism and the drug trade.

On April 15, a massive car bomb exploded in a crowded shopping mall in the commercial center of Bogotá, killing at least 12 and injuring another 200. Like earlier bombings this year, which have claimed 40 lives and wounded more than 400, the fugitive Escobar is believed to have ordered this latest act of terrorism to try to force the government into granting him a general amnesty.

The Gaviria government, while condemning the bombing, still refuses to rule out the possibility that Escobar may win a negotiated "surrender" deal with the government. In fact, it is currently conducting sentence-reduction negotiations with Escobar's brother and other Medellín Cartel prisoners, which could lead to their release from jail and their conversion into "capitalist entrepreneurs" within a short period of time.

Ironically, it was Escobar's personal lawyer, Guido Parra, the self-proclaimed "intellectual author" of government legislation that paved the way for banning extradition and for

Pablo Escobar's short-lived surrender in 1991, who was just assassinated by the vigilante PEPES terror squad. According to a message found by the bullet-riddled bodies of Parra and his teenage son in Medellín, the PEPES action was allegedly in retaliation for the Bogotá bombing. PEPES also claimed responsibility for fire-bombing several cartel ranches and a posh but abandoned discotheque said to be cartel property.

The Gaviria government issued a statement repudiating the PEPES actions, and offering a large cash reward for their capture—a studied effort to be even-handed with their earlier reward offers for Escobar's capture. But the government is in fact doing less than nothing to stop the drug mafia. Rather, they are shamelessly readying the country for the ultimate surrender of drug legalization, by promoting two Liberal Party candidates who have endorsed such a direction.

Ernesto Sámper Pizano, a minister in Gaviria's cabinet before taking up the ambassador's post in Spain, has just returned to the country to launch his campaign. Colombia's leading lobbyist for drug legalization for nearly two decades, Sámper wrote an article for the Spanish magazine *Cambio-16* just before his departure from that country, in which he urged the legalization of all narcotic drugs.

Another Gaviria favorite is his former Government Minister Humberto de la Calle, who just resigned from that post to begin his campaign. De la Calle brazenly used the forum

of the ruling Liberal Party's March convention to urge drug legalization, while also calling for a halt to the war on drug trafficking. "It is time for humanity to pause and reflect" on this fight, which he insisted "has been largely ineffective."

These treasonous policies are not without opposition, however. At that same Liberal Party convention, Gaviria was attacked for his policy of appeasement toward the drug cartels, and for his embrace of free market economics as promoted by the International Monetary Fund. Former Justice Minister Enrique Parejo González, one of the few surviving heroes of the country's anti-drug war, told the convention that Gaviria had betrayed Liberal ideals by adopting foreign-inspired economic schemes such as privatization of the state sector, which "are stripping Colombians of their ownership of companies which are the fruit of their labor."

Parejo also charged Gaviria with responsibility for Pablo Escobar's 1992 "escape" from a "jail" of his own construction: "We will never tire of demanding justice in this case! This government has contributed, like no other, to intensifying the process of corruption in the country." Unfortunately, Parejo has exposed his own weak flank, in advocating "peace negotiations" with the country's narco-terrorist guerrilla forces. It was this same blindness on the part of former President Virgilio Barco which led to a negotiated amnesty for the M-19 narco-terrorists who, once legalized, put "peace talks" with the *traffickers* on the country's political agenda.

Another former minister and presidential candidate, Carlos Lemos Simmonds, attacks Gaviria, but as an advocate of government shrinkage, he cannot be expected to break with the privatization and free trade lunacy now dominating the nation.