

Andean Report by Valerie Rush

Legalizing 'clean' dope

Colombian officialdom takes a step closer to drug legalization, as negotiations with the Cali Cartel proceed.

Colombia's Attorney General Gustavo de Greiff has just gone on record urging the legalization of drugs, with the proviso that such a strategy be carefully planned to guarantee only top-quality dope. Speaking to a forum sponsored by the University of the Andes in Bogotá Oct. 4, De Greiff insisted, "One thing should be absolutely clear, and that is that we are not talking about legalizing the traffickers, nor these low-class drugs, but rather something similar to what was done with alcohol: It wasn't rot-gut and moonshine that were legalized, but Chivas Regal and Johnny Walker. . . . Legalization should yield a clean product."

This stunning statement, from the man who has paraded himself in Colombia as the nemesis of the Medellín Cartel's fugitive chieftain Pablo Escobar, did not come out of the blue. Defense Minister Rafael Pardo Rueda, another speaker at the event, was only slightly more cautious in arguing that planning studies on how, when, and which drugs to legalize had to be conducted first. The majority of Colombia's presidential candidates, from all points on the political spectrum, also favor drug legalization.

Backing for such a stand is coming from the same "pro-democracy" and "free trade" shysters who now control much of the Clinton administration, and the seminar at which De Greiff spoke was addressed by two prominent American advocates of drug legalization: Nobel economist and free-trade guru Milton Friedman and former State Department official Ethan Nadelman, co-founder of the legalization lobby's Drug Policy Foundation.

That the "anti-drug" De Greiff was finally able to come out of the closet on the legalization issue was no doubt facilitated by the message Harvard professor Nadelman brought to Colombia. He assured his audience that "the people that the President has named to head the CIA, DEA [Drug Enforcement Administration], and Justice Department are much more liberal" than in previous administrations, and that fighting drugs is now at the bottom of the CIA's priority list, as with the Congress's. Nadelman admitted that, for now, Clinton "is not going to back legalization as such, but members of his government privately support legalization. They are moving from the extreme of repression toward the middle, without reaching total legalization."

Nadelman continued: "The key objective of the new philosophy is not to halt consumption, but to reduce the risks of consumption and its abuse. . . . If heroin is going to be used, one must guarantee needles free of AIDS or hepatitis contamination, and that consumers don't rob and kill to buy the substance. . . . Under this strategy, official publicity might end up saying: Addiction to drugs is bad, but doesn't kill. AIDS kills."

Friedman, who addressed the Bogotá seminar via satellite, argued, "There can be no intermediate path between prohibition and legalization." Declaring that it is "unethical" to legalize "drugs" like alcohol and tobacco but not cocaine, heroin, and marijuana, Friedman concluded that legalization would go smoothly when it is "the private companies and not

the governments which take charge of its production and merchandising."

Just *which* companies will take charge of the production and merchandising of dope in Colombia, should legalization ever be permitted, is suggested by an admission made by De Greiff that he is maintaining regular negotiations, through the Washington law firm Ristaud and Abbel, with the Cali cocaine cartel. According to a recently concluded Judicial Police investigation dubbed Operation Belalcázar III, the Cali Cartel has vastly extended its "legal" financial empire during the past year. In the city of Cali, the cartel's holdings include 40 shopping centers, 2 brokerage firms, several banks, 2 real estate firms, and 11 investment companies.

De Greiff told the media that cartel drug lords Gilberto and Miguel Rodríguez Orejuela were prepared to surrender to authorities if the government would modify the country's penal code to significantly reduce prison sentences. Precisely such a "reform" has already been submitted by De Greiff's office, and should go a long way toward "laundering" the Cali Cartel. If the legalization scenario proceeds according to plan, the Rodríguez brothers should be emerging from their jail stints just in time to receive the marketing franchise for "clean" dope.

In his speech to the Bogotá seminar, De Greiff expressed concern that Colombia could not unilaterally legalize drugs "because they would call us a narco-democracy." Nadelman's answer was to urge Colombia to "join forces with Bolivia, Peru, and Ecuador on the key aspects of legalization, and then to turn to forums such as the United Nations, the Organization of American States, the Vienna Commission, to make the [world] community aware of the failure of current policy."