

Andean Report by Javier Almario

Samper's narco-links confirmed

The retired director of DEA in Bogotá says the evidence is conclusive: Colombia's President took money from narcos!

Colombian President Ernesto Samper Pizano received millions from the Cali drug cartel, and his predecessor César Gaviria Trujillo was a witting collaborator in the cartel's penetration into the very pores of Colombia's political system, according to bombshell statements made at the end of September by Joseph Toft, the head of the Drug Enforcement Administration in Bogotá, on the day of his retirement.

Former President Gaviria, who was delivered the prestigious post of secretary general of the Organization of American States (OAS) by the United States, could only sputter his indignation at Toft's statements, but chose not to counter Toft's explicit charges, which included that Colombia's 1991 Constitution was drafted by Constituent Assembly delegates who were massively bribed by the drug traffickers—with the full knowledge of then-President Gaviria! Thanks to these bribes, the assembly constitutionally banned the extradition of Colombian nationals to a foreign country. "Extradition was the only thing the traffickers feared," said Toft.

Toft revealed that the DEA had cooperated at the time with the Colombian police in videotaping a secret meeting between a lawyer for drug lord Pablo Escobar and a delegate to the Constituent Assembly from the "legalized" narco-terrorist movement, the M-19, at which a substantial bribe to vote against extradition passed hands. On the video, subsequently known as the "narco-video," one can hear the boast that the M-19 delegate was but one of many assembly delegates who had succumbed to greed or fear.

"At that moment, there was a great deal of information available about the drug traffickers' maneuvers in the Constituent Assembly in order to free themselves from extradition." Toft confirmed what has long been rumored, that President Gaviria was in possession of the narco-video but chose never to reveal it, despite the fact that the DEA considered it "convincing evidence."

Gaviria was also responsible for the escape of the late drug kingpin Pablo Escobar Gaviria, because the President "knew what was happening at The Cathedral [the estate which served as Escobar's prison following the assembly vote against extradition—ed.], knew that Escobar was in control there, that he would come and go at will, and he knew long before it happened that Escobar would escape," said Toft.

Toft also confirmed that the infamous "narco-cassettes," the popular name given to secretly made tapes that document the millions contributed by the drug traffickers to Samper Pizano's campaign to buy him the presidency, are but one more piece of evidence that the government of Colombia is a full-blown "narco-democracy." However, it is not the only evidence against Samper. "The narco-cassettes for me are evidence," but "there is much more information" concerning the millions contributed by the traffickers to Samper's campaign. Toft also said that the Cali Cartel has "immense power" in Congress.

Last August, then-Prosecutor General Gustavo de Greiff (like Samper, a supporter of drug legalization), was emphatic that the narco-

cassettes—which have the voices of Cali Cartel bosses Gilberto and Miguel Rodríguez Orejuela confirming the bribery of Samper—do not constitute proof that a crime was committed. The only real crime, insisted De Greiff, was that the recordings were illegally made, without judicial permission! At the time, De Greiff had telephoned Toft, accusingly demanding to know who had made the recordings. The U.S. officially denied any involvement.

EIR has reported for years that Samper is a longstanding spokesman for the narcotics mafia and for the legalization of drugs. Moreover, EIR has insisted that the political godfather of both Samper and Gaviria, and of the drug cartels themselves, is former Colombian President Alfonso López Michelsen.

The interview with Toft triggered an upheaval in diplomatic relations between United States and Colombia, already shaky from this past summer's "narco-cassettes" scandal. While the Colombian government denounced and dismissed Toft's charges outright, the U.S. Embassy in Bogotá issued a formal statement distancing itself from Toft, now a private citizen. However, the DEA has not contradicted the statements of its former agent.

Toft made no mention of the role of López Michelsen as political godfather to the Colombian narcotics cartels, yet it is well known that the López government (1974-78) deliberately opened the doors to the cultivation of marijuana and to the laundering of the drug proceeds, through a series of banking and other decrees. It is therefore not surprising that it was López who responded with the most fury to Toft's charges, accusing the former agent of creating an international disinformation network, for the sole purpose of "slandering" Colombia.