

Andean Report by Javier Almario

Samper on his knees to British Empire

The drug cartels' President Samper Pizano of Colombia is playing the British card against Clinton.

On Feb. 2, U.S. Ambassador to Colombia Myles Frechette told a meeting of businessmen at the Council of the Americas in New York that both the Clinton administration and the U.S. Congress "firmly believe that the Samper government has not done what it could" in the fight against drugs, and that most probably, come March 1, the Congress will refuse to certify Colombia as effectively combating the drug trade.

Without certification, the United States will suspend anti-drug aid to that country, as well as deny it the benefits of the Andean Preferential System which provides trade benefits to nations in the region fighting drugs. The United States could also veto any request for credits that Colombia might submit to the World Bank or International Monetary Fund, where it controls 30% of the vote.

In response, Samper has turned to the British to demonstrate that his government can survive without U.S. help. In the midst of widespread anti-U.S. propaganda in the Colombian press, Britain's Vice Secretary of Foreign Affairs David Davis, who is in charge of Britain's relations to Ibero-America, arrived in Colombia on Feb. 20 and announced that Britain would be happy to provide "anti-drug aid" and to make further investments in oil exploration in Colombia.

This is not the first time that Samper has turned to the British to try to cleanse his image. In June and July 1994, Samper was hit with a pre-inauguration scandal over his acceptance of millions of dollars' worth of donations from the Cali Cartel to assure his presidential victory. Then, while

President-elect, he fled to London and announced a "special relationship" between Colombia and England, a "model" country in drug legalization, which has been Samper's personal hobby horse since the mid-1970s.

During his two-day stay, Davis confirmed that Britain would be providing Colombia with economic aid in the eradication of drug crops, and that the aid "would not be conditional," as is U.S. aid. Davis visited a opium poppy plantation in the department of Huila, and appeared on TV caressing and sniffing the flowers from which heroin, morphine, and other opiates are derived.

Davis also visited the oil fields of British Petroleum (BP) in Cusiana. The company is conducting operations in the foothills of the eastern mountain range, where new discoveries have increased estimates to some 10 billion barrels of oil.

The British "aid," of course, is not free. Samper has just approved a series of guidelines regarding the oil industry so that the British can draw more substantial profits from their exploitation of the subsoil. Further, Samper has decided that 40% of oil income will remain abroad, in a Petroleum Stabilization Fund to be held exclusively in British banks. The idea is to prevent this money from being reinvested in Colombia. "We are not going to allow money from Cusiana to become a monetary curse," Samper said. Colombians, according to this logic, should not invest this money in urgently needed physical infrastructure; the British banks will enjoy the dividends from using the funds in speculative ventures.

Contrast this with the fact that Samper has already contracted \$4 billion in new foreign debt, bringing the total from \$17 billion to \$21 billion in less than one year. Is it less inflationary, somehow, to use money usuriously lent?

During Davis's visit, Samper voiced his disgust with the Clinton administration. In a speech in Cusiana in Davis's presence, Samper expressed his gratitude for Britain's investment, and stressed that its anti-drug aid was "unconditional." Many there were surprised that Samper never mentioned the U.S.-based company Triton, which is a partner in the Cusiana operations, and took it as a deliberate diplomatic affront to the United States.

BP world president Lord Ashburton, who was on the scene, reminded listeners that the British had sent troops to help Francisco de Paula Santander (an agent of British secret intelligence head and pervert Jeremy Bentham) in the war of independence against Spain. Ashburton praised Samper's political godfather and former President Alfonso López Michelsen (1974-78)—better known as the godfather of the drug trade—for having designed Colombia's oil policy to "improve conditions for international oil investment."

It is said that British "aid" will consist of \$70 million a year, similar to what has been provided until now by the United States. Part of the money will be used by Scotland Yard to train 100 agents of Colombia's DAS (equivalent to the U.S. FBI), and for the British secret service's MI-5 to train elite units of the National Police and Army.

One source said that the special interest in the DAS rural section, is supposedly because British investments are in the countryside. Curiously, the rural DAS is composed largely of "former" narco-terrorists amnestied by the previous government.