
The Samper Pizano File

Colombia's decertified President is a 20-year project of drug legalizers

by Andrea Olivieri

In the aftermath of the Clinton administration's March 1 decision to decertify the government of Ernesto Samper Pizano for its collusion with the drug cartels, the Colombian President is still clinging desperately to power. Faced with growing demands from business, church, and political leaders for him to step down, Samper is employing outright blackmail and terror tactics. Despite this, the scandal of his Presidential campaign receiving a reported \$6 million in drug money, grows daily. But even this scandal is nothing compared to the full story behind Samper, which is enough to not only oust him from the Presidency, but to jail him, along with his sponsors.

Ernesto Samper Pizano is not your run-of-the-mill corrupt politician who just couldn't say no to the cartels. Rather, he is a 20-year pet project of the international drug lobby, nurtured for the purpose of capturing a government and turning it into a launching pad for the legalization of the drug trade in Ibero-America, the United States, and beyond. Samper has been a narco since at least the late 1970s, and associates of Lyndon LaRouche were the first to say so, starting in 1978, when they published the book *Dope, Inc.*, which identified Samper as Colombia's leading drug-legalization lobbyist; later, in a 1984 special report, *EIR* described Samper as "the Colombian contact man for the dope lobby." In 1979, *EIR* published an interview that Samper had given to a New York journalist, in which he urged a drug-legalization strategy that specifically targeted the United States (see accompanying excerpts). And, in a 1991 *EIR Special Report*, "Bush's Surrender to Dope, Inc.: How U.S. Policy is Destroying Colombia," Samper was described as key to launching the legalization drive in Latin America.

How did *EIR* know back then that Samper was in bed with the cartels? Simple: He ran their campaign for drug legalization.

Working for 'The Octopus'

When Samper was first boosted into the Presidency of Colombia's National Association of Financial Institutes (ANIF) in 1977, it was already clear that the 25-year-old had been selected for a purpose. His mentor was the former

Colombian President Alfonso López Michelsen, a.k.a. "The Godfather," whose 1974-78 reign paved the way for that country's takeover by the drug cartels, and whose drug-tainted second bid for office in 1982 was managed by Samper.

In 1977, ANIF was the think-tank and lobbying machine of the powerful Grancolombiano financial group, headed by López Michelsen's first cousin, banker Jaime Michelsen Uribe. Grancolombiano, known as "The Octopus" because its tentacles extend into every aspect of national economic life, was the chief beneficiary of the financial "reform" López implemented as President.

That reform not only created a legal laundering mechanism for drug dollars through the Central Bank's so-called "sinister window," but also created the so-called *financieras*, off-shoots of the major banking houses through which a great deal of dirty money flowed. According to a 1982 evaluation by the London-based *Latin America Weekly Report*, those *financieras* provided "a link between the classically conservative Colombian establishment and the underground parallel economy, drawing funds from contraband and drug smuggling. They flourish in an atmosphere of high interest rates, lax controls, and feverish speculation," precisely what López's reforms provided.

No one was surprised when the Grancolombiano Group, under López's benevolent eye, became Colombia's leading financial institution. With that financial—and political—power behind it, ANIF under Samper ran a high-profile campaign, including international tours, symposiums, research projects, and publications, to win the country's elites over to the idea of legalizing drugs. In December 1983, Grancolombiano's dirty financial practices were laid bare by the Belisario Betancur government. Arrest warrants were issued, but Jaime Michelsen and his top henchmen were allowed to flee overseas.

By this time, however, Samper was already well on his way up the political ladder, first as López Michelsen's Presidential campaign manager (1982), then as Bogotá city councilman (1984), then as senator (1986). Samper tested the Presidential waters in 1990, but was swept out to sea by the anti-

drug flood that followed, after the drug cartels assassinated front-running candidate Luis Carlos Galán, their staunch opponent. Samper's predecessor in the Presidency, César Gaviria (1990-94), made him development minister, and later ambassador to Spain; Samper resigned in early 1994 to run for the Presidency on behalf of Dope, Inc.

Back in the 1970s, Samper had privately boasted that his legalization campaign "is what will make me President. I am going to be President, it's already decided." Twenty years later, that project was about to come to fruition.

Legalization and the cartels

Despite the arguments of today's drug-legalization lobby that decriminalizing the drug trade would put an end to the narcotics cartels, it is a fact that the drug cartels would like *nothing better* than to legalize their trade and win a place on the world's stock exchanges, alongside the other cartels. This was made explicit in 1982 when, as López's campaign manager, Samper had accepted substantial contributions from the drug bosses of the Medellín Cartel, in return for López's pledge to legalize drugs if returned to office. There are numerous instances in which Colombia's drug cartels, or their representatives, have come out explicitly in favor of drug legalization:

- In 1984, after the cartel assassination of the country's leading anti-drug fighter, Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, López Michelsen met clandestinely with Lara's assassins to discuss an amnesty for the narco-bosses and legalization of their trade. A July 1984 editorial in the Medellín newspaper *Orientación Liberal*, run by López Michelsen networks, attempted to motivate such an arrangement with the cartels: "We must ask ourselves if the country can afford the luxury of burying immense sums of money when production is stagnant and unemployment corroding our cities and countryside."

- In October 1989, it was revealed in the media that Joaquín Vallejo Arbeláez, a long-standing member of the Colombian ruling elite, had been serving as a secret interlocutor for the drug chieftains. Vallejo was the spiritual godfather to Pablo Escobar, the late head of the Medellín cocaine cartel. A summary of Vallejo's negotiations with the cartel, with details handwritten by Vallejo himself, included the cartel's proposal to "facilitate" a deal whereby the United States would legalize cocaine consumption and the Colombian government would get the monopoly on export of the drug.

- Strong legalization advocates include leaders of the "formerly" narco-terrorist M-19, which garnered international headlines in November 1985 when one of its commando squads seized and occupied Colombia's Justice Palace, headquarters of the Supreme Court and national legal archives. During that siege, half the Supreme Court magistrates were massacred and the archives, especially the dossiers on petitions to extradite drug lords to the United States for trial, were gutted by fire. It was said at the time that the terrorist action was financed by the drug cartels.

In February 1996, the city council of Pasto called for drug legalization. The mayor of Pasto, "former" M-19 head Antonio Navarro Wolf, co-chaired the 1991 Constituent Assembly which was massively bribed by the drug cartels to constitutionally ban extradition. In the same month, Carlos Alonso Lucio also called for drug legalization. A "former" terrorist and the M-19's sole representative in Congress, Lucio took out expensive full-page advertisements in Colombia's two leading dailies, which called for an end to the war on drugs, and legalization as a "solution" to Colombia's problems. He had just met with the imprisoned heads of the Cali Cartel days earlier.

- Still another ardent legalization advocate is Colombian novelist Gabriel García Márquez, who urges that "all countries agree to global and instantaneous legalization" of drugs. García Márquez, or "Gabo" as he is known, has long been a public relations man for Cuba's Castro regime, which spawned the narco-terrorist São Paulo Forum. But Gabo has also served as public relations man directly for the Colombian drug cartels. In March 1995, he arranged for eight U.S. journalists to visit the imprisoned Ochoa brothers of the Medellín Cartel, who announced that as soon as they got out of jail, they would devote themselves "full time" to campaigning for drug legalization!

- Then, of course, there is Gustavo de Greiff, former Colombian prosecutor general and currently Samper's ambassador to Mexico. De Greiff has campaigned for drug legalization for years, including at least one trip to the United States to address the Drug Policy Foundation, the U.S. legalization lobby. De Greiff not only used his position as prosecutor general in 1994 to sweep under the rug the mounting evidence that the drug cartel financed Samper's Presidential campaign, but De Greiff himself was a business partner with Cali Cartel chieftain Gilberto Rodríguez Orejuela in the early 1980s, in an airline company called Aerolíneas El Dorado Ltd.

One of the tragedies in Colombia today is that many of the political and business elites who are truly horrified by the Cali Cartel takeover of their country, only yesterday endorsed many of the cartel's arguments for drug legalization—in particular the free-trade axioms behind those arguments—which allowed Samper and his cohorts to get a stranglehold over Colombia. Whether the arguments are pseudo-nationalist diatribes against the "consumer nations" of the North, appeals for "social justice" for the oppressed marijuana and coca growers, or obeisance to the "relentless economics" of the market, they are all concoctions of Dope, Inc.

Today, these elites are squirming uncomfortably to find their arguments echoed by the likes of M-19 terrorist Carlos Lucio, but they were blind and deaf for two decades, while the current catastrophe was wrought before their eyes. President Clinton's decertification of the Samper government gives these elites an opportunity to redeem themselves: Confronting the false axioms promoted by the drug legalizers would be a useful first step.

Samper wanted drugs legalized in 1979

The following are excerpts from an interview with Ernesto Samper Pizano, then the president of Colombia's National Association of Financial Institutes, in New York in 1979, which a journalist made available to EIR, back then. The full text of the interview is published in the March 4, 1996 issue of the weekly newspaper New Federalist.

Q: Now, in your opinion about the legalization of marijuana and so on, are these the opinions of the association, or your personal opinions?

Samper: These are the opinions of my institution. We have a team of investigators, people who are doing research at this moment, and they have completed their task and made their conclusions, and (ours) may be the only social and economic study about the problem of marijuana in Colombia. The main conclusion was that the only way that Colombia can solve the marijuana problem is to legalize it. But, that I propose to be done jointly with the United States, not only by Colombia. I propose legalization, but with the U.S., because we don't think it's a solution only to legalize it in Colombia. . . .

Q: Now you propose specifically that marijuana should be legalized, and then the government would tax it, and you would take that tax money under government control and apply it to various needs of the country. . . .

Samper: Yes, that's the basic idea. But let me say something. Some people think that we are proposing legalization because we are interested in the money from the marijuana. Even if we did not receive any money from the marijuana . . . we would have made a good investment, because we have a big ethical problem and we have to think about \$200 million a year in the enforcement campaign. . . .

Q: . . . You say that this would require a joint effort of both governments to implement this legalization proposal that you have. . . . Are you in contact with people . . . in the United States, who are also proposing this?

Samper: Well, I have many invitations from many people to discuss the drug economy and marijuana with them. Many people are only interested in knowing about our thesis; and others have a real interest in legalization. You know NORML [National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws]? . . . They are for legalization. . . .

Q: Well, what about people in the government? We cer-

tainly have many Congressmen here who have—well, as I think you know, we have decriminalization. Now, this is not legalization, but it's a certain kind of step. . . .

Samper: It's the same thing. . . . Let me explain. It's a problem of balance. Our problem is that we are trying to contain the supply when the demand is not under control. And you have many symptoms here that the marijuana is rising in the street. You have decriminalization in 11 states and you also have 11 states that permit marijuana for medical uses. And that is the rising of demand. Right? . . .

Q: You're familiar with the NORML lawsuit against the State Department about the question of paraquat . . . ?

Samper: . . . I think that paraquat is the most inhumane drug we could utilize as the solution to the marijuana problem. It is a defoliant and it kills only the small plants, but the big plants assimilate it and survive. Thus, it becomes a question of consumption, because you export the poisoned marijuana. . . .

Q: What about the proposal to put a coloring dye in the paraquat so that it can be detected?

Samper: I think that it's very difficult to separate the marijuana with paraquat from the marijuana without it. I think that we can't use paraquat.

Q: You don't think it should be used? Because the Mexican government did eliminate a great deal of the Mexican marijuana coming into the United States. In fact, it's said that because of the Mexican paraquat spraying, the growing shifted to Colombia. So, why could Colombia not start a paraquat-spraying program? . . .

Samper: Well, the first answer is that we are not yet convinced that we shall eliminate marijuana. . . . I think that legalization would be a way, because, in any case, there is still a lot of consumption and the only way to eliminate marijuana is to eliminate consumption. And I don't think consumption is about to be eliminated. That is the first point. . . . But, if you present the issue as a social problem, as a problem which is causing more danger to American society, with the enforcement campaign than with legalization, you can prove to public opinion that you are working on the drug issue in the right way. . . .

You can see, if you look at the way that legalization has been going, that when elections are about to happen, legalization is very bad, but when the election passes, legalization goes up. Right? And I think that here in the United States . . . [there are] people [who] will have influence on the advisers to the White House. This professor who . . . sent his paper [to a seminar sponsored by Samper in Bogotá, in March 1979], Prof. Norman Zinberg: He's a professor at Harvard and he is for the legalization of all drugs, not only marijuana, but also cocaine, LSD, all drugs. And he has a lot of influence with the advisers of the White House. . . .