

Samper Pizano: 'legalization is the solution'

The following is the text of an interview with Ernesto Samper Pizano, the president of Colombia's National Association of Financial Institutes. The interview was made available to Executive Intelligence Review by a news source in New York.

Q: *Mr. Samper, you direct a very important banking association in Colombia, the National Association of Financial Institutes (NIF), correct?*

A: Yes.

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

A: 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

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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 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. Is that your basic idea?*

A: 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 campaign. You understand?

Q: *Yes, the U.S. also spends money on this?*

A: Yes, about \$2 million of the \$200 million that Colombia spends. And that is the budget of the Justice Ministry and the Health Ministry. We need that money to have social programs and investments. And in this effort, we have converted the Sierra Nevada into a small Vietnam. You know, we are killing our own farmers, who are not receiving their share of the marijuana business.

Q: *Well, let me get on to something else. You say that this would require a joint effort of both governments to implement this legalization proposal that you have. Who do you think in the United States will work on this? Are you in contact with people, or are other people in contact with people in the United States, who are also proposing this?*

A: 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?...They are for legalization. ...

Q: *Well, what about people in the government? We certainly 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 a step. ...*

A: It's the same thing. ...

Q: *You feel it's the same?*

A: Yes, I think so. 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: *Do you think that the Carter administration would ever do it (legalize—ed.) though, or do you think it will take a new administration before this is implemented?*

A: I don't know. I know that the position of the Carter administration is against legalization, but I think that there are many ways to find a solution to the problem without (immediate) legalization. For example, we can make joint contracts to export marijuana for medical uses. You know that the general contract regulating marijuana is the Geneva Convention. And the Geneva Convention permits the export of marijuana for medical uses. ...

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

A: ...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 proposals to put a coloring dye in the paraquat so that it can be detected?*

A: 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 program 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 instead of your approach?...*

A: Well, the first answer is that we are not yet convinced that we shall eliminate marijuana.

Q: *Oh, I see. I didn't realize you were making the distinction. In other words you don't think that marijuana is so bad.*

A: No. I am not sure that we should do away with it. 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 the consumption. And I don't think consumption is about to be eliminated. That is the first point. ...

Q: *The problem is, who's going to do it, who's going to carry it out? Who's going to be the president who says his administration will call for legalization of marijuana?... In*

terms of Senator Kennedy, who is making a presidential bid, how do you think it is possible for a person like him to appear publicly in favor of marijuana?

A: Yes, I think that it is very difficult with the marijuana issue to obtain political support. It is very difficult.

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 advisors to the White House. This professor who went down there (to a seminar sponsored by Samper in Bogota, Colombia during March—

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ed.)...he could not go, but sent his paper, Professor 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 advisors of the White House. ...

Q: *But, we have politicians here in New York—for example, Assemblyman Franz Leichter. ...He proposes to bring the marijuana into liquor stores, that it should be sold like liquor, under state control in the liquor stores.*

A: Ah ha! I was talking last week with the ambassador, or the representative of the United States at the Inter-American Development Bank, Mr. Duncan, I think, and he said that to me. ... He said that he was 100 percent in accord with my thesis, with my program, but that he didn't believe that the government of President Carter would legalize marijuana. But, that it would study, possibly it would make a study of the feasibility of the government of the U.S. buying all the marijuana crop and selling it here (in the U.S.—ed.).

Q: *But, then the World Bank's proposal for substitution of crops—you don't believe that would work for the reasons you said before?*

A: No. I don't honestly believe the World Bank on that subject. ... But, I think that the person who is nearest to the proposal for legalization is Senator Kennedy.