

## Miami indictments hit 'Medellín Cartel'

by Jeffrey Steinberg

On Nov. 18, 1986, a federal grand jury in Miami, Florida, unsealed a 39-count indictment originally handed down on Aug. 25, 1986 against nine of the world's leading cocaine traffickers, named as the directors of the "Medellín Cartel." The nine indictees are: Colombians Jorge Ochoa-Vásquez, Fabio Ochoa-Vásquez, Juan David Ochoa-Vásquez, Pablo Escobar Gaviria, Carlos Lehder, and Rafael Cardona-Salazar; Mexican Gonzalo Rodríguez-Gacha; former Nicaragua Vice Minister of the Interior in the Sandinista government, Federico Vaughn; and a "John Doe" a.k.a. "Joto."

The indictment charges that between May 1981 and April 1985, the Medellín Cartel manufactured and imported into the United States over 47 tons of cocaine, established an elaborate cocaine-processing network in South America and Central America (including Nicaragua), created an extensive transportation system constituting a virtual private air force capable of averting U.S. government drug interdiction systems, and controlled wholesale warehouse facilities in the Caribbean and continental United States that distributed cocaine to street trafficking organizations from coast to coast.

The indictment, which includes RICO (continuing criminal enterprise) counts, additionally charges Medellín Cartel members with the murders of two men, at least one of whom was a key government witness against the cartel. Rafael Cardona-Salazar is accused of the Dec. 25, 1978 murder in Dade County, Florida, of Antonio Arles Vargas.

Cartel kingpins Fabio Ochoa-Vásquez, Pablo Escobar Gaviria, and Cardona-Salazar are all charged with the Feb. 19, 1986 murder of Adler Berriman Seal. Seal, a former Green Beret and expert pilot, had been involved in the Cartel's initial opening up of laboratories, warehouses and airstrips in Nicaragua in cooperation with Interior Minister Tomás Borges' chief deputy, Federico Vaughn. According to the indictment, this "Sandinista Connection" had been established in May 1984—within weeks of the April 30 assassination of Colombia's Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla at the hands of the Medellín Cartel, and an American collaborator, Harold Rosenthal.

Seal had provided federal authorities with evidence critical to the 1984 indictment and later extradition effort against Jorge Ochoa-Vásquez. Seal's assassination in Baton Rouge, Louisiana dashed that extradition effort.

Among the overt acts listed in the indictment is a series of meetings in Miami, Florida and Medellín, Colombia involving Jorge Ochoa-Vásquez and an American communications specialist named James W. Cooper. In December 1980, Cooper established a long-range navigational communications system between Acandí, Colombia and the continental United States to track the long-distance drug flights and assist the pilots in averting DEA radar tracking and intercept systems.

### Confirms *EIR* reports

Cooper's role in the Medellín Cartel confirms reports first published by *EIR* as early as 1975, that out-of-the-way airports throughout central and eastern Pennsylvania were at the center of the international drugs-for-guns trade.

According to an article by Lindsey Gruson in the Nov. 20, 1986 edition of the *New York Times*, Cooper was sent to Medellín by Frederick Luytjes, the owner of Air America, Inc., a private airline and custom air service company headquartered at the Scranton-Wilkes Barre International airport in Avoca, Pennsylvania.

According to separate federal indictments handed down in the central district of Pennsylvania in August of this year, Cooper's navigational communications system was interlinked with a facility at Luytjes's secluded home in Deer Lake, Pennsylvania. A leading member of the Medellín Cartel, Rigoberto Correa-Arroyave, in early 1985 relocated to the United States where he oversaw the Air America flights between Colombia and Pennsylvania. Those flights, according to the Pennsylvania indictments, accounted for an estimated 7.5 tons of cocaine entering the United States market over a several-year period in the mid-1980s.

Federal authorities now acknowledge that the 200 small commercial airports dotting the eastern and central Pennsylvania landscape have emerged since the 1981 creation of the southern Florida drug interdiction task force under Vice-President George Bush as favorite landing spots and hideaways for big-time cocaine traffickers.

Federal authorities also admit that the unsealing of the Florida indictments is intended to in part increase the pressure on the recently inaugurated Barco government of Colombia to proceed ahead with extradition of cocaine kingpins.

These latest indictments furthermore provide a more detailed map of the multi-hundred-billion-dollar dope-for-arms apparatus which operates in the length and breadth of the Western Hemisphere. Taken in the context of previous indictments of Luytjes, Harold Rosenthal, and others, the ground is now laid for a full-scale assault on the top levels of the international drug cartel—including the bankers who still remain untouched.