

Free Trade Spawns Masses Of Marauding ‘Maras’

by Gretchen Small

In his historic 15-point anti-drug war-plan for the Western Hemisphere issued in March 1985,* U.S. statesman Lyndon LaRouche, Jr. warned: “The greater political threat to democracy in Venezuela, Colombia, Peru, and other countries, is the use of the billions of revenues held by the drug traffickers to fund terrorist armies, and to bring corrupted military officers into right-wing coup plots directed by former officials of the Nazi regime of Germany.”

LaRouche called for an alliance of the nations of the Americas—an alliance in which the absolute sovereignty of each be respected, he specified—to crush the power of this “enemy quasi-state.” This war must include the confiscation of its financial and economic resources, the which are to be allotted to the needs of economic development, in basic economic infrastructure, agriculture, and goods-producing industry. Should that not be done, “the nations of Central and South America will each and all either fall under bloody, Nazi-like dictatorships, or will be destroyed through more or less perpetual civil war,” LaRouche forecast.

The needed alliance was not formed, sabotaged from within the United States by precisely the financier interests who, since the 1970s, have fostered the spread of a drug empire across the Americas, from which they have reaped billions in profits. As LaRouche warned, the whirlwinds of hell are today engulfing the Americas, including the United States.

Emergency law enforcement meetings are being held across North and Central America, as governments attempt to respond to the rapid spread of the “*maras*”—transnational

gangs of thousands of largely Hispanic youth, moving back and forth across borders from Panama up to the United States, and now into Canada. These are not Hispanic gangs in general, but a specific structure of gangs, founded in Los Angeles, California, which have become an integral part of the dope and illegal weapons trade in the Americas, and are reported to be moving into Europe’s prostitution rings, as well.

The origin, extent, and bestiality of the *maras* provides a hideous picture of a New Dark Age: It is an omen—so far, numbering only in the hundreds of thousands—of what LaRouche has warned will soon become tens of millions of homeless people migrating across the globe, in search of a life where there is none to be had, if free trade and globalization are not dumped.

Estimates of their numbers range from a conservative 100,000, to 600,000. Distinguished by hideous tattoos, and using Satanic hand-signals as part of their cult rituals, these gangs are used by migrant-labor traffickers to terrorize, maim, or kill migrants who don’t pay up. Some of these youth have become so dehumanized that they have adopted beheadings as a means of reprisal against rivals and opponents. They terrorize whole towns in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Mexico, including the capitals of several of these nations. Now *maras* are reported to have put out orders to kill policemen in two counties which border the U.S. capital itself.

People were forewarned. Today, the problem is vastly greater than in the mid-1980s. Governments now face not only the extraordinary military and economic power of the drug trade, but millions of citizens who have fallen under the control of the drug trade. Not only is it the children of Central America who have been abandoned into the hell of the *maras*, stealing the very future of the region, but there are millions of peasants throughout Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Peru

* “A Proposed Multi-National Strategic Operation Against the Drug Traffic for the Western Hemisphere.” March 9, 1985. See the December 2001 LaRouche in 2004 Special Report, “To Stop Terrorism—Shut Down ‘Dope, Inc.’ ”

for whom the drug trade provides their only livelihood and which controls their lives through narco-terrorist forces. Millions are also trapped in the slums, the *favelas*, in Brazil's major cities, run by the local equivalent of the *maras*.

In their desperation—and in some cases, spurred precisely by the Nazi networks of which LaRouche warned—some have launched a campaign for imposing the death penalty upon gang members as the solution.

Could a society survive, which orders the mass execution of its own *children*, as a solution to the savagery created by its own policies? For experts in the *maras* agree that they are, by and large, *children*. In the most dramatic case, a May 2004 study by an anti-drug expert of El Salvador found that 51.9% of the *mara* members in her nation are between 11 and 15 years old; 2% are only 7 to 10 years old; and the remaining 49.6% are under 25!

It is time to face reality: Without a radical reversal of the last 40 years of free-trade economic policy, of which the drug trade is but a subsumed part, there is no strategy that can succeed in saving the children of the Americas, its future, from this hell.

Product of a Policy

Neo-conservatives and anti-immigrant racists are using the *maras* crisis to promote Samuel Huntington's thesis that the United States' greatest enemy is Hispanics, within and beyond its borders. Harvard's Huntington, who promoted the lie that a "clash of civilizations" between Muslims and the West is inevitable, named Hispanics, the largest ethnic minority in the United States, as the new "enemy image" for the United States, in his May 2004 book, *Who Are We?* (See Anton Chaitkin's review in *EIR*, May 21, 2004.)

Playing on fear, these circles put out the line that al-Qaeda terrorists have hired the *maras* to get them into the United States—the truth of which assertion no government in the region, that of the United States included, has been able to prove. (A U.S. military officer knowledgeable in this area told this news service that U.S. intelligence today is so inadequate, that people could only guess whether it is true or not, and it would not even be an educated guess.)

None of that has stopped the radical free-traders of the Mont Pelerin Society's Manhattan Institute from churning out articles about "The Illegal Alien Crime Wave" and the "Immigrant Gang Plague," which scream that "tens of thousands of illegal farmworkers and dishwashers bring thousands of brutal assailants and terrorists in their wake," to justify their demand for mass deportations and sealing the U.S. southern border.

The truth is, as Honduran President Ricardo Maduro reiterated in a press conference with Mexican President Vicente Fox on Nov. 11, that the *maras* are a problem "exported by the United States." Maduro pointed out that their headquarters are located in Los Angeles, and their violent actions in Central America are done in consultation with headquarters.

LaRouche goes much further. "This is a New Dark Ages phenomenon. And it was done by the U.S. government," LaRouche stated on Oct. 24. "This is not just an operation. This is a *policy*. The policy is to destroy the nation-state, to destroy the idea of the nation-state. The intention is to plunge the whole planet into a New Dark Age. You are not going to get solutions, unless you change the situation in the United States."

The specific structure of the *maras* in question (as opposed to pre-existing gangs) was founded in Los Angeles in the 1980s, by children of the million or so poor refugees who fled to the United States, to escape the civil wars in Central America. Those brutal wars, which *EIR* documented in the early 1980s in several studies on El Salvador and Guatemala, were no "local" affairs. These were wars financed and fomented, like the "dirty wars" between terrorists and right-wing military governments in South America in the same period, by foreign financier interests out to crush Ibero-America's capability to resist the sudden, sharp increase in foreign looting which followed the imposition of the floating-exchange-rate monetary system in 1971-72, and the subsequent global oil price hike.

In April 1983, LaRouche, in his capacity as chairman of the Advisory Board of the National Democratic Policy Committee (NDPC), issued a four-point program for ending the slaughter in Central America. The United States, he said, should cooperate with its neighbors in the Contadora Group (Colombia, Venezuela, Panama, and Mexico) to shut down arms-trafficking in the region, including Israeli trafficking to all sides of the conflict. The U.S. must also crack down on the agencies fomenting the war: the Jesuits in the United States (including those operating out of the notorious United Brands Corporation) running the Liberation Theology networks, and their "opposite numbers" among the Moonie and Christian fundamentalist cults swarming over the region. With some stability restored, the Contadora Group and the United States must help Central America undertake the great projects needed to develop the transportation, energy, and agro-industrial infrastructure of Central America.

LaRouche followed with his 1985 hemispheric anti-drug plan. In 1986, working with patriotic U.S. and Guatemalan military circles, he designed a pilot project, called Operation Guatusa, to demonstrate how the war plan could work. Follow-up on LaRouche's plan was sunk by the Iran-Contra team of Lt. Col. Oliver North, then-Vice President George H.W. Bush, and Nestor Sanchez.

The problem was, that the Reagan Administration had decided in 1983 to hand Central America policy over to Henry Kissinger and Vice President Bush. Kissinger's Bipartisan Commission on Central America decreed that Central America was fit only for plantation agriculture, Hong Kong-like free-trade zones so useful for drug-trafficking and drug-money laundering, and sweatshops (today called *maquiladoras*). Facing spreading war, and watching their already poor

economies shipping net capital out because of increased debt and the oil price, the Central Americans' exodus toward the United States got under way.

Now, Add Bush's Iran-Contra Dope

Even before they arrived in the United States, the victims of these wars who fled to the United States, had already seen "carnage that even Faces of Death chose not to use," as one former gang member put it. And those who went to Los Angeles, already on its way to earning its title of "gang capital of the world," arrived in the very years that crack cocaine was introduced into the ghettos of the United States, starting precisely with LA.

The spread of crack was one of the most organized drug operations ever seen: In a few short weeks in the pre-Christmas rush of 1985, crack hit the streets in a score of America's most burned-out urban neighborhoods. With an average purity of 90%, the drug is instantly addicting. It's cheap, and easy enough for local retail dealers to manufacture it. The franchise to manufacture and market crack was given to a nationwide infrastructure of black and Hispanic gangs.

With crack came a subculture of unprecedented violence. The crack itself induced wild mood swings in its users, fueled paranoia, rage, and irrationalism. With fast profits to be made from crack manufacturing and sales, violent urban youth gangs began to spring up everywhere.

As that was done in the United States, the "parallel government" networks operating under then-Vice President Bush set up yet another instrument for war in Central America, the Nicaraguan Contras, an operation, as *EIR* exposed in the 1980s, paid for by trafficking Colombian cocaine. It was in August 1996, when the *San Jose Mercury* blew the story of how those Contra networks had flooded the streets of Los Angeles with crack cocaine, that the full extent of the story was known. *EIR* pulled its extensive files to put together the full story of how crack cocaine was deliberately introduced into the United States, in order to develop a new market for the cocaine being trafficked by Bush's secret government Contra operation. The amazing story was told in *EIR*'s 1996 Special Report, *Would a President Bob Dole Prosecute Drug Super-Kingpin George Bush?*

Jobs! Create Jobs!

The early 1990s marked another turning point in the development of the *maras* structure. Central America's wars were ended in the early 1990s, but with "peace" accords which brought no economic development, only more free trade, a giant black market in weapons, and tens of thousands of unemployed former guerrillas and former soldiers. The drug traffickers had a field day.

At the same time, in its infinite wisdom, the U.S. government began a program of mass deportation of the young, criminalized Central American gang members back to their countries of origin, which had nothing to offer them, and no

capacity to handle the crime. Here, unemployed guerrillas and soldiers supplied the *maras* with a new wave of battle-hardened cadres and a qualitatively more sophisticated level of military training.

Just as the mass deportation policy of the 1990s spread Los Angeles's highly organized gang structures back into Central America, so the "zero-tolerance" policies adopted by terrorized governments in El Salvador and Honduras, have simply driven thousands of *maras* north into Guatemala, Mexico, and back into the United States.

Law enforcement is needed, but until millions of good jobs are created, around a crash program to build infrastructure in Central America and the United States—jobs which provide training and a source of pride of participating in building one's country—there will be no solution. Guatemalan Planning Minister Hugo Beteta told the *Washington Post* in October that more than half of the citizens of his nation are under 18 years old, and most of them have no chance to get a job. Poor youths see two choices: Migrate to the United States, or join the drug trade, he said. "And if you get tough on migration, what is left for them?"

Today, crack is spreading through Central America. In Guatemala, drugs are now a leading domestic problem. The country is the leading transshipment point in Central America for Colombian cocaine being sent to the United States. Because traffickers pay people for the trafficking in drugs, an estimated 10% of the 150-200 tons a year moving through the country, now stays there. So, too, drug-money laundering through the local economy has soared, spreading corruption. Government officials report that the *maras* are a leading component of the drug trade, used to distribute the drugs locally, and to tie down law enforcement personnel, leaving the drug lords with a freer hand. *Maras'* use of crack cocaine is soaring, making their actions even more brutal.

Likewise, the capital of Honduras is being overrun by these gangs. President Maduro ordered a police mobilization to protect public buses in October, after bus drivers refused to enter several sections of the city, because the *maras* were systematically stopping the buses, to demand that drivers and passengers pay a "war tax," and killing those who refused to do so. Attacks on buses dropped with the police presence, but trucks and people on the street are now being assaulted. In a country where unemployment and under-employment was officially registered at 42% in 2003—and where others estimate that as many as 70 to 80% of the people do not have work!—for every youth gang member jailed, many more will be recruited.

The anguish of the people of these nations is captured by the recent report in the Honduran daily *La Tribuna* that many of the criminal gang members "were in the past normal youth, who because of the lack of opportunities, opted to forge a criminal career. There are neighbors who remember with nostalgia many children who over time became transformed into rapists, assassins, and drug addicts."