

Open letter to UN Division of Human Rights

Warren Hamerman, Organizational Secretary of the U.S. Labor Party, submitted an open letter to the United Nations Division of Human Rights on May 10, charging that the wave of terror in Colombia was launched to secure a drug economy. The U.S. Labor Party and its fraternal parties in Colombia, Mexico, Canada, and Europe are waging an international campaign to bring public attention and immediately bring an end to this gross violation of human rights.

On March 30 and 31, and on April 1 of this year, 1,554 delegates from every region of Colombia gathered in Bogota to participate in a Forum on Human Rights and Democratic Liberties, and to analyze the growing evidence of widespread torture, illegal arrests, and other violations of human rights in that country. Eminent individuals of all parties and political persuasions—ranging from jurists, trade unionists, and medical doctors to a number of Senators and Congressmen and a respected Conservative ex-Foreign Minister—reached the definitive conclusion that current repressive measures being carried out by the Colombian military are in flagrant violation of the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights (to which Colombia is a signatory), and that there is in fact a grave danger that the military may soon decide to finish off Colombia's frail democracy altogether through a Pinochet-style military coup.

The purpose of the U.S. Labor Party in writing you this open letter is to publicly second these charges and to present you with solid documentary evidence from the torture victims themselves—of which we enclose only a small portion of that presented to the Forum, and which is available for your consideration. More particularly, it is our purpose to draw attention to the causes of the terrible repressive nightmare that is now engulfing one of the last democracies in Latin America—and that will engulf the entire world unless those causes are eliminated.

As the U.S. Labor Party showed in a July 1978 publication, "There Are No Human Rights Under the IMF or World Bank," the principal and worst violators of human rights in the Third World are the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the City of London and Wall Street financial interests that direct these institutions. Colombia is no exception: World Bank/City of London policy is to turn Colombia into a marijuana-producing paradise, and to terrorize

and destroy any political forces that actually or potentially oppose this plan.

The single, most outstanding fact about the hair-raising tortures now being executed in Colombia is that its perpetrators are identical to those who argue openly for the legalization of marijuana production in Colombia, and for the country's conversion into a total drug economy along the lines encouraged by the World Bank. Those forces are associated with feared Colombian Defense Minister and would-be Pinochet, General Luis Carlos Camacho Leyva, and his political mentor and controller, Conservative Party leader and self-avowed Falangist, Alvaro Gomez Hurtado.

The evidence from the Forum

As of this writing, the government of President Julio Cesar Turbay Ayala continues to deny strenuously the existence of torture in Colombia. On Feb. 23, 1979, Defense Minister Camacho Leyva answered a foreign critic that "we are respectful of the law and we protect freedom of expression, of assembly, and of association"; he then denied the existence of "supposed tortures" in Colombia.

On March 12, Secretary to the Presidency Alvaro Perez Vives challenged "those who claim to possess proof [of torture] to present it.... I have announced and I reiterate, because the President wants it that way, that if any proof is presented, the implicated officials will be implacably sanctioned."

In the course of proceedings at the Forum on Human Rights, verbal and written testimony was taken from dozens of victims of outrageous tortures (see below). As a rule they had been arrested in the dead of night, taken to various military detention camps, and questioned about alleged links to one of a number of terrorist groups. Standard operating procedure has reportedly been to force prisoners to stand for anywhere from 24 to 36 hours at a stretch; to be kept awake for similarly long periods of time; to be hung by their arms, which are tied behind their backs; and to receive brutal beatings and electroshock on sensitive parts of the body, including the genitals.

Further, there are reports of extensive violations of due process, of inadequate access to legal counsel, and of threats and harassment of lawyers defending torture victims.

Report after report presented to the Forum had passages like the following, taken from one victim's

account:

They hit me very hard in the head, chest, and legs with their fists and revolvers, and they threatened to kill me. . . . (Then) they stuck my head in a tank full of cold water, and applied electrical discharges to the tank. . . .

After days of examining countless cases of similar testimony, the Forum's Committee on Tortures concluded: "Based on denunciations, backed up by abundant documentary evidence, the commission has concluded that physical and psychological torture is being systematically employed in Colombia. . . ."

Two weeks later, and in the face of such massive public evidence, Interior Minister German Zea told the press: "I have received information that there have been excesses committed by some authorities, and I have personally investigated these charges. I can assure all Colombians that, if the tortures are proven, those responsible will be sanctioned and dismissed immediately."

In mid-April, the Union of Workers of Antioquia charged the military police with torturing one of their leaders by forcing him to strip and sit naked on an ant hill for almost 30 minutes. In the *only* case to date where the government has admitted the existence of torture, the soldier responsible was investigated and found guilty as charged—and imprisoned for 8 days for his crimes!

The political objective

In late 1975, the international financial mafia which runs the world drug trade—based in the City of London and the notorious Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation—targeted Colombia to replace Mexico as the main supplier of marijuana for the U.S. market. Mexican President Echeverria that year had launched a successful drug eradication campaign, and so the overlords of "Dope, Inc." set about leveling all Colombian opposition to converting that nation into Mexico's replacement as a drug-producing hothouse.

In September 1975, for example, the anti-drug Inspector General of Colombia's Armed Forces, Gen. Rincon Quiñones, was assassinated—allegedly by urban terrorists, who to this day have neither been identified nor captured.

But the most serious obstacle to taking over Colombia for drug production has been that country's well-organized labor movement, and in particular the Colombian Communist Party (PCC). Although it is only in the last year that these forces have begun *explicitly* to denounce the growing dominance of the drug trade in their country, their unwillingness to tolerate World Bank-imposed austerity and their demands for development of Colombia's industry and agriculture have constituted from the beginning a tremendous stumbling block to Dope, Inc.'s designs.

On May 1, 1976, Colombia's best known trade union leader, José Raquel Mercado, was kidnapped

and murdered—again by "urban guerrillas"—only weeks after he had called for an unprecedented alliance of the country's four trade union confederations.

In September 1978, the new Turbay government used its authority under the existing official State of Siege to institute a broad new Security Statute which attempted to outlaw strikes and the possession or distribution of "subversive propaganda," and which established military justice for all major areas of criminal activity.

The massive roundups and torture of prisoners documented at the Bogotá Forum on Human Rights have occurred under the thin legal veneer of this Security Statute, and under the recently invoked Article 28 of the Colombian Constitution, which permits "even in times of peace but there being grave motives to fear the disturbance of the public peace," the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus for up to 10 days. It is that 10-day period which the military is now exploiting to torture their prisoners into making forced "confessions."

A central target of this campaign has unquestionably been the Colombian Communist Party, whose Sub-Secretary General, Alvaro Vasquez del Real, has been jailed for over a month on flimsy charges of being "linked to terrorism." Many Communist Party members have been detained and tortured. The ultimate objective, as the PCC itself has charged, is to outlaw the party and then attempt to drive it out of existence.

Falangist activism

It is well known inside Colombia that the Liberal Turbay government is in fact dominated by a faction of the Conservative Party led by Alvaro Gomez Hurtado—the son of Colombia's most hated dictator, Laureano Gomez, and a self-avowed Falangist and supporter of Adolf Hitler in his own right. Leading "Alvaristas" today hold such key cabinet posts as Defense (Camacho Leyva), Justice (Escobar Sierra), and Labor (Martin Bernal). These individuals are directly heading up the current witchhunt.

But it is also Alvaro Gomez Hurtado and his allies who are the strongest advocates of the legalization of marijuana production on Colombia—as countless editorials in the "Alvarista" daily *El Siglo* attest. It is the Grancolombiano banking group linked to Alvaro Gomez which is also on record endorsing the marijuana trade, and which has been publicly accused of financial involvement in that multibillion dollar business. And it is the "Alvarista" layers in the military that directly protect—and participate in—drug-running activities.

It is the contention of the U.S. Labor Party that stopping torture in Colombia and putting an end to the drug-runners who currently dominate that nation's economy are one and the same task. Both are intolerable violations of human rights, and for that reason, we call upon the U.N. Division of Human Rights to take vigorous action on both these counts.