

# Decriminalization: Kennedy campaign plank in 1980?

"The only thing that is needed to have (marijuana) legalization is the election of Kennedy ... I have been speaking to many people who are close to Kennedy ... I think he is the candidate who is most likely to put this through."

So stated Ernesto Samper Pizano, director of Colombia's largest financial association, ANIF, to an inquiring reporter last week. While Senator Edward Kennedy's presidential bid may be floundering in the United States, it is gaining in popularity among the drug-pushing networks of South America.

Samper Pizano, the foremost proponent of legalization in Colombia, is on a six-month visit to the United States where he is lobbying in Washington, D.C. and on campuses across the country for legalization of marijuana. Samper Pizano has frequently stated that "our proposal is to legalize on both sides ... it wouldn't be reasonable to legalize marijuana in Colombia and not do it in the U.S. ..." Samper's campaign is coordinated with the "pot lobby" NORML (National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws), which will be sponsoring Samper's prodrug lectures in Washington, D.C. in November. He is also associated with the pornographic prodrug magazine *High Times* which carried an extensive article based on an interview with Samper in its current issue.

## Campaign for drugs

Since Samper Pizano went public with his legalization campaign in Colombia last spring, interests tied to the drug-trafficking networks have surfaced on both the left and right. *Alternativa*, a counterculture paper linked to *High Times*, and *El Siglo*, the newspaper of Conservative Party chieftain Alvaro Gómez Hurtado, are no longer the only campaigners for a "free enterprise" drug economy in Colombia.

The head of the national industrialists' association, the head of the Bogotá stockmarket, the comptroller general of the country, a leader of the nation's powerful coffee federation, and leading columnists have all gone public with their prodrug affiliations. Perhaps most shocking, however, is the call by the president of the Colombian Senate last week for the formation of what he termed a "Latin American Common Market" to

coordinate the legalized production and sale of marijuana and cocaine. Senator Echeverri Correa asserted that the government's antidrug efforts were depriving Colombia of billions of dollars of drug revenues which could go toward "resolving the country's grave social and economic problems." His call also embraces the long-standing proposal by *High Times* for the formation of an Organization of Dope Exporting Countries (ODEC).

## Decrim: 'a matter of principle'

The legalization drive in Colombia is coordinated with prodrug decriminalization allies in the United States. NORML has intensified its efforts to open the legislative pathways for legalization, especially focusing its efforts on enforcement of the so-called Percy amendment, which would cut off funding for drug eradication programs in Mexico, Colombia and elsewhere. Even more significant is the attempt by Kennedy's backers to revive the Senator's "Criminal Reform Code" proposal to federally decriminalize marijuana possession.

The invariant of prodrug lobbying in both countries is Kennedy, whose staff aide on the Senate Judiciary Committee has insisted that decriminalization is "a matter of principle" for the senator. The editor of Colombia's *Alternativa* magazine, Enrique Santos Calderon, wrote last week that "the day is not far away when production and sale of marijuana will be completely legalized in the United States. ... (We must) wait patiently for President Carter, or perhaps President Kennedy, to provide us the magic formula."

Colombia's former President Alberto Lleras Camargo, a longtime friend of the Kennedy family and one of the strongest influences behind the Bogota daily *El Tiempo* which has supported Kennedy's stand on drug legalization, has lavished praise on the British model of legalized "personal dosage." According to a January 1979 commentary by Lleras: "The problem of drugs does not exist in countries, like England, where they do not fight drugs and its control is handed over to doctors who authorize addicts to purchase their small personal quota at reduced prices from the pharmacies."

—Valerie Rush