

Narcotics mob's agents fear LaRouche associates in Colombia

by Valerie Rush

A leading Colombian asset of the U.S. State Department's Agency for International Development (AID) and of the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD), part of the international division of the AFL-CIO, recently held a secret meeting with that country's number-one drug trafficker, Carlos Lehder Rivas, according to informed sources. Lehder, a self-confessed admirer of Adolf Hitler and business partner of the Cuban-based Robert Vesco, is sought by Colombian authorities for his role in the May 1984 assassination of Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla.

The man who met with him is the president of the Union of Colombian Workers (UTC), Victor Acosta, who also maintains a special relationship with AIFLD executive director William Doherty, Jr., known for years as a stringer for the CIA who funnels monies to assets like Acosta within the Ibero-American labor movement.

Acosta's meeting with Lehder has not made the headlines of the Colombian press—yet—but his open letter to former President of Colombia Alfonso López Michelsen demanding a witchhunt against anti-drug fighter Maximiliano Londoño and against the Schiller Institute, founded by the wife of U.S. presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche, already has.

Londoño, former vice-president of the Colombian Anti-Drug Coalition and presently the official economic advisor to Labor Minister Jorge Carrillo, is accused by Acosta of being a "slanderer" of Colombia's most prestigious "true democrats" (namely, López and Acosta himself). The Schiller Institute, an international organization active within the Ibero-American labor movement through its Trade Union Commission, is accused of sabotaging the "authentic values of the country and of the world."

An anti-drug 'conspiracy'

On April 22, the widely read newspaper *El Tiempo*, politically associated with ex-President López Michelsen, published the full text of Acosta's letter under the headline, "Ministerial Adviser Runs Campaign Against López." That letter reads, in part:

"[This letter] is to expose the dark maneuvers of a conspiracy orchestrated by foreign forces against individuals and entities who, in the strictest sense, personify represent-

ative democracy. . . . Some time ago, an anonymous mini-group within national life appeared waving banners totally foreign to our environment, preferring to enter labor strata and trying to make the name of a Mr. LaRouche familiar. . . .

"The visible head of that group in Colombia is Maximiliano Londoño, author, actor and promoter of the public campaign against yourself [López Michelsen] and against the Union of Colombian Workers, the UTC, and particularly against the person of its president, and who has reached the extreme affrontery of irresponsibly declaring that you, Mr. President, are linked to the drug trade and to other vile things of that sort. . . ."

"The disruptive work of Londoño has been reinforced by a so-called Schiller Institute to trap the unwary and carry out through false education a slander campaign against the authentic values of the country and of the entire world, such as Queen Elizabeth of England, Dr. Henry Kissinger. . . ."

The letter goes on to present an ultimatum to President Belisario Betancur to purge Londoño or be smeared with the same slanders: "The subject in mention [Londoño] today occupies a government position as ministerial adviser, from which post he continues his subversive activity. You know, Mr. President [López], that such a position requires backing, and I would dare to think that the presidency is not ignorant of this situation. . . ."

Acosta concludes by calling for the destruction of "the conspiracy whose hidden hands control the marionettes of the subject to whom I have referred."

What do Acosta and López fear?

López Michelsen and Acosta have a special reason to want the purge of anti-drug forces, and particularly of LaRouche's influence, from Colombia. The victory of a number of LaRouche associates in several top positions in the Illinois Democratic Party primary last March 18 not only stunned the world political community, but also convinced the top echelons of Dope, Inc. that a LaRouche presidential victory in 1988 is now a distinct possibility.

LaRouche, the author of a proposed military war plan against the drug trade of the Western Hemisphere, has pledged

to put an end to the United States' dirty operations in Ibero-America. He has especially sworn to end the interference of AIFLD's drug-tainted thugs in the Ibero-American labor movement, interference which, by spreading corruption inside the democratic labor confederations, has favored the growth of Communist influence over the trade-unions of the continent. LaRouche's pledges make the likes of Acosta and López very nervous.

López Michelsen's qualifications as "Godfather" of the Colombian drug trade can be traced back at least to 1974, the year he entered the presidency on the coattails of his father's reputation as one of Colombia's best 20th-century Presidents. López Michelsen, however, proved to be cut of very different cloth. One of his first measures in office was to decree an extraordinary "economic emergency" under which tax and monetary legislation favoring the laundering of vast quantities of drug money was rammed through by presidential decree.

The financial entities that sprang up like mushrooms under López's ministrations, according to the July 9, 1982 issue of *Latin America Weekly Report*, "serve as a link between the classically conservative Colombian elites and the parallel underground economy to attract contraband and drug traffic money. They flourish in an atmosphere of high interest rates, lax regulations, and feverish speculation."

López's finance minister at the time, Rodrigo Botero Montoya, is currently a member of Sol Linowitz's Inter-American Dialogue. Its 1986 report advocates consideration of drug legalization as one possible "option" for dealing with the drug problem (see page 32).

And speaking of legalization of drugs. López's political godson, Ernesto Samper Pizano—elected this past March to the Colombian Senate—is notorious in Colombia as a one-man lobbyist for the legalization of drugs. Samper served as treasurer and campaign manager for López's 1982 bid for the presidency, and confessed publicly at the time to accepting campaign contributions from leading drug mobsters Carlos Lehder Rivas and Pablo Escobar Gaviria. Samper is currently being pushed by López's vast media empire as a likely presidential candidate for 1990.

Among his many other presidential initiatives, López legalized the Universal Christian Gnostic Church in Colombia, a pagan cult whose leaders have been publicly accused of involvement in drug trafficking, brainwashing, rape, and sexual abuse, among other things. It was the Universal Christian Gnostic Church which was discovered to be up to its neck in the 1984 kidnap and drugging/brainwashing of Patricia Londoño, the wife of Maximiliano Londoño and an anti-drug activist in her own right.

On July 9, 1984, while Patricia Londoño was still in the hands of her abducters, López gave an interview to the newspaper *El Tiempo* in which he urged President Betancur to grant the drug mob an amnesty and take their proffered billions in exchange.

His proposal had first been aired back in May 1984, just days after the mafia assassination of Justice Minister Lara Bonilla, in the form of a mafia-drafted memorandum to the President, in which the mobsters "in good faith" pledged to dismantle their drug-trafficking apparatus and bring home their smugglers' fortunes in return for a presidential pardon. López's July interview, elaborating on the offer, argued that it would take at least 10 years for the mafia to reconstitute their trafficking capability and that Betancur might as well "take the easy path" to solving the drug problem in Colombia. López insisted that it was a mistake to mix morality and law, since "they are two distinct things," and warned the anti-drug Betancur that "almost all dictatorships are premised on the principle of morality."

López has never relinquished his desire to return to the Colombian presidency, despite his crushing defeat in 1982, and is expected to maneuver a return to power over the figure of the probable next president, Liberal Party candidate Virgilio Barco.

Schiller Institute responds

A press release just released by the Schiller Institute responds to Acosta's "open letter" with the question, "What does Victor Acosta really fear?" and comments that the "high-sounding phrases of the letter are only an attempt to divert the attention of the public. Mr. Acosta wants to blame the Schiller Institute for all his troubles, which have apparently all come upon him at once."

The statement continues: "But, it's not the fault of the Schiller Institute that the Colombian press is reporting on Acosta's complicity in the embezzlement of more than 28 million pesos in Union of Colombian Workers (UTC) funds. It would be more useful for all, if Mr. Acosta were to begin explaining what has been done with the millions of pesos sent him through his CIA contact, William Doherty, executive director of the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD).

"There are matters which interest the public more, that Mr. Acosta is avoiding. Why doesn't Mr. Acosta clear up the rumors that are circulating about his contact with Carlos Lehder. . . . It is a poor favor Mr. Acosta is doing for the UTC to have his name circulating so irresponsibly. A better favor would be to convince [UTC secretary general] Alfonso Vargas to publicly explain why he traveled to Spain to intercede for the drug trafficker Rodríguez Orejuela."

With Acosta and López showing their hand so boldly in launching an attack on Maximiliano Londoño and the Schiller Institute, it would do well for them to remember the fate of former Peruvian Finance Minister Manuel Ulloa. Ulloa's attempt in the fall of 1985 to sue Luis Vásquez Medina, the head of the Peruvian Anti-Drug Coalition, for libel backfired when the courts of that country reaffirmed Vásquez's public charge that the Peruvian official's financial policies had fostered the flourishing of the drug trade in that country.