

Colombian drug traffickers make a bid to control the next government

by Valerie Rush

With presidential elections coming up on May 25, the god-fathers of the Colombian drug trade have made an offer “too good to refuse” to the next government. While couched in careful, “patriotic” declarations, the mafia proposal is an unmistakable threat to the two contending presidential candidates: Which of you will legalize the drug trade, and which of you wants to die?

The mafia offer (full text below) formally consists of a demand that Colombia’s extradition treaty with the United States be overturned and the 20 fugitive narco-chiefs be allowed to return to Colombia—with guarantees. In exchange, the mobsters pledge to end their trade in illegal narcotics, and bring home enough of their ill-gotten fortunes stashed abroad to pay the Colombian foreign debt and start up “legal businesses” that will allegedly generate thousands of jobs.

Neither Alvaro Gómez Hurtado, candidate of the ruling Conservative Party, nor Virgilio Barco Vargas of the Liberal Party, have publicly commented on the proposal. President Belisario Betancur—asked to respond to the mafia offer—threw the ball into his potential successor’s court with the reply, “That’s a proposal to be presented to Alvaro Gómez.” Justice Minister Enrique Parejo González, who succeeded the murdered anti-drug fighter Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, spoke for the Betancur government in publicly denouncing the mafia proposal as “absurd” and “unnegotiable.”

‘Dope, Inc.’ charges surface

And yet the question of legalizing the drug trade in some form has become the issue of the day, and could define the outcome of the presidential elections. On May 9, the Conservative Bogotá daily *La República* devoted its front page to lengthy excerpts from the Spanish-language edition of the best-seller *Dope, Inc.*, written by an *EIR* investigative team. The excerpts were taken from the Colombia chapter of the book which focused on the mafia links of former President Alfonso López Michelsen, his cousin, the fugitive drug-banker, Jaime Michelsen Uribe, and their “joint project” for

the 1990 presidency, drug-legalization lobbyist Ernesto Samper Pizano. *La República* titled its page-one exposé “López, Michelsen, Samper: Colombian Trilogy of ‘Citizens Above Suspicion.’”

The major Liberal Party mouthpiece, *El Tiempo*, was quick to point out that *La República*’s choice of coverage was overt political opportunism: López, Michelsen, and Samper are all important figures—political and financial—in the top-down control of the Liberal Party. Not bothering to deny the charge, *La República*’s editors answered their critics by challenging them to a debate on the published charges—with *EIR*!

The Conservatives have their own rotten apples, of course, as exemplified by the column of Bertha Ospina, widow of former President (1966-70) Mariano Ospina Pérez, in the May 11 edition of *La República*. Attacking Justice Minister Parejo González for his rejection of the mafia proposal, the crusty matriarch of the Ospina family writes:

“I think that everyone in this country knows that the most reprehensible act of which the drug traffickers are accused is the vile assassination of Dr. Rodrigo Lara Bonilla. But the guerrillas who today have been given all sorts of guarantees have assassinated, not in a day but over months and years, thousands. . . .

“For these people there are houses, cars, scholarships, freedom, but for the drug traffickers there cannot even be conversation over proposals that would end that criminal activity based on the right to be judged in their own country and not by a strange country where they would be judged and treated in the midst of prejudices against Colombians comparable to those suffered by the Jews under Hitler’s Germany. I think that if in Colombia there be justice for guerrillas, then there should also be for the drug traffickers.”

Of course, Bertha Ospina does not mention that two of her grandchildren were recruited to the drug trade by Severo Escobar, one of the signers of the mafia petition, and were arrested last year in Florida on cocaine trafficking charges.

López Michelsen and his Liberal friends have not, of course, gone after their cohorts in the Conservative Party, but have instead tried to smear the anti-drug elements in both political parties. Thus, anti-drug fighter Jorge Carrillo, Betancur's labor minister and a Liberal Party member, has come under violent attack in the López-dominated media, as has his economic adviser Maximiliano Londoño, former vice-president of the Colombian Anti-Drug Coalition (See *EIR*, May 2, 1986).

Similarly targeted has been President Belisario Betancur. On April 30, the scandal sheet *El Bogotano* owned by Jaime Michelsen Uribe charged Betancur with violating Colombian exchange controls and illegal laundering of fortunes from abroad. The same charge was then televised nationally by kook presidential candidate Regina Once, a self-proclaimed witch.

The most prominent anti-drug spokesman in Betancur's cabinet, Justice Minister Enrique Parejo González, has been under the most intense pressure to resign. Since the M-19 assault on the Justice Palace in Bogotá last November, enemies of the Betancur administration have alternately blamed Betancur and Parejo for the narco-terrorist massacre of half the Supreme Court and destruction of the nation's legal files. The March escape of drug trafficker José Ramón Matta Ballesteros from a Colombian jail with the complicity of unknown but powerful "citizens above suspicion" and the corruption of numerous prison officials, were also laid at Parejo's doorstep, even though the minister had repeatedly denounced and sought remedy for the rampant corruption of the prison and court system.

The efforts of the mafia-linked Attorney General Carlos Jiménez Gómez to force Parejo's ouster have gone public. A bitter exchange of accusations between the two, triggered by Parejo's denunciation of the attorney general's office for sabotaging the war on drugs, led to Jiménez demanding a presidential censure of the justice minister. Betancur thus far has refused to yield to the attorney general's pressures, but rumors of Parejo's resignation were so widespread May 12 that a presidential communiqué had to be issued to quash them.

While the mafia seeks to buy a foothold in the next government, its media mouthpieces are busy creating the popular environment for some form of legalization of the dope trade. TV journalist German Castro Caicedo of the López Michelsen-owned station Caracol spent time in New York in April with the U.S. dope lobby NORML (National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws), apparently comparing notes and drafting campaign strategy. The first result of that cooperation was a television show produced by Castro and broadcast nationally in Colombia which argued that since the United States was growing more marijuana than Colombia, the herbicide eradication programs "imposed" on Colombia were unfair. The hidden argument was that Colombia's only opportunity for a competitive edge on the U.S. dope market was legalization.

Documentation

The mafia's bid to legalize drug money

What follows is the full text, in EIR's exclusive English translation, of the document presented to the Colombian news media by the fugitive "godfathers" of that country's drug trade, and published in El Tiempo on May 9, 1986:

May 6, 1986

To: Colombian reporters and communications media
We,

Lukas Evangelista Gómez Van Grieken, Carlos Gómez González, Emiro de Jesús Mejía Romero, Mario Otoy Robón, Alberto Escobar, Jovani de Jesús Cano, Armando Jaramillo Marulanda, Beatriz Helena de Tamayo, Mario Ochoa, Julian Otoy Tobón, Linda Gómez Otoy, Carmenza Valenzuela Martínez, Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha, Carlos Enrique Lehder Rivas, Marlene Navarro, Pablo Escobar Gaviña, Jorge Sauma Ramírez, Fabio Ochoa Vásquez, Carlos Ferreira Camargo, and Carlos Tulio Gómez Gutiérrez, who act in our own name and are today pursued by the DEA [U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration], and who thanks to God find ourselves free and therefore are presenting the current communiqué, in solidarity with our comrades, friends and compatriots:

Hernán Botero Moreno, Said Alberto Pabón Jatter, Nayib Ricardo Pabón Jatter, Marcos Cadavid, Carlos Humberto Gómez Zapata, Berta Yolanda Páez de González, Severo Escobar Ortega, José Antonio Cabrera Sarmiento, Evidalina Garzón de Escobar, José Jatter Alvarez, Bernardo Peláez Roldan, Luis A. García Uribe, Marlene Orejuela, Gilberto Rodríguez Orejuela, and Jorge Luis Ochoa, who are currently prisoners in different jails in the U.S. and Spain. All because of the poorly named "Extradition Treaty," "Law 27 of 1980," which only in a moment of servility, slavery, and insanity could have been signed by then President of the Republic, Julio Cesar Turbay Ayala, and then minister of foreign relations, Diego Uribe Vargas. We declare our firm, total and self-sacrificing position against said treaty, asserting the following points:

1) We don't understand how Colombia, being a sovereign, democratic, and independent nation, had to resort to foreign and alien laws to judge its children, since as can be clearly seen with the signing of this extradition treaty and the handing over of nationals to the U.S. government, we are allowing Colombia national sovereignty to be violated;

2) It is almost incredible to have to accept that with the

mere say-so of some people who have infiltrated our country (DEA agents), we are to be turned over to foreign judges, so that they can satisfy their thirst for vengeance on us Colombians;

3) It is clearly demonstrated that that treaty is unconstitutional and in clear violation of human rights. In making this reference, we base ourselves on the already tested and proven thesis that after five long years of study of the extradition treaty on the part of the honorable Supreme Court of Justice, that body has been unable to openly rule on the constitutionality or not of said treaty.

4) Reviewing a little history and from memory, we can observe that in an act of patriotism and independence in the name of our country, the President of the Republic, Belisario Betancur Cuartas, and the then-justice minister, Rodrigo Lara Bonilla (R.I.P.), at the end of 1983 ruled unfavorably on the extradition request that the U.S. government had made against Colombians Lukas Gómez and Emiro Mejía, at the same time that the President made Colombia's position on extradition clear, and indicated that none of its nationals would be handed over in extradition. At that time, the Colombian people unified in support of their President;

5) We cannot explain the causes or reasons that led to President Betancur's change of mind regarding the extradition of nationals, and in a moment of anger to favorably sign the first extradition requests, except to adduce as the only cause the lamentable death of then Minister of Justice Dr. Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, which also led the President to declare that from that moment on the Colombian government declared open and all-out war on the so-called drug traffickers;

6) It is inconceivable and even infantile to think that at that time we, the so-called drug traffickers, who were at the time the beneficiaries of the measure adopted by the government in regard to non-extradition of nationals, could be so ignorant and naive as to hang ourselves by taking the life of Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla (R.I.P.). Our position is so truthful that if at this moment we were given procedural guarantees, we the so-called drug traffickers could clearly demonstrate that neither Pablo Escobar Gaviria nor any of us had anything to do with that tragic event;

7) At the end of 1984, a group of us headed by our protector and spokesman Carlos Tulio Gómez Gutiérrez, in a private meeting held in Mexico City, had the pleasure of dialoguing with the ex-President of the Republic, Dr. Alfonso López Michelsen. In that meeting, we asked ex-President López to serve as our mediator with the President of the Republic Belisario Betancur. To facilitate cordial dialogue between the conflicting parties, we offered to appear, as long as we were given indispensable guarantees, before the Colombian courts, to respond to the charges against us, and thus to clarify our image before the nation and public opinion. We similarly offered in a very disinterested way and without expecting anything in return, to pay off the entirety of the Colombian foreign debt, which at that time amounted to the not inconsiderable amount of approximately \$11 billion, but,

as we expected, the government's answer was a flat no to our proposals;

8) In view of the fact that we achieved nothing with our first offer, we decided to invite the attorney general of the Republic, Dr. Carlos Jiménez Gómez, with the purpose of carrying out a new dialogue which would permit a good understanding with the Colombian government. That meeting was held in Panama City. The attorney general accepted despite warning that at no time did he attend as mediator or as attorney general, but only to hear us and, in case our proposal was viable, to transmit it to the President. Once we met with the attorney general, we made it clear to him that our principal concern was to collaborate in reestablishing social peace and national tranquility, to which end we would formally, genuinely, and materially surrender all elements and raw materials used for producing cocaine. At the same time, we would make ourselves available to justice in order to clarify our juridical situation. The attorney general listened to us very attentively, but we never received a response. Today, nearly two years later, we still accept in good faith that a decision will be made on our proposals;

9) It is impossible to accept the true reality of our country since after seeing what is going on here, we confirm once more our conviction that we are inhabitants of the land of the sacred heart of Jesus. Glancing at our current situation, we find ourselves with the signing of the so-called peace treaty, where there is neither treaty nor peace, since the signers have not re-joined the social life of the country and continue killing and robbing, protected by the amnesty laws;

10) It is clearly proven that we the so-called drug traffickers have nothing to do with the so-called narco-guerrillas, as we are friends of true democracy, which is being trampled on in our country. For all of the above reasons, we proceed to request the following from the government:

a) The right to be judged in the Republic of Colombia, by Colombian judges, in Colombian jails.

b) The right to prove that none of us, the so-called drug traffickers, had any connection to the death of the Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla (R.I.P.)

c) That a national plebiscite be immediately held for the purpose of carrying out a total revision of the so-called Extradition Treaty.

d) That we be granted the right to bring back into the country our capital, which is currently in foreign countries. In truth, these resources could generate employment by paying taxes and generating foreign exchange that could help to relieve our weakened national economy.

e) To demonstrate that in reality we are neither bandits nor criminals, as Justice would have the resigned and tolerant public opinion of this beautiful country believe.

Thanking you once for the attention you give us, we sign ourselves (signatures in first paragraph follow).