

State Dept.-funded AIFLD caught sabotaging Reagan's war on drugs

by Valerie Rush

The American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD), the "labor education" institution financed by the U.S. State Department to the tune of millions of dollars annually, has been exposed for providing financial and political backing to associates of prominent Colombian drug traffickers embedded in that country's trade union movement. What, one may well ask, is the State Department doing spending millions of tax dollars on friends of the dope mob, while President Reagan calls for a national mobilization against drugs?

The AIFLD-drug connection emerged into the limelight when the majority of trade union affiliates within the Union of Colombian Workers (UTC) walked out of that federation during its July 25-26 national plenum, in protest against the corruption of certain members of the executive board, and specifically their links to the Colombian drug mob. At the plenum, UTC president Victor Acosta was accused by the federation's comptroller (see Documentation) of receiving substantial personal funding from AIFLD, along with others on the executive board.

Acosta, together with UTC secretary general Alfonso Vargas and Manuel Felipe Hurtado of the "rival" Colombian Workers Federation (CTC), headed a campaign during 1984 to overturn the U.S.-Colombia extradition treaty under which drug traffickers wanted for trial in the United States were being handed over to U.S. authorities. Acosta went so far as to force the entire national executive board of the UTC to sign a document opposing extradition, which was then published in 17 Colombian newspapers with union—or was it AIFLD?—funds.

Acosta's anti-extradition campaign met with the hearty approval of Colombia's leading drug kingpins, like Carlos Lehder and Pablo Escobar, who have been and remain in hiding from Colombian and U.S. authorities, ever since they orchestrated the mafia slaying of Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla on April 30, 1984.

The Rodríguez Orejuela connection

On Aug. 5, a landmark decision in a New York-based federal appeals court determined that assets in U.S. accounts of foreign banks could be seized by the U.S. government if the money was suspected of originating from drug trafficking. The decision stands out as a praiseworthy step forward

in President Reagan's recently declared anti-drug mobilization.

The specific case dealt with \$3 million belonging to the First Interamericas Bank (FIB) of Panama and held in five different accounts of the New York subsidiary of Colombia's Banco Cafetero Panama. FIB was shut down by the Panamanian banking commission in 1985 for serving as a laundry for drug trade profits. Its owner was Gilberto Rodríguez Orejuela, recently extradited to Colombia from Spain where he was captured and jailed on charges of trafficking in cocaine.

Rodríguez Orejuela was also a major stockholder of the UTC-founded Banco de los Trabajadores of Colombia for several years, and in that capacity functioned as a business partner of then UTC president Tulio Cuevas, as well as of current UTC president Victor Acosta. Acosta's colleague, UTC secretary general Alfonso Vargas, publicly confessed at the federation's national plenum last month that he had traveled to Madrid in 1984 to visit Rodríguez Orejuela in jail. Although Vargas's accuser charged that the UTC official had brought money with him to try to buy testimony from Spanish labor unions on the drug trafficker's behalf, Vargas claimed that his visit to the prisoner was an act of "Christian charity." An associate of Vargas privately confided that the visit to Rodríguez "was the least he could do for a friend."

Unable to dispute the charges against them, Acosta, Vargas, and company opted for expelling their accusers from the UTC—a desperate move which prompted the abandonment of the federation by 16 of its regional affiliates and 15 national unions. The same process occurred simultaneously in the CTC, when federation president Hurtado tried to purge his accusers from the organization at a national plenum, only to lose a number of its affiliates, including the powerful Bogota-based FTC. A similar split also took place in the number-three trade union federation, CGT, when its most important regional affiliate Utracun determined to join the anti-corruption forces from the other federations in a new unity movement.

The shakeup of the Colombian trade union federations on the eve of a presidential inauguration (Aug. 7), and the implications for the new administration of a unified labor movement actively committed to halting the subversion of the

country's national institutions by the drug mafia have not eluded the media in Colombia. Throughout the week leading up to the inauguration of President-elect Virgilio Barco, the national newspapers followed the battle in the labor movement up close.

On Aug. 3, the joint communiqué of the 31 organizations that walked out of the UTC was published in the daily *El Espectador*, outlining not only their charges of corruption and malfeasance against the Acosta/Vargas leadership, but also offering a well-defined economic program for solving the problems of narco-terrorism, high unemployment, and an unpayable debt with which the Barco government will immediately be faced (see Documentation). The communiqué specifically noted that the labor movement intends to share responsibility for solving the ills of society along with the government, business, and other layers—within the concept of what the unions define as “harmony of interests.”

The Aug. 3 edition of *El Tiempo*, considered the mafia's mouthpiece in Colombia, carried a statement by the remnants of the UTC leadership, blaming the disintegration of the federation on a “conspiracy” run by outgoing President Belisario Betancur, his labor minister Jorge Carrillo Rojas, and the LaRouche-associated Schiller Institute (see Documentation). One of the leaders of the anti-corruption faction that led the plenum walkout last month was Pedro Ignacio Rubio, a coordinator of the Schiller Institute's Ibero-American Trade Union Commission and the secretary general of the UTC's Bogota-based organization, Utraboc.

The Schiller Institute has been active worldwide in organizing political, scientific, industrial and trade union layers for a new world economic order and cultural/scientific renaissance. It has focused much of its energies in Ibero-America on exposing the political and financial “citizens above suspicion” who dominate the drug trade, and on building support for leaders—such as Peru's Alan García—who have put the interests of their nation above that of international usury.

Labor Minister Carrillo—a national spokesman for the concept of “harmony of interests” between labor and capital—was also attacked, along with the Schiller Institute, by the CGT federation, in a press release published in several newspapers Aug. 4. Minister Carrillo is accused “of being a sponsor of the Schiller Foundation [sic], a shadowy organization that has been accused of assaulting the sovereignty of countries and of trampling the rights of the working classes.”

Carrillo will attend an Aug. 13 meeting of Ibero-American trade unionists in Lima, sponsored by the Schiller Institute, which will discuss joint action in defense of President García's debt and like initiatives. Asked by a reporter to explain his charges against the Schiller Institute, CGT president Julio Roberto Gómez said that his sole concern was “to alert the Barco government about the activities of Carrillo.”

Carrillo's response was, simply, “They want to attribute to me an international power that I don't possess.”

Documentation

A new movement for labor unity

From a paid political advertisement by the executive board of the Union of Colombian Workers (UTC), published on Aug. 3 in the national daily El Tiempo:

With profound respect for democratic principles, the national directive heard the presentation of Orlando Obregón Sabrogal, who held the microphone for six uninterrupted hours to present his diatribe filled with baseless charges and fallacies against the executive committee of the federation, following orders dictated by agents of division, advised and instigated by representatives of the Schiller Institute, who had previously trained him as their mouthpiece. . . .

Upon discovering that the conspiracy against the democratic trade union federations was run from the highest positions of the national government, in compliance with the reelection aspirations of Dr. Belisario Betancur . . . the national executive board decided to exclude from the UTC Orlando Obregón Sabrogal, Fredy Orozco Castañeda, and Pedro Ignacio Rubio. . . . The UTC unconditionally supports the declarations that federation president Victor Acosta has made to different media, in denouncing the formation of a fifth workers' central in the country, to the detriment of the working class and to the benefit of the current Minister of Labor Jorge Carrillo Rojas, and as a political platform for the reelection campaign of Dr. Belisario Betancur Cuartas for 1990.

Excerpts from a document issued by the 30 labor organizations that walked out of the July 25-26 national plenum of the Union of Colombian Workers (UTC):

. . . We announce the formation, by mandate of our bases, of a democratic and open national movement of labor unity. We propose to adopt and promote a genuine labor and social program to address the following challenges that we Colombian workers face in the immediate future. . . .

A) The highest unemployment in the history of the country . . . ; B) abandonment of the agricultural sector; C) the weakness and feeble development of national industry; D)

the bankruptcy and immorality of the financial sector; E) the reactivation of narco-terrorism; F) aggravation of tensions in Central America.

We do not feel that analysis and solution of this series of problems is the exclusive responsibility of the government, of other branches of public office, of the economic and industrial associations, [or] of the financial institutions, but of a united and strong union movement . . . within the concept of “harmony of interests. . . .”

Of the problems mentioned, the most severe is the growth of unemployment . . . principally caused by the imposition of the so-called adjustment program. . . . This policy of austerity . . . is no more than a continuation of the recommendations of the International Monetary Fund monitoring, and the goal is to force Colombia to sign a formal letter of intent, to serve as an international strike-breaker in the fight being waged by countries like Peru and our own against the usury of the international financial institutions. . . . The international bankers—anticipating the resistance of the workers to these programs and policies—have given the order to disable, weaken and destroy democratic trade unionism. . . .

We accept that morality cannot be separate from any human activity, and therefore we are prepared to bring this teaching into practice inside democratic trade unionism and our own labor confederation. That is why we oppose narco-terrorism, since the moral fiber and future of our society is being shattered by those who traffic in illegal drugs and turn our sons and brothers into drug addicts. We support the determination to move ahead with eradication of this plague and will be alert, because we know that the money of the mafia will continue to try . . . to take control of the institutions of the country. It is not accidental that the labor movement is being besieged by the narco-financial interests.

We feel it is urgent that, regarding immediate measures to fight unemployment, we undertake a program of infrastructure to give the nation railroads, canals, water control, highways, ports, public health, etc. . . . For this a large percentage of foreign capital is not necessary, merely the mobilization of national resources, issuing money for this activity without this increasing inflation since what would be happening is the reactivation of unused resources to create new wealth. . . .

We believe that the promotion, on the part of the World Bank and other analogous organizations, of the “micro-company” does not help the country . . . since these, through their low productivity, are incapable of competing on the international markets. The “micro-company” represents a generalization of poverty. Colombia should be an agricultural and industrial power, not a colony producing raw materials and crafts.

We commit ourselves to defend, spread, and fight for such a program of action . . . and will continue our efforts to purify and moralize the union movement as a step toward its necessary and urgent . . . programmatic unity.

Interview: Orlando Obregón Sabrogal

A new labor unity

Mr. Obregón Sabrogal was comptroller of the Union of Colombian Workers (UTC) until the UTC national plenum of July 25-26, 1986, in the city of Cali. The interview which we excerpt here was given to EIR's Bogota correspondent, Javier Almario, at the headquarters of the National Union of Social Security Workers, where the coordinating committee of the soon-to-be-founded national labor movement meets.

EIR: What happened at the UTC plenum?

Obregón: The 32nd plenum of the federation had been called, and several incidents occurred . . . demonstrating how the Colombian labor movement has been handled. In the first place . . . we discovered that some credentials had been granted which did not carry the signature of the comptroller, who is the person responsible by law for controlling entrance to these events. Some credentials were signed exclusively by the UTC president [Victor Acosta] to admit certain individuals who were brought from different parts of the country, having nothing to do with, no links to, the national plenum.

The main purpose of the event was analysis of the situation within the federation; thus the comptroller gave a detailed report on how it has been managed . . . administratively, economically, failures on a moral order in labor relations, the vacuum existing within the federation in addressing the country's problems. He also reported in his document on the personal activities of certain . . . executives of the federation who are dishonoring the labor movement, such as in the case of Alfonso Vargas, in the handling of certain contributions that a labor organization sent—nearly 600,000 pesos—which never found their way to the federation. Also denounced was the relation of this gentleman and other executives of the federation to elements clearly identified in the country as drug-traffickers. Other executives of the federation were denounced for their immorality and betrayal of the labor movement. . . .

The response of those indicted was grotesque, prompting 30 organizations to withdraw from the meeting, since no guarantees of their right to intervene were given; only friends of corruption were allowed to speak. The comptroller had the opportunity to question a pre-plenum meeting that was held,