

He recalls that two things struck him about his work, drawing him into collaboration with LaRouche. First was LaRouche's passionate commitment to the development of the Third World; the right wing seemed to be unconcerned about the Third World, and the left wing seemed concerned only with "liberation from imperialism," and not the actual solutions to economic backwardness. Second, LaRouche's economic method was derived from the same current of philosophy and the physical sciences that Billington himself had come to adopt as his own during his college studies, thus surprisingly unifying his scientific worldview with his fundamental moral commitment to contributing to the development of our world.

Billington began informal collaboration with the National Caucus of Labor Committees (NCLC, the philosophical association founded by LaRouche) in 1972. By 1974, he had joined. He settled in New York, driving a cab part-time while organizing and writing with the NCLC. He worked on Asian and Middle East intelligence, doing research and writing articles for the newspaper, *New Solidarity*. He also became more involved in public political activity. In 1977 he ran for County Executive in Westchester County (north of New York City), and for U.S. Congress in 1978. Around 1979 he stopped driving a cab and began receiving a weekly stipend to support himself from Caucus Distributors, Inc. (CDI), the distributor of *New Solidarity* and other publications.

In 1981, he began full-time organizing and fundraising by telephone from the offices of CDI. He lived in New York or the vicinity (except for one year, 1983, spent in Boston), until spring 1985, when he moved to Leesburg, Virginia, when a number of companies run by LaRouche associates moved their national headquarters from New York City to Virginia.

In addition to the organizing work, Billington has been responsible for various aspects of the NCLC's work on performance and composition of great classical music. He received vocal training from Maestro José Briano of the Autonomous University of Mexico, who is an expert in the classical bel canto method of singing. Billington subsequently taught bel canto singing to hundreds of NCLC members and supporters in the course of developing choruses in New York, Boston, and Virginia. He has conducted several concert performances, and has performed several solo and vocal ensemble concerts as part of the political/cultural endeavors of the NCLC and the Schiller Institute.

In 1983, Billington met his wife Gail, who is also a member of the NCLC. They were married on Dec. 2, 1984. His father died of cancer in 1978. His mother, who worked as a librarian and teacher in a school for emotionally disabled children for about 10 years, retired in 1985. His brother Pete began working with his father in 1971 and took over Billington Metal Sales, Inc. about one year before his father died.

Cali Cartel's lawyer was cleared by DoJ

Michael Abbell, former director of the Office of International Affairs of the U.S. Department of Justice, and now an attorney and consultant to lawyers of Colombia's drug-pushing "Cali Cartel," says he was cleared of any conflict of interest by the Justice Department, giving him a green light to represent his controversial clients.

This adds a new wrinkle to a much-debated story in Washington, D.C. legal and law enforcement circles, highlighting what some have called a "fifth column" in President Bush's War on Drugs. The debate was sparked by a front-page piece in the Oct. 2 issue of the *Washington Post*, profiling the activities of the former DoJ official.

Abbell defends his work as an expert on extradition for lawyers of cocaine kingpin Gilberto Rodríguez Orejuela as "ethical." Gilberto and his brother Miguel, among other Cali Cartel heavies, recently made it onto Attorney General Richard Thornburgh's "Dirty Dozen" list of "most wanted" fugitives. "I have worked for people who are allegedly members of the cartel or their lawyers as a consultant," Abbell explains. "I headed the office at the Department of Justice which oversaw extradition matters. I went into private practice, 'of counsel' here [at the law firm of Kaplan Russin and Vecchi]. I was asked by representatives of Rodríguez Orejuela to serve as a consultant to a Spanish and Colombian lawyer in connection with an extradition case in Spain. I wrote to the Department of Justice to determine whether it perceived any conflict of interest in my taking on this role. . . . I received clearance."

Abbell's clearance was obtained back in 1985 from the Deputy Assistant Attorney General, then heading the Criminal Division.

Abbell has written several tomes on the constitutional aspects of extradition law and has advised and lobbied the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on pending extradition treaties. He argues that extradition laws have been improperly used against international drug pushers. "What you have is narco-McCarthyism," complains Abbell.

Although he maintains that he has never received a single penny from the Cali Cartel for his research and writings that criticize laws that would make it easier to prosecute narcotics traffickers, Abbell is quite candid about his support for drug legalization. He says that it is based on the "Milton Friedman principle" and a study of the U.S. experience under Prohibition. In an open letter to drug czar William Bennett published in the *Wall Street Journal* on Sept. 7, Friedman, a Nobel Laureate in economics and guru of "free enterprise," advocated the legalization of all controlled substances, including heroin.

"You ain't going to deal with drugs through the criminal law," says Abbell. "It is a public health problem. The monies would be better expended to educate people not to take drugs, to rehabilitate those who are taking drugs, and to diminish the incentive for addicts who are dependent on drugs to commit crimes to support their habit. All of this could be financed by taxes on the sale of drugs."

Drug legalizers convene

Abbell also seems to be a "fellow traveler" of the pro-legalization Drug Policy Foundation, which started a conference in Washington on Nov. 2, which he recommended as a source of further information. Titled "Beyond Prohibition: Practical Alternatives to the War on Drugs," the conference is expected to issue a plan for achieving "drug peace" through legalization, as counterposed to the "current war-like approaches to drug control" which are being carried out by "drug war extremists."

According to Kevin Zeese, a colleague of Abbell and adviser to the foundation, the conference will "paint the picture of what the world would look like without prohibition," and will showcase an array of luminaries from the academic, legal, and political spheres who demand national surrender to drugs.

Among the scheduled speakers at the 400-person confab were such well-known pro-drug lobbyists as Dr. Arnold Trebach, president of the foundation; Kurt Schmoke, mayor of Baltimore, who is scheduled to receive the Richard Dennis Drugpeace Award of \$100,000 for Outstanding Achievement in the Field of Drug Policy Reform; Lester Grinspoon, M.D. of Harvard Medical School; Princeton University Prof. Ethan Nadelmann; Marco Pannella of the Italian Radical Party; and Judge Georges Apap of France.

Large delegations were scheduled to attend from among British drug-legalization groups and from the international anti-prohibition group run by networks of the Italian Radical Party. The main British connection to the Drug Policy Foundation is the Drugs Advisory Group, which received a grant from the European Community in Brussels to produce a report outlining the pro-legalization arguments.

A similar conference was held last year, featuring workshops on the themes that characterize the current campaign:

- "The Dutch Approach," highlighting the Dutch and

English models of drug legalization, especially the Liverpool "Harm Reduction" program of free needles and free drugs;

- "Coping with Stress and Corruption: the Police and Criminal Justice System in the Drug War," developing the idea that drug police are inevitably corrupted by the attempt to suppress trafficking;

- "The Campaign to Reestablish Heroin and Marijuana as Medicines."

Law firm upset

On Oct. 23, the *Washington Post* reported that Abbell had resigned from the firm of Kaplan, Russin and Vecchi. The *New York Post*, which carried the same story, titled it "Drug-fighter Turned Defender Quits Law Firm in Flap." The article reported that "Abbell, who once supervised U.S. efforts to extradite Colombian drug traffickers, said he will continue to represent reputed drug boss Gilberto Rodríguez Orejuela and other accused Cali traffickers whose extradition is wanted by the U.S."

Abbell explained to *EIR* on Oct. 20, "The real problem that was arising is that we [the law firm] do a commercial law practice in Colombia. There was a tension developing between my representation of individuals over there who are allegedly connected with drug trafficking, and the perception of U.S. corporations and businesses who the firm represents or would like to represent in Bogotá."

Although Abbell has tried to put a good face on his separation from the firm, someone at Kaplan, Russin and Vecchi has not been happy with all the media coverage and controversy. On Oct. 16, three days after *EIR* published a story about Abbell based in part on the *Washington Post* piece, our Washington, D.C. bureau received a letter from Abbell's now divorced law firm threatening legal action if any report were to be published "linking Mr. Michael Abbell to the firm of Kaplan, Russin and Vecchi."

The letter reads, in part, "Please be advised that this firm has never represented any members of the Colombia drug cartel, nor has this firm represented any clients, Colombian or otherwise, directly or indirectly, in criminal matters. Mr. Abbell was never an employee or member of this firm. He rented office space in the firm's Washington offices and was listed as 'of counsel' to the firm while he was researching and preparing a multi-volume work on *International Judicial Assistance in Criminal Matters*, which supplements an earlier two-volume work on *International Judicial Assistance in Civil Matters* published by one of our partners five years ago."

Reached at the offices of Kaplan, Russin and Vecchi four days after *EIR* received the letter, Abbell was somewhat miffed that a former colleague would describe his relationship with the firm as that of having "rented office space." "I was 'of counsel,'" he said.

The letter stated, "Mr. Abbell has terminated his of counsel relationship with this firm."