

Samper Pizano flails in European tour

by Our Paris Bureau

Presidential pre-candidate for Colombia's Liberal Party, Ernesto Samper Pizano did not exactly get the red carpet treatment when he visited Paris at the end of October. Samper, whose spokesmen in Colombia pretended would be meeting with President François Mitterrand, was only able to meet "functionaries" at the interior and foreign ministries, as well as party representatives.

One can only suspect that despite all his efforts to appear as supporting Colombian President Virgilio Barco's war on drugs, Samper's reputation as the head of the pro-drug legalization lobby of Colombia was too strong for anybody important to meet with him.

Many journalists, mainly from Ibero-America and Spain, but also from France attended his press conference at the Latin American House. All had received a press communiqué from the French Anti-Drug Coalition recounting Samper's career as the head of Colombia's pro-drug legalization effort. Between 1977 and 1980, Samper headed the Association of Financial Institutes of Colombia (ANIF), which he described in public statements as the "Latin American coordinator for the International Cannabis Alliance for Reform (ICAR)." In 1982, while Samper was campaign manager for ex-President Alfonso López Michelsen, Carlos Lehder, one of the leaders of the Medellín Cartel, said he contributed a million pesos to the López campaign!

After the murder this past August of frontrunner Luis Carlos Galán, however, Samper Pizano became a top contender for the Liberal Party's presidential nomination, and this seems to have led to some changes in his speech. The purpose of his European trip, he said in his press conference, was to discuss Colombia's problems, in particular the war on drugs, with political figures. Samper, who paid lip service to Barco's war on drugs throughout his remarks, demanded that a "global" approach be taken in this war, to include three main points: 1) Military aid must be "redirected" toward equipment useful to an "intelligence" war, not toward a brute force war. Colombia needs electronics surveillance equipment, sophisticated bomb detectors, etc. 2) Samper demanded financial and economic aid not only for the "war on drugs" but also for the "peacetime." Huge costs incurred in the course of the war and because of the destruction of the war economy can be counterbalanced, he said, only if the Europe-

an Community, for example, proposes to Colombia a Marshall Plan similar to that being proposed to Poland. 3) Finally, with 40 million drug consumers in the world, the war on drugs cannot be an effort directed only toward the producing countries, but must be accompanied by a similar war in the consumer countries.

While we can hardly attack such proposals, which in themselves could be useful, the lack of will to fight the war against the mafia seems to plague this presidential hopeful. Samper said several times in Paris, and elsewhere in Europe, that if the war on the mafia is not successful, "the only alternative is legalization." That the problem of drug legalization is not a moral issue for Samper but a technical question became clear after he stated several times that the problem of legalization cannot be dealt with as a "unilateral" problem because there is the producer and the consumer end. The solution can only be "multilateral," he stated, showing his willingness to legalize if all such technical conditions are fulfilled.

Samper's image as a drug fighter was not convincing to many. The first question shot at him by a journalist from Radio France International was "Mr. Samper, in the past you were associated with the pro-legalization lobby. Can one interpret your remarks from today as meaning that you have changed your line?" After Samper professed that this was indeed the case, Christine Bierre, president of the Anti-Drug Coalition in France, said she was a bit astonished to hear about this sudden change of line, since she had received information concerning an interview he granted to RCN Radio just after the murder of Galán, rather than supporting Barco's emergency measures, Samper had criticized extradition of indicted drug criminals, had called for a dialogue with the gangsters, and had finally declared that the only alternative to not winning the war against drugs, would be legalization!

Ernesto Samper Pizano was quite furious at being "uncovered" and just kept repeating that he had never made these statements and demanding that Mrs. Bierre read actual quotes from him, if she had them. Christine Bierre proceeded to read the exact quotes from his speech, while pandemonium broke out in the room with several aides to Samper denouncing the Anti-Drug Coalition as having been founded by Lyndon LaRouche, an American statesman currently in prison.

Many of the questions which followed, however, were aimed at trying to pin down the "ambiguous" Mr. Samper: "What kind of drug policy will you conduct if you are elected President?" "Would you favor investigations into the links to top-level government and other elected officials and the drug runners?" "What would you do if you found your children consuming cocaine?" While Samper pretended he was against drugs, when Christine Bierre asked him if he would legalize in the case "prohibition" against drugs stopped in the consumer countries, this chameleon who otherwise dared to denounce the "moral" evil of drugs, immediately stated that in that case, he would be in agreement with legalization.