

Andean Report by Andrea Olivieri

An ex-President whose time is up

Former Colombian President López Michelsen's highly placed friends can't seem to hide the truth about his drug ties.

Despite a "gag order" issued by the Colombian government on the matter of former President Alfonso López Michelsen's links to the cocaine cartels, the shocking truth of his criminal associations, and consequently those of the government which covers for him, is continuing to find its way into the public consciousness.

López was named as the "political godfather" of the murderous Medellín Cartel by one-time cartel "transport king" Carlos Lehder, during his Nov. 25 testimony at the Miami trial of Manuel Antonio Noriega. Lehder's admissions, which coincide with charges that were made and documented by *EIR* in 1984, prompted furious denials from López and an official protest by Liberal President César Gaviria Trujillo.

Perhaps they do protest too much? According to former Justice Minister Enrique Parejo González, López is lying outright in claiming that his 1982 presidential campaign had been officially cleared of taking drug money, and that the Betancur government had authorized his meeting with the country's leading cocaine traffickers in 1984, immediately following their assassination of Parejo's predecessor, Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla.

Writing in the Dec. 1 *El Espectador*, Parejo reveals that the commission established in 1983 to investigate charges of dirty money infiltration into electoral campaigns "declared in its final report that the accounting books did not reveal any contributions

explicitly provided by the drug mafias," but that it had detected "the existence, in certain groups, of donors who had decided to withhold their names." Hardly a statement of absolutism! And regarding López Michelsen's 1984 Panama meeting with the cartel, Parejo wrote: "This author, who was then justice minister and who publicly condemned that meeting, feels obliged to state once again that I was not informed of Mr. López's unfortunate trip until after it was held."

Parejo added that López's Panama meeting "was not the only act of acquiescence to the Medellín Cartel traffickers. Despite all of their crimes, high-level individuals several years later served as intermediaries between the government and these criminals. Nothing more effective to demoralize society could have been conceived." López headed the infamous "Notables" who, in 1989, urged the government to negotiate a bloc plea bargain with the cartel.

Parejo insisted that "the drug trade could not have grown as it did and become so powerful and influential in public life, if it did not have the complacency and, at times, collaboration of prominent individuals, and even of certain rulers." Parejo concluded that traffickers dared to murder their opponents, such as Lara Bonilla, only because of "the tolerance of both the authorities and of high-level political leaders toward their illegal activities."

One week earlier, Parejo had charged President Gaviria with con-

ducting a virtual "coup d'état" against Colombia's national institutions by codifying the illegal acts of the cartel-dominated National Constituent Assembly. Parejo had called for a "broad popular mobilization" to rescue the nation.

Notwithstanding Gaviria's efforts to keep the lid on the López story, the damage has been done and Colombia's creditors—who helped make the drug trade what it is today—are now sounding alarms. The *Financial Times* of London had the following to say about Lehder's revelations in a Dec. 6 survey on Colombia: "The former President has denied the charges . . . but the fact that many people in Colombia were not surprised by [Lehder's] testimony indicates a pervasive belief that the influence of the drug traders extends deeply into Colombia's political classes."

The *Times* concluded its survey for potential investors on a less than positive note: "Colombia today is a confusing confrontation of different forces. . . . Whether the new era dawning over Colombia is one of a free market and an open democracy or one of the gun law of the narcotics gangs thus remains open to debate."

Moreover, in the midst of growing public concern over the spread of opium poppy plantations inside Colombia, the López name has again been linked with drugs. His oldest son, Alfonso López Caballero, who was just sworn in as Gaviria's new agriculture minister, came under attack Dec. 1 by the anti-drug *El Espectador*, for his inaugural speech, which "seemed indistinguishable from an invitation . . . to cultivate" poppy. López Caballero apparently elaborated on the "high profitability" of such a crop for Colombian farmers, which, said *El Espectador*, could serve as the signal to "heroin-ize" the Colombian economy.