

Andean Report by Valerie Rush

Drug legalization scenario launched

A Colombian government official came to the United States to propose a common strategy for legalization.

Was it just coincidence that leading free-trade mouthpiece Jeffrey Sachs arrived in Colombia on almost the same day that that country's prosecutor general argued before an international conference outside of Washington that "the war on drugs is a lost battle. The only solution is legalization"? If one keeps in mind that the British Empire imposed the genocidal opium trade upon the Chinese people under the free trade banner, the timing of the Harvard-trained advocate of economic "shock therapy" policies appears less and less like a coincidence.

Sachs's arrival in Colombia, where he treated 400 members of the political and business elite to a diatribe on the virtues of austerity and the "open market," followed his visit to neighboring Bolivia, where he conferred with President Jorge Sánchez de Lozada. Sachs was a consultant to Sánchez de Lozada in the mid-1980s, and was instrumental in designing the austerity measures that ravaged an already-impoverished Bolivia and turned it into a full-fledged narco-economy.

Sánchez de Lozada, who is considered "on loan" to the Bolivian presidency by a quasi-private Washington-based think-tank, the Inter-American Dialogue, made a public statement in defense of drug legalization as one of his first official acts. During his Nov. 19 seminar in Bogotá, Sachs admitted—in private, of course—that he also "tended to lean in favor" of drug legalization.

It is predictable that the first major bid for a global legalization strategy should come from Colombia, which

is not only headquarters to the world cocaine trade, but whose government has already taken major steps on the road to legalization, including striking amnesty deals with the narco-terrorists and, soon, with the cartels themselves.

The majority of Colombia's near-dozen presidential candidates are open advocates of drug legalization, including front-runners Ernesto Samper Pizano and Andrés Pastrana. And, although President César Gaviria has shown a certain "delicacy" in handling the question, prominent members of his own cabinet have gone public with endorsements for drug legalization.

On Oct. 2, a seminar on drug legalization was held in Bogotá, and addressed by U.S. lobbyists Milton Friedman and Ethan Nadelman of the Drug Policy Foundation. Also speaking were Gaviria's prosecutor general, Gustavo de Greiff, and his civilian defense minister, Rafael Pardo Rueda. De Greiff proposed that legalization was necessary for Colombia to produce "a clean product." He said Colombia should be producing the cocaine equivalent of "Chivas Regal," and not moonshine! Minister Pardo was a little more cautious, saying drug legalization should be undertaken multilaterally and not just by Colombia.

In his address to the two-day international drug conference in Baltimore, hosted by Baltimore Mayor and prominent legalization lobbyist Kurt Schmoke, De Greiff clearly felt that the time for proposing joint action had arrived (see p. 62). Presented to the

Colombian people when appointed to Gaviria's cabinet as a hard-line anti-drug warrior, De Greiff was emphatic that waging a successful war on drugs was impossible. "It has been fought on the interdiction level, and it has failed. . . . The profits are so large that it is a delusion to think that jailing or killing major traffickers will result in [fewer] drugs on the market. . . . In the end, the only solution is legalization, with regulations to control the market."

De Greiff's remarks, the first time a high-level Colombian government official has publicly advocated drug legalization on U.S. soil, were buttressed by the comments of Colombian Sen. Enrique Gómez Hurtado. Gómez, the son of a former President and a long-standing drug legalization proponent, was present both in Baltimore and at a followup, three-day conference in Washington given by the Drug Policy Foundation, the premiere drug legalization lobby in the United States.

In his remarks, Gómez argued that neither repression nor interdiction has proven successful in stopping the illegal drug trade, given the power of the multinational companies and continent-wide guerrilla movements which stood behind it. He scoffed at the U.S. State Department's claims that drug money laundering could be brought under control, insisting that this was a phenomenon run by international banks, and not by the cartels.

While identifying the true nature of Dope, Inc., Gómez's "solution," legalization, constitutes nothing short of surrender. Indeed, Gómez's new book, *The Drug Tragedy*, was circulated at the two conferences, and is shot full of the same free-trade dogma behind which Dope, Inc.'s multinationals and banks imposed a narco-economy on Colombia in the first place.