

Andean Report by Jacobo Frontoni

Drug legalization drive escalates

Behind the campaign to defend the Andean coca-producers are the "free-trade" legalizers and the narco-terrorists.

Bolivian President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada took advantage of the recent meeting in Quito, Ecuador of the Rio Group Presidents to try to organize them against the war on drugs being urged by the United States, according to Mexican "political scientist" Jorge Castañeda. In an article entitled "Drug Trafficking: The Second Wave," published in the Peruvian magazine *Caretas* in late September, Castañeda wrote that President Sánchez "reportedly told his Rio Group colleagues meeting in Quito a few weeks ago that in light of the latest extravagant demands of the U.S., he was tempted to ask Washington's envoys, 'Tell me whom you'd like me to hand power over to, because I can't continue to govern like this.'"

Sánchez has also been touring Europe, complaining wherever he goes of "perverse" U.S. pressures on his government, and leaders of his political party have accused the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration of trying to destabilize the country.

Castañeda, a promoter and mouthpiece for the narco-terrorist São Paulo Forum, did not denounce Sánchez de Lozada, but rather used the story to press his own case for drug legalization. In his article, Castañeda asserted that there can be only two choices: Either pursue a no-holds-barred war against the drug trade, "or throw in the towel." But, wrote Castañeda, this last should be accompanied by ideological and moral justification: legalized production, distribution, and consumption . . . of drugs."

Castañeda also has close ties to the Inter-American Dialogue (IAD), with which he has collaborated to promote the leading figures of the São Paulo Forum inside the United States. In response to the latest blows against the Cali cocaine cartel, the narco-terrorist forces of the São Paulo Forum are joining with their pin-striped counterparts in the IAD to renew the push for drug legalization.

Their arguments are based on a supposed defense of the poor coca producers of Bolivia and Peru. The Inter-American Dialogue, for example, writes, "To curtail drug production is to destroy the livelihoods of tens of thousands of people, to cripple local economies, and to foment political opposition." This is the same argument used by Evo Morales, the head of Bolivia's coca-producers' federation. Morales is a favorite of the São Paulo Forum, whose publication *America Libre* recently hosted a Buenos Aires seminar at which Evo Morales was a featured speaker. Morales argued that "to defend coca is to defend the dignity of national sovereignty," and he denounced those pursuing a war on drugs as possessing a "Hitlerian mentality." Morales is also a fervent admirer of Fidel Castro, the São Paulo Forum's founder.

Why is Bolivian President Sánchez de Lozada, a millionaire mining entrepreneur ruling over a country of impoverished Indians, balking at conducting a war on drugs? First, he is a member "on loan" from the Inter-American Dialogue, which advocates

legalization as an answer to what they have repeatedly dubbed an "unwinnable" war on drugs. He also has direct ties to the São Paulo Forum, through his Foreign Minister Antonio Araníbar, a leader of the Free Bolivia Movement, which is a long-standing Forum affiliate.

There are also serious questions about the narco-corruption of the Sánchez de Lozada government. Interior Minister Carlos Sánchez Berzain, for example, has just been called to testify before the Bolivian Congress for suspected ties to the La Paz cocaine cartel.

On Sept. 25-26, Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori met in Santa Cruz, Bolivia with President Sánchez, and both complained about the "consumer countries" which have failed to adequately support and finance the war against drugs. Referring to Colombia, Bolivia, and Peru, Fujimori said that they are forced to finance the war on drugs, "but this shouldn't presuppose that they must assume responsibility for development of the coca zone. . . . That is where the question arises: Why should the producer countries get in debt to fight the drug trade, when that is a problem for the consumer countries? So, we Peruvians propose that the consumer countries should put up their own money to effectively eradicate the drug trade, and that means not only repression, but also economic and financial support for those growers who are dedicated to the illegal crop."

According to the Peruvian daily *Expreso*, however, President Fujimori "showed little enthusiasm" for the idea of "industrializing the coca leaf," which is one of the proposals of the would-be coca legalizers. "In contrast," writes *Expreso*, "Bolivian President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada commented that the industrialization of coca is important for his country."