

British nobility leaps to defense of Colombia's narco-President Samper

by Valerie Rush

In the aftermath of the March 1 decision by the Clinton administration to decertify Ernesto Samper Pizano's narco-government in Colombia, some political circles in both Washington and Colombia complained that decertification was a rather harsh action to take against a country which was in the process of getting rid of its corrupt President. Now, six weeks later, the headlines about "Samper Still Clinging to Power" are growing stale, and many in both Washington and Colombia are asking, "Why isn't he out yet?"

After all, Samper is personally facing a second corruption probe in Congress, and a number of his campaign aides and cabinet ministers are either in jail or facing imminent arrest on corruption charges. At least 173 congressmen—many of them Samper backers—are under investigation for links to the drug cartels; the country's leading clerics are urging Samper's resignation; prominent businessmen are organizing a nationwide strike against his Presidency; and opposition politicians are urging acts of civil disobedience against his regime. His government has been labelled a pariah by the most powerful country in the world. And yet, Samper is still occupying the Casa de Nariño (Presidential palace) in Bogotá.

A royal pedigree

In the weeks prior to the March 1 decertification decision, *EIR* issued a special memorandum, "Who Backs 'Certification' of Samper's Government?" which precisely identified Samper's defenders. That memorandum pointed to 1) political forces allied to George Bush and Henry Kissinger; 2) proponents of drug legalization; and 3) the Inter-American Dialogue, a bankers' lobby, as the three groupings in Washington which were fighting against Samper's decertification. The memorandum emphasized that each of these groups "has a lengthy British political pedigree."

The British Empire has now come out in its own name to take up Samper's cause. The British House of Lords held a debate on April 2—the 14th anniversary of that country's war against Argentina over the Malvinas Islands—on whether Her Majesty's government should "make representations" to the Clinton administration over their displeasure with Samper's decertification. Raising the query was Viscount Montgomery of Alamein (son of Britain's Field Marshall Montgomery), who argued, "Surely we should be supporting a country which has made such determined efforts."

Responding was the Minister of State, Foreign, and Commonwealth Office, Baroness Chalker of Wallasey, who emphasized the Samper government's "spectacular successes" against the drug cartels, and claimed that "accusations against certain members of the government of Colombia . . . are only allegations," despite the mountains of evidence against those "certain members." She even lied that those allegations "came to light as a result of the Colombian government putting vastly additional resources into tackling the drugs problem." She also noted that Britain "enjoys a warm and important trading relationship with Colombia," bringing uncomfortably to mind the "warm and important trading relationship" Britain shared with China in the last century, when the opium trade was at its height.

Baroness Chalker "absolutely" agreed with Lord Pearson of Rannoch that the United States were better off looking at the "deep-seated problems within its own society that cause this demand" for drugs, rather than antagonizing Britain's trading partners with its "black and white" anti-narcotics policy (see *Documentation*).

Baroness Chalker is well known to *EIR* readers for her genocidal role in Africa. See, for example, *EIR*, Sept. 8, 1995, "Baroness Chalker's Minions Are Plunging East Africa Into War."

Anti-'yanqui' feeling

Lady Chalker's comments are coherent with those of British Brig. David Webb-Carter, a former commander of British Royal Forces in Belize who authored a chapter on drug policy for the Royal Institute for International Affairs' 1989 book, *Britain and Latin America: A Changing Relationship*. Webb-Carter argued that at the time, "A significant effect of U.S. pressure to eradicate illicit drug growing is, nevertheless, an increase of anti-'yanqui' feeling among many Latin Americans who resent the apparent arrogance of their northern neighbor." Elsewhere, the book comments that British authorities "have shown a commendable sympathy for the dilemmas faced by governments in drug-producing countries."

The British are positioned to take full advantage of the "anti-'yanqui'" feeling they themselves are fanning across Ibero-America. A recent joint conference of the European Union and the Rio Group of leading Ibero-American countries was held in Cochabamba, Bolivia, in which British out-

rage at Clinton's decertification of Colombia echoed again and again through such Anglophile mouthpieces as the government of Bolivia, presided over by a "former" employee of the Crown's Rio Tinto Zinc, Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada. Also, British Foreign Secretary Malcolm Rifkind has just concluded the latest of several Ibero-American tours which, according to one Brazilian press account, had drugs at the top of the agenda. It was during the period of this tour that an anti-drug cooperation treaty was signed between Her Majesty's government and Samper Pizano.

Great Britain's cozy relations with the cocaine cartel-dominated Samper government would be suspect under any circumstances, but are made particularly despicable by the thuggery with which Samper is fighting off any and all adversaries. Last November, his leading political opponent, Alvaro Gómez Hurtado, was assassinated. Those claiming responsibility called themselves "Dignity for Colombia"; Gómez's family and followers, however, laid the blame squarely at Samper's doorstep.

In early April, the brother of former Colombian President César Gaviria was kidnapped by the same "Dignity" terrorists. Gaviria, currently the general secretary of the Organization of American States in Washington, is rumored to have been working with the U.S. government to forge an "acceptable" replacement for Samper.

Chalker: We have excellent relations with Colombia

The following excerpts are taken from a transcript of the British House of Lords' debate of April 2, 1996; Hansard's Col. 133-135.

"Viscount Montgomery of Alamein asked Her Majesty's Government: Whether they agree with the 'decertification' of Colombia by the United States.

"The Minister of State, Foreign, and Commonwealth Office (Baroness Chalker of Wallasey): My Lords, how to achieve a reversal of the U.S. decertification of Colombia is a bilateral matter between the United States and Colombia. . . .

"Viscount M. of A: My Lords, that may well be so. But surely we should be supporting a country which has made such determined efforts and is so successful in bringing so many drug barons into custody. Does my noble friend recall that when President Gaviria visited Britain in 1993 it was clear that we had a long-standing and warm relationship with Colombia? The bilateral relationship is extremely important in as much as we have considerable trading and investment interests in Colombia. Is my noble friend prepared to make representations in Washington concerning that arbitrary measure? . . .

"Baroness Chalker of W.: . . . We have excellent relations with Colombia. . . . I can certainly confirm to my noble friend that Colombia has had some spectacular successes against drug traffickers in recent times since President Samper took office, particularly [the arrest of Cali cartel chiefs] . . . and a number of other instances where the authorities did all that one could possibly believe necessary. I note my noble friend's point in regard to representations. . . .

"Lord Hailsham of Saint Marylebone: My Lords, can my noble friend enlighten my darkness and tell me exactly what is meant by the terms 'certification' and 'decertification' . . . ?

"Baroness C. of W: My Lords, when my noble and learned friend asks a difficult question, I take careful note. I understand that the United States' legislation allows that country to take a specific attitude with those they believe have not taken adequate action against drug trafficking. . . . There are accusations against certain members of the Government of Colombia, but they are only allegations. . . . it is considered by some in the United States that there is not the full cooperation that there needs to be.

[Labor Party's Baroness Blackstone clarifies that it is President Samper himself who is being investigated, and asks:] ". . . Was it not inevitable that the U.S. Administration would take action to decertify Colombia? Do [sic] the British Government support the U.S. Administration in taking that decision, at least for the time being?

"Baroness Chalker of W.: My Lords. . . . I should underline that these are only allegations; they are not proven. I underline also. . . . [that] it is a result of the Colombia Government tackling this problem so energetically that many of the possible takers of drug money have come to light. Until the issue is resolved by the Colombian authorities, nobody can gainsay one way or the other. It may be, because of the 'black and white' nature of the [U.S.] Foreign Assistance Act, that that action was inevitable. However, we take the view that it is more important to work in support of Colombia's counter-narcotics policies than to have such legislation on our statute book.

"Viscount Waverly: My Lords, is the Minister aware that a recent report by the international drug control committee of the United Nations categorically states that Colombia is doing all that can reasonably be expected of it? . . .

"Lord Pearson of Rannoch: My Lords, does my noble friend agree that it is the increasing demand for these drugs, particularly in western societies, which causes their supply? Does she further agree that it might be advantageous if the United States were to look at the deep-seated problems within its own society that cause this demand, a demand which exists in other western societies including our own, and treat those problems with the same vigour that they recommend the Colombians should adopt?

"Baroness Chalker of W.: My Lords, on this occasion I think my noble friend is absolutely right."