

Colombia 'peace' pact covers for drug surge

by Valerie Rush

"Peace" is the new name for drug trafficking on a grand scale in Colombia, according to statistics released by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). In the past four years, while Bolivia and Peru, once the largest coca producers in the world, significantly reduced hectares under illicit drug cultivation, Colombia has become the world's largest grower of coca leaves, the raw material that goes into cocaine production, as well as a dominant player in the heroin market.

This dramatic expansion of drug crop production in Colombia—it used to "only" be a processing point for drugs grown elsewhere—is directly linked to the expansion of influence by the FARC and ELN narco-terrorist movements, which have terrorized their way into control of nearly half the country. And now, the Andrés Pastrana government is negotiating a "peace pact" with the FARC-ELN which will consolidate that takeover by the drug cartels.

The narco-terrorists' rise to power has taken place with the overt complicity of successive corrupt administrations of the Colombian government, and with the blessings and even prodding of the U.S. State Department, which has persisted in arguing that there is no such thing as *narco*-terrorism, and that financing counterinsurgency efforts in Colombia would constitute a violation of human rights. This is the same argument promoted by Human Rights Watch, which is heavily financed by drug legalization advocate and megaspeculator George Soros.

Official Washington, especially circles associated with Al Gore's friends in the Inter-American Dialogue, has also endorsed the so-called "peace dialogue" between the Pastrana government and the narco-terrorists, despite overwhelming evidence that any such agreement would turn Colombia into a bloody re-run of the Balkans tragedy. The result of such criminal stupidity in Washington has been to deprive the Colombian Armed Forces, already under brutal attack by cartel-linked forces at home, of crucial support in battling the nation's enemies, thus leaving Colombia wide-open for takeover by Dope, Inc.

Not everyone in Washington is happy with the way things are going. In a presentation in February at the North-South Center of the University of Miami, anti-drug White House policy adviser Gen. Barry McCaffrey (ret.) reported that more than 40% of Colombian territory is now under coca and poppy cultivation (the raw materials for cocaine and heroin), a figure comparable to the territory currently under the political and

military control of the FARC-ELN narco-terrorists. Said McCaffrey, "Colombia is a country that has been divided up by the power of the guerrillas."

Earlier this year, McCaffrey had told the press that while Bolivia had reduced its illegal coca crops from 48,000 hectares to 38,000 during 1994-98, and Peru from 108,000 to 51,000, Colombia during that same period had more than doubled its coca plantations, from less than 50,000 in 1994 to 101,000 hectares last year.

The growth of the heroin trade

Equally important is the growth of the heroin trade coming out of Colombia, where five years ago there was none. The *Washington Post* in February cited a DEA source, who reports that by slashing the price of heroin from \$150,000 a kilogram to \$90,000, and by increasing the purity of the drug on U.S. streets to nearly 80% (as compared to 7% for Southeast Asian heroin), Colombian traffickers have succeeded in capturing "a significant share of the largest U.S. heroin markets"—an estimated 75% or more of the heroin currently being seized in the United States comes from Colombia.

Although the *Washington Post* admits that the FARC guerrillas provide protection for Colombia's poppy growers, and that they collect a 10% tax on the illegal crops, its concern is for the "poor peasants" who may lose their livelihoods as the result of U.S.-backed eradication efforts. The article has a photograph of a Colombian farmer, who "watched in dismay as U.S.-supplied airplanes plunged through the narrow gorge, spraying his illegal crop with a commercial weedkiller." The farmer is quoted, "We don't know who the people are who buy this [opium gum]. . . . We don't know what it is used for. . . . We used to grow coffee here, but a plague killed our trees. What are we supposed to do?"

The *Post* uses this lying image of Colombia's abandoned peasants to argue that, instead of funnelling U.S. anti-drug dollars into eradication, they should be going to "alternative crop development"—the argument of the drug legalization lobby. This was the argument offered by Manuel Marulanda, head of the FARC, in a Jan. 18 interview with the Colombian weekly *Semana*, in which he insisted that coca could only be "eradicated" through crop substitution. Marulanda appealed to the "international organizations," that "if they can trust in us and give us money, we promise to end coca growing."

McCaffrey was asked by a Colombian journalist on Jan. 6, if more U.S. money for alternative crop development, "as part of the peace process under way in Colombia," might not get Peru-style results in Colombia? McCaffrey said, "Let me categorically say that what you've been briefed on today [Peru and Bolivia anti-drug successes], in my professional judgment, was not the significant resources which have been placed in support of Peru and Bolivia by the State Department, Department of Defense, etc. It was changed political will. This was the result of Peruvian and Bolivian leadership, not U.S. leadership."