

Ernesto Samper Pizano: front man for the Colombian dope traffickers

by an EIR Investigative Team

On Sept. 20, it was revealed that the U. S. State Department had canceled the entrance visas of two dozen Colombians, including eight congressmen, for suspected involvement with the narcotics trade. When the existence of the list was made known, presidential candidate Ernesto Samper Pizano protested, "It is very dangerous for us to initiate a campaign of moral terrorism, and for all Colombians to have to go to the [U.S.]

One of the individuals on the State Department's "black list" is presidential candidate Alberto Santofimio Botero, whose political faction inside the Liberal Party has long been a haven for such drug mafiosi as Medellín Cartel chieftain Pablo Escobar. Santofimio, who has charged the U. S. Central Intelligence Agency and Drug Enforcement Administration with murdering front-running presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galán on Aug. 18, had first formulated the accusation of "moral terrorism" against the United States.

Also on the U.S. "black list" are Sen. Juan Slebi, an open advocate of drug legalization, and political leader David Name Terán, brother of former Labor Minister José Name Terán. All are notorious for their involvement with the Atlantic Coast contraband trade, and all of them are high-profile activists within the Samper presidential campaign.

The State Department's action against these Colombian "citizens above suspicion" was both correct and justified. Which leaves the question: Why was Ernesto Samper Pizano not included on the "black list"?

In the following dossier, we demonstrate that Samper Pizano is in fact the leader of the pro-drug forces inside Colombian ruling circles. Should Samper become President, he will legalize the drug trade as the prelude to delivering his nation over to Dope, Inc.

One major U. S. daily has publicized Samper's true role. On Sept. 26 the *Miami Herald* headlined its coverage on Colombia, "Leading Colombian Candidate Suggests Legalization of Drugs." The article describes Samper as "the first major presidential candidate" to publicly endorse legalization. Now that it can no longer pretend that "it didn't know," it is incumbent upon the U. S. State Department to include Samper Pizano on its "black list."

Launching the legalization effort

From 1977 to 1980, Ernesto Samper Pizano served as president of the **National Association of Financial Insti-**

tutes (ANIF), a think tank and lobby of the country's most powerful financial agencies. In the January-March 1979 edition of ANIF's quarterly magazine *Carta Financiera*, ANIF economist **Hernando Ruiz Hernández** published an article on "The Production and Marketing of Marijuana in Colombia," which marked the opening of the ANIF campaign to legalize the marijuana trade.

On March 15-16, 1979, ANIF's president Samper Pizano sponsored an international symposium in Bogotá under the title "Marijuana: Myth and Reality," which was attended, among others, by:

- Colombian Attorney General Guillermo González Charry;
- U.S. Ambassador to Colombia Diego Asencio;
- White House drug adviser Lee Dogoloff;
- representatives of the U.S.-based **National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws** (NORML) and the pro-drug monthly *High Times*.

At the symposium, Samper presented his arguments for legalizing the drug trade, which ran the gamut from protecting the peasantry which makes its livelihood from drug production, to deriving economic benefits through legalized drug revenues, to eliminating the corruption and violence fostered by illegal drug smuggling.

The next issue of *High Times* carried a lengthy article, written by one of the attendees at the Bogotá symposium, singing the praises of Samper's legalization campaign. Samper is described as "identifiably wealthy, but instead of merely wearing his richness, he uses it. A fat, smug South American capitalist Samper is not. He is sharp, irresistibly ingratiating, and quick as a hawk." Samper's ANIF is described as Colombia's "leading marijuana lobby." In a July 1980 press statement, Samper himself characterized ANIF as "the Latin American coordinator of the international alliance to amend marijuana laws."

One year later, Samper authored an English-language pamphlet under ANIF auspices, entitled "A Proposal to Legalize Marijuana." Among the many lies in the pamphlet is the claim, identical to that of the Colombian Communist Party, that "marijuana is not grown by criminals, nor by opportunists hoping to get rich rapidly, but by some 30,000 peasant families . . . who have been traditionally excluded from the benefits of Colombia's economic development. . . . Marijuana production . . . constitutes an

occupation that, if not licit within the terms of the law, is legitimate according to a clear concept of social justice.”

Samper argues in the pamphlet that “repression” of the drug trade:

- “threatens and harms small farmers, humble fishermen, modest transporters”;
- “terrorizes inhabitants of production areas”;
- “breaks down the innovative social organization scheme that permits the thousands of small marijuana growers to help each other”;
- undermines moral values by forcing the creation of a clandestine economy which has corrupted the honest work ethic;
- increases the profitability for the drug mafias;
- causes “deterioration of [Colombia’s] national image”;
- corrupts “the security forces, the judiciary and all levels of public administration”;
- has caused “more generalized violence in the areas where the repressive campaign has been intensified.”

The U.S. connection

In July 1979, Samper Pizano devoted several months to touring the United States where, under joint NORML-ANIF auspices, he conducted intense lobbying efforts with U.S. representatives and senators, government officials, academics, and others to promote his proposal for “legalization on both sides.” In a July 1979 interview, Samper declared, “I think that the person in the U.S. who is nearest to the proposal for legalization is **Senator Kennedy**.” Samper also named Harvard professor **Norman Zinberg** as an ally in his legalization campaign. During his tour, Samper also met with the Carter administration’s representative to the Inter-American Development Bank **Ralph Duncan**, who endorsed Samper’s legalization proposal and lamented only that the proposal was not yet a Colombian government initiative.

Samper Pizano was also a member of the executive council of the **International Cannabis Alliance for Reform (ICAR)**, of which NORML is a member, and he was quoted in ICAR publications calling for the United States to recognize the legitimacy of Colombian marijuana exports. A close ally and associate of ICAR at the time was **Mathea Falco**, head of the State Department’s Bureau of International Narcotics Matters during the Carter-Mondale administration and also a member of NORML’s advisory board. Falco is believed to have opened the door to Samper Pizano’s U.S. tour and subsequent lobbying efforts.

On the mafia payroll

Samper Pizano left ANIF to become director of the Liberal Party in 1980. His new position was provided by his mentor, former President and party “patriarch” **Alfonso López Michelsen**, just as the ANIF presidency had been granted Samper by López’s cousin **Jaime Michelsen Uribe**, at the



Presidential candidate Ernesto Samper Pizano, the State Department’s friend in the Colombian dope legalization lobby.

time Colombia’s most powerful banker. **Michelsen Uribe** is currently in jail for dirty financial dealings. López needed Samper in the Liberal Party executive in order to assure his own nomination by the party as its presidential candidate. Samper went on to become the campaign manager for López’s reelection bid in 1982.

During the López campaign, Samper met with and accepted substantial contributions from leading drug kingpins. In 1983, convicted cocaine smuggler and former chieftain of the Medellín Cartel **Carlos Lehder Rivas** gave an interview to the Colombian press revealing that he had represented the entire cartel leadership in donating more than 20 million pesos to the López Michelsen campaign, with the explicit understanding that the contribution was a down-payment for legalization of the drug trade should López win the presidency. Samper was forced to acknowledge that he had accepted the money, while denying that any strings had been attached.

Despite the financial backing of the drug mob and the commitment of his own substantial wealth to the campaign, the universally despised López lost his presidential bid. Samper, who had hoped to ride López’s coattails into the Senate and thence to the presidency itself, also lost in the anti-López backlash. Two years later, Samper sought and won a seat in the Bogotá city council, campaigning on a platform which urged the legalization of Colombia’s contra-

band trade. He would ultimately use that post as a stepping-stone into the Senate in 1986.

The murder of Lara Bonilla

On April 30, 1984, Colombian Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla was murdered by Medellín Cartel hit-men. Lara Bonilla had directed a spectacular series of raids against the cartel's extensive jungle cocaine refineries, had begun investigations into several drug money-laundering operations in the country, and had started to turn his sights on the political protectors of the mob, when his assassination was ordered. One week later, Samper's mentor López Michelsen met secretly in Panama with the cartel's high command, allegedly to record and convey their interest in negotiating a deal with then President Belisario Betancur. That deal, according to a document delivered to López by the traffickers and subsequently published, proposed that in exchange for a political amnesty (read: legalization) and an end to extradition, they would:

- dismantle illicit smuggling operations;
- invest their drug money inside the country;
- combat domestic consumption of drugs; and
- retire from "open or visible political activity."

President Betancur rejected the cartel's proposal, despite López's urgings.

The Galán murder

On Aug. 19, 1989, presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galán was murdered by mafia hit-men. Galán was a close friend of Lara Bonilla's, and with César Gaviria Trujillo (Galán's political successor), the three had collaborated in the founding of the anti-López political movement inside the Liberal Party known as New Liberalism (Nuevo Liberalismo).

Galán was widely viewed as a shoo-in as Colombian President in 1990, and as a dedicated enemy of the drug cartels. With Galán's death, the front-runner's position for the Liberal Party presidential nomination was open, and Samper Pizano's chances boosted. Samper immediately issued two responses. In a statement to RCN radio in Bogotá, he urged making "all the concessions necessary to achieve peace and avoid violence." He also declared that "Galán's banner cannot go slack, and we will take it up and fight for his ideals."

Samper then went on to attack President Barco's emergency decrees issued on the night of the Galán murder, which included extradition of captured traffickers and expropriation of properties and assets owned by the drug mafia. Samper charged that the measures were "inconvenient on the eve of new elections called to consolidate the democratic process." He called for a referendum to determine whether the population agreed with President Barco's course of action or not. He denounced U.S. offers of aid: "Let's not let Colombia be converted into a Vietnam of the war against drugs." He

opposed extradition: "I continue to believe that it is not the ideal solution." He urged dialogue with the mafia, and finally he told the daily *La República* Sept. 25, "If repression fails, there must be legalization."

The mafia's fifth column

On Sept. 22, shortly after her return from the United States where she was sent to hammer out a more concrete aid package to back up Colombia's war on drugs, Justice Minister **Monica de Greiff** was fired by President Barco, through the offer of a low-level ambassadorial post which she rejected.

The public story was that the minister had "wanted out" of the dangerous job for security reasons, including threats to herself and her family. In fact, De Greiff was part of Samper Pizano's "fifth column" inside the government, as she made clear by her statements to the press following her "resignation," that she:

- opposed extradition of drug traffickers (the cornerstone of Barco's anti-drug offensive);
- favored dialogue with the drug mafia;
- was joining Samper Pizano's presidential campaign.

Days after De Greiff's dismissal from the Barco cabinet, Samper Pizano demanded a meeting of Liberal Party congressmen to formulate a new policy on drugs. He told the media that one needn't "blindly" follow government policy simply by virtue of membership in the ruling Liberal Party. He also announced plans to demand a Liberal Party "statement of solidarity" with De Greiff.

At the same time, the president of Colombia's Chamber of Deputies **Norberto Morales Ballesteros** called for peace talks with the narcotics traffickers, saying, "People don't see government actions as capable of eliminating the terrorism." Morales is also a supporter of Samper Pizano's presidential candidacy.

The bankers' blessing

Samper Pizano has the blessing of the U.S. Establishment media, representing those financial interests that have managed to stay afloat during the past decade or more due largely to the international flow of hundreds of billions of drug dollars. In one week alone, several prominent articles appeared in major U.S. dailies praising candidate Samper Pizano, including:

- The Sept. 15 *Los Angeles Times* presented Samper as the country's leading anti-drug fighter, backing his President's anti-drug war because, "My responsibility at this moment is to my country and its people." Samper "now opposes legalization," wrote the *Los Angeles Times*, one week before Samper endorsed the legalization "option."

- The Sept. 24 *New York Times* devoted a feature-length article to Samper's presidential campaign, portraying him as a courageous anti-drug fighter dedicated to "an international solution" to the drug-trafficking problem.