



The Bogota affair

Why the terrorists were the winners

by Cynthia Rush

On April 27, the Colombian terrorist M-19 released the 13 diplomats it had held hostage in the Dominican embassy in Bogotá since Feb. 27. The terrorists had revised their original “nonnegotiable” demands for the release of 311 of their jailed comrades, accepting instead \$5 million. The M-19 released their hostages in Havana, Cuba and then flew on to Austria where they have been granted temporary asylum.

The crisis was resolved peacefully enough. In fact, the M-19 was given a hero’s welcome in Havana by the dignitaries of the Cuban Communist Party and, incredibly, was asked by Colombia’s President Turbay to return to function as a legitimate political party.

What transpired to give a group which has assassinated leading political and labor figures in Colombia, kidnapped hundreds of others, took over a foreign embassy and threatened to assassinate all the hostages credibility as a major political force within Colombia?

The crisis was in fact an experiment during which a professional “crisis management” team successfully intervened on Colombian national sovereignty and interests to impose “international law.” As a result, representatives of the International Red Cross, the Human Rights Commission of the Organization of American States (OAS) and other supranational “human rights” agencies are now, for all intents and purposes, running the government’s trial of M-19 suspects in Bogotá under the guise of defending their democratic rights.

At each point in the crisis, the Colombian government, already cowed by the constant threat of a right-wing military coup, succumbed to the methods of classical brainwashing which alternately saw the Turbay government attacked for not moving fast enough to resolve the hostage situation and then rewarded when it made concessions to the M-19. At the same time, the M-19 abandoned its “hard-line” demands and asked instead that the government accept the presence of international “human rights” agencies as observers at the court martials of their jailed comrades and as participants in the negotiations.

In the eyes of the Turbay government, these demands

were far less provocative to the right wing. But in meeting those demands, Turbay opened Colombia’s door to international human rights organizations which moved in to help “manage” the crisis.

From the initial two government officials originally involved in talks with the M-19, the number of negotiators swelled to include foreigners and members of the political opposition summoned by the guerrillas.

Dr. Erik Kobel, a Swiss physician who works for the International Red Cross, was given unlimited privileges in Colombia allegedly to ensure that the human rights of the hostages as well as the suspected subversives were being respected. Kobel visited the occupied embassy whenever he wished, held private interviews with the guerrillas and the hostages, and even held “group therapy” sessions with the hostages!

For having cooperated so willingly, the Turbay government is now being warmly congratulated. President Carter sent Turbay a letter thanking him for his “firm and patient leadership” during the two-month occupation of the embassy. Some of the hostages who were most adamant that Turbay adhere to “international law” in resolving the crisis—such as the Venezuelan ambassador to Colombia—are now proclaiming Turbay’s “marvelous” behavior.

The evidence of brainwashing of the hostages themselves, however, is the most pathetic aspect of this operation. Upon their release in Havana, several of the ambassadors expressed only praise and admiration for the M-19 terrorists, building up its image as a “nationalist, patriotic” and very Catholic group, seeking only to ensure real democracy for Colombia. The *New York Times* reported April 28 that the guerrillas held a farewell party for the ambassadors the night before their release, and all bade each other “emotional” goodbyes.

While the U.S. Ambassador Diego Ascencio was reported giving a fond goodbye kiss to one of the female guerrillas, Mexican Ambassador Ricardo Galan explained that “in 60 days of living together you learn to admire people as people, if not to admire their ideas ... As people, some of them [the M-19] were excellent.”