

Countdown to the Non-Aligned summit: Colombia's President Betancur under attack

by Valerie Rush

The most effective Ibero-American leader in the drive for a New World Economic Order is currently fighting for his political life. Colombian President Belisario Betancur, whose application for membership in the Non-Aligned is expected to be approved at the upcoming New Delhi summit in March, is facing a challenge to his presidency by military and political forces determined to eliminate his influence within the developing sector.

Inside Colombia, Defense Minister Fernando Landazábal is heading up the destabilization effort. In an editorial in the latest issue of *Fuerzas Armadas* magazine, Landazábal predicts that "violence of incalculable and unforeseen proportions" will be sweeping Colombia in the form of "generalized civil war" unless the drug-tainted military, which Betancur has attempted to rein in since coming to power, is again given its head. Betancur's guerrilla amnesty, a personal initiative designed to stabilize the countryside and limit the military's sphere of influence, is characterized by Landazábal as "stripping away the political mask with which the guerrillas have protected themselves. . . . Let there be no mistake. The Colombian military does not display the insignia of its hierarchy for surrender, but for victory."

One week earlier, Army Commander Gen. Gustavo Matamoros had violated military protocol by delivering a report to the Colombian Attorney General's office purporting to document the failure of Betancur's amnesty initiative in keeping the peace. At the same time, radio reports in Bogotá claimed that the Colombian army was gathering troops in the southern portion of the country for a "final and definitive battle" with the guerrillas who dominate the region.

The government issued a Jan. 22 statement that the President has no plans to reimpose a state of siege in Colombia. "The amnesty has *not* failed," declared the Minister. In a statement before Colombia's diplomatic corps in Bogotá Jan. 26, President Betancur sent a further signal: "We cannot remain impassive before the unleashed arms race, no longer limited to the great powers but extended to the developing-sector nations. Faced with this reality, *dialogue must replace violence and war* fomented by injustice and intransigence

[emphasis added]."

In a Jan. 26 speech, Betancur reaffirmed his government's commitment to join the Non-Aligned movement and play a leading role in creating North-South momentum for a New World Economic Order. "This urgent objective is slowly becoming a mere piece of rhetoric instead of the hope of the developing nations, with their economies oppressed by cold and cruel treatment which prevents their attending to such basic necessities as food, housing, education, and health. Colombia will contribute to the true proposals which originally inspired the [Non-Aligned] movement."

The deployments against Betancur

One week before the Matamoros document was made public, U.S. banker and Trilateral Commission head David Rockefeller made his appearance in Bogotá. After Rockefeller met with President Betancur Jan. 11, he was forced to deny to the press that his visit was intended as a pressure tactic against Colombia's joining the Non-Aligned. In an interchange with reporters, Rockefeller specifically attacked the proposal for a collective renegotiation of Ibero-America's foreign debt which Betancur had made to visiting President Ronald Reagan last December, terming it "highly dangerous."

In early January, Betancur's leading enemy within Colombia, former President Alfonso López Michelsen, was in Cuba under the sponsorship of terrorist sympathizer and Nobel laureate Gabriel García Márquez. López spent nearly a full week cultivating a "close personal relationship" with Cuban President and current Non-Aligned head Fidel Castro. Inside Colombia, it was widely rumored that López hoped to supplant the president-to-president relationship Betancur would be seeking to develop as a new member of the Non-Aligned.

On Jan. 23, the most explicit threat against Betancur to date appeared in the *Diario las Américas*, a Spanish-language daily published in Miami, the stronghold of Colombia's drug-trafficking networks. *Diario's* editorial "lamented" that "within every democratic country there are 'useful fools' who, without desiring to be communist, play along with

communism in the belief that, at the right moment, they can defeat it. Experience shows that these useful fools end up in front of firing squads. . . ." That same day, Betancur ordered his Foreign Minister Lloreda Caicedo to grant an interview to the leading Bogotá daily *El Tiempo*, which signaled that U.S. "reprisals" against Colombia for joining the Non-Aligned would not be tolerated.

Betancur has been targeted not because of populist speeches about keeping Colombia outside the spheres of influence of the great powers or because of his attacks on the arms race. Betancur has been targeted because he is the first President Colombia has had in many decades who has brought a humanist purpose to governing. His frequent references to the lessons taught by 19th-century humanist scientists Alexander von Humboldt and Celestino Mutis inform the "Second Botanical Expedition" development projects which Betancur has made the cultural and scientific hallmark of his administration.

In a recent speech in the department of Huila, Betancur told a delighted crowd that Lenin had once defined communism as nothing more than socialism with electricity. For me, said Betancur, "Democracy plus electricity means development in freedom."

Other Non-Aligned targets

Another applicant, Bolivia—whose population is having its first experience of political sanity under the recently inaugurated Siles Zuazo administration—was rocked by a series of coup threats and a U.S. State Department-orchestrated cabinet crisis during January (see article, page 46). The effect of this crisis was to achieve one immediate success: President Siles was unable to attend a scheduled meeting in Europe Jan. 22 with the chiefs of government of Spain and France, as well as the heads of several other countries. Nor was Siles able to accept the invitation of Spanish Prime Minister Felipe González to spend a week in Madrid following the presidential summit. With coup organizing openly taking place within the military and a still unresolved government crisis, if Siles left Bolivia, it would be for good.

Thus Siles has been removed from the immediate international coordination for a New World Economic Order. The Bolivian President has filled the cabinet posts abandoned by the opposition MIR party with colleagues from his own party, and he has pledged to continue to govern based on a return to democracy and an unrelenting war on drugs, but there is little question that his efforts both domestically and internationally have been set back.

Argentina, the leading Ibero-American nation inside the Non-Aligned Movement, is already playing an important role in maintaining the cohesion of that body against numerous splinter tactics. The Argentines were straitjacketed Jan. 24 by the imposition of an International Monetary Fund package of austerity which, if enforced, will paralyze the government both domestically and in foreign affairs with violence and even civil war.

Smear campaign aimed at India's Indira Gandhi

by Susan Brady

Rumors are circulating internationally that "certain circumstances" could prevent the Non-Aligned summit from taking place. Fueling this sabotage effort is the black propaganda campaign that has been launched in the Western press against India and its Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, in an attempt to parley her party's recent electoral defeats in two southern Indian states into the collapse of Mrs. Gandhi's government and the dissolution of the nation.

The near-term aim of this exercise is to destabilize India and undermine the authority of Prime Minister Gandhi as she assumes leadership of the Non-Aligned movement. The British press led the charge with a London *Times* feature on the demise of the "Nehru Dynasty." The *Times* has been joined by the London *Economist*, the *Statesman* and the BBC. The latter recently ran a lengthy radio feature on the "extreme danger" in which Mrs. Gandhi finds herself. The campaign jumped the Channel, and the West German weekly *Der Spiegel* hit the streets with a multi-page lead international feature about how the "arrogant Nehru clan" is in trouble, how Mrs. Gandhi's rule over India is threatened, and so on.

Sweden's largest-circulation morning newspaper, *Dagens Nyheter*, has published a major op-ed by the paper's editor-in-chief Svante Nysander titled "Political Disintegration in India Has Its Roots in the Planned Economy." Featuring the opinions of a "sociologist" in New Delhi named Rajni Kothari, a discredited individual with known ties to anti-India networks in international intelligence circles, Nysander's assertions that the Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka election defeats for the Congress-I party "could be the beginning of the end of rule for Indira. . . . Many are now fearing that since she is becoming weaker, there will be anarchy for India." Kothari, for his part, expresses enthusiasm at the prospect.

Altaf Gauhar, an individual with links to the Brandt Commission, and whose *South* magazine is financed by Pakistani dirty-money kingpin Agha Hassan Abedi, is selling the imminent political revival of Morarji Desai to anyone who will listen. Gauhar's "prediction" is couched in a titillating rendition of how Mrs. Gandhi is increasingly becoming "paranoid" and awash in dirty laundry. Gauhar does not attempt to hide his delight in his own fantastic stories.

More ominously, the rumor mill of distortion and vilification concerning the Prime Minister herself has been supplemented by a resurgence of scenario-mongering over an alleged plan to carry out a pre-emptive strike against Pakistani nuclear installations à la Baghdad, a plan which is alternately attributed to Israel and India, or, even more improbably,