

Andean Report by Valerie Rush

Who deploys the 'cocaine cartel'?

The "underground" is going public in an IMF-directed bid to force debt payment with narco-dollars.

In a Venezuelan newspaper article dated Aug. 19, the attorney for Bolivian "Cocaine King" Roberto Suárez is quoted as saying that Suárez holds "proof positive" that Bolivian Interior Minister Mario Roncal is on the take from drug runners. Then, one of Colombia's leading "cocaine magnates," an associate of congressman Pablo Escobar, scandalized Colombian political circles with charges that newly appointed Justice Minister Lara Bonilla had accepted thousands of dollars from a noted drug trafficker for his senatorial campaign.

Suárez employs some 235,000 Indians on his vast coca plantations in central Bolivia. Escobar, one of the world's richest men, has built up a personal fortune of \$2 billion by financing cocaine traffic to the U.S. from his home base in Medellín, Colombia.

Why the sudden elevation of the "cocaine cartel," as ABC-TV dubbed it in a recent documentary, from the criminal underground into the political limelight? These highly publicized "surfacing" of leading Dope, Inc. figures in Latin America are timed to coincide with the tightening of the austerity screws by the International Monetary Fund. The aim is to force these countries to pay their debts with drug money. The more outrageous and widespread the scandal, the easier the IMF hopes it will be to force the government in question to cave in.

Exemplary is the case of Peru, which has just signed a debt refinanc-

ing package with the Club of Paris—the Western nations' debt renegotiating body—at a stupendous interest rate of 4 percent above Libor. With nothing left to pay its debt, much less at such astronomical interest rates, Peru is opening up its territory to investments by the Italian and Israeli mafias for the construction of vast new "Resorts International"-style projects designed to bring in desperately needed foreign exchange.

The projects—to include hotels, casinos, and race tracks—will sprout along the length of the Peruvian jungle fringe, from northern Tarapoto through the drug centers of Ayacucho, Huanuco, Pasco, Junin, and Ucayali down through the department of Madre de Dios, and are reportedly being financed through the Italian P-2-linked Banco Ambrosiano Andino.

Just as the Mexican-U.S. mafias converted northwestern Mexico into their playground in the early 1900s, so is Peru intended to become the South American mafias' "Paradise Island."

Bolivia is another case in point. The confederation of cocaine traffickers—headed by Roberto Suárez—is organizing a return to power through a coup d'état against President Siles Zuazo. According to their own admission, all they lack is an untainted military figure to place at the helm.

This time their new government will wear an "anti-drug" face, and one of its first acts after seizing power will be to eliminate the independent "free enterprise" coca growers who have

flooded the cocaine market and depressed prices.

As part of the coup preparations, Suárez has deployed his lawyers and bought-and-paid-for congressmen to smear collaborators of Siles Zuazo with charges of association with drug traffickers. Their opening move is to accuse Interior Minister Roncal. The rest, they hope, will follow.

In Colombia, the Betancur government is besieged by the so-called *clase emergente* which has now fully emerged and, while actively seeking to buy up political posts, is smearing every government official possible.

The most recent—and outrageous—case is the charge just levelled against the new Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla of having taken "hot money" to finance an earlier senatorial campaign. The charges were made by Jairo Ortega Ramírez, the congressman whose alternate back home in the drug capital of Medellín is Pablo Escobar. Further, the charges were made at the opening session of a congressional debate on the infiltration of "hot money" into politics called by Justice Minister Lara Bonilla himself.

Lara Bonilla responded to Ortega and Escobar's offensive with the demand that "the courts of investigation not be turned into courts of drug traffickers," but the remainder of his extraordinary congressional session has been turned into a personal self-defense. Corrupt media like the magazine *Semana* have already begun to publish the alleged evidence against Lara Bonilla.

These assaults by drug traffickers against members of constitutionally elected governments have a simple purpose. Once the public is convinced that honesty in government is a thing of the past, it will accept the International Monetary Fund's insistence that cocaine is their only future.