

## Andean Report by Valerie Rush

### 'Mafiagate' versus Betancur

*A new Colombian cocaine scandal is aimed by his enemies against the anti-drug President himself.*

The Madrid-Colombia cocaine scandal that has erupted within the past few weeks is being directed against Colombian President Betancur on at least two simultaneous levels. The first, run by the mafia itself, is designed to break Betancur's anti-drug resolve.

According to Spanish intelligence sources, when Gustavo Jacome Lemus, the second secretary at the Colombian embassy in Madrid, was arrested on Dec. 23 for using the diplomatic pouch as his cocaine smuggling route, his first act was to claim that President Betancur was personally complicit in the trafficking. *El País* of Madrid did not hesitate to splash across its front page the provocative and false headline, "Cocaine Comes from the Presidency."

The attempts to implicate Betancur are easily understood in light of the mafia's non-stop efforts to bully, terrify, and now, presumably, humiliate the Betancur government into abandoning its war on drugs, and particularly the President's commitment to extraditing wanted drug traffickers. It is no accident that Jacome Lemus is reportedly an intimate friend and likely employee of Jorge Luis Ochoa and Gilberto Rodríguez, two of Colombia's most prominent mafia kingpins recently arrested in Madrid and now facing extradition to the United States.

The mafia's first major offensive aimed at dissuading the Colombian government from its anti-drug efforts was the brutal April 30 slaying of Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla. The impact of that bloody act was, however, to strengthen Betancur's re-

solve to wipe the mafia out finally and permanently. This latest transparent attempt to implicate Betancur in the drug trade, as was originally attempted with Lara Bonilla, has failed just as miserably.

Delivering his year-end presentation to a nationwide television and radio audience on New Year's eve, President Betancur declared: "The [mafia's] threats are useless. We will not yield a millimeter. The most they can do is take our lives and that rests with the will of God, by whose grace we are alive and well. The example of [murdered Justice] Minister Lara Bonilla will guide us."

Betancur added, "There is no truce in this war; there is no room for false compassion for those who directly or indirectly have been or are now in this dirty and contaminating business. . . . Anyone caught should pay all—absolutely all—the consequences. . . ." The two officials charged with running the international press section of the presidency have been arrested.

The second level of assault on Betancur is, if anything, more insidious. Immediately when the news broke of the cocaine scandal, the Bogotá daily *El Siglo*—the newspaper of former ambassador to the United States and perennial presidential contender Alvaro Gómez Hurtado—covered it from the angle of implicating J. Emilio Valderrama, former Colombia ambassador to Spain, in the case. The mafia courier who had sent the cocaine through the diplomatic pouch from Bogotá was a Spaniard named Ballesteros, who had allegedly presented

"personal authorization" from J. Emilio Valderrama for sending the sealed film reels that disguised the cocaine shipment.

Valderrama is not only an intimate friend of President Betancur's, but also the man considered most likely to challenge the presidential bid of the neo-fascist Gómez Hurtado in the 1986 elections; Valderrama's candidacy would likely be under President Betancur's sponsorship.

Valderrama has patiently explained to the public that all ambassadors regularly do such small favors as authorizing the sending of Colombia publicity films via the diplomatic pouch, as he was led to believe he was doing by Ballesteros and Jacome Lemus. Nonetheless, *El Siglo* played up Valderrama's "confession" and has suggested as well that Valderrama is also implicated in the scandalous theft of \$13.5 million out of a Colombian government account in the London branch of Chase Manhattan Bank early last year.

That Alvaro Gómez personally and *El Siglo* repeatedly have endorsed a policy of drug legalization for Colombia suggests that there is a likely link between the two levels of assault currently directed against the President. The discrediting of J. Emilio Valderrama is but a short step away from smearing President Betancur himself with sufficient scandal to eliminate him as a counterforce to Alvaro Gómez's faction within the Conservative Party, come time to choose the official party candidate.

If the mafia/Alvaro Gómez strategy succeeds in emasculating Betancur's anti-drug offensive and his political power as well, there will be little to stand in the way of a Gómez presidency in 1986. And the drug mafia would be sharing the throne right along with him.