

Andean Report by Valerie Rush

Betancur extradites the dope pushers

But his bid to "internationalize" the war on drugs has put him under fire from the mafia—and his own attorney general.

President Belisario Betancur's extradition on Jan. 5 of four Colombian drug traffickers wanted in the United States has triggered a furious counter-attack from the mafia, which has threatened to murder five Americans for every Colombian extradited and to blow up the Colombian consulate in New York City and the Drug Enforcement Administration headquarters in Washington, D.C.

The extradition went ahead despite terror threats against President Betancur, his cabinet members, U.S. Ambassador Lewis Tambs, and American citizens resident in Colombia. The mafia is particularly keen on forcing a mass exodus of Americans; but Tambs's forced departure from the country and the subsequent exodus of some U.S. personnel were also a result of the U.S. State Department's refusal to back up its own ambassador, who had pledged his support for Betancur's war on drugs.

The recent Spanish government decision to follow Colombia's example and approve the extradition of two of Colombia's most-wanted drug criminals to the United States has triggered a bloody rampage by the mafia networks, forcing Colombian and Spanish consulates around the world to implement security precautions.

Betancur's decision to extradite the criminals signifies what he calls an "internationalization" of the war on drugs. Instead of facing a court system which has been corrupted or intimidated into serving as a revolving door

for Colombia's most-wanted drug criminals, the mafiosi will now face judges and juries generally outside their reach, and, consequently, long prison sentences.

Yet the President's move has drawn heavy fire from the press and even from within his own administration—from self-proclaimed "nationalists" who are in fact covering for the dope pushers. Attorney General Carlos Jimenez Gomez—the same who met without authorization with Colombia's fugitive mafia chieftains in Panama shortly after the assassination of Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla last May—issued an open letter to President Betancur on Jan. 12 demanding a reversal of the President's extradition policy.

Claims from families of the extradited mafiosi that they are being "maltreated" and "abused" by the U.S. authorities have been picked up by certain elements within the press to demand that Betancur reverse his policy. The fact that cautious U.S. authorities brought the Colombian mafiosi before the Miami courts chained hand and foot and under machine-gun guard has been trumpeted in the Colombian press as a violation of the civil rights of the prisoners. Prominent leftist economics columnist Jorge Child charged that the treatment of the prisoners was a reflection of Ronald Reagan's alleged "anti-Hispanic," "McCarthyite" tactics, and endorsed the attorney general's opposition to extradition.

Another columnist and former for-

eign minister, Alfredo Vasquez Carrizosa, charged Betancur with having "sacrificed his nationalism." Sensationalist papers like Bogota's *El Espacio* loudly repeated the claims of "torture" and "starvation" made by the families of the mafiosi currently standing trial.

Despite the clamor of the mafia and its propagandists, Betancur has continued his offensive. The authorities have arrested the mafia "contractor" who hired the assassins of Lara Bonilla, along with five other mafia hit-men; terrorists responsible for kidnapping Betancur's brother were also arrested, and the President has launched an investigation of all Colombian diplomatic legations in Europe, following a cocaine scandal involving Colombian diplomatic personnel in Spain.

In a public statement issued in response to his attorney general's attack, the President explained the reasons for his crackdown:

"The government has determined that application of the [extradition] treaty in the fight against the drug trade is appropriate because it is conscious of the gravity of the crime. In truth, at the beginning it abstained from applying [the treaty] to Colombia for known philosophical reasons, and perhaps this was seen as weakness or yielding to such crimes. Public opinion is aware that the criminals have carried their daring to incredible extremes, which culminated in the hideous assassination of Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla. This outrageous act, which signified open defiance of Colombia's institutions, plus the certainty that we are faced with an internationalization of the drug trade which demands an equally international defensive response, moved the government to apply the treaty to its fullest extent."