

Andean Report by Valerie Rush

A movement above parties

Oligarchs of both traditional parties are running scared at the emergence of a powerful new force.

When President Betancur appointed Jorge Carrillo Rojas, the outspoken vice-president of the UTC trade union federation, as his new labor minister, irate Liberal Party presidential candidate Virgilio Barco protested at not having been consulted.

Barco, like his political associate, former president Alfonso López Michelsen, has good reason to be nervous. The first trade unionist in decades to be brought into a cabinet, Carrillo is guaranteed to raise the white hairs of Colombia's oligarchy, of which oil-rich Barco and bank-rich López are exemplary members. In particular, Carrillo's declared-war on the International Monetary Fund and the drug trade may well take aim at certain figures, in both his own Liberal Party and the ruling Conservative Party, whose relations with the Fund and the drug mob are an open secret.

Barco's complaint at Carrillo's nomination was less than subtle. *El Tiempo*, the newspaper behind López Michelsen, was hardly more sophisticated. In an Aug. 22 editorial, *El Tiempo* "praises" Carrillo for his dedication to labor's cause, but adds: "He reminds one of the legendary José Raquel Mercado. His style is similar to the sacrificed leader." Trade union leader Raquel Mercado was assassinated by M-19 terrorists in 1974. *El Tiempo* adds, "We hope Dr. Betancur won't turn [the Carrillo appointment] into a populist trampoline for his return to power."

The Carrillo appointment was a surprise move by Colombia's unor-

thodox President. It must be seen in the context of Betancur's drive in this, his final year in office, to forge a supra-party movement of nationalist forces which can prevent the drug-tainted oligarchy from recapturing the presidency in 1986.

That supra-party movement was formally launched in mid-August when Liberal Party dissident Luis Carlos Galán Sarmiento announced to an outdoor rally of 50,000 supporters that he would challenge the official Liberal and Conservative candidates for the presidency. Galán, although a Liberal, and Betancur, although a Conservative, represent elements within their respective parties determined to rid the nation of the mafia-allied parasites in Colombia's political class.

In the weeks preceding Galán's announcement, he held lengthy negotiations with Betancur's ally inside the Conservative Party, J. Emilio Valderrama. Valderrama had hoped to challenge the neo-fascist Alvaro Gómez Hurtado for the Conservative presidential nomination, but was unable to break through the web of promises and backroom deals by which Gómez had secured his candidacy. So, Valderrama moved to join forces with the "Galanistas," establishing the foundation of a new nationalist current which might be capable of duplicating Betancur's 1982 landslide victory—for Galán.

Although Carrillo, a member of the Liberal Party, is not part of Galán's "New Liberalism" faction, his

principled fight to protect the working class from the ravages of IMF austerity and mafia exploitation has consistently placed him at odds with the party leadership.

Betancur is prohibited from interfering in the electoral process. Nevertheless, on Aug. 10, he told the press that Colombia's voters would most likely reject both Barco and Gómez, a conclusion which was, "of course," not his own, but rather the private opinion of Uruguayan President Julio Sanguinetti, "one of the most knowledgeable individuals on Colombian politics."

Said Betancur, "As the number of independent voters has grown, they will surely not vote for either López, Barco, or Gómez Hurtado, but rather—with a zeal for new faces—for Galán Sarmiento."

Galán, at a banquet of his New Liberalism faction Aug. 14, denounced the official Liberal and Conservative candidates as "tied to a political class both wasted and filled with vice." The drug mafia, he said, has infiltrated the two "traditional" parties by financing electoral campaigns. He compared the Liberal and Conservative party leadership to two hippopotami, who one week earlier, had mauled a fisherman to death when he accidentally stumbled upon their river-bottom nest. The animals had been brought from Africa by one of Colombia's wealthy cocaine mafiosi.

"These hippopotami," said Galán, "are like the party machinery, especially when they lie with their mates in zoos abandoned by individuals with huge and shady fortunes. . . . The party machines—like the hippopotami—sleep quietly, but if they awaken frightened, or their love-making is disturbed, they are momentarily dangerous. . . . However, their huge and slow bodies won't allow them to go very far."