

Colombia launches intense anti-drug war

by Mark Sonnenblick

The most intense war on drugs in modern history is now being waged in Colombia. During the 24 days following the Dec. 17 assassination of the respected publisher of the Bogota daily *El Espectador*, Guillermo Cano, police and army have raided 1,198 homes and safehouses used by known drug traffickers. Operating without need of search warrants, police and the army netted 783 persons linked to drug traffic, including 3 of the 72 wanted for extradition to the United States, and Evaristo Porras, one of the mafia chieftains.

In retaliation, a gunman walked up to former Justice Minister Enrique Parejo González in Budapest, Hungary, Jan. 11 and shot three to five bullets into him as he left his apartment there. Miraculously, the bullet which hit his head went through the roof of the mouth and came out behind the ear, just missing the brain. Parejo was serving as ambassador to Hungary. He may have believed that Dope, Inc. does not operate in Communist states. The mafia thus put on notice those whom it has threatened: This is war to the death, and there is no place to hide.

Parejo ran the biggest Colombian anti-drug offensive until the present one, following the April 30, 1984 murder of his predecessor, Rodrigo Lara Bonilla. He sent in military force to smash dozens of cocaine refineries in the Colombian jungle. He persisted in spraying herbicides on marijuana and coca crops, despite howls from "environmentalists." But his unpardonable crime was to extradite 13 top Colombian traffickers, 9 of them to the United States. One of them was Hernán Botero, who had trusted the power of his political protectors to provide him immunity.

An "Hernán Botero Command" claimed responsibility for the attempt on Parejo. A message read to UPI stated, "We who were extradited take responsibility for the attempt on the life of the traitor and extraditer, which took place in Budapest. This attempt was made after he was tried and convicted for the crime of treason to the fatherland, of having handed over our citizens to North American Imperialism."

Financier Botero was the first Colombian extradited in February 1985. Four months later he was convicted in Miami of laundering \$57 million in drug money. Botero was a key figure in the "Medellín Cartel," and built up a formidable political machine based on his ownership of a soccer team,

Club Atlético Nacional. When he installed lighting in the local stadium, he became a local hero among those who share Henry Kissinger's sports preferences.

When Botero was on trial, one of his character witnesses was Mario Valderrama. Valderrama was just made vice-president of the Union of Colombian Workers (UTC), an operation financed and controlled by the State Department's American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD). Valderrama and UTC president Victor Acosta responded to Colombia's anti-drug offensive by trying to spark a general strike. Their efforts were blocked by Jorge Carrillo, former UTC vice-president who now presides over a new labor body to which 80% of Colombian organized labor belongs. Carrillo's battle against AIFLD and its *pro-drug unionists* has led to threats. One of them was delivered by Congressman Ernesto Lucena Quevedo, who accused Carrillo of being a communist sympathizer.

The same politician leveled the same accusation against Carlos Ossa Escobar, the head of Colombia's peace commission. Ossa had just confronted 23,400 coca-growing peasants riled up by drug traffickers and communists to demand the army be removed from the region. In several days of hard arguing, he convinced not only the peasants but even the VII front of the Communist Party-led Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) to accept the army presence, to welcome increased police presence, and to stop growing coca. The government will invest in the region's development, build roads, and pay transport costs for the food crops which would replace the coca.

Economic grievances

Carrillo and Ossa courageously thwarted the mafia's attempts to turn discontent over economic policies into violence which would divert the military from the war on drugs. But policies approved by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank remain a permanent provocation. Narcoterrorists, on the pretext of protesting 20% increases in bus fares, firebombed buses in the cities of Barranquilla and Medellín, two centers of mafia power, on Jan. 13, killing 14 people. Some military factions would prefer to overthrow President Virgilio Barco—in the name of "stopping chaos"—rather than fight drugs.

Some 80% of Colombia's people want a still *tougher* war on drugs, the latest polls indicate. Guillermo Cano's sons, who now run *El Espectador*, insist daily that police actions will prove unsuccessful if the politicians protecting narcotics traffic are not put away. On Jan. 14, it pressed for the pursuit of "many professionals and eminent members of other groups like ranchers and merchants linked to the cartel's magnates."

In response to public calls for convicted narcotics traffickers to be put to death, Germán Villa Gaviria, Archbishop of Barranquilla, said, "The Catholic Church's position on the death penalty is in the Bible. It does not oppose it. The death penalty does not go against Christian morality."