

Andean Report by Valerie Rush

Deal-making with the mob spreads

Colombia's failure to take on the drug traffickers has put the entire region in danger of mob takeover.

When the Barco government in Colombia permitted the "legal" release from jail of Jorge Luis Ochoa, one of the world's most wanted drug criminals, it was not only pronouncing a death sentence for Colombian justice. The Barco administration's surrender to the mob—under pressure from the international banks—has also facilitated the spread of capitulation throughout the Andean region.

In neighboring Peru, the courts have taken a lesson from their "hear-no-evil, see-no-evil" Colombian counterparts, issuing a ruling that paves the way for the ultimate release from jail of Peru's most prominent mafia "godfather," Reynaldo Rodríguez López. He is the owner of the cocaine-refining complex in Lima known as "Villa Coca." Lack of evidence was cited, by judges going all the way up to the Peruvian Supreme Court, as the basis for absolving Rodríguez of charges of customs fraud.

In addition, the courts ordered that Rodríguez's police record be wiped clean. Thereby, the "godfather" will face drug-trafficking charges as a "first offender." Under such circumstances, his well-paid lawyers hope to get him out of jail with a slap on the wrist.

Equally distressing is the report that a top leader of the narco-terrorist Shining Path, Laura Zambrano (a.k.a. Comrade Meche) has just been released from jail under a new anti-terrorist law which abolishes the crime of "apology" or defense of terrorism. Although Zambrano is a known Shining Path chieftain, there allegedly exists no evidence against her to back up

the charge of terrorism.

The same legal mechanism protects the Lima newspaper *El Diario*, the acknowledged mouthpiece of Shining Path which daily exhorts the population to arms against the government, and editorially exults whenever military or police officers are gunned down by terrorists. The frustrated mayor of Lima, Jorge del Castillo, denounced the failure of the anti-terrorist statute to define defense of terrorism as a crime, arguing, "One cannot confuse freedom of the press with the assault that *El Diario* carries out daily through its publication encouraging terrorism."

Perhaps worst of all has been the García government's own capitulation to the very drug bankers García had previously risked his administration and head to do battle with. Initially, President García denounced the financial sector's collaboration with the drug trade as the worst treason against the nation, and threw the entire effort of his administration into a bank nationalization initiative designed to break the drug bankers' stranglehold over the economy.

But now, under the combined pressures and blackmail of the international creditors, the Peruvian economy is flat broke. On Jan. 28, the government issued Decree 009-88, which authorizes the Foreign Trade Institute to issue licenses for importing producer goods (capital goods, repair parts, etc.) without use of official (regulated) dollars, a perfect mechanism for laundering drug dollars.

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that the decree "gives birth to a mechanism for capturing foreign exchange. . . . Behind the bureaucratic language is the important recognition on the part of the government that there is a lack of foreign exchange and its own apparent incapacity to provide such through increasing legal exports." The government's decision to create a kind of *ventanilla siniestra* on the Colombian model—accepting undeclared dollars with no questions asked—marks the beginning of the end of that country's fight against the mob.

In Venezuela, where the presidential campaign is hot, a political scandal was triggered when pro-terrorist journalist José Vicente Rangel charged on national television that the presidential campaigns were receiving money from the drug trade. Outraged denials were issued by the various candidates, and the personal integrity of Vicente Rangel himself was called into question. Rangel claims to have proof, but has as yet offered none to the public. No one has yet commented on the announcement made just weeks earlier by the leading figure of the opposition Copei party, Oswaldo Alvarez Paz, who charged his own party's presidential candidate, Eduardo Fernández, with taking money from the drug mafia.

In tragic Bolivia, the government has not only publicly admitted that the bulk of its foreign exchange earnings come from cocaine, but has just announced a deal struck with the leftist labor federation COB to make coca cultivation legal, pending congressional approval. Although the argument used is that legalizing it will make it controllable, and permit the slow phase-out of drug production, the reality is that Bolivia, under the financial gun of the creditor banks, has no other economic resource upon which to survive.