

Narco-Communists face major defeat in Colombia

by Valerie Rush

Efforts by Colombia's narco-Communist forces to create maximum disruption, terror, and sabotage during a 24-hour general strike planned for Oct. 27 were unexpectedly smashed by the government of Virgilio Barco. A series of uncharacteristically harsh measures was decreed on the eve of the strike, evidently with the full support of the Armed Forces, which succeeded in breaking the back of the strike and preventing, at least for now, a major advance in the subversives' drive for power.

The narco-Communists have been very clear as to their agenda for taking power, and the role of the national strike within that. A joint military command structure was announced by the chiefs of all five terrorist organizations in the period leading toward the Oct. 27 strike, and a timetable for seizing power set. But for every armed terrorist Moscow can field in Colombia, 100 supporters are required to provide the infrastructure of power. By mounting a national strike of explicitly terrorist coloration, the guerrillas hoped to project an aura of power through control of the labor movement. The strike's defeat, described as "total" by the government, is thus a dramatic setback to the narco-Communists' plans.

Among the measures decreed by the government were the threatened suspension of the legal status of any trade union participating in the strike; the jailing for periods of 30-180 days of any striker caught in the act; the prohibition of any media coverage of violence or public disorder during the period of the strike, except for official bulletins; the provision of short-term government insurance coverage against damage for public transportation vehicles, and suspension of operating license for any transport companies which failed to operate their vehicles on the day of the strike. Governors and mayors were instructed not to authorize any strikes or demonstrations in zones under their control.

In announcing the measures in a nationwide address the night of Oct. 26, Government Minister César Gaviria Trujil-

lo, acting as chief-of-state in President Barco's absence, said that the emergency decree was necessitated by the bad faith in which the labor unions had negotiated. An irreversible order to proceed with the strike—which was publicly endorsed by every guerrilla organization in the country—had been issued in the midst of ongoing talks with the government, explained Gaviria.

On the day of the strike, Defense Minister Gen. Rafael Samudio Molina announced numerous raids against union headquarters involved in promoting the strike, and against the main offices of the Colombian Communist Party. Twenty-three leading strike organizers were arrested under the decreed emergency ordinances. Troops had been deployed to protect port, air, train, and truck terminals across the country, and to patrol the streets of all major cities. The Army also guarded food warehouses, bridges, diplomatic offices, the Congress, and other strategic locations.

With all the security, terrorists still managed to bomb two power transformers in the industrial zone of Yumbo, in Valle de Cauca department, leaving more than 100,000 without electricity for the next month; blow up a power pylon, which left the Caribbean resort city of Cartagena without electricity and water; bomb an electricity tower in the southern city of Pasto, leaving half the department of Nariño without power; and attack army installations in the town of Turbo, in the troubled, banana-growing Uraba region.

Despite the violence, the country was reported functioning at 95% capacity, with transportation freely functioning and most banks, offices, and commercial establishments open. Said Minister Gaviria, "I can report tranquility throughout the national territory."

Just days earlier, observers were expressing fear that a "Tet Offensive" would be attempted under cover of the strike. Numerous weapons caches and plans for selective sabotage, ambush, and assassination had been uncovered by the mili-

tary in cities across the country, and mass leafletting by guerrillas of peasant and worker layers warning them to join the strike or be killed was spreading an environment of terror. At least seven busloads of workers on their way to work were reported seized by guerrillas in various parts of the country, and the passengers threatened with death if they did not join the strike. In some cases, photographs of the workers were taken to heighten the terror.

Other irregular warfare forces were drawn out on the eve of the strike as well. A self-styled "Ecumenical Gathering of Christians for Life" met in Bogota, pulling together 1,500 terrorists, gnostics, and theology of liberation advocates to pledge their support for the strike "against the dirty war." The gathering, sponsored by the legal front of the National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrillas, included representatives of the Colombian Communist Party, the World Council of Churches, the Pentecostal Church of Venezuela, numerous "grass-root Christian" communities, and others. The motley group declared its plan to create committees of popular resistance on the regional and local levels, promoting "civic strikes" to complement the Oct. 27 general strike, creating popular defense organizations, etc.

An escalation of violence took place in the weeks prior to the strike, including such concerted efforts to terrorize the population as strafing of buses with machine-gun fire, dynamiting of heavily trafficked bridges, etc. Just one day before the strike, a mixed group of military and civilians was ambushed in the department of Antioquia by the Maoist EPL terrorists. Eighteen people were killed, including a one-year-old child. Bombs were set off at commercial establishments and bridges in the cities of Medellín, Urabá, and buses burned in Tunja and Popayán.

The spark of resistance

Leaflets widely circulated by the small Andean Labor Party (PLAN) in Colombia, calling on democratic forces within the trade unions and political parties to stand firm against the terrorists and warning of the deadly consequences for Colombia and the entire Andean region, of a successful strike under narco-terrorist auspices provided a moralizing influence for the otherwise terrorized population. The leaflet, which also detailed the blackmail that has been employed by narco-terrorist elements infiltrated within the labor movement against democratic trade union forces, was enthusiastically welcomed at factories everywhere, with many workers urging PLAN organizers to stand firm and "not be intimidated."

Ever since the drug mafia's assassination of Attorney General Carlos Mauro Hoyos earlier this year, and the narco-terrorist kidnaping of former presidential candidate Alvaro Gómez Hurtado later, Colombian authorities have increasingly capitulated to the terrorist blackmail. Political leaders everywhere could only talk about "dialogue" with the narco-terrorists. The PLAN leaflet challenged people to take a stand,

and sparked hope.

The first signs of a popular resistance movement against the destabilization of Colombia began to emerge the week of the strike, as thousands mobilized in the violence-torn Magdalena Medio region of the country in defense of those popular leaders who have dared to stand up to the Communists.

On Oct. 18, three hired assassins gunned down a provincial congressman from Cundinamarca department as he was leaving the offices of the Attorney General in the capital city of Bogota. That congressman, Carlos Meléndez Boada, was the former military commander of an effective counter-insurgency unit in the terrorist-riddled border province of Arauca, and had also served as a military mayor in the unstable Yacopi region.

Meléndez had been accused by the Communist Party newspaper *Voz* and by several guerrilla organizations, of having masterminded the creation of paramilitary death squads in the Magdalena Medio, but his family charges that the Communist Party fingered him for assassination because of his staunch anti-communism and for his successful counter-insurgency operations.

Thousands of Colombians have been murdered in political warfare this year, but the Meléndez murder and a judge's arrest warrant—based on Communist Party accusations—against popular Puerto Boyaca Mayor Luis Rubio—apparently proved the last straw. On Oct. 24, the peasants' association and cattlemen's committee of Magdalena Medio halted all activity in the region, and some 10,000 blocked the La Dorada bridge which crosses the Magdalena River into the interior of the country. The local Chambers of Commerce ordered a protest shutdown of business and public establishments.

A 15-mayor committee from Magdalena Medio travelled to Bogota to meet with the Interior Ministry following Meléndez's death, and demanded protection for themselves and especially for Mayor Rubio, who has been denied security despite repeated death threats against him. The mayors charged that the indictment against Rubio, for alleged death-squad activity, is nothing but a trick to get him in jail where he can be murdered.

The narco-Communists cannot be expected to pack up and go away in the face of this setback. Increased terrorism, including assassinations, can be expected. It is no accident that on the day before the strike, the Communist Party's weekly, *Voz*, carried an article entitled "The CIA with an Old Disguise," which attacks the PLAN for its effective leaflet against the strike mobilization. After denouncing the Andean Labor Party as a front for the CIA and for the U.S. Embassy in Colombia, the article calls PLAN secretary general Maximiliano Londoño a police agent, the standard method used for fingering someone for assassination. The PLAN has responded with a statement holding Colombian Communist Party chief Gilberto Vieira personally responsible for any harm that might come to Londoño.