

Andean Report by Andrea Olivieri

M-19: wolves in sheep's clothing

In the name of "peace," the Colombian government is letting the drug cartels in through the back door.

On Nov. 2, amid great political fanfare, the Colombian government of President Virgilio Barco signed a "Political Pact for Peace and Democracy" with the narco-terrorist April 19 Movement, known as the M-19. Hailed by the government as the first major success of President Barco's so-called "peace initiative," the pact is intended to lay the basis for reincorporation of some 200 guerrilla insurgents—by executive pardon—into the civilian and political life of the country, including the creation of their own political party. What it does, in fact, is invite some of the bloodiest agents of the drug-trafficking cartels into the corridors of Colombian power.

The pact, which must be approved both by the Senate and in a popular referendum next January, includes a pardon for the multitude of crimes committed by the M-19 during its 15-year reign of terror, and electoral concessions which will give the narco-terrorists a significant quota of seats inside the Colombian Congress. The M-19's crimes—described as "political" and therefore "pardonable" by the government—include the 1980 mass kidnaping of more than a score of foreign diplomats, the 1988 kidnaping of former Conservative presidential candidate Alvaro Gómez Hurtado (killing his bodyguard in cold blood), and the 1985 mass murder of a dozen Supreme Court magistrates during the drug mafia-financed occupation of the Justice Palace. Nearly 100 people were killed during that siege, and the Palace itself—containing the national

legal archives—was gutted.

Less well known, but publicly documented, has been the M-19's role as armed security guards for the coca plantations and cocaine refineries of the drug-trafficking cartels, and in the weapons-for-drugs swaps sanctioned by the Cuban government and its resident drug financier Robert Vesco.

Perhaps worse than the proffered pardon itself is the fact that the M-19 will, if the pact is approved, be guaranteed the right to elect a senator or congressman with a mere 15% or less of the vote required of traditional party candidates. For example, while other candidates must receive 60,000 votes within their province to win a senatorial seat, an M-19er will need only 10-12,000 votes *nationwide* to win. As one columnist was quick to point out, "Add several M-19 congressmen to the 14 from the [Communist] Patriotic Union, and you have a powerful parliamentary front composed of enemies of the system." The Communists are now demanding the same electoral concessions.

Indicative of how unrepentant the M-19 is, is the fact that they had tried to set Nov. 6 as the date for signing the peace pact with the government—the fourth anniversary of the Justice Palace slaughter. The M-19's comrades inside the Simón Bolívar Guerrilla Coordinating Group have issued a statement casting doubt on the government's sincerity in the peace pact, but embracing the M-19 nonetheless as members in good standing of their terrorist league. These same organizations have launched a renewed terror-

ist offensive during the past weeks, reminding the people of precisely what manner of "former" subversives the Barco government is inviting into the national Congress.

With all this, Government Minister Lemos Simmonds continues to insist that he prefers "20 M-19 senators to 2,000 M-19 guerrillas."

Opposition to this government betrayal is growing. Former cabinet member and prominent Liberal politician Abdon Espinosa Valderrama wrote in the daily *El Tiempo*, "No democratic regime, not even the most tolerant, has ever countenanced such a course." Ana María Busquets de Cano, the widow of the mafia-assassinated director of *El Espectador*, wrote: "But when [the M-19's] struggle stopped being anything positive, and became sheer terrorism, committing atrocious crimes whose authors have no shame in confessing, one cannot wipe the slate clean."

It is expected that Colombia's Senate, already corrupted by a combination of drug money and pure self-interest, will approve the pact with the M-19 in short order. It then remains for the Colombian people to let their opinion be known, in the January referendum on constitutional reform—of which the peace pact is a part. Even if the electorate rejects the proposed pact with the M-19 narco-terrorists, the credibility of the Barco government's heretofore serious anti-drug efforts will have suffered a serious blow. As *El Tiempo* columnist Keren-sky wrote Oct. 30, "With hands joined, the guerrilla and the drug trafficker seek to strangle the Republic and its democratic institutions. If the proposal of dialogue with the drug traffickers is accepted, or if the guerrilla is rewarded with a pardon for his heinous crimes, or given unmerited seats in the Congress, we are contributing to the dissolution of Colombia."