

Andean Report by Andrea Olivieri

Legalized crime in Colombia

The threat of civil war looms, as the narco-terrorists move to grab top-down control over the country.

President César Gaviria issued Executive Decree 836 in late April, which amended Colombia's existing tax regimen to permit all holders of undeclared assets to legalize them by including their value on their 1990 tax returns and paying a 3% surcharge. The Finance Ministry will demand no explanations as to origin, means, or dates of acquisition of said assets, nor will it impose any sanctions for the sudden appearance of these formerly undeclared assets.

The decree, tailor-made to satisfy the requirements of Colombia's soon-to-be amnestied cocaine traffickers, follows recent court decisions to return to their "rightful owners" hundreds of narco-properties that had been confiscated during former President Virgilio Barco's 1989-90 war on drugs.

With their properties safe in hand and now ready to be legalized, the remaining step to consolidate Colombia as a drug traffickers' paradise, is the amnesty of the traffickers themselves.

The first big step in that direction was taken in the National Constituent Assembly, with the introduction by former Foreign Minister Diego Uribe Vargas of a long-awaited proposal to constitutionally ban the extradition of Colombians. The Assembly has formed a commission to consider the proposal and make recommendations to its full 73-member body: That commission is made up entirely of anti-extradition lobbyists!

The lead editorial in the April 21 issue of the anti-drug daily *El Espectador* drew the appropriate conclusion: "It is now certain that the National Constit-

uent Assembly will approve a generalized amnesty before it ends, which will cover, among other criminal actions, those committed by narco-terrorism and subversive vandalism. . . . As a result, the Assembly will legalize crime as a source of law."

The Assembly's overtly pro-drug and pro-terrorist actions raise the obvious question of whether constitutional law still governs Colombian society at all. The Assembly was originally convoked by President Gaviria to revise the national Constitution under a state of siege decree allegedly designed to bring about "global peace." Now, it has taken on a life of its own. The narco-terrorist M-19 movement, amnestied last year and given a cabinet post inside the government, controls a bloc of 19 of the Assembly's 73 seats—not counting those held by front-men of the drug traffickers, or the three seats just given to the M-19's amnestied narco-terrorist brethren in the EPL, PRT, and Quintín Lamé Brigade. The M-19 has just proposed that the Assembly formally dissolve Congress, to prevent it from modifying whatever new Constitution the Assembly writes.

Congressional leaders have responded that, since they were elected with more votes than the Assembly delegates—who were chosen by less than a quarter of the electorate—they have more legitimacy. And yet it was these same congressional leaders who approved the various "peace amnesties" that the Gaviria administration has granted the narco-terrorists, and which established a dual-power ar-

range in the country.

As the Congress and the Assembly battle it out, the conditions grow ripe for civil war. Colombians were shocked to learn on April 21 that the Justice Ministry had authorized the use of armored cars for the families of the "surrendered" Ochoa brothers, part of the hierarchy of the Medellín Cartel. Colombia's beleaguered judges, forced daily to choose between a bullet and a bribe from the traffickers, have begged for armored protection for years, to no avail.

The Gaviria government is even financing the "literacy campaign" of the amnestied EPL guerrillas, who are distributing alphabet posters to citizens which read, for example: "*M* is for *military*. Our military activity has enabled us to enter the Constituent Assembly."

The narco-terrorists have moved to turn entire cities into their feudal turfs. In the capital city of Bogotá, the M-19 has created a "para-police" patrol financed by forced contributions from the city's merchants. The Moscow-controlled FARC, together with the EPL, has done the same in the second-largest city of Medellín, and has recruited the drug-addicted maniacs who once made up the ranks of the Medellín Cartel's paid assassins as "popular militias," to purge the city of "undesirable" elements.

High-level Colombian military officials told a meeting of Medellín industrialists in April that these so-called popular militias are 800 strong and armed with automatic weapons, and control 90% of Medellín's poor neighborhoods. One source said the Gaviria government has deliberately kept the military from interfering with these "militias," for fear of disrupting its peace pact with the EPL. "The Army is being forced to remain mute in the face of this subversive advance," said the military source.