

# Colombian civil war looms after murder of leftist leader

by Valerie Rush

Colombia has been driven to the brink of civil war and Central American-style chaos, following the Oct. 11 murder of Jaime Pardo Leal, the ex-guerrilla president of the country's communist electoral front, the Patriotic Union (UP). The murder, committed by unknown assassins, came less than a week after the country's five major terrorist organizations had joined forces in a "Simón Bolívar Guerrilla Coordinating Group," and demanded the demobilization of the armed forces and creation of a new "transitional" government to replace the current elected one.

The murder of Pardo Leal is the latest of several hundred murders of UP leaders—local and national—as well as hundreds of others across the political spectrum, that have taken place since the beginning of the year. The Pardo Leal killing set off bloody rioting and looting in many of the country's major cities, with entire blocks of stores looted and burned, and at least 11 people killed. At Pardo Leal's funeral, three cabinet members were forced to abandon the site amidst boos and jeers, and political representatives of the ruling Liberal Party were driven from the microphone.

Only two individuals spoke at the funeral service. Pardo Leal's replacement as head of the UP, Communist Party congressman Bernardo Jaramillo Osa, called for a "front of national salvation" against the "fascist minority," called Pardo Leal a "martyr for democracy," and told the tens of thousands of graveside mourners that the government must purge Defense Minister Rafael Samudio Molina and other "dirty war" advocates. The UP blames Samudio for protecting paramilitary squads that have hunted down the amnestied guerrillas who make up the UP's ranks.

Another cabinet minister, anti-terrorist hard-liner Arias Carrizosa, was recently forced to resign from the Justice Ministry around a contrived scandal, after the UP and Communist Party had targeted him as a "protector" of death squads. When Arias Carrizosa resigned, the Communist Party newspaper *Voz* exulted, "One down, one to go!" At least one magazine, the popular weekly *Semana*, noted the strange coincidence of Arias Carrizosa's departure and the formation

of the "Simón Bolívar Guerrilla Coordinating Group."

Also speaking at Pardo Leal's funeral was Colombian Communist Party secretary general and faithful Moscow servant Gilberto Vieira, who identified Colombia's "two most important developments toward democracy" as the birth of the Simón Bolívar Guerrilla Coordinating Group, and the creation of the Unified Workers Confederation (CUT). The "Guerrilla Coordinating Group" is run from the top by the Communist Party-linked Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), which has contributed upward of 10,000 hardened guerrillas to the terrorist umbrella group.

On the other hand, the pluralist CUT—through a series of maneuvers by the communists and radicals in its leadership ranks—continues to be portrayed both domestically and internationally as an instrument of the Colombian Communist Party. Founded as an alternative to the existing drug mafia-dominated trade union federations, the CUT has been drawn away from its anti-drug, anti-International Monetary Fund origins, and backed into an amorphous "anti-violence" corner.

CUT founder and president, former Labor Minister Jorge Carrillo Rojas, is one of more than a score of prominent individuals, including generals, priests, actors, senators, and former government officials, whose names appeared earlier this year on an alleged right-wing "hit list." Several people on that list have already been assassinated.

## A new 'Bogotazo'?

The capital city of Bogotá remains tense, and heavily patrolled by army and police forces, in the aftermath of the rioting and a 48-hour general strike called by the CUT, which succeeded in paralyzing the country. Many Colombians still fear a repeat of the 1948 "Bogotazo," where the murder of Colombia's leftist presidential candidate, Jorge Eliecer Gaitán, was the trigger for a citywide explosion of violence, which caused incalculable loss of life and property. It also served as the prologue to a decade-long civil war known as the *Violencia*, which terminated in Colombia's only military

coup of the past 50 years.

The UP is pressing its advantage. According to its new president, contacts are already initiated with "other political groups" to try to force the Barco government to accept Church-offered mediation with the "Guerrilla Coordinating Group," a la Central America. Otherwise, threatened UP president Jaramillo Osa, Colombia faces civil war "worse than that in El Salvador."

The PCC's Vieira, also a senator, gave a similar warning in a Sept. 30 speech to the Colombian Congress: "There is a mirror in which we should look; it is the example of El Salvador, a small Latin American country, where the government—with enormous logistical support from the United States—is not only incapable of defeating the guerrillas, but sees them grow daily."

### The drive for power

The demands of the Guerrilla Coordinating Group, according to a communiqué released by the FARC and published in the Oct. 13 issue of *El Tiempo*, are for nothing less than a new government dictated by the terrorists. The FARC asserts: "We support the idea of organizing a national civic strike, and not lifting it until the fascists leave the government and the military command. The Colombian people well know where the assassins live and eat. They are to be found in the barracks, the battalions, the brigades, and the intelligence services of the state." The FARC statement also asserts that the only reason Colombia has not yet "defeated fascism," as in much of the Southern Cone, is that the people have yet to "rise as one to bury it."

In March of 1988, the first mayoral elections in the country's history are scheduled. The UP, with the backing of the Guerrilla Coordinating Group, hopes to turn the disenchantment of the population with the government's economic policies and its own martyrdom into a big win at the polls. In fact, there is every likelihood that in the more marginalized sectors of the country where the guerrilla movements have built their base, the communist UP could politically capture a large number of regions which could then serve to launch a new civil war, or as the Salvadoran rebels call it, a "war of national liberation."

UP President Jaramillo Osa has called for the creation of a "national committee of electoral guarantees," and has announced that contacts have already been made with other political parties toward the fielding of "national convergence" candidates. He insisted that the bloodbath would not stop its electoral drive but, if anything, had strengthened it. A FARC communiqué describing its organizing drive among the Colombian peasantry emphasized that "the movement" provides "the employment that they don't have either in the countryside or in the city, the brotherhood of the family which Latins so need, the solidarity that their hard lives seek, and the explanations that no one ever offered them before."

### A vacuum of power?

The ruling government has so far given no adequate response to the threat it is facing. Emasculated by the combined forces of the International Monetary Fund and the drug traffickers, who have successfully dictated Colombian economic and judicial policy to the detriment of national interests, the Barco government is considered "out to lunch" by most observers. The daily *El Espectador* was strongest on this point. In its Oct. 13 edition, it editorialized that the necessity for competent leadership in Colombia was "unavoidable and untransferable," and that "if the head of state does not assume the leadership demanded of him, he might just as well give his policy of change up for lost."

The most potent statement to come out of the government was a late September announcement by Interior Minister César Gaviria Trujillo, that if the guerrilla groups did not disarm and demobilize preparatory to dialogue, they would be militarily crushed. Unfortunately, the government—under IMF oversight—has refused to allocate the kind of military budget, and order the kind of military mobilization, that would cause such a threat to be taken seriously.

Measures that have been taken by the government include the creation of 35 special courts to investigate political assassinations, and the creation of exclusive telephone lines so that "suspicious actions" can be reported to the proper authorities by a vigilant citizenry. Said Justice Minister Low Murtra in a brief television appeal, "The responsibility for saving the country belongs to all Colombians, and not just a few. . . . If a nation-state permits impunity, it is an endangered state."

Constant pressure on President Barco to "follow the path of dialogue" has come from all sides. Prominent journalist Jorge Child urged Barco to abandon a policy toward the terrorists of "demobilization or war," replacing it with one of "dialogue and demobilization." The UP has demanded that the President follow his "rehabilitationist" doctrine, instead of a "national security" doctrine "made in the United States." The Communist Party has even resorted to promoting the example of Reagan's readiness to meet with Gorbachov.

But most devastating has been the pressure of the Colombian Catholic Church which, under orders from Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, has offered to mediate such a Central American-style "dialogue" between the government and the Simón Bolívar Guerrilla Coordinating Group. Following a series of meetings between Colombian Cardinal Alfonso López Trujillo and heads of both the Communist Party and FARC, the highly respected religious leader drew a parallel to the Esquipulas agreement in Central America—also mediated by the Church—and reiterated the Church's offer to serve as a "bridge" of understanding to end the violence in the country.

What such negotiations could at best come down to, is power-sharing with Soviet-backed narco-terrorists.