

## Andean Report by José Restrepo

### Drug kingpins are not untouchable

*Colombia shows it, with a war on drugs that is sending the traffickers and their political apologists running for cover.*

**M**edellín Cartel capos Pablo Escobar, members of the Ochoa Vásquez family, and probably Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha barely escaped capture by Colombian police and Army forces on Nov. 22. Reportedly, the belligerent Pablo Escobar was injured and he eluded capture only by running off into the thicket in his underwear.

That should puncture the myth that Escobar and company are all-powerful and that Colombia's war on drugs is bound to fail. That myth is employed by those favoring drug legalization to argue, "Therefore, the government must negotiate with the capos."

The raid was based on intelligence from three separate sources that the capos would be meeting at Escobar's El Oro ranch, in the Magdalena Medio region 95 miles from Bogotá. This shows that Colombian intelligence agencies have penetrated the wall of silence and terror inside mafia ranks. Two of Escobar's bodyguards died in the raid. Fifty-five mafia collaborators were captured along with 39 radios, 15 weapons, 10 vehicles, 2 boats, and 2,500 rounds of ammunition.

The operation was made possible by three months of unrelenting warfare against the logistics apparatus of the drug traffickers. Government forces have seized some of Rodríguez Gacha's and Escobar's most trusted men and their key intelligence centers. Government security agencies have seized from the traffickers during the past three months 1,343 properties, 1,413 weapons, 276 airplanes. They have arrested 497 and extradited eight middle-level commanders of the drug cartel to the U.S. "We know this war

will be won by whichever side is able to persist, hold out, and prevail, and our men fully understand that," *EIR* was told by Col. Eduardo Arevalo, the Defense Ministry press secretary. He added, "It is true that Rodríguez and Escobar were not captured, but sooner or later that will happen."

The traffickers' response was to step up their indiscriminate assassinations. On Nov. 27 a mafia spokesman called a radio station to claim they had just blown up an Avianca jetliner because there were "five squealers" aboard. The explosion of the plane when it took off from Bogotá bound for Cali killed 107 people.

This wanton murder is backfiring on the drug lobby. The congressmen and political and business leaders who have piously demanded dialogue with the drug cartel are now exposed as collaborators in murder. Liberal businessman Joaquín Vallejo Arbeláez, who tried to force the government to negotiate, complained that hundreds of angry people had phoned him to call him "a disgusting drug runner."

Hours before the Avianca explosion, a constitutional amendment granting pardons to drug traffickers, was approved by a committee in the Chamber of Deputies. It was sponsored by Dep. César Pérez García, a follower of pro-drug Liberal Party presidential candidate Alberto Santofimio. The next day, the heroic daily *El Espectador* editorialized that the approval showed Colombia has "a congress which has laid down its arms and surrendered to the enemy." "This is a booby trap of the country and legal sanctification of the prevailing immorality, precisely when the great capos

of the business are being encircled for punishment."

After the Avianca bombing, it will be tough for drug legalizer Liberal presidential candidate Ernesto Samper Pizano and his political godfather, ex-President Alfonso López Michelsen, to maintain their public political positions of "neutrality" towards the drug barons. López will have to keep saying, "for the moment, there is no possibility of dialogue."

Documents found in Escobar's hideout during the raid included a letter signed by one "Carlos" who advises Escobar how to pursue his war. "Carlos" tells Escobar, "You must go back on the offensive because the government is trying to turn public opinion against us." "Carlos" also recommends sabotaging Colombia's exports, its mass media, and the presidential campaign of César Gaviria Trujillo, the successor to anti-drug martyr Luis Carlos Galán, since Gaviria's victory "would prolong the war."

Escobar's eminent "adviser" has apparently ordered that Gaviria—front-runner in the opinion polls—be stopped from becoming President. Samper, who would allow the narcotics traffickers to rule Colombia, is to be the next President. (Samper is portrayed as "anti-drug" on U.S. television.)

Despite the lies by all the fifth columnists in the Colombian and foreign media that Colombians are sick and tired of the war against the narcotics traffickers and want to negotiate with them, President Virgilio Barco is determined to fulfill his people's mandate: Defeat the cartels. Commenting on the operation to capture Escobar, Barco insisted that the country will continue its struggle: "Delinquents wanted by other countries' courts have been captured and extradited. We are dismantling their criminal business."