

Andean Report by Carlos Cota Meza

Rebellion in Colombia

President Betancur and the military are in a dangerous tug-of-war for control of the country.

The government of Colombia is under blackmail threat to voluntarily relinquish its constitutional order, or face a coup from fascist, drug-running elements of the military and political elite.

As of the first week in March, the Betancur government has seen the core of its economic emergency program overturned and top-ranking members of the armed forces as well as right-wing business sectors have demanded the firing of Betancur's attorney general. Simultaneously, pressures have been applied to force Betancur to change the composition of his cabinet.

In addition, Betancur has been compelled to cancel his planned trip to the Non-Aligned meeting in New Delhi, and his organizing for a continental debtors' cartel has thus been curtailed.

The developments leading to the present confrontation are as follows.

In early February, Colombian Attorney General Carlos Jiménez released a study commissioned by the President on the nature and organization of the MAS death squads, which has been an obstacle to the government's successful negotiation of an amnesty with the country's widespread guerrilla movements. That study confirmed what labor, university, leftist, and some government circles had been claiming: that military personnel were implicated in the MAS's terrorist activities. The report further confirms what *EIR* has asserted, that the MAS represents a nexus between terrorism, drug-running, and elements in the military who run pro-

tection for the drug mafias that formed and finance the MAS.

The military high command responded with angry denials of its complicity, and dared the attorney general to "name the names." To their shock, he did so, indicting nearly 170 individuals for membership in the MAS—including 60 active military personnel, ranging from colonel to private.

The backlash was swift and furious. A letter was delivered to Betancur by Defense Minister Landazábal—a fierce opponent of the president's amnesty initiative—demanding the dumping of the attorney general. The demand was repeated by representatives of some of the country's leading producer associations—the agricultural growers, the cattle raisers, the construction companies, metallurgical industries, and others.

An emergency meeting of the military high command decreed the "donation" of one day's pay from all servicemen for the defense of the accused. The highest-ranking generals and admirals were assigned as defense lawyers.

Finally, on March 2, Landazábal gave an exclusive interview to the leading Bogotá daily *El Tiempo* in which he announced that the accused death-squad members would be tried in military courts—a blatant challenge to the constitution.

Betancur's response has yet to be made public.

Observers have noted the coincidence of the military challenge with the Feb. 23 Supreme Court decision

to overturn the core of Betancur's economic emergency decrees, leaving the country without a taxation policy.

The Supreme Court decision followed several weeks of protests orchestrated by the networks of former President López Michelsen against alleged "presidential abuse of powers." The target of their outrage? The economic emergency decrees, which threatened to shut down the speculative activities and drug-money laundering with which López's powerful banking family is associated.

Betancur must now take his emergency program to the Congress for approval, a Congress dominated by *lopista* and allied forces.

The blackmail note has already been delivered to Betancur in the form of an editorial by the *lopista* daily *El Tiempo*. If Betancur is to survive the challenge from the military and the oligarchic opposition, insinuates *El Tiempo*, he's going to have to make "a few advised changes."

Among those suggested changes are restructuring of his cabinet to bring in López allies who had been put on the sidelines, and the formation of a new "national unity" movement to include his enemy, López Michelsen. López went on television at the beginning of March to magnanimously declare his preparedness to help Betancur "in any way I can."

There is no question that this is the severest test the Betancur government has had to face in its seven months of rule. Betancur's highly popular mandate drew its support precisely from the anti-López sentiment which the former President's subservience to the U.S. State Department and the drug mafias had stirred. If Betancur yields to the blackmail of the *lopistas* and their allies in the military, the remainder of his presidential term could be considerably foreshortened.