

Andean Report by Valerie Rush

Colombia's antidrug war goes regional

Andean countries gear up an antidrug offensive that could ultimately take on the behind-the-scenes financiers of Dope, Inc.

On September 30, the Venezuelan police captured the largest cocaine cache in history, with a street value estimated at more than \$700 million. The bust awakened the Venezuelan authorities to the extent of their drug problem, previously considered insignificant; it was the result of unprecedented collaboration between Colombian and Venezuelan law enforcement, and figures as part of a region-wide campaign launched by the Betancur government in Colombia to eradicate the drug trade.

On July 23-25, the heads of state of the five Andean nations had met to discuss shared economic and social problems, and went on record to condemn the illegal drug trade, "which has disrupted contemporary society and whose impact on the economy and politics demands a decisive and joint action for its eradication."

That commitment was followed, on the initiative of the Betancur government, by a series of bilateral meetings of the affected nations to work out common strategies in the war against drugs.

One such meeting was held Oct. 15 in Bogotá between Colombian and Venezuelan government representatives to plan a crackdown on clandestine airstrips, illegal flights, and other trafficking modes. The Colombians presented names of known traffickers residing in Caracas, and emphasized that Caracas has become a key transshipment point for illegal drugs going to the United States and Europe. The Venezuelans agreed, among other

things, to consider the use of paraquat against marijuana cultivation, especially along border areas with Colombia.

The participants also resolved to meet again next month in the Venezuelan port city of Maracaibo, and the Colombian government is scheduling similar meetings with authorities from Ecuador, Brazil, Peru, Honduras, and the Dominican Republic.

Within Colombia, the Betancur government has focused much of its effort on mobilizing popular support for its antidrug campaign. A series of international forums and roundtables sponsored jointly by the Colombian and U.S. governments were held last month in the three leading cities of Bogotá, Medellín and Cali to discuss everything from drug abuse to the ecological damage caused by marijuana and cocaine cultivation.

A special commission sent by Colombia's National Drug Council to inspect the U.S. and Mexican antidrug programs returned home the third week in October to recommend the use of paraquat against Colombia's marijuana fields.

Several initiatives by the Colombian justice ministry have also put dents in the mafia's machinery. As many as 50 percent of Colombia's private airplane fleets have been grounded on orders of the Ministry for their involvement in the drug trade. Hundreds of clandestine airstrips on Colombian territory have been mapped out, and preparations are underway for their elimination.

The Supreme Court's approval of a controversial extradition treaty with the United States has put teeth in what was hitherto merely paper legislation. At least 25 prominent Colombian traffickers were startled when the United States requested their extradition and the Colombian government began proceedings against them. Cocaine billionaire Pablo Escobar, believed to be one of the world's richest men, is presently hiding behind his parliamentary immunity (he is a congressional alternate), but a vote to lift that immunity is currently pending in the Colombian Congress.

One major obstacle to the Betancur administration's antidrug efforts has been extensive corruption and inefficiency within the justice system. With the appointment of Justice Minister Lara Bonilla last August, that problem is also being attacked.

In a hard-hitting presentation to the National Lawyers Congress Oct. 9, Lara charged that 23 of the 25 fugitive traffickers were still walking the streets of Colombia because "they have created a protective screen around themselves by capturing some members of the secret services." He pledged a total overhaul of his Ministry and its security dependencies.

On Oct. 19, it was announced that an international assassination plot against Lara had just been uncovered and thwarted by the Colombian security service.

The next step is going after the financial holdings of the drug mafia—in both the United States and Latin America. Responding to a question from *EIR* during his visit to the United Nations on Oct. 5, President Betancur criticized "the degree of tolerance [shown] by certain U.S. financial institutions [towards the drug trade] for the benefits derived when important sums are deposited in these banking entities."

EIR

The Real Story of Libya's Muammar Qaddafi

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Saudi Arabia in the Year 2023

Written by EIR Contributing Editor Lyndon H. LaRouche Jr. at the request of several Arab clients, this public memorandum report outlines Mr. LaRouche's proposals for the development of Saudi Arabia over the next 40 years, as the fulcrum of an extended Arab world stretching from Morocco in the west to Iran in the east. It outlines the approach necessary to industrialize and stabilize the entire region over the next two generations. Included are proposals for irrigating present desert regions in the Saudi peninsula and the Sahel, utilizing India's scientific and technical cadre, and the basis for creating true nation-states in the region by drawing on the cultural heritage of the Arab Renaissance.

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The Hot Autumn 1983:

Separatism, Pacifism, Terrorism

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