

# Betancur's war on drugs under fire

by Our Correspondent

Colombian President Belisario Betancur's political amnesty program for the guerrilla groups fighting his government, a program vital for pacifying the country and winning his war on drugs, remains in jeopardy due to sabotage by narco-terrorists and their allies in the Gnostic "church."

A truce was to have been signed between the Betancur government and the M-19 and Popular Liberation Army (EPL) guerrilla organizations the week of Aug. 13. On Aug. 10, hired assassins succeeded in murdering M-19 founder Dr. Carlos Toledo Plata, who had accepted Betancur's amnesty offer two years ago. At the time of the murder, Toledo Plata was working as a physician in a public hospital. The killing was seized upon as a pretext for a bloody rampage of "reprisal" by the M-19, and the signing of the peace pact was postponed.

However, representatives of the two guerrilla groups announced Aug. 15 that they will sign the truce with representatives of President Betancur later this month.

EPL leader William Calvo stated that his group will sign an agreement with the government on Aug. 23, and indicated that the M-19 is also committed to the amnesty. No date for the M-19 signing has been specified. Calvo was emphatic that both groups would lay down their arms as soon as an agreement was signed, and enter negotiations with the government to institute social and economic reforms leading to a full amnesty.

There has been virtual civil war in the Colombian countryside for the past 35 years, with insurgent armies regularly maintaining up to 15,000 men under arms. The hold of left-wing ideologues has never been firm in this war; the central dynamic has been the blood feuds between peasants and death squads in the service of local landowners. The drug mafias have thrived in this environment, trading arms for drugs with the guerrillas and hiring guerrillas as guards for their secret cocaine labs.

President Betancur's strategy, supported by a majority of the population, is to end the pattern of killings by offering an amnesty for those insurgents willing to return to productive occupations, as Carlos Toledo Plata had. This tactic has succeeded in splitting the insurgent movements, cutting off new recruitment, and isolating those elements most involved with the drug trafficking. By destroying the popular support base for the guerrillas, the government is able to move in on and destroy the "Nazi-communist" drug-traffickers without provoking a full-scale war.

The drug mafias, together with drug-linked elements in the guerrillas and the military, stand the most to lose if Betancur's peace strategy succeeds.

The modus operandi of the Toledo Plata killing—two assassins on motorcycles armed with machine guns—is the same as that used by the drug mafias to assassinate Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla on April 30, 1984. Now, the Colombian government has moved against the Lara Bonilla assassins. On Aug. 15, the government issued arrest warrants for 14 people in connection with the murder. Among those indicted were the Ochoa brothers and Pablo Escobar.

The killing of Toledo Plata was a pretext for escalation by the drug mafias. In alleged "commemoration" of their fallen leader, a 200-man column of the M-19, accompanied by elements of other guerrilla organizations, invaded Yumbo, a small industrial town outside the important city of Cali, on Aug. 11. Several hours of gun battles fought with army troops left close to 100 dead among the M-19, police, and civilians.

Reports are that the invasion of Yumbo was carried out by an M-19 brigade from Santa Marta. Santa Marta is the drug capital of the Guajira Peninsula on the other side of the country; its M-19 terror squads, as revealed in an interview with M-19 leader Jaime Bateman before his death last year, are "under the protection" of the Universal Christian Gnostic Church. Bateman's mother, Clementina, has been a leader of the Gnostic Church headquartered in Santa Marta for 15 years.

## According to Kissinger's plan

The conditions have now been laid for a full-scale eruption of guerrilla-military violence. This is the kind of regional violence which Henry Kissinger and his associates at the Georgetown University Center for Strategic and International Studies have "predicted" will force a U.S. troop deployment into South America.

In a study on U.S. Military Requirements in the 1990s edited by Kissinger associate Kupperman which was released this past spring, Kissinger think-tankers expressed their confidence that a civil war in Colombia would be one of the foremost problems faced by the United States in the region over the next decade.

The Andean Labor Party (PLAN) of Colombia, committed to saving President Betancur's war on drugs, has launched a campaign to expose the "string-pullers" behind this new violence scenario. In an executive statement now being widely circulated inside Colombia, the PLAN states that Soviet agent-of-influence Kissinger and the IMF, joined by former President López Michelsen, are promoting violence and terrorism to allow a drug-mafia takeover of Colombia. Kissinger and the IMF, the PLAN points out, are operating in the midst of a superpower strategic crisis, in which the Soviets are pushing U.S. intervention in Ibero-America to undercut U.S. commitments to the NATO alliance in Europe.