

Andean Report by Javier Almario

Lara Bonilla policy still prevails

In Colombia, the President and trade unions pledged to carry on the slain justice minister's heroic work.

It is one of the greatest prides of this government," said Colombian President Belisario Betancur on April 30, in a speech in homage to Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, slain by the drug trafficking mafia on April 30, 1984, "to have had his immense collaboration as justice minister, to be able to say that the spirit of his conduct was the faithful interpretation of the unbreakable convictions to the President of the republic.

"And to be able to assure that beyond his sacrifice, beyond the enormous vacuum of his absence, our gratitude toward him is expressed in the ceaseless continuity of the struggle which he began and which must not conclude except in the victory of the forces of democracy, honesty, and national dignity, which are the aspirations of the human species all over the world. . . .

"There are moments in which individuals, overcoming their own circumstances, are transformed into symbols of historic processes, of collective thoughts and aspirations." President Betancur explained that prior to the fight engaged in by the late minister, Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, "our country was being dragged into dangerous situations in which crimes go unpunished, fascinated by easy enrichment at the cost of the health of society, of intimidation and of terror. It was then that the country learned with shock and with relief, that this young friend of the law and of reason, taking and disdaining risks, was speaking everywhere of the danger which was stalking us and convoking

a crusade against crime and lawlessness."

In fact, as Lara Bonilla himself said in an interview, a few days before he died: "Before I assumed the justice ministry, the big bosses were walking around like they were at home and the minister was the one who had to hide. Now they have learned that they are the ones who have to hide, and they are the ones who are in hiding."

The President recalled that "Rodrigo succeeded in prompting in Colombian society a new conscience and a new spirit in the face of the criminals' defiance. Many Colombians had reached the point of thinking that our historic problems, poverty, the conjunctural problems of the economy, explained, and somehow legitimized, succumbing to the enormous capacity of distributing ill-gotten gains and building mirages of prosperity which characterizes the activity of the universal drug groups."

Offering Lara Bonilla as an example to youth, he said, "In human history, only those societies have survived that affirm their ideals with daily devotion and turn them into a manifestation of their character, that do not fear the despoticisms of money and crime, and that challenge and undertake great adventures with an elevated frame of mind."

Finally the President took the occasion to renew his pledge to totally destroy drug trafficking: "In his honor [Lara Bonilla's], in honor of his children and our children, we must extirpate this evil from its roots and shake off this opprobrium for ever. God is

watching us."

Besides the continental effect of the fight which Rodrigo Lara undertook against drug trafficking, as detailed in another article (page 32) on the Rodrigo Lara Bonilla Anti-Drug Pact signed in Lima, April 30 is now celebrated in Colombia as a day of national homage.

Three trade-union federations of Bogota and Cundinamarca, the Bogota Union of Workers and Cundinamarca (Utraboc), the Cundinamarca Union of Workers (Utracun), and the Cundinamarca Federation of Workers (FTC) decided to celebrate Labor Day, traditionally May 1, on April 30 instead.

The reasons are, first to commemorate the hero Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, and second, so that May 1 from now on shall be a day of total rest.

At twilight on April 30, the three federations carried out a march of about 10,000 people, each carrying a torch, traversing about 16 blocks. The torches lighted up the banners of the unions, some carrying the names of the organizations represented, others attacking the International Monetary Fund, and a very special one of Utraboc saying, "We Remember You Rodrigo Lara. Utraboc."

The text of the joint communiqué read at the end of the march said, "We reject the drug traffic, which two years ago cut off the life of the invaluable Rodrigo Lara Bonilla and which has brought only ruin and frustration to the country, and especially to the rural zones under its control." The communiqué mentions Lara Bonilla after condemning terrorism "in its various manifestations, both on the world level as well as in the afflicted conditions of Colombia. It is indispensable to banish violence as a form of defining political confrontations.

"And surely in this action God is watching us."