

## Andean Report by Valerie Rush

### Cornering a President

*The enemies of Colombia are mobilized to straitjacket the government, so as to impose a mafia dictatorship.*

In mid-August leading Colombian drug mobster Jorge Luis Ochoa was released from jail through the complicity of a bought judge, and immediately disappeared. The new government of Virgilio Barco has reacted by mounting an anti-drug offensive comparable in scope to that launched by the just-departed Betancur government after the April 1984 mafia murder of Justice Minister Lara Bonilla.

In a nine-city manhunt launched in the aftermath of Ochoa's escape, over 80 arrests were made. Eduardo Mera Mosquera, second in command of the Severo Escobar drug trafficking band, and near the top of the list of drug traffickers to be extradited to the United States, was pulled in, and homes and ranches of leading mafia fugitives Carlos Lehder, Pablo Escobar, and Rodríguez Gacha were raided.

Howls of rage came from the enemies of the Colombian republic, who had been banking on a softer president. They have been mobilizing desperately to corner and straitjacket Barco before he has a chance to set a firm anti-drug policy in his few months in office.

Elements within the Liberal Party linked to the drug-tainted oligarchy have issued a chorus of criticisms against the one-month-old Barco administration for its alleged "inaction." Leading the pack have been the daily *El Tiempo* and the weekly magazine *Semana*, both linked to former President and mafia-ally Alfonso López Michelsen, who claims that a "vacuum of power" already exists in the brand-new government.

The drug lobby is again demand-

ing drug legalization. Noted columnist Antonio Caballero, a relative of López Michelsen, insisted on Aug. 27 that the only means of protecting judges from threats or corruption by the drug mob is to legalize drugs. Caballero later wrote that Barco's "honeymoon" with the Colombian people had ended almost before it began, implying that the President might as well yield power to those, like Interior Minister Cepeda Ulloa—"the Colombian Kissinger"—more prepared to use it.

A prominent political supporter of López Michelsen, *El Tiempo's* columnist D'Artagnan, insisted in an Aug. 24 "open letter" to Justice Minister Suescun Monroy that his ministry dedicate itself to rescuing its soiled credibility instead of "obsessively dedicating itself to a sterile battle against the drug trade." One of Colombia's wealthiest oligarchs, Eduardo Lemaitre, argued in *El Tiempo* of Sept. 1 that no one should be denied the freedom to consume drugs, if he so chose, and cited Milton Friedman's infamous book *The Tyranny of the Status Quo* to justify his call for legalized drug consumption.

These same drug-tainted circles are also campaigning for an "anti-imperialist" break with anti-drug fighters in the United States and elsewhere. On Aug. 11, Defense Minister Gen. Samudio Molina was asked by reporters if, in light of Bolivia's "Operation Blast Furnace," the minister still believed necessary the "intervention [or] participation of a foreign country to aid us in protecting our lands and roads. . . ."

General Samudio Molina re-

sponded, "Our authorities, our government, have sovereignty and dignity. We do not need foreign forces to come and act in our territory. Another thing is attendance at courses, visiting more advanced institutions, especially with technology, and returning to the country to apply it. . . ."

On Sept. 1, the security chief at Avianca airline, Carlos Luna Rojas, was shot dead by two hired mafia assassins on a motorcycle. He had been trained by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, along with other security chiefs of Colombia's major private firms, and only one week earlier had collaborated with several national police forces to bust a cocaine smuggling operation in Avianca.

The drug mafia is fully at war with the government. Since Barco's Aug. 7 inauguration, 103 persons have died in confrontations between the Colombian armed forces and the narco-terrorist army known as the National Guerrilla Coordinator. Since the March legislative elections, 18 elected office-holders of the Unión Patriótica (UP) party have been assassinated. In the first weekend of September alone, four UPers, including its sole senator and sole representative to the federal Congress, were murdered. The UP was formed when the Moscow-linked FARC guerrilla movement decided to accept President Betancur's offer of an amnesty and reentered politics.

UP head Braulio Herrera gave a press conference Sept. 2 in which he warned that the assassinations were intended to drive the Communist leaders back into armed insurrection against the government. President Barco responded with a statement issued by his office expressing his outrage at the murders and declaring that they were directed against his plan for national harmony.