Andean Report by Valerie Rush

A trail of dirty cops

Police corruption probes may lead the Colombian government's war on drugs onto battlefields it would rather avoid.

Ongoing investigations by the Colombian attorney general's office of two F-2 police lieutenants arrested in the city of Medellín has the potential to unravel an entire network of police and political corruption in league with the drug mafia.

The two detectives, whose names are being withheld from the public while the investigation of their activities is pursued, are believed to have served as the "intelligence arm" of the infamous "Medellín Cartel" of drug traffickers, headed by Pablo Escobar and the Ochoa clan. That the dirty cops were also reportedly engaged in heroin trafficking, suggests that the mafia network which employed them extends far beyond Colombia's cocaine trade.

Little fanfare has attended the news of the F-2 arrests, but the busts have already prompted a shakeup of the Colombian national police. The police commanders of both the city of Medellín and of Antioquia department (of which Medellín is the capital) have been fired for negligence and may soon be facing formal charges as well. The anti-narcotics section of the national police has been put under the command of army general Antonio Gómez Pandilla, a first in the history of that institution.

Perhaps most importantly, the arrests of the F-2 lieutenants have stripped away one important layer of protection from the cocaine kingpins who have heretofore managed to stay at least one step ahead of police and army raids, based on the warnings of their hirelings. Despite the complaints of the international media over the failure of President Barco's anti-drug war to snag the "capos" of the drug trade, hardly a word has been devoted to the police clean-up now under way, a clean-up which targets the very security of the drug mafia itself.

The purge in law enforcement will lead, necessarily, to the political protectors behind the dirty cops. Whether the Barco administration is prepared to accept the consequences of its own investigations remains to be seen.

A more serious problem, however, is the Barco government's refusal to face the contradiction of its economic policies—authored by the International Monetary Fund—with its anti-drug commitment. Colombia closed out 1986 with an official 5.3% economic growth rate, cause for great celebration and praise of the government's strict adherence to IMF dictates. However, unlike Peru, whose 8.5% growth rate represented new jobs and increased productivity, Colombia's "wealth" came in large measure from the very dope trade it would defeat.

The sad truth was perhaps best expressed in an article published by the daily *El Espectador* Jan. 18: "The Colombian economy in 1986 had an exceptional performance, thanks to improved prices for coffee and the increase in services income, apparently derived from the drug trade, after two years of adjustment monitored by the International Monetary Fund."

The article notes that services accounted for $1.1 billion in 1986 income, representing 19% of the country's total foreign earnings. Despite the war on drugs, services income—repatriated capital and drug money laundered through the infamous *ventanilla siniestra*, or black market window at the central bank—was up 55% over 1985!

According to the president of the Latin American Banking Federation (Feleban), Fernando Londoño Hoyos, the Colombian central bank takes any quantity of money, from anyone, with no questions asked: "There is never an investigation to know exactly the origin of the dollars . . . nor the reason for the transfers, nor which Colombians are violating the law by earning dollars." If the government really wanted the drug traffickers, says Londoño, "they should capture them on the lines at the *ventanilla siniestra*."

This year, the Barco government will be hard put to reconcile its contradictory policies. If it pursues its anti-drug efforts seriously, the cocaine trade will start to suffer in a big way, affecting income through the "sinister window." At the same time, a collapse in coffee prices on the international market is being predicted. A report just issued by National Westminster Bank of London says the fall in coffee, oil, and gas prices this year will give Colombia a huge balance of payments deficit, which would rather quickly deflate its spurious economic growth claims and get it into trouble with the IMF.

At the beginning of 1986, according to the report, Colombia's foreign debt totaled $13.56 billion, representing 45% of GNP. New credits to sustain such a debt burden could be jeopardized by the 1987 perspective outlined by National Westminster Bank. Which would bring the Barco government face-to-face with a critical choice: a deal with the drug mafia to keep the IMF happy, or growth Peru-style?