

Andean Report by Valerie Rush

Mafia attacks Colombia's Betancur

Jaime Michelsen and friends are using the "soft on communism" line to stop Betancur's war on drugs.

A full-page (presumably paid) ad by fugitive Banco de Colombia head Jaime Michelsen Uribe appeared in the anti-government Bogotá daily *El Tiempo* February 12 charging that Colombian President Belisario Betancur's intervention against the Banco de Colombia and its former president "endangers the confidence and position of the private sector generally and financial sector in particular . . . with obvious damage to the domestic and foreign image of our country."

The ad, which was accompanied by a flurry of interviews granted the same week to the Colombian media from Michelsen's "hide-out" in Miami, virtually called for a coup d'état against Betancur by urging that "the people and the nation should try those who are truly responsible for having dealt such a blow to private enterprise."

Several weeks earlier, then Defense Minister Landazábal Reyes presented Betancur with a 17-point memorandum purporting to outline the military's concern that the country was rapidly being taken over by "Marxism-Leninism" and demanding greater prerogatives in the policy deliberation process for the Armed Forces. Landazábal was unceremoniously sacked by a furious President Betancur, but numerous co-thinkers of Landazábal remain within the military hierarchy.

On Feb. 13, the government secretary of the department of Magdalena charged that guerrilla bands in the region were openly working with the drug mafia in a cozy arms-for-drugs

arrangement (evidence exists that such collaboration is the rule throughout much of the country).

Over the past month, several hundred peasants in the terror-plagued Magdalena Medio region have been butchered—throats slit, decapitated, disemboweled—and tossed into mass graves, prompting mass exoduses by the region's terrified inhabitants and outcries for Betancur to end his peace dialogue with the guerrillas and give the military free rein.

On Jan. 27, the *Wall Street Journal* ran an editorial entitled "Notes from the Underground" which attacked "dirigist" leaders on the continent whose "excessive state interventionism" was forcing would-be entrepreneurs—like those of the "free-market" drug trade—into the underground.

What all of these incidents have in common is a deliberate focus on Betancur's alleged anti-capitalist and pro-communist leanings. What their protagonists, in fact, have in common is an unholy alliance with the drug mafia whose notorious interface with KGB networks on the continent make the anti-drug President's sudden label as "soft on communism" ludicrous at best.

Last month, Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla—the moving force behind Betancur's anti-drug commitment—discovered that both his home and ministry office telephones were being intercepted by the mafia, who were analyzing his taped conversations to counter the Minister's anti-drug initiatives and to plot his assassination. *EIR* has learned that, despite

official efforts to downplay the incident, high-level figures in official government entities had to have been complicit in the illegal and sophisticated interception.

It is no secret that the powerful Colombian drug mafia has friends in very high places, having either infiltrated or bought outright friends in the military, Congress, the political parties, the courts, etc. It is thus logical that Betancur's courageous war on drugs, ranging from endorsement of paraquat use against the drug crops to prosecution of political and financial "citizens above suspicion" behind the drug trade, has prompted a panic within circles capable of launching major destabilizations—up to and including a coup d'état—against the Betancur government.

It is in this light that recent statements by the U.S.'s new Drug Enforcement Administration chief Francis Mullen should also be closely investigated. In early February, the 20-year FBI veteran arrived in Bogotá presumably to consult with the Colombians on antidrug collaboration. Instead of praising Betancur's unprecedented efforts and offering the full support of the U.S. government against his would-be destabilizers, Mullen stepped off his airplane to announce to the assembled press corps that his government was "irritated" with Betancur's handling of the new bilateral extradition treaty and was demanding "intensified" anti-drug efforts from the Colombian government.

Recent commentaries in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* about U.S. irritation at Bolivian President Siles Zuazo for his failure to defeat that country's cocaine mafia have contributed to an ongoing destabilization of the Siles' government which could well bring the "cocaine colonels" back into power.