

Andean Report by Andrea Olivieri

Colombian narco-strategy stumbles

As the scandals surrounding Gaviria's appeasement policy begin to mount, his "peace in our time" plan crumbles.

These days, Colombian President César Gaviria is starting to look about as uneasy as Venezuelan President Carlos Andrés Pérez, as a series of scandals begin to make Swiss cheese of his "peace through appeasement" policy toward terrorists and the drug cartels.

On Aug. 5, he was forced to fire Justice Minister Jaime Giraldo, along with his deputy minister and several underlings. Giraldo, the architect of the President's plea-bargain arrangement with surrendering drug traffickers, took the heat when it was learned that Gaviria's prize prisoner, Medellín Cartel chieftain Pablo Escobar, had received 208 visitors in one month at his gilded jail in his hometown of Envigado. Among those visitors were at least a dozen wanted fugitives. Escobar's cartel partners, who also "surrendered," the Ochoa brothers, were being similarly favored in Itagui prison.

Among other outrages, it was revealed that Giraldo was attempting to remove several terrorism charges against Escobar from the jurisdiction of the protected "faceless judges," to the jurisdiction of ordinary judges more vulnerable to cartel intimidation. It was also learned that the head of criminal investigation in Medellín was one Juan Guillermo Sepulveda, formerly a lawyer for the Escobar family before receiving his government post. Sepulveda has also resigned.

An embarrassed President Gaviria has admitted that "there have been some failures" in the surrender policy, and is promising to "take corrective

measures." Rumor has it that Minister Giraldo's "resignation" followed a heated confrontation with Colombia's military commanders over the entire surrender package, and that Giraldo's head was delivered by Gaviria to the military as one of those "corrective measures." Another likely "corrective" was the appointment of a military man to head Colombia's prisons, which Escobar has loudly protested as a violation of the conditions of his surrender.

That these purges are cosmetic, however, was revealed by former Justice Minister Enrique Parejo González, who resigned an ambassadorial post earlier this year to protest Gaviria's appeasement policy. Writing from exile for the daily *El Espectador*, Parejo charged Aug. 16 that the current head of criminal investigation of the Colombian Attorney General's office—whose job includes providing "information and protection" to surrendering traffickers—was a top aide to Carlos Jiménez Gómez in 1984, when the then-Attorney General had traveled to Panama to meet clandestinely with the chiefs of the cocaine cartel. Jiménez Gómez went on to become one of Pablo Escobar's leading lawyers. Parejo suggests that Jiménez's underling was deliberately placed inside the current Attorney General's office as an Escobar plant.

Giraldo has been replaced with Fernando Carrillo, a Harvard-trained fop and Gaviria friend chosen to inspire confidence in Washington. Carrillo's first official statement was a pledge to "humanize" Colombia's prisons.

Gaviria's troubles are far from settled with the dumping of Giraldo, however. A videotape has "just" been discovered on Gaviria's desk, which confirms what every Colombian suspected—that more than half of the delegates to the Constituent Assembly, which concluded their writing of the new national Constitution in July, had been bribed by Pablo Escobar to, among other things, constitutionally ban extradition. More scandalous, perhaps, is the report that President Gaviria was fully aware of the videotape's contents *well before* the vote against extradition was taken, and yet said nothing.

Minister De la Calle, charged with investigating "the supposed videotape," has refused to confirm or deny Gaviria's prior knowledge of it. *El Espectador* editor Alfonso Cano Isaza wrote Aug. 18 that "confirmation of the authenticity of the narco-video . . . would vitiate Colombia's new Constitution, the so-called Gaviria Constitution." He went on to question Gaviria's failure to "alert the country of this aberration, as should have been his duty."

While Gaviria struggles to contain the growing scandal around his tolerance for drug traffickers, he is facing yet another policy disaster vis-à-vis his "peace negotiations" with the narco-terrorist army of the Simón Bolívar Guerrilla Coordinator. Despite repeated concessions, including the demilitarization of parts of the country to accommodate their delegates' travel, the narco-guerrillas have yet to call a halt to their violent rampages.

The recent dramatic developments in Moscow may also prove to be the *coup de grace* against Gaviria, whose groveling to narco-terrorism was pegged to the success of the Bush-Gorbachov "New Yalta" condominium.