

Colombia

It is no exaggeration to say that the apparatus for a right-wing military coup is already in place in Colombia. Under the direction of Camacho, Colombia's military is arresting and torturing hundreds of citizens of varying political affiliations, under the pretext of hunting for members of the terrorist grouping, the M-19, which raided an important military installation in Bogota on Jan. 1.

The wave of repression is reminiscent of the worst excesses of the Southern Cone dictatorships. Reliable sources and eyewitnesses report that at the Brigade of Military Institutes (BIM), the center of the military's counterintelligence operations, persons arrested for suspected connections to the M-19 are subjected to electric shock, cigarette burns, and hanging from a "parrots perch" to extract "confessions" of guilt. "Technicians" have reportedly been invited in from Uruguay and Chile to "advise" the military in perfecting their torture techniques.

Arrests have been indiscriminate, with over 2,400 persons reportedly detained since the military began its "antisubversive" sweep three weeks ago. Those seized include prominent Liberal Party political and intellectual figures, members of the clergy, university students and trade union leaders. Victims subjected to jailings at the BIM headquarters report they were blindfolded for days, deprived of food and water, and drugged. Several reported having hallucinations as a result of drugging.

The targets

The actual target of the repression and torture is Colombia's organized labor movement, united since August 1977 in a National Union Council (CNS) that brings together Liberal, Conservative, Catholic and Communist unions around a program of opposition to austerity and militarization.

A national one-day work stoppage carried out by the CNS in September 1977 terrified the Colombian oligarchy, which feared the alliance of Liberals and Communists embodied in the CNS might evolve into a political force that would challenge the no-growth policies they had succeeded in imposing for two decades through the National Front apparatus set up in 1957.

The ending of the National Front—a system of alternating and hand-picked Liberal and Conservative governments—constituted a serious threat to the Conservative oligarchy. It meant that independent factions of the Liberal Party, generally supported by the majority of the population, could gain control of the government and adopt policies contrary to the goals of the

Kennedy associate endorses legalized drugs

In the midst of the high-profile international press campaign to create a climate favoring legalization of marijuana and other dangerous drugs, one of Colombia's leading oligarchical figures, Alberto Lleras Camargo, has suggested that the United States adopt the British model of "not fighting" drug trafficking to solve the drug problem it now faces. The "father" of Colombia's Liberal Party, a close associate of the Kennedy family and architect of John Kennedy's Alliance for Progress in Latin America, cited the arguments of writer Gore Vidal in a recent column to explain that the U.S. has a drug problem only because law enforcement officials and stringent laws have made the illegal drug trade too attractive and too profitable. Anyone can be bought off, anyone can be "corrupted." "Where there is no fight," Lleras commented, "as in England, there is no problem."

In what is clearly a cover-up of the role of the British financial oligarchy in controlling the international drug trade, as recently exposed by the U.S. Labor Party, Lleras Camargo asserts that "In any case, England doesn't appear to have a drug problem, nor Mafias, nor fantastic world connections to destroy the morality of the British population..." This Colombian lauds the British policy of legally granting heroin addicts their "fix," and again citing Gore Vidal, remarks on the reduced number of heroin addicts in England, as compared to the U.S.

Lleras' commentary, published in the Liberal daily *El Tiempo* on Jan. 28, is an explicit approval of the health care plans recently elaborated for both the advanced and underdeveloped sectors by Senator Ted Kennedy, and promoted internationally by British policy-makers: hospices in which people "die with dignity" — with the help of heroin or cocaine mixtures — to replace modern health facilities and scientific advances in medical research.

World Bank or International Monetary Fund which have played a major role in Colombian economic planning throughout the postwar period. When Liberal President Lopez Michelsen entered office in 1974, he was subjected to a series of destabilizations to force him into line on matters of economic policy— austerity—and clamping down on the labor movement and population at large.

During Turbay's electoral campaign in 1978, Liberal and Conservative oligarchs joined forces to insure that Turbay would pose no problem to them. A slander and watergating campaign—including charges of drug running—succeeded in forcing Turbay to join with the Conservatives in forming a government, something he had initially vowed he would never do. It is those Conservative oligarchs who have, together with their military allies, brought the country to the brink of fascist dictatorship.

—Laurence Hecht