

# Colombia's Betancur presses for world pact against drugs

by Valerie Rush

With his combined announcement April 1 of a historic truce with Colombia's largest guerrilla organization and call for a "world pact" against drugs, President Belisario Betancur has taken aim at the very infrastructure of the Nazi-communist forces which Henry Kissinger and his backers have used to undermine one constitutional government after another in Ibero-America.

The Colombian head of state declared: "We must . . . recover the national dignity that the drug trade has stolen from us, presenting us with a blackened image before the world and sickening and perverting our youth with drugs. This is the great task that we have before us—to denounce it daily, to notify [the traffickers] that they can no longer continue to disrupt our society. . . . To tell them in one great national chorus—Enough!

"Enough of speaking in amused tones—as if it were unimportant—of the things that are going on with this empire of [drug] money. The greatest problem that Colombia has had in its history is drugs, its dark effect on our people, their health, their morality. In this we can dramatically sum up our poverty, our unemployment, our departure from basic values."

Betancur's initiative followed soon after Mexican President de la Madrid visited Colombia on his four-nation tour of South America (see article, page 6), which focused world attention on the danger that economic and social crisis could replicate Central Americas throughout the continent. In view of Colombia's strategic position at the "joint" between Central and South America, Betancur's effort to forge a durable peace in his country is intended as a model for a similar solution in Central America, as well as a buffer against the spread of Kissinger's "Thirty Years War" throughout the continent.

Betancur's specially designated Peace Commission which negotiated the truce greeted its final approval by the President with the statement: "Now begins the next stage in which we must comply with what has been agreed to. . . . Without wishing to sound fatalistic, what is being decided here is nothing less than whether or not there will be civil war—as in Central America—in this country's future."

The truce President Betancur approved in his nationally

televised presentation was contracted with the 5,000-strong guerrilla army of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). It will go into effect May 28. The truce will be maintained on an "experimental" basis for one year to give the FARC an opportunity to organize its cadre and prepare them for re-integration into civilian life. Thousands of peasants who have made the mountains their home for years will lay down arms and take up the government's offers of land, jobs, credit, and security.

The government has committed itself to a genuine agrarian reform, as well as to a political reform which will extend civil and political rights to the so-called "marginalized" rural poor. Dismantling of the rural oligarchy's paramilitary death squads will be one of the government's top priorities.

After the first year, the truce will be extended indefinitely. Other Colombian guerrilla organizations have been invited by Betancur to join the truce, and negotiations for that have begun. Those who violate the truce—through extortion, kidnapping and acts of terrorism—will be punished with the full severity of the law.

## Severing the 'narco-guerrilla' link

Betancur's determination to make his war on drugs an integral part of the peace initiative was given special impetus by last month's spectacular cocaine busts in the southern jungle department of Caquetá, where the world's largest cocaine refining laboratory complex was uncovered. Within days of dismantling what became known as "Villa Coca," a 100-man commando unit of M-19 guerrillas assaulted the provincial capital of Florencia, holding the city hostage for several hours before being dislodged by the military.

The M-19 attack was viewed universally as a terrorist retaliation for the drug busts; confirming the existence of a "narco-guerrilla" link. Equally revealing was the evidence that emerged from the cocaine laboratory raids demonstrating that the drug trade served as a convergence point of "left" and "right" terrorism. The owners of the cocaine refining complex—Pablo Escobar, the Ochoa clan, Evaristo Porras, and others—have been identified by the authorities as the founders of the right-wing MAS death squad, allegedly cre-

ated to eliminate left-wing subversion. The government raiding party found irrefutable evidence at the laboratory site that the MAS founders hired *leftist* guerrillas to protect their interests in the drug trade!

With the truce, Betancur hopes in one stroke to expose the "Nazi-communist" alliance that uses the terrorist movements of both left and right as expendable "infrastructure," while dealing a decisive blow to the drug trade which helps to finance it all.

In publicly asserting the link between terrorist violence and the drug trade, Betancur has also reiterated a regional commitment to defend the sovereignty of the Andean Pact countries. The final communiqué issued by Andean Pact heads of state at a special Bolívar commemoration held in Caracas last July 24 emphasized that it was the joint deployment of the drug trade and terrorism that posed the single greatest threat to their nations' integrity, and they pledged a joint battle against the twin evils.

### **'Soft on communism'**

Betancur's truce was not easily won. Former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger has orchestrated a campaign in Washington and elsewhere portraying the Colombian president as "soft on communism" for his amnesty offer and truce negotiations. Friends of Kissinger, like former Colombian Defense Minister Fernando Landazábal, used the "soft on communism" lie to set the President up for a coup d'état, failing only because of Betancur's tremendous popular support. Repeated destabilization attempts—such as the kidnapping and threatened assassination of the president's brother—were orchestrated by Nazi-communist forces to try and force Betancur into a hard-line retrenchment.

As Betancur declared in his April 1 national address: "Peace has been a very hard road for this president. It has cost him his prestige in the great salons, in meetings with persons who only believe in the so-called fast and expeditious route, explosive, on target, razed land and repression. What was described by one journalist as 'the fashion of speaking ill of the president' reached such proportions as to suggest that his zeal was not for peace, not to improve Colombia's fortunes, but rather that the president was guided by a less noble interest: winning the international peace prize for himself. But the president cannot afford the luxury of thinking about such insignificant things."

### **No more 'Violencias'!**

Betancur's truce is of special historic importance for Colombia. For nearly four decades, entire portions of Colombia's countryside have been a bloody battleground between armed peasant groups and gangs of assassins deployed by oligarchic interests to prevent Colombia from consolidating herself as a constitutional republic. During the 1950s, Colombia underwent a particularly brutal period of civil warfare known as "La Violencia" in which political partisanship and religious strife served as the backdrop for the wholesale

slaughter of between one-quarter and one-half million rural Colombians.

Today, the warfare continues on an only slightly smaller scale—a Nazi-communist alliance has been forged to simultaneously spur violence on both the "left" and "right." The international drug mafia, finding a congenial home in those violence-torn parts of Colombia where the government has dared not—or simply could not—tread, has grown fat supplying arms and financing to all warring sides in exchange for protection of its drug fields, processing laboratories, and trafficking routes.

### **Will it succeed?**

The success or failure of Betancur's peace accord will depend on whether or not Colombia can launch the great infrastructural projects necessary for a qualitative leap in the economy as a whole. Betancur's application of minimal "American System" principles of tariff barriers to encourage industry has somewhat improved economic conditions. The problem is that what is planned for the countryside at present is a host of mini-projects that fit into the "small is beautiful" perspective of the Club of Rome—which the president has hosted more than once—and the "appropriate technology" recommendations of the World Bank.

Without a thriving industrial economy spurred by great development projects, Colombia's rural population is condemned to the feudal existence which feeds the cycles of violence familiar in El Salvador and elsewhere.

Making the point, one of Colombia's major trade union federations, Utraboc, passed a declaration March 23 giving full support to Betancur's "war against narco-terrorism" and calling for a "second inter-oceanic canal and not micro-enterprises. Only with great economic projects can we put an end to unemployment and generate the constantly increasing standards of living and cultural level that the population requires."

Betancur's truce initiative is as fragile as it is daring. Enemies from within and without will do their best to sabotage it. Betancur is well aware that his best chances for success lie in exporting his peace model as rapidly as possible. Thus, his declaration:

"I said just a few days ago, without trying to be apocalyptic, that every city councilman elected by drugs is the equivalent of three, four, or five guerrilla fronts in the mountains; every family of honest background that enters the service of drugs is acting not to take up arms for concrete or even vague ideals, but to join the army of new anarchy created by the destructive chimera of easy money. . . ."

"For all these reasons, because it is the case that the multinationals of crime assume different faces in different parts of the world, it is for this that we are urgently calling for a world pact against these new criminal forms, a pact which the United States, Venezuela, Bolivia, and other countries have already proposed to us, and which we have accepted."