

Andean Report by Gretchen Small

The new plot of the 'cocaine colonels'

The threat by the Nazi drug mafia to Bolivia threatens to usher in a wave of bloody coups throughout South America.

The "cocaine colonels" who ruled Bolivia in 1980 and 1981 are preparing to install a bloody dictatorship again, Bolivian sources report—after Moscow's local leftists and the international banks finish off the anti-drug government of President Siles Zuazo. According to these reports, this time the drug mob doesn't plan to make the same mistake they did the last time—when some of the opposition was left alive.

This is no simple "local affair." The drug mafia's strategy is to use the Bolivian chaos to set off a chain of civil wars and bloody coups throughout the Andean region, along the lines advocated by Colombia's Hitler-loving mafioso, Carlos Lehder.

The immediate crisis in Bolivia began two weeks ago, when the Bolivian Workers Federation (COB) began a general strike, demanding economic changes. The combination of a collapsed productive economy with billions of illegal dollars from the cocaine trade had sent inflation into the stratosphere—but not worker's wages. Some now estimate Bolivia's inflation rate at 50,000% annually!

But COB Secretary General Juan Lechin Oqueda has made the establishment of a government of "all the left parties"—a kind of soviet—the central demand of the strike, over the protests of nationalist labor leaders.

Now a new alliance of drug-linked military groups is preparing to step in to "restore order": the "cocaine colonels" of the 1980-1981 Garcia Meza regime joined with those allied with

retired General Hugo Banzer. These, indeed, are the new Hitlers.

When last in power, General Garcia Meza's crowd brought with them a whole crew of French, German and Italian Nazis. Heading the list was the infamous Gestapo killer, Klaus Barbie, "the Butcher of Lyon," who was an official advisor to Interior Minister Col. Luis Arce Gomez in the Garcia Meza government.

Triumphant pictures of the backers of the July 1980 Meza coup showed Bolivian paramilitary leaders smiling alongside the old Nazi Hans J. Stellfeld, sporting a swastika on his hat, and the old French OAS agent Jacques Leclerc, who moved to Bolivia after running the heroin ring popularly dubbed the "French Connection" out of Paraguay.

When Stellfeld died of a drug-overdose in December 1980, he was given a burial with full military honors by the Bolivian regime. Garcia Meza's comptroller general, Adolfo Ustares, eulogized the dead Nazi as a "great comrade" who had served as a "bulwark against communism" in Bolivia.

Since the cocaine-trafficking of Garcia Meza's openly Nazi regime left that crew discredited internationally, retired General Hugo Banzer, president of Bolivia from 1971-1978, has been hired to provide a "legitimate" cover for the would-be coup-makers.

Touted as the man who brought Bolivia a half-dozen years of "political stability," Banzer is being promoted in Washington as a clean "anti-communist" by the same "free enter-

prise" crew in the U.S. Republican Party and State Department who promote the drug-trafficking PAN party of Mexico. Banzer was even invited to Dallas during the Republican Party convention in the summer of 1984.

Banzer may be a little hard to sell for long, however. Under his presidency, the groundwork for the cocaine industry in Bolivia was established. While Banzer "cooperated" with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) in pulling up a few coca plants in some traditional planting areas in the highlands, the financiers who placed Banzer in power were busy turning the Santa Cruz valley into industrial-sized coca plantations.

One of Banzer's backers in his 1971 coup was the Gasser family, whose members boasted openly in Santa Cruz that they had placed Banzer in power "at very little cost." The Gassers established the largest sugar plantations in Bolivia in the early 1900s when they emigrated from Switzerland.

In 1980, the latest up-and-coming Gasser, Roberto, was busted by DEA officials while standing in line in a Miami bank to deposit \$90 million from a cocaine deal set up as a "sting" operation by the DEA. Gasser's family paid his \$1 million bail, and Roberto returned home under immunity granted by the Garcia Meza regime.

DEA sources reported in 1981 that Banzer's brother entered the drug trade under his brother's administration, and that Banzer's step-brother, appointed by the general as consul in Miami, had protected cocaine trafficking.

But when police raided one of Banzer's ranches in San Javier, Santa Cruz in January 1980, and captured a Colombian plane being loaded with 300 pounds of coca-paste on a well-equipped landing strip, Banzer expressed shock that "someone" had been using *his* estate for drugs!