

Andean Report by Valerie Rush

Barco's first week

Colombia's new President is already drawing fire from leading enemies of the Republic. What will the future hold?

Only a week old, the administration of the new Colombian President Virgilio Barco Vargas had already become the target of unexpected vitriol on Aug. 12. The weekly magazine *Semana*, owned by former President Alfonso López Michelsen and managed by López's son, carried an unsigned article which compared Barco to Adolf Hitler, and warned that if the President did not pay more attention to his advisers, he could end up as Hitler did—in an “irreversible catastrophe.”

“Presidents, . . . even the ones most attentive to political rumor, end up isolating themselves. . . . In the case of Virgilio Barco this tendency may be accentuated because of . . . his electoral campaign in which he won overwhelmingly while general opinion, including that of his own advisers, agreed that his strategy was wrong. . . . History has demonstrated that a series of successes against all advice can create a worrisome syndrome of infallibility. Something similar happened to Hitler, who again and again proved right against the opinion of all his military experts in the first years of the world war—and with perfect confidence and against them all launched himself irreversibly into the catastrophic Russian campaign.”

Whence such dire predictions about a just-inaugurated President? López Michelsen is the head of the Liberal Party which swept Barco into office, and as such was clearly counting on holding the reins of power of the new administration. Judging from López's outburst, that apparently

hasn't happened—at least not yet. López Michelsen is also the man who, more than any other Colombian, is responsible for turning his country into a haven for the drug mafia during his 1974-78 term in office, and who has remained the public-relations man for the mob ever since.

As was widely rumored during the last months of the Betancur government, leading mafia fugitives like Pablo Escobar, Carlos Lehder, and Matata Ballesteros were only waiting for Barco to take power in order to return to Colombia. The rumor at the time was that some overly confident person around the Barco camp had offered them guarantees of safe passage.

In both his inaugural speech on Aug. 7 and in discussions with U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz in Bogota, Barco stressed his government's readiness to continue the fight against such “crimes against humanity” as terrorism and the drug trade. On the specific issue of enforcing the U.S.-Colombia Extradition Treaty which, as ambassador to the U.S. in 1984, Barco negotiated, the new Justice Minister Jaime Suescun Monroy declared Aug. 9, “All international treaties to combat this scourge would be complied with by the Colombian government.”

What has López so worried is the popular mandate that Barco received in last May's presidential elections, a mandate which gives him political strength the power-hungry López had not reckoned on.

López, however, has other cards

to play, including majority control of the Colombian congress and a presidential cabinet dominated by the most treasonous characters López was able to foist on the politically indebted President.

Specifically, Barco will have to ride roughshod over several of his ministers, if he is to truly rule in the national interest. Finance Minister Cesar Gaviria Trujillo, a lover of rock music and of such fascist/existentialist authors as Mario Vargas Llosa, Gabriel García Márquez, and his own beloved Alfonso López Michelsen, is also a former employee of the dopamine-promoting International Monetary Fund and director of the anti-papal magazine *Consigna*. He has publicly criticized former President Betancur's “adjustment program” under IMF guidelines as coming too late: “The delay in taking measures brought us a tremendously severe and recessive adjustment. . . . The current period. . . must adapt to its possibilities and to those of the country, so as not to make the error of investments which have led to excessive installed capacity. . . .”

Labor Minister José Name Terán, from the drug-infested state of Atlántico, is considered the political “godfather” of Victor Acosta, president of the UTC labor federation. The UTC just lost the majority of its union affiliates (see *EIR*, Aug. 15, page 40) due to Acosta's known links to the drug mafia. Name offered the post of deputy minister of labor to the UTC president, but Acosta refused it, apparently afraid of losing the UTC entirely should he take the required leave of absence to enter the ministry.

Other ministers to beware of include Interior Minister Fernando Cepeda Ulloa, Mines and Energy Minister Guillermo Perry, and Education Minister Marina Uribe de Euse.