

## Andean Report by Carlos Méndez

### Venezuelan drug-fighter forced out

*Justice Minister Carlos Manzo González was one of the most outspoken enemies of narcotics money laundering.*

Venezuelan Justice Minister Carlos Manzo González resigned March 28 under heavy fire from the enemies of the war he had been fighting against drug trafficking and the powerful financier networks in his country which have thrived on laundering the profits of narcotics sales made on the streets of the United States.

Manzo has been one of the few ministers in Ibero-America to have insisted that the war against narco-terrorism must be waged continentally and by military means, and that money laundering must be hit hard. Interviewed in the daily *El Nacional* March 19, Manzo said the slander campaign against him was a plot to "debilitate the war on drugs." He continued, "This campaign has a strange similarity with the one in Colombia, first against minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, who was assassinated, and then against his successor, Dr. Enrique Parejo González, who was victim of an assassination attempt in Budapest."

Manzo said the section of the Social Christian Party (COPEI) around its presidential candidate, Eduardo Fernández, was in the midst of the plotting against him. The chairman of Manzo's Democratic Action Party, Gonzalo Barrios, described those conspiring to destabilize Venezuela abstractly as "Factor X." But "Factor X" has real names. Congressman Rafael Poleo wrote in his newspaper column March 5 that the visible heads of "Factor X" include "socialist" José Vicente Rangel, "moribund ultra-capitalist fascistoid" Marcel Granier, and "adventurer" Alberto Quirós Corradi.

These are strange bedfellows, but they have things in common. Everybody in "Factor X" coincides in attacking Panamanian Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega; and none of them has ever done anything real against drug trafficking. On the contrary, Quirós Corradi is a member of Sol Linowitz's Inter-American Dialogue, which proposes "selective legalization" of narcotics. Quirós Corradi has recently become the president of the board of directors of the daily *Diario de Caracas*, which printed proposals from its ex-director Carlos E. Ball to legalize the drug trade.

Granier has a hand in that daily and in Radio Caracas TV, both owned by his brother-in-law.

José Vicente Rangel—said to have been the one who distributed money from Fidel Castro among the Venezuelan guerrillas of the 1960s—has constantly sought to provoke conflicts between Venezuela and Colombia and to cover up for narco-terrorism. It was Rangel who launched the "Factor X" offensive. Interviewed on TV by Marcel Granier, Rangel claimed that Venezuelan election campaigns were financed by drug traffickers. He could have plenty of proof of that, since his daughter is the lawyer for jailed drug trafficker Jesús María León; but Rangel offered no evidence at all.

"Factor X" charged the justice minister's special anti-drug group—which they tagged "Manzopol"—with cooperating with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and operating secretly. They published the names of people working in the anti-

drug group, which ruined a major bust it had been preparing.

Manzo has repeatedly angered the families which control Venezuela. Last year he had published a letter he sent the attorney general demanding explanations for the large number of drug traffickers freed by Venezuelan judges. Some think Manzo's problems began last November, when the government freed Eunice Valle Ruiz, a Costa Rican who had been arrested on drug charges. It was said that the U.S. embassy had helped spring her, though Ambassador Otto Reich denied it. Interviewed by *Diario de Caracas*, Manzo said, "I can tell you that other American officials participated in obtaining her pardon." The informant against Manzo's anti-drug group many have been Rafael Rivero Muñoz, who commanded it during the previous Social Christian regime. Rivero Muñoz was fired in 1980 on accusations of having tortured political prisoners, Manzo declared March 15. That same day, Poleo wrote in his column that Radio Caracas television "has former commissioner Rivero Muñoz on its payroll. He does research for a confidential bulletin run by another Granier employee, journalist Schmidt, together with Vicente Rangel."

There is yet another star in the operation against Manzo. "Factor X," says Venezuelan vice consul in Miami, Anelo Espinoza, worked in the "Manzopol." Espinoza ran an investigation proving corruption in the state iron and steel company, Corporación Venezolana de Guayana (CGV). Espinoza presented his report to the Venezuelan congress March 16. He described fraudulent deals made by a company called Palmet, reportedly part owned by Marc Rich, the U.S. "investment banker" who helped Khomeini keep up his foreign trade, while Iran kept Americans hostage.