

Colombia wins first round vs. communists

by Robyn Quijano

The Colombian nation won round one against the communist subversive plot when the government imposed harsh emergency measures that made a general strike called for Oct. 27, a full 95% ineffective. The subversives' aim was to use the general strike to launch a nationally coordinated terrorist offensive to prove that the communists and their narco-terrorist partners are capable of paralyzing the nation, destroying the energy grid of key industrial regions and demonstrating that they, not the increasingly weakened Virgilio Barco government, are in control.

The tough stance of the government against the strike was in stark contrast to the months-long capitulation to the narco-terrorist offensive. Although the Colombian people strongly backed the decision to move hard against the Oct. 27 plot, the government is again wavering and talking of "dialogue" while the terrorists continue their offensive. While the military has suffered ambushes and massacres at the hands of the terrorists, and has sharply disagreed with the government's capitulation over the past year, the tough policy imposed on Oct. 27 proved how successful a clear anti-subversive strategy can be.

Now, under pressure from the Moscow-allied human rights lobby, the Barco government's backdown has caused conflict with the military. Defense Minister Rafael Samudio resigned on Nov. 4 after orders to the troops to destroy the subversives as "enemies" of the constitutional order were undercut by the government's insistence that it will continue dialogue with the terrorists. In the days since the defeat of the strike, the terrorists have continued their offensive.

- Eleven officers and nine soldiers of an engineer battalion were killed and 17 wounded in an ambush carried out by the Communist Party's FARC guerrillas in Meta. The soldiers were surprised without weapons as they were on their way to finish building a road in the Ariari region.

- Some 120 guerrillas of the FARC and the gnostic M-19 seized the town of San Pablo in Narino. The local branch of the Agrarian Bank was destroyed, and the police station attacked.

- The Atlantic coast region was cut off from the rest of the country because ELN terrorists dynamited 45 meters of railway lines. Damage to the railroad is estimated to be 100 million pesos.

- Large sections of the Atlantic coast are blacked out after guerrillas bombed the region's electrical grid.

Target: Uraba

Disturbances occurred in a handful of places around Colombia on Oct. 27, but the only region which was totally paralyzed was the banana-producing northern region of Uraba, in Antioquia, where the Communists control the labor unions. The government responded to the Uraba situation by banning the two Communist-controlled banana workers' unions in the region for one year, for their role in the strike. The Communists' response has been to declare what the military chief of the zone, Gen. Jesús Arias, described as "a state of war" against the region's economy and infrastructure.

Some 38 banana plantations have been destroyed in wild guerrilla-led rampages, and 20 packing plants sabotaged. Radio stations have been seized, and company buses burned entirely. Two bridges connecting the region, which borders Panama, with the rest of the country have been dynamited, leaving Uraba isolated. The military, totally underequipped to handle the situation, is unable to enter the region. Telephone communications to Uraba have been cut off, and food and fuel shortages are already reported. Some 500 guerrillas have seized several government offices, and Antioquia's governor says the guerrillas currently hold the zone.

On the day of the strike, Acting President Cesar Gaviria reported calm throughout the nation, and assured the population that terrorism, not trade unionism had been defeated. He added, "I am certain that the normalcy reigning today means a move toward a strong and democratic trade unionism."

Jorge Carrillo, president and head of the democratic sector of the CUT, the largest national confederation which had called the general strike, resigned the day after the strike. He charged that his faction's effort to unify the labor movement around democratic principles "was defeated by subversion and terrorism," and he challenged the labor movement to exploit the Oct. 27 setback dealt the narco-terrorists by purging itself of subversive infiltration.

The day after his resignation, 23 of the 30 members of the CUT executive voted to retain Carrillo in the presidency and to facilitate agreements on the conditions which Carrillo insists must be met if he is to withdraw his resignation. Carrillo is demanding: 1) that leadership in the CUT be declared incompatible with leadership in any political party or other political organization; 2) that the CUT condemn terrorist acts against the national patrimony, such as blowing up the pipeline, etc. 3) that neither the CUT nor any organization affiliated with it involve themselves in campaigns against the armed forces; and 4) that the CUT condemn the massacres and ambushes against the military.

While an important battle was won on Oct. 27, the continued wavering on the part of the government could allow the guerrillas to quickly retake the offensive.

Camillo's letter of resignation

Bogota, Oct. 31, 1988
Executive Committee and National Directorate
Unified Workers Confederation of Colombia ("CUT")

Brothers:

Two years ago, I called on Colombia's workers to join forces, without distinction of political or religious creed, in a great project of coexistence; to demonstrate that together we could contribute to making Colombia a more dignified and greater nation. I said then that we workers should put aside our political differences and follow a higher goal, that beyond all ideologies, we are all workers. That we should offer ourselves as an example to the entire nation, that we could coexist in peace. That we show our compatriots that beyond our differences, something higher unites us: that we are all Colombians, obligated to build our nation on solid bases of peace with social justice. We created the CUT, we set our goals. We would fight for the right to life, for the gains of workers, for the defense of national sovereignty, so seriously damaged by the dictates of the International Monetary Fund, and we clearly said: We would be against violence and terrorism.

Thousands of workers have embraced our postulates and no one can deny our affirmation that the CUT represents 75% of Colombian trade unionism. We have advised the unions in their demands with government and with businessmen. Thanks to our efforts, hundreds of collective contracts have been subscribed to, and there exists relative labor peace, due in this aspect to the CUT. . . .

We created the CUT as an instrument for workers to improve their living and cultural levels, with total independence from the political parties and groups. The Unified Confederation was born wedded to a project of peace and coexistence. To the disgrace of the country, the opposite has occurred. Violence has increased: More than 200 trade unionists have been assassinated and many threatened with death. . . .

In the meeting of the National Directorate of Feb. 5, 1988, I said in the opening speech: ". . . Certain political groups agreed to unity out of political and ideological interests, and those who try to impose such a vision will find that they will not succeed in their designs. Unity was for the national interest, because it [labor] was the only effective means of defending the interests of the working class and of

the people in general. In the different countries where they have managed to maintain labor unity in a single confederation, it is because it placed itself outside the interests of the political parties."

. . . What has in fact happened is that the political groups *A Luchar*, *Frente Popular*, and even the Communist Party, have spared no effort in spreading the idea among public opinion that the CUT is simply a bastion of their political designs. It is enough to review the organs of the political groups to which I refer, to confirm that even executive members of the CUT have been used in this campaign. We would add that these same political groups have launched a campaign against those leaders who do not share their political theories. . . .

The country is witness to my permanent opposition to [the administration's] economic policy, rejecting the government's submission to the austerity dictates of the International Monetary Fund. I have condemned the dismantling of Ecopetrol [state oil company], to use its monies for payment of the foreign debt and not for new explorations. Thus I believed it appropriate to present the national government with a list of demands, including increases in wages, a price freeze, and other prerogatives of the people. The government preferred to continue its policy of first paying the debt and then, if anything remained, offering the crumbs to the workers. I believed that the government would concern itself more with Colombians than with the interests of the creditors. Just as the Papal Encyclicals have taught us.

Well, the power of the international banks proved more than the justice of our petitions. We were left no other path but peaceful protest, which was defeated by subversion and terrorism. . . .

On Oct. 27, the insurgents redoubled their violent actions, demonstrating in effect that they sought to take advantage of the strike for their purposes. Violence and terrorism defeated us, but the demands of justice remain in force; these do not disappear with punishment of the unions, firings, and arrests of workers.

I do not believe that Colombia can be served by any paths other than those of peace and coexistence. The CUT can continue to contribute to finding these. I have said that peace and labor unity will be much closer on the day that those who can do so desist from pursuing the combination of all forms of struggle.

This week the National Directorate of the Unified Confederation meets. On the agenda is the convocation of the [CUT] congress; it would be appropriate for this to occur as quickly as possible so that the workers may define the future of this most important labor federation.

In my belief, the bad thing that has occurred is the systematic violation of the founding principles of the CUT. To facilitate a solution to the existing situation, I present my resignation as President of the Unified Confederation. . . .

Jorge Carrillo R.