

# Colombian Supreme Court backs extradition, despite mafia threats

by José Restrepo

The Colombian Supreme Court on Oct. 3 put an end to weeks of speculation and concern over the fate of President Virgilio Barco's war against the drug mafias, when it ruled in favor of extradition of drug traffickers wanted in the United States, the cornerstone of the government's anti-drug offensive. The Supreme Court also approved the constitutionality of eight other hard-hitting emergency decrees that President Barco had issued on Aug. 18, the day that front-running presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galán was assassinated by drug mafia hit-men.

The only decrees ruled unconstitutional by the court were No. 1893, a judicial procedure allowing confiscation of goods and properties suspected—but not proven—to belong to drug traffickers, and No. 1863, which authorized military judges to order raids without specifying criminal charges. The government has prepared two emergency decrees to correct and substitute for No. 1893 and No. 1863, which have already been submitted for approval to the Court. In the meantime, military spokesmen have congratulated the Court for its findings, while reporting that the two rulings of unconstitutionality in no way contravene their sanctioned search-and-seizure operations against the drug mafias.

## Mafia 'fifth column' retaliates

The Supreme Court findings represent an important and timely victory for the Barco government, which is fighting a two-front war against the cartels—one on the streets and in the jungles, and another against the mafia's paid agents inside the National Congress. On Oct. 4, the Colombian Senate gathered in full quorum, the first time it has bothered to do so since Barco's declaration of war against the drug mob. It had been convoked by Sen. Alberto Santofimio Botero, a presidential candidate and one of eight congressmen whose name appeared on the U.S. State Department's "black list" of canceled visas. Held ostensibly to "clarify" the issue of the canceled visas, the session was in fact a war council called by the drug mafia's fifth column.

The majority of senators gathered warmly applauded a

two-hour diatribe by Santofimio, who attacked the extradition weapon, the military's raids on the mafia, and the canceled visas as "Yankee aggression" and "moral terrorism" imposed by the United States on Colombia. He denounced the anti-drug daily *El Espectador*—nearly bombed out of existence by narco-terrorists—as two-faced, claiming it had accepted paid advertisements from drug mobsters years earlier. He praised both the Conservative and Patriotic Union (communist) parties for their "anti-Yankee" stance, and insisted that it was the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, not the drug cartels, which had ordered the murder of his rival, candidate Luis Carlos Galán.

In his speech, Santofimio further claimed to possess documents—never presented—proving that Galán's successor César Gaviria Trujillo had taken money from the drug cartels. Not accidentally, it was Santofimio who had created a scandal back in 1984 by accusing then Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla—coordinator of the country's first successful offensive against the traffickers—of being on the mafia payroll, and demanding his resignation. Lara Bonilla had been pointing the finger at Santofimio and his political associates as "narco-politicians." A few short weeks later, Lara Bonilla was assassinated by the mob. It is widely known that Gaviria Trujillo's strong stance against negotiations with the drug mob and in defense of extradition has made him a target of the traffickers.

During the same Senate sessions, Interior Minister Orlando Vásquez Velásquez announced his resignation from the Barco cabinet. He accompanied his announcement with strong praise of Santofimio's speech while defending Congressman Bernardo Guerra Serna, whose name appeared on the U.S. "black list" along with Santofimio's. Further, Vásquez Velásquez gave his personal endorsement to Santofimio's proposal that application of extradition procedures be submitted to a popular plebiscite—a proposal that has also been made by another presidential candidate, the pro-drug legalization Sen. Ernesto Samper Pizano. The proposal is universally viewed as a mafia stall tactic, to indefinitely sus-

pend any extradition orders.

It is no coincidence that Vásquez Velásquez was the first government official approached by the Medellín Cartel after Galán's murder, and asked to consider negotiations with the cocaine traffickers. An Oct. 6 article in the daily *El Siglo*, by Colombia's leading congressional commentator Darío Hoyos Hoyos, claimed that, as interior minister, Vásquez Velásquez was instrumental in sabotaging President Barco's decree permitting the assignment of military mayors to towns besieged by narco-terrorism, or by mafia-tolerant officials of Vásquez Velásquez's ilk. Just prior to Vásquez Velásquez's "resignation," his political boss Federico Estrada Vélez told President Barco that the government minister's departure from the cabinet would force Estrada Vélez's withdrawal of support from a constitutional reform bill, President Barco's pet project. The President, it appears, was not to be blackmailed.

### **A matter of treason**

Although the majority of Colombia's Congress has proven itself deserving of the invective it has drawn recently from Colombians disgusted with its suspicious "do-nothing" attitude, there are exceptions. One such is Sen. Iván Marulanda, a close colleague and friend of the murdered Galán, who used the sessions called by Santofimio Botero to denounce the black-listed presidential candidate and his colleagues as "traitors," and negotiations with the traffickers as "treason."

He said, "Those who negotiate over the bodies of Galán Sarmiento, Cano Isaza, Lara Bonilla, Pardo Leal, and the thousands of other fellow citizens immolated in the fratricidal orgy of the drug trade, will go down in history for their cowardice and for their surrender of national dignity." Marulanda demanded total support for President Barco's war on drugs and blasted his fellow congressmen for having bartered their dignity for mafia money. "They are now accountable to history and to their consciences for having contributed to the nightmare the country is going through."

President Barco and the circles backing his anti-drug campaign have issued their own denunciation of these traitors, in a statement issued by the National Security Council presided over by the President: "In evaluating the characteristics of public order, the Security Council detected the application of an insidious campaign of disinformation on the part of the drug-trafficking mafias, for the purpose of diverting investigations, distracting citizens' attention, slandering officials charged with combatting that plague, reducing the efficiency of anti-narcotics operations and heaping false accusations upon organizations uninvolved in the assassinations and assaults that have shocked the nation.

"The means used by this criminal enterprise are slander, defamation, black propaganda, pamphlets, and rumor as mechanisms of psychological terrorism. . . . These are some of the various methods the drug kingpins have been using to

crush the battle readiness of honest people and, at the same time, to muddy the good image of authorities who for security reasons they have been unable to physically eliminate. . . . In this sense, it is clear that the drug traffickers seek to saturate public opinion so as to cause exhaustion and intolerance, to force society to react against the government and demand a different strategy."

The Security Council also addressed the campaign of indiscriminate narco-terrorist bombings that have been rocking the nation since Barco's anti-drug decrees were put in force. Nearly 120 bomb attacks have occurred in the five weeks since then in what has been termed by Colombian officials an "avalanche of terror." Particularly targeted have been farms, banks, businesses, political offices, supermarkets and schools.

Despite heavy militarization in major cities such as Bogotá, people are afraid to go to work, send their children to school, or go to the marketplace.

Referring to this violence, the Security Council stated, "In moments of such confusion, one can see symptoms of a collective neurosis, the product of indiscriminate terrorism applied to defenseless sectors [such as] the student population. The Security Council calls on the community to maintain its good sense and not submit to the impositions of the drug trade . . . which seek to place the national government in a precarious position to force it to negotiate the proposals presented by the Extraditables. This is blackmail that under no circumstances will be permitted."

## **Who's behind the 'Cali Cartel' ploy?**

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Michael Abbell, a former senior official of the United States Department of Justice now representing Colombia's Cali Cartel drug boss Gilberto Rodríguez Orejuela, has offered new terms for a deal between the dope traffickers and the United States government, the *Washington Post* revealed in a front-page article Oct. 2. Abbell, the primary attorney for the Cali Cartel in the United States since he left the Justice Department in 1984, has been lobbying the U.S. Congress and legal establishment in the past month to overturn the extradition agreement with Colombia—this time from the U.S. side.

Despite the glimpse it offered into the depths of corrup-