

Andean Report by José Restrepo

Gaviria's surrender to narcos exposed

The democratic resistance is doing its best to awaken Colombia's citizens, before it's too late.

The pact according to which the César Gaviria government in Colombia has negotiated the supposed "surrender" of drug kingpin Pablo Escobar, and the scandalous terms of that "surrender," stood exposed in a devastating front-page story published by the daily *El Espectador* on May 30.

Under the title "Operation Surrender," the anti-drug daily charged that among the terms imposed by Escobar as the condition for his surrender to Colombian authorities are: "the withdrawal of the police generals and suspension of activities of the Elite Force and DIJIN [special police units] in Antioquia—the province where Escobar has his refuge; legalization of his properties and money; his exclusion from trial on charges of terrorism; and the retention of his bodyguards in his eventual place of confinement."

According to *El Espectador's* information, Escobar's lawyers also demanded that National Police Gen. Miguel Antonio Gómez Padilla be fired, and that the commander of the Administrative Security Department, or DAS (Colombia's equivalent of the FBI), be exiled in a diplomatic post abroad. They also demanded that the place where Escobar and a select group of associates do their presumed few months of penance be set totally apart from any other building; that it be located on a rise where all surroundings are in view; that it have special armored windows and walls; that it be protected by a small army, including both members of Escobar's bodyguard and an elite military unit

whose members would all have to be approved in advance by Escobar; and that the "jail" be equipped with closed-circuit television, radar, and anti-air defenses.

"I consider it homage paid to the institution [National Police] and to myself that Pablo Escobar Gaviria has demanded that I be removed from this position," said police director General Gómez Padilla upon learning of *El Espectador's* information.

On the same day that the details of "Operation Surrender" were revealed, the news media received two open letters on the story. One was from President César Gaviria, the other from Pablo Escobar. The latter, describing *El Espectador* as "that yellow newspaper" and "an enemy of peace," insisted that no conditions had been imposed on the government "except those which any citizen would demand from justice and the government."

Gaviria's letter denied that his administration had agreed to any conditions, and insisted that Escobar would be treated like any other trafficker accepting the government's surrender terms. He had no comment on charges both by law enforcement figures inside Colombia and by diplomats that Escobar's surrendered partners, the three Ochoa brothers, are continuing drug-trafficking operations with impunity from their comfortable jail cells. Gaviria also denied that Escobar would be exempted from any charges; one presumes he was referring to the murders of presidential candidate Luis

Carlos Galán, of Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, of former Justice Minister Enrique Low Murtra, of police Col. Jaime Ramírez, and of the many others whose deaths have been laid at Escobar's doorstep.

Within days of the exposé of "Operation Surrender," *El Espectador's* editors received a warning that their "false morality" could undermine the deal, just as a similar deal, mediated by former President Alfonso López Michelsen, fell through in 1984, partially due to the daily's efforts. The newspaper's director and family patriarch Guillermo Cano Isaza paid for his anti-drug stance with his life, falling to an assassin's bullets in December 1986.

While various Colombian press had access to the same information on "Operation Surrender" as *El Espectador*, no others had dared to publish it.

One day before the shameful details of Gaviria's surrender to the drug cartels was published, *El Espectador* devoted its front page to an open letter to the nation by former Justice Minister Enrique Parejo González, the current ambassador to Switzerland who in 1987 barely survived a mafia hit. Parejo charged that Colombia had been "morally kidnaped," and that the National Assembly's plan to ban extradition was capitulation to "illicit pressures" from the traffickers.

While the democratic resistance strives to awaken the Colombian population before it is too late, Pablo Escobar's posh retreat is being readied—at the expense of the country's taxpayers. In addition to parabolic television antennas and a private restaurant, the drug rehabilitation center-turned-prison will include a game room and, it is said, a steam room, massage room, and jacuzzis. There has as yet been no word on whether Escobar will have a personal hot line to the presidential office.