

Ibero-American leaders challenge IMF

Robyn Quijano reports on Colombian President Betancur's bid to bolster regional cooperation and destroy the drug mafia.

"If the powerful nations can congregate in a summit and the bankers of all latitudes can associate in a creditors' club, why have we insisted on each one of us pursuing our fate individually, when unified we would constitute one of the greatest forces of modern times?" Colombian President Belisario Betancur asked this question of the health ministers of Ibero-America, gathered in Medellín, Colombia, on July 12 to discuss solutions to the health holocaust attacking the continent's growing mass of poor and unemployed.

In the strongest challenge to the immoral policies of the International Monetary Fund and the advanced-sector nations since the continent formed its own debtors' club in Cartagena on June 22, Betancur declared that the debt "is a sort of noose that threatens to strangle the economies of a large number of nations." He deplored the poverty and social deterioration "which are caused by the increasingly aggressive demands of certain international banks."

With optimism that the present crisis will trigger encouraging responses for the survival of the human race as at other crucial moments of history, he declared: "This is the beginning of the reunification of Latin America: We are living the first chapter of that great adventure."

With this challenge, Betancur called the continent to war against the aggression of the international banks that are recolonizing the developing sector through usury, to war against the drug mafias allied with international financiers that profit from the hundreds of billions of dollars in this new opium war. And he called the leaders of Ibero-America to peace and solidarity, to a battle to end forever the century of border disputes among the brother republics that have been manipulated by the continent's enemies to assure that the power of a united "nation of republics" never again be unleashed.

The issues of debt, drugs, and border disputes are precisely those areas in which the international financial oligarchy and its agents such as Henry Kissinger have stepped up their own warfare since the Cartagena Accords for a "permanent mechanism" for consultation on the debt, a debtors' club. Since then, the key movers of continental unity have been threatened with coups and destabilizations. Betancur and his family have received threats on their lives, and the

Colombian drug mafia has threatened to launch economic warfare and terrorism unless drug traffickers are given an amnesty to take over the nation with their illicit billions.

Borders and development

Betancur has proposed great infrastructural projects and the populating and development of border territories in order to unify the continent. During the recent visit of Panama's President-elect, Ardito Barletta, to Bogotá, Betancur proposed four major projects to benefit the two countries: 1) the development of the two countries' border infrastructure, 2) a highway system that would bridge the Darien Gap on the eastern coast of Panama and close the separation between South and Central America, 3) an electricity grid "which would be the means to achieve our ambitious goal of forming one single system from Mexico to Colombia, thereby making adequate use of our potential to generate hydroelectric and thermal energy," and 4) a binational, inter-oceanic canal, a project "that is more feasible—technically and financially—with each passing day." The Japanese government has just assured Barletta of their interest in such a project.

Colombia and Venezuela also have a long-term border dispute, and Betancur has proposed a plan for the development of that border region. "I propose that we create a binational company to protect the basins of our rivers and to exploit the petroleum sources all along our immense border," Betancur said in an interview with Venezuelan journalist Alfredo Pena.

Former Venezuelan President Carlos Andrés Pérez, still a powerful figure in the ruling Acción Democrática Party, backed President Betancur's proposal, calling it "a highly interesting idea." He backed Betancur's comments on the creditors' club, saying that the bankers "are mounting a scandal against our countries, accusing us of wanting to create a debtors' club, as if to say, a club of rascals and rogues . . . [while] there does exist a creditors' club." Pérez blasted the "economic totalitarianism of the International Monetary Fund," and warned that the problem of the foreign debt "could become the factor that unleashes an international financial catastrophe."

The Venezuelan government showed a lukewarm re-

sponse to the initial call for the Cartagena debt summit which reflected a faction fight within the cabinet that is still raging. One faction sees Venezuela as superior to the rest of the continent because of its oil reserves, and is seeking a "special relationship" with the United States and a special deal with the banks. Venezuela's firm commitment to continental unity and a joint stand on the debt would be crucial support for Betancur's "great adventure."

On July 5, Venezuelan Independence Day, President Jaime Lusinchi cited the consensus of Cartagena, warning that no one will escape the "strangulation of our economies," for a general collapse will hit "the developed as well as the underdeveloped countries." In this context, "a reform of the international monetary system is essential . . . the high interest rates, which have reached unprecedented levels . . . are an arbitrary and fictitious way of financing a few powerful economies, to the detriment of the stability of the rest of our nations," the Venezuelan President warned.

The advanced-sector response has been such that the nations of Ibero-America have finally understood that, rather than mere indifference, there is a determined effort to benefit from the destabilization to recolonize and loot the economies of the region.

Such evil intentions and the planning of destabilizations have been documented in a recently released book *Strategic Requirements for the Army to the Year 2000*, a study by the Jesuit-controlled Georgetown University Center for Strategic and International Studies. (See p. 30.) The study is premised on the necessity for superpower "access to those choice pieces of real estate vital to their global strategic designs."

The study predicts "medium-intensity civil war" for Colombia, and suggests a scenario in which Colombian guerrilla forces, joined by rebelling army units, launch an attack on the Colombian coastal city of Barranquilla, "thereby threatening the Venezuelan petroleum complex at Maracaibo." "A serious threat to Venezuelan oil production would effect vital U.S. interests. Insertion of a U.S. forces along the Venezuelan-Colombian border would thus be likely," reads a U.S. Army planning document.

Such scenarios are not to be taken lightly, as a similar scenario for the "Second War of the Pacific" by the Rand Corporation in the mid-'70s determined the outline of actions that would rekindle old border disputes among Peru, Chile, and Bolivia, and bring Ecuador, Argentina, and Brazil into a continent-wide conflagration. One of the key operatives in attempting to start the Second war of the Pacific, Luigi Einaudi, toured Peru, Argentina, and Venezuela over the last three weeks.

Hypocrisy on drugs attacked

In his address to the health ministers of Ibero-America, Betancur, who is in total war with the drug mafia of Colombia, blasted the hypocrisy of the advanced sector which has

not only refused to conduct an all-out war on drugs, but has fostered the economic strangulation of the continent to force dope production.

The advanced-sector countries "demand of us colossal efforts, sometimes beyond our human and financial possibilities, and, nonetheless, there have been in certain societies, which have become natural markets for drugs and which foster their production, no more than secondary police efforts and even an undisguised political reticence toward eradicating the evil.

"But even worse: When countries like ours, making enormous sacrifice, turn to where we are supposedly offered collaboration, equipment to reinforce our prosecution of these criminals, and so forth, we are given miserable trade conditions and they even try to impose unacceptable financial conditions. . . . In Colombia, despite such obstacles, we will continue the war without truce, not only in defense of our own dignity and our own

of humanity, because we are facing a world threat.

"I hope that from this forum comes forth an expression of our political will to preserve the public health and human dignity against the threat of the drug trade," Betancur said.

Mafia blackmail

During the last weeks, not only have the lives of President Betancur and his family been threatened, but the drug mobs have sparked a "great national debate" on an "amnesty" for the drug mafia with the explicit purpose of undermining national institutions and creating a national movement in favor of the wealthy mafia. Not only has Nobel Prize winner and folk-hero Gabriel García Márquez backed the drug mobs, but Liberal Party boss and Betancur's opponent in the last election, Alfonso López Michelsen, whose family runs the financial laundering of drug money, met with the mafia chiefs in Panama and delivered a proposal demanding a drug amnesty in return for the investment of billions of dollars of dirty money in the crisis-ridden Colombian economy.

On July 17, an editorial appeared in the Medellín newspaper *Orientación Liberal*, run by López Michelsen networks, which called for a "tax amnesty," which would allow mafia fortunes into the country so long as they are used "productively. . . . We must ask ourselves if the country can afford the luxury of burying immense sums of money when production is stagnant and unemployment corroding our cities and countryside," the editor wrote.

Betancur categorically rejected the dope mobs' offer of a deal in a declaration on July 19: "For its part, the government has been explicit that under no circumstances would there ever be dialogue concerning situations that are clearly defined by the law. . . . As a consequence, there has not been, nor are, nor will be negotiations, nor any form of understanding between the government and the authors of the [mafia] proposal."