

## Andean Report by Valerie Rush

### 'In defense of Western civilization'

*Lara Bonilla's successor urges the incoming government of Colombia to continue the anti-drug fight.*

**I**n a dramatic interview published June 1 in the Colombian daily *El Espectador*, Justice Minister Enrique Parejo González—friend and successor to the murdered anti-drug fighter Rodrigo Lara Bonilla—declared that the fight against the drug traffic is nothing less than “a fight in defense of the fundamental values of Western civilization,” and insisted that it must be carried forward to final victory.

Parejo outlined the numerous laudable successes of the outgoing Betancur government in that war, the most significant being that the godfathers of the drug trade were forced underground, no longer free to strut their financial and political power on the streets of Colombia's cities.

He also pointed to the extraordinary anti-drug collaboration achieved with several of Colombia's neighbors, the extradition of numerous middle-level gangsters to the United States, the eradication by herbicides of almost all of Colombia's formidable marijuana fields, destruction of innumerable illegal airstrips, the seizure of 150 narco-planes and nearly 30 tons of cocaine, and so on.

However, Parejo lamented that the government's many achievements in the war on drugs might have been much greater “had all authorities collaborated with the same interest in the fight. . . .” He did not have to name names, for the justice minister's public battles with the mafia-linked Attorney-General Jiménez Gómez, corrupt judges, and others are well known.

Parejo's full-page interview was

intended as a challenge to the next government of Colombia, which takes power on Aug. 7, to carry the war forward. Yet a number of recent developments suggest that the fugitive godfathers intend to return to Colombia under incoming President Virgilio Barco.

When the United States recently abandoned its extradition request against several of Colombia's leading drug traffickers, after the sole U.S. witness against them had been murdered, corrupt elements of the Colombian judicial system went to work to dismantle the cases against them at home as well.

On June 2, the superior court of Bogota withdrew a standing arrest warrant against Pablo Escobar Gaviria, one of Colombia's two most powerful “godfathers.” The warrant, which had been issued on charges that Escobar had illegally imported into Colombia exotic animals for his private zoo, was withdrawn when the charges were dropped by a court from Escobar's home town of Medellín for “lack of evidence”—despite the fact that that zoo was confiscated by the government two years ago! Within days, the same Bogota court dismissed its case against Escobar and 10 of his associates regarding involvement in the April 30, 1984 assassination of Justice Minister Lara Bonilla, again for “lack of evidence.”

With no arrest warrants outstanding against him, Escobar can not only stroll back into Colombia, but can reoccupy his seat as a congressional al-

ternate, with his parliamentary immunity restored. This, despite the fact that Escobar signed his name to the mafia proposal demanding a government amnesty in exchange for paying Colombia's foreign debt with narcodollars, a proposal issued in 1984 and again this year.

Such prominent fugitives as banker Jaime Michelsen Uribe, the cousin of ex-President Alfonso López Michelsen who chalked up enormous profits during the burgeoning of Colombia's drug trade in the 1970s, while his cousin was in office; drug kingpin José Ramón Matta Ballesteros; and master-thief Roberto Soto, have all pledged to return to Colombia after President Betancur leaves office. Their path is already paved by Escobar, it would seem.

Moreover, the Colombian state council is currently studying a possible constitutional reform which would sanction the moral decay of Colombian society upon which the likes of Escobar thrive. The proposed reform would not only prohibit extradition of Colombian drug traffickers for prosecution abroad (Lara Bonilla had won the fight for extradition at the cost of his life) and forbid presidential reelection (aimed at Betancur), but would eliminate from the preamble to the Colombian constitution, the crucial assertion, “God is the source of all authority.”

Natural law, perhaps better understood as the reign of morality over society, was frontally attacked by former President Alfonso López Michelsen in a 1984 press interview where he tried to justify his collaboration with the mafia assassins of Lara Bonilla by claiming, “Morality has no place in politics.”

Parejo González's challenge to Barco to “defend the fundamental values of Western civilization” was thus never more appropriate.