
Peru's Narco-Banks

A case study— Banco de Crédito

by Ricardo Martín Mora

Peru's private banks are in open, total insurrection against the elected government of President Alan García. Over the recent period, these banks have used every dirty trick—including flouting the law—to forestall the nationalization of the country's financial system, proposed by García and approved by Congress on Oct. 2. Behind the bankers' desperation is more than a fight in defense of "private property," as they so earnestly contend. It is drugs. And given the billions at stake, it can be expected that the bankers will go to any and all extremes to defend their interests.

One of many examples of narco-banking operations in Peru is the case of the Banco de Crédito, Peru's largest commercial bank. The October issue of the magazine *Equis X* accuses Dionisio Romero, owner of the Banco de Crédito prior to the nationalization, of direct links to the drug mafia, both through illegal money-laundering and by running cover for drug trafficking itself.

Equis X asserts, "The Romero family owns palm tree crops in the Peruvian jungle, and these have allegedly served as a cover for its drug-trafficking activities." *Equis X* explains that "in the environs of said crops, the Romeros have clandestine airports for the export of semi-processed narcotics," and insists that "the origin of the Romero fortune, before assuming ownership of the bank, was the drug trade."

Equis X also charges that the Romeros "have allegedly worked closely with two of the seven principal mafia gangs that operate in the Tingo María jungle," and that this reportedly represented "a true society of interests, in which the mafiosi have also allegedly been something like fronts of the Romeros, in charge of the dirty work." The mafia agents of the Romeros, according to the magazine, were drug traffickers Marcial Pérez Aliaga and Pablo del Aguila, the heads of two criminal organizations linked to the international drug trade.

There is a popular saying in Peru that "the horse fattens

under its owner's eye." This would presumably explain why Dionisio Romero has a summer home on the outskirts of Tarapoto, in the middle of the Alto Huallaga jungle, where he periodically holds conferences with his lieutenants who run Banco de Crédito's local branches.

Equis X is a notoriously dirty operation in its own right, and is apparently going after Romero for suspect reasons. Neither is the source of its information stated, nor the evidence in its possession revealed. Nonetheless, this writer—a former deputy attorney general of Peru responsible for investigating drugs and terrorism—has plenty of independent documentation on the participation of the Banco de Crédito's owners in the illicit drug trade.

A criminal 'modus operandi'

The cover for the drug mafia operations headed by narco-banker Dionisio Romero, through the Banco de Crédito's offices in the central Peruvian jungle, is the Company for the Development and Exploitation of Palm Oil (Endepalma, S.A.), which has 6-8 hectares of palm stands near the jungle city of Tocache. Endepalma, S.A. has a second operation of 14 hectares of palm in the Amazon Basin area of Santa Cecilia, between the rivers Maniti and Amazonas. At the Tocache plantation, Endepalma has an illegal airport, despite the fact that it is but 3-5 kilometers from Tocache itself, which has an official airport, complete with police force and the Corporation of Civil Aeronautics.

It is this clandestine airport of Endepalma—owned by the Romeros—which is used by Colombian light-plane pilots to transport vast quantities of basic coca paste (PBC, the raw material of cocaine), for which they pay U.S. dollars then laundered through the Banco de Crédito branch at Tocache (see *EIR*, Aug. 21, 1987).

This writer personally took part in operations against the drug-trafficking organizations that used the Endepalma airport, such as in the case of the arrest of international drug trafficker Fhon Clark Pérez Rengifo, at the Endepalma airport installations in September 1983. The raid was conducted by the Umopar, the mobile unit of the Civil Guard rural police. Pérez Rengifo was snared just as he was storing some 500 kilos of basic coca paste on board a Colombian narco-plane.

There also exist numerous affidavits in the files of the Peruvian judiciary, such as the case of Raúl López Villar, who laundered more than \$6 million through the Banco de Crédito (Tocache) in less than one month. One such affidavit states, "On approximately September 10 or 12, 1982, I gave 400 kilos of basic coca paste and four days later another 430 kilograms of PBC, to Erencio Malpartida López at the airport of Tananta [name of the Endepalma airport site], where a Colombian light plane landed at least twice."

Another of the more notorious cases involving the Endepalma airport is that of the palm oil transport company run

by the infamous gangster Arturo Pacheco Girón (alias "Búfalo Pacheco," a former member of the ruling APRA party expelled from its ranks in the late 1970s). Pacheco's company, which possesses approximately 200 tank trucks, was caught *in flagrante* on several occasions transporting PBC. One such instance occurred on Christmas 1978, when one of his Volvo trucks returning from the Endepalma installations was pursued by the police, and finally seized after a furious gun battle on the outskirts of Lima, literally at the doorstep of Pacheco's residence. Inside the truck was found approximately 400 kilograms of PBC.

Yet another case is that of the drug-trafficking organization of Colombian Carlos Correa Pérez, who was captured by an Umopar unit at the Endepalme airport, just as he was loading a huge cargo of PBC onto four Colombian light planes. Later, the members of this band escaped from a prison at Tarapoto, with the complicity of the corrupt Judge Washington Castillo. Correa Pérez's organization was also linked to the operations of the notorious Peruvian assassin and drug trafficker Catalino Escalante Calvo.

Complicity in laundering

The participation of the narco-banker Dionisio Romero and his Banco de Crédito in the laundering of the proceeds of the drug trade is fully demonstrable, and goes a long way toward rebutting those who suggest that Romero "didn't know" his Endepalme airport was used for drug trafficking. The proof exists in the form of affidavits obtained by the Peruvian police and court authorities from various confessed drug traffickers, all of whom confirmed that it was the Banco de Crédito's owners who had solicited their collaboration to carry out the laundering of "coca-dollars."

We could, for example, refer to one which states that "the deposits in his dollar account, at the branch of the Banco de Crédito at Tocache, are there because he had lent said account to the administrator of that branch, at his request, who had indicated that he would receive a commission of 50¢ per dollar, for each dollar deposited, and that he didn't know the names of the individuals who had used his account." (Police file No. 679-DIE/DINTID, dated 9/23/1983; declaration of one Juan del Carmen Barrantes.)

A similar statement is offered by drug trafficker Alfonso Perea Panduro, who writes: "In the month of June . . . in the afternoon hours, Don Miguel Tenorio Ballon, the administrator of the Tocache branch of Banco de Crédito, came to me and proposed the use of my current account to deposit dollars, without mentioning the quantity involved, for which operation Tenorio Ballon, I, and the Banco de Crédito accountant Joel Hidalgo Sánchez would earn one-half of 1% of the total quantity thus changed. . . . After eight days, I was approached by Joel Hidalgo Sánchez, who told me there would be another 'little client.'" (Police report No. 42 DIDRF, PIP, Plan of Operation Zancudo, of 9/23/1983.)

Arrests 'traumatize' City of London

by Mark Burdman

At the outset of October, a new phase of Britain's "Guinnessgate" scandal opened with a vengeance. By mid-month, five leading City of London financial figures had been arrested by the City's Fraud Squad, and rumors of new arrests were spreading like wildfire. British dailies are already calling it the biggest shakeout of the British Establishment since the bursting of the South Sea Bubble in the early 18th century. The *Sunday Times* of London Oct. 18 labeled it "one of the most traumatic events ever to hit the City of London."

The Guinnessgate charges derive from a wild "share support scheme" engineered in early 1986 by Ernest Saunders, then chairman of Guinness PLC, the brewer. During fiercely fought competitive bidding between Guinness and another firm, Argyll, to take over Distillers, the whisky giant, Saunders allegedly set up an "inducement fund" of some £25 million, which went to various financial and business entities around the world. These entities used the money to buy Guinness stock, shoring prevail over Argyll in the bidding for Distillers.

Saunders resigned in late 1986, when the scandal first broke, but little was heard thereafter, until October 1987.

The new wave of arrests began with stockbroker associated with the Alexander, Laing and Cruickshank brokerage house. Nicknamed "the Animal" because of his wild selling habits in the City, Parnes had been the broker in the illicit deals of several other Guinnessgate figures. He was arrested by the FBI in Los Angeles, on request of British authorities, and, as of this writing, is awaiting extradition back to London.

During the same week, police arrested millionaire businessman-financier Sir Isidore "Jack" Lyons, on charges of stealing £3.25 million from Guinness. The 71-year-old Lyons is well-known in London as a patron of the arts and funder of Israeli causes.

On Oct. 13, Gerald Ronson, owner of Britain's second-wealthiest private company, Heron International, was arrested while visiting Fraud Squad offices. He was charged with eight offenses, including the theft of almost £6 million from the company, conspiring to create a false market in Guinness