

## Andean Report by Valerie Rush

### Narcos go for total amnesty

*Abandoned by the U.S., Colombia's back is to the wall; legalization of the drug cartels is Gaviria's next play.*

Colombian President César Gaviria Trujillo's first cousin, former cabinet minister and governor Fortunato Gaviria Botero, was kidnaped, murdered, and buried on his own coffee farm on Feb. 13. And on Feb. 16, a car-bomb loaded with 440 pounds of dynamite and shrapnel was triggered by remote control at the exit to a bull-fighting arena in the city of Medellín, just as thousands of spectators began streaming out. The blast was so powerful that human bodies and automobiles alike were flung into the air, and "it rained arms and legs," according to one shell-shocked observer.

Both incidents were the work of the Medellín cocaine cartel, whose leaders have been negotiating a legalization deal with the Gaviria government for many months. Just hours after the Medellín car-bomb explosion, a confidant Juan David Ochoa, one of the cartel's four chiefs, swaggered into the offices of Medellín's prison authorities and surrendered, under promise of a reduced jail term and protection from extradition to the U.S. He joined his two younger brothers, Jorge Luis and Fabio, in a special, luxuriously appointed jail just outside of Medellín.

Two days earlier, on Feb. 14, the Bogotá daily *El Tiempo* reported that, according to security agency intercepts of the communications of top Medellín Cartel chieftain Pablo Escobar, the "godfather" had decided to reject the government's surrender offer. Escobar has reportedly opted instead to seek an alliance with the rival Cali Cartel of Gilberto Rodríguez

Orejuela, which would employ a combination of terrorism and "diplomacy" to force through a general amnesty for all the traffickers, through the good offices of the traffickers who have penetrated the Constituent Assembly now deliberating in Bogotá.

Already, two of Escobar's lackeys inside the Assembly, former Medellín Mayor Juan Gómez Martínez and Hernando Londoño, have formally proposed that the Assembly constitutionally ban extradition and repatriate Colombians, such as former cartel transportation czar Carlos Lehder, convicted and serving time in the United States. Former minister and cartel negotiator Joaquín Vallejo Arbeláez, Pablo Escobar's baptismal godfather, also added his voice to the campaign. He penned a column in the Feb. 11 *La República*, urging the Assembly delegates to "dialogue" with the country's narco-terrorists: "Christian pardon of crimes, when there exists a formal commitment to a new life, is what distinguishes us from the philosophy of vengeance," intoned the apologist for terrorism.

Notwithstanding the ongoing terror and blackmail scripted by the drug traffickers, who still hold several prominent hostages after having slain several others, President Gaviria has announced that he is prepared to renounce all U.S. financial assistance for a war on drugs, in return for a U.S. "open door" policy to Colombian export products. We must "de-narcotize" relations with the U.S., said the Colombian President, who is scheduled to visit Washington, Feb. 25-28,

to get the official stamp of approval from the Bush administration for his appeasement policy.

Indicating that such approval has already been unofficially granted, the U.S. Justice Department has just announced that it has negotiated a "memorandum of understanding" with its Colombian counterpart, which will "put extradition on the back burner," wrote the *Washington Post* of Feb. 16. According to Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Bernard Aronson, Washington's policy will now be one of strong support for Gaviria's negotiations with the cocaine cartels. It comes as no surprise that official Washington has yet to provide Colombia with any evidence for use in the pending criminal trials against the surrendered Ochoa brothers, who are wanted for murder and drug trafficking in the United States—but *not* in Colombia!

Despite the diplomatic charade that will take place in Washington, all but the most naive in Colombia know that Gaviria's appeasement policy was *made in the U.S.A.* in the first place. Ranging from both overt and covert attacks on the Colombian military for alleged "human rights violations," to denial of adequate economic, financial, and technological assistance in order to wage an effective war on drugs, Washington's strategy has been to drive Colombia into precisely the indefensible corner it is in today.

The unholy combination of Gaviria, a former International Monetary Fund economist, as President and a Constituent Assembly dominated by narco-terrorists and their apologists virtually guarantees that full amnesty for the cartels and legalization of the drug trade will be the next *made in the U.S.A.* proposals on the Assembly's agenda.