

Andean Report by Valerie Rush

Colombia launches suit against Chase

The trail of dead bodies lengthens as the Betancur government seeks to recover stolen millions.

Colombia's Attorney General Carlos Jiménez Gómez emerged from special congressional hearings in Bogotá Jan. 20 to inform the press that his government was suing Chase Manhattan Bank to recover \$13.5 million which had been stolen last year from a central bank account at Chase's London branch. The decision came after a lengthy investigation on the Colombian side, and persistent refusal on Chase's part to acknowledge responsibility for the "electronic theft."

The millions had been illegally transferred from the Chase branch last spring into a hastily created account at Morgan Guaranty in New York, and from there to a numbered Swiss bank account. Further government investigations found that the millions had gone through both Lloyds of London and Israel's Banco Hapoalim, both in Zürich, and from there to an unnamed Panama bank. There, reportedly, the trail ended.

The Betancur government's pursuit of the suit, despite widespread warnings that such a move would be "meaningless" against the awesome financial and legal resources of the powerful bank, suggests a newfound determination emerging in Ibero-America to challenge the colonial looting practices of the international banks and their drug-trafficking appendages.

Chase Manhattan and the Rockefeller interests it represents have long been the enemy of republican tradi-

tions in Ibero-America. Through Henry Kissinger's chairmanship of Chase's international advisory board, Chase has worked hand-in-glove with the International Monetary Fund to impose murderous austerity conditions across the continent, paving the way for widespread cultivation of illegal drugs to pay the debt.

Chase has vied with the drug-tainted United Brands company, with whom it shares institutional ties, for the title of "El Pulpo" (The Octopus) among Ibero-Americans for its longstanding looting practices toward the continent. And Chase's imperial treatment of the developing sector has been fully complemented by the Malthusian Rockefeller Foundation, a leading funder of population control programs in the Third World for decades.

Despite Chase's denial of complicity in the "case of the missing millions," which reportedly involved high-level individuals within Colombia's central bank, at Chase's London branch, in the United States, and elsewhere, its legal representatives reportedly offered the Colombian government an \$8.5 million settlement under the table. The Betancur government responded "nothing doing," and continued its investigations.

The Chase scandal grew particularly nasty when it was learned that special investigator at the finance ministry Diego Domínguez Cortes, the man credited with uncovering the theft, had been murdered.

Domínguez, who had received numerous death threats, was killed in a "car accident" last month after an alleged drunken spree. According to his family, however, he neither smoked, drank, nor used drugs of any kind.

Though described as a devoted husband, he was reportedly accompanied at the time of his death by a "mistress" who had begun working at the ministry just two weeks earlier. She miraculously escaped unharmed in the accident. The round-the-clock bodyguards the ministry had assigned to Domínguez did not accompany him the day of his death.

On Jan. 24, the Senate committee investigating the Chase theft ordered the exhumation of Domínguez's hastily buried corpse for further tests.

Since then, it has been reported that another potential witness in the Chase scandal, former Banco de la Republica international executive Oscar Alviar Ramírez, has also turned up dead. Alviar, associated for 30 years with the Banco de la Republica before his 1981 retirement and an ongoing consultant at the central bank, was discovered dead in a hotel room with a bullet hole in his head in late January.

Attorney General Jiménez admitted in his press conference that the trail of the missing millions had for the moment turned cold, but that his government nonetheless intended to recover the missing \$13.5 million plus damages from Chase Manhattan.

The Betancur government's insistence on defending Colombia's national interests has enraged the international financial powers he is challenging (see *EIR*, Jan. 20 and Jan. 27). Sources have privately linked Betancur's recent toppling of the Gran Colombiano financial empire—the "Chase Manhattan" of Colombia—to the subsequent coup attempt by drug-tainted elements of the Colombian military in January.