

# Hammer's Occidental teams with Colombia's narco-terrorists

by Valerie Rush

The assassination this week of the judge investigating last year's mafia slaying of Colombian Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla signals a renewed bid for power by the drug-linked forces in that country. Not unexpectedly, the mafia's new show of strength comes at precisely the moment that the government of Belisario Betancur is being faced with political and economic blackmail, and a resurgence of terrorism, courtesy of combined Soviet and International Monetary Fund forces.

The blackmail against the Betancur regime is being skillfully orchestrated by the Occidental Petroleum Company of Armand Hammer, Moscow's loyal agent in the West, which has been caught red-handed financing one of Colombia's bloodiest guerrilla organizations. Should Betancur throw Occidental out of the country—as he is being urged to do by the military—he could face a renewed boycott by the multinational oil companies against development of Colombia's substantial petroleum reserves. With the boycott would come a collapse of Betancur's dream of paying the debt with oil revenues and freeing Colombia from murderous IMF oversight.

## Dope, Inc. kills again

Judge Tulio Manuel Castro Gil, the First Superior Judge of Bogotá, was returning home from a late night at the office on July 22 when his taxi was caught in a hail of gunfire, killing him instantly. Castro Gil had already subpoenaed 16 suspects in the Lara Bonilla murder, half of whom are sitting in jail and the rest of whom—including notorious cocaine king Pablo Escobar Gaviria—have fled. Despite repeated death threats against him, Castro Gil was afforded no security protection except that which he himself was forced to pay for. Like Lara Bonilla, he had publicly vowed to continue his investigation “until its ultimate consequences.”

The way was paved for the judge's murder one week earlier, when Attorney General Carlos Jiménez Gómez, an open ally of the drug mafia, filed charges against Colombia's national police chief, Gen. Delgado Mallarino, for human rights violations and “abuse of authority” in conducting the government's herbicide eradication program against the country's vast illegal marijuana fields. The Attorney General's action, which provoked outrage from Defense Minister Vega Uribe, was viewed, by pro- and anti-drug forces alike,

as a green light to the mafia to retake the offensive without fear of prosecution.

Former President Alfonso López Michelsen has targeted for ousting Justice Minister Parejo González, friend and follower of the murdered Lara Bonilla, and one of the Attorney General's bitterest enemies. The López-allied leadership of the opposition Liberal Party demanded that President Betancur fire any and all members of *Nuevo Liberalismo*, the political tendency to which Lara Bonilla belonged and of which Parejo González is the sole representative in the cabinet. They threatened that unless Betancur complied, “not a single bill will pass the Congress.” More blackmail.

## Occidental and terrorism

Occidental Petroleum's subsidization of Colombian terrorists first came to light in early July, when an army commander charged that the company and its subcontractor, Mannesman-Handel of Germany, were paying “war taxes” to ELN guerrillas in Arauca province, ostensibly to prevent sabotage of the oil pipeline they were constructing and/or the kidnapping of their personnel.

Later, the agricultural producers' organization, SAC, charged that money and supplies were being provided to the guerrilla group by “foreign companies” in the area. Finally, Armed Forces Commander Gen. Augusto Moreno declared that documentation existed proving the complicity of Occidental, Mannesman, and a third subcontractor, SICIM of Italy, in subsidizing the ELN.

Despite repeated denials by the companies, the evidence was irrefutable down to the minutest details: On Dec. 27, the three companies' representatives met with five ELN terrorists to approve the payment of \$200,000 a month to the guerrilla organization, plus provision of supplies and helicopters for supposed vigilance of the pipeline. The ELN has since put out a press release claiming payments from Mannesman of some \$4 million!

Although Betancur has been unable to ignore the scandal outright, he appears for the moment to have yielded to Occidental's blackmail and ignored the oil multinational's complicity in the affair. Instead, the state oil company Ecopetrol has ordered the firing of Mannesman's representative in Colombia and its security chief for alleged “poor relations with military and civilian authorities in the area.”

The fact is that Mannesman—like Occidental—was not paying “protection money” to the guerrillas, but providing outright financing! The press has revealed that Mannesman not only refused to accept protection from the local military, choosing collaboration with the guerrillas instead, but has issued a statement insisting that “everything that happens within the perimeters of [the work] camp is a matter of the company. . . . Any outside intervention we consider clearly illegal.” The “outside intervention” referred to is military deployments in the vicinity of the camps where the guerrillas were operating! According to high-level security officials in Colombia, the Llanos Orientales (eastern plains) region where Occidental, Mannesman, and the ELN have their operations is not only oil territory but, increasingly, drug territory as well. In fact, it is said that the Llanos Orientales are replacing the jungle territory of Caqueta—busted last year by Lara Bonilla and the narcotics police—as the cocaine mafia’s plantation.

### Peace amnesty crumbles

The effect of Occidental’s open financing of the ELN guerrillas is to make a laughing stock of Betancur’s carefully nurtured peace amnesty, which he designed to pull honest elements out of the guerrilla movement and bring an end to decades of violence. Instead of a political forum for dialogue, Occidental is providing the funds for weapons, terrorism, and drug trafficking—all aimed at destabilization of the Betancur government.

The Occidental-Mannesman scandal has arisen in the middle of a resurgence of terrorism around the country. The M-19 guerrillas have broken their truce with the government and returned to armed assaults on police stations, military barracks, banks, and government offices. A variety of smaller groups, ranging from the Ricardo Franco Commandos to the EPL, have begun a bloody rampage in the rural areas, and Occidental’s ELN—which never joined Betancur’s amnesty—continues to plague the countryside, demanding “war taxes” from the population in exchange for their lives.

At the same time, anti-nationalist forces inside the military are using Betancur’s dilemma to push a “military solution.” Former Defense Minister Fernando Landazábal Reyes has just resigned his ambassadorial post in the Netherlands to return to Colombia, arguing the need for iron-fisted rule. The country needs “a Perseus, the legendary Greek hero who cut off the head of the Medusa of violence,” declared Landazábal in a letter published in all the Colombian press. Although he has not formally announced, it is widely expected that Landazábal—who was forced out of Betancur’s first cabinet for refusal to support the president’s peace plan—will run for the presidency at the head of a military-dominated movement.

The *Lopistas’* demand for the firing of Parejo and others is part of the open warfare launched against the *Nuevo Liberalismo* dissidents in the Liberal Party, who have allied with Betancur’s “progressive” faction inside the ruling Conser-

vative Party to challenge the encrusted drug-linked leadership—and presidential candidates—of both parties.

That warfare escalated this week when the standing agreement to grant the vice-presidencies of Colombia’s House and Senate to the Liberal Party’s minority faction—that is, *Nuevo Liberalismo*—was abrogated by the *Lopistas*, who took the positions for themselves, thus effecting the virtual expulsion of *Nuevo Liberalismo* from the party.

The justification given by the *Lopistas* was that, in light of *Nuevo Liberalismo’s* emerging alliance with the “progressive Conservatives,” they no longer represented Liberal Party interests in Congress. The *Lopistas* newspaper, *El Tiempo*, completed the scenario with the headline, “Nuevo Liberalismo Leaves Government.”

The “supra-party” alliance of *Nuevo Liberalismo*—head-

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*Occidental Petroleum, and Mannesman, its subcontractor, not only refused to accept protection from the local military, but chose collaboration with the guerrillas instead. Evidence now proves that the “protection money” paid to the guerrillas was, rather, outright financing.*

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ed by Luis Carlos Galán—and the *Belisaristas*—headed by J. Emilio Valderrama—has terrified the Colombian oligarchy in both camps which, until the landslide election of maverick Betancur in 1982, had maintained a stranglehold over Colombian politics, and its hands on the country’s vast natural wealth, for decades.

Exemplary is Liberal Party presidential candidate Virgilio Barco Vargas, whose family made its vast fortune by stripping Colombia of its oil wealth earlier in the century, and who is today a close ally of López Michelsen in promoting the conversion of Colombia’s economy into a haven of the international drug mafia.

Conservative presidential candidate Alvaro Gómez Hurtado, an avowed enemy and rival of the president within the Conservative Party, does not come out of oligarchic circles, but has nonetheless done his best to join them. His father was the infamous Nazi-loving Laureano “the Monster” Gómez, whose 1950s dictatorship dragged Colombia through its bloodiest period, *La Violencia*. Alvaro Gómez, a self-avowed Falangist in his own right, has openly endorsed the legalization of drugs and has called for an expansion of the “tourist trade” (read: drugs and gambling) as the basis for Colombia’s economic recovery.