

labor federations, both affiliated with Conservative Party politics. With some 230,000 members, the two conservative labor groups have both accused the CUT of being leftist and of having ties to drug traffickers. In response, spokesmen for the new organization explained that communist and socialist unions are in the minority and that "in this country even Queen Elizabeth is accused of having ties with drug smuggling."

BARCO AND HIS FRIENDS

Virgilio Barco also seems to be very cautious about his country's foreign policy, and in several instances he has sent out what could be read as mixed messages. On the one hand, a Cuban delegation was present for his inauguration even though Colombia does not maintain diplomatic relations with Havana. That immediately opened the way for speculation that relations would soon be reestablished, following the example set by Uruguay and Argentina, South America's fledgling democracies. But to date, Barco has once again preferred to say little. On the other hand, U.S. Secretary of State George Schultz was also present for the ceremony and had a private meeting with the new President. The statement issued after their talk explained that they had not dealt with the question of the foreign debt or the guerrilla movement. Thus, it was presumed that their meeting focused on two even more pressing topics: drug traffic and the strategic facilities that Colombia might grant the United States.

With regards to drug traffic, Colombia's position is a rather embarrassing one. As things are viewed from the U.S., Colombia is a paradise for drug traffickers, serving as the main center for processing Bolivian and Peruvian cocaine and for sending the refined product off to clandestine landing sites in Florida and the Bahamas. The recent participation of U.S. troops in anti-drug operations in Bolivia weighs heavily on Colombia. Thus, a strict legal accord has been

reached with the U.S. regarding the extradition and trial of drug smugglers. Under this agreement, the U.S. may sentence Colombian citizens taken prisoner on U.S. soil and even extradite Colombians from their own country. The Barco Vargas government went on to announce joint operations with Peru to fight drug trafficking, declaring that "we don't need U.S. troops in our territory."

The other crucial issue has to do with a U.S. request to set up radar installations on the Colombian island of San Andres, located in the Caribbean Sea just 9 minutes flying time from Nicaragua. Until now the Barco government has been reluctant to grant permission, arguing that the proposed equipment is out of date. Washington hurriedly replied that it would be willing to install more advanced equipment. It could well be that Virgilio Barco is thinking about distancing his country from the Contadora process, but granting permission for a U.S. radar station on Colombian territory might be seen as going too far, too fast; hence the reluctance. At any rate, it is widely believed that the new Colombian President is interested in a closer alignment with general U.S. policy in Central America, which could well mean backing off from the process initiated by his predecessor.

The fact that it was Colombia that inspired the pantagruelian excesses of Gabriel García Márquez' *One Hundred Years of Solitude* helps illustrate some of the limits on the new administration. Barco Vargas will have to run his government in accord with the country's history and national character. For now, correspondents for two major international news agencies, Reuters and DPA, agree that the new President's administration has been "indecisive during its first month, occasioning premonitions of instability." The question for the future is, will that indecision cause Barco's ship to spring a leak? ★

Irving Roffe

Reaping the Future

Though supposedly embarked only in an anti-drug campaign, U.S. military presence has generated an internal conflict in Bolivia.

In the midst of the worst economic crisis in its history, Bolivia today faces a seemingly invulnerable enemy: drug traffic. The magnitude of the

crisis confronting this scarcely inhabited country (6.5 million people) is expressed in the spiraling fall of its income from exports and the persistent decline of its exportable production, and in an increasingly high unemployment rate along with a loss in the real value of wages.

Hand in hand with the crisis,



Armed transporter of cocaine paste to traffickers.

Photo taken from Cultural Survival Quarterly

latin american issues

increasing drug trafficking appears as the major political and economic issue, one which came to the forefront last July 14 with the arrival in Bolivia of 170 U.S. soldiers. Their stated mission is to combat the flow of drugs coming out of this land-locked Andean country, but their presence unleashed an uproar among political parties, in Congress, the universities and the unions. The broad-based opposition to the presence of U.S. troops stems from the fact that they are regarded as violators of the nation's sovereignty and dignity.

The U.S. assigned 170 soldiers, 7 helicopters, 2 reconnaissance planes and 15 Drug Enforcement Agency advisors to provide logistical support for Bolivian authorities during 60 days in their struggle against drug traffic. Yet the real length of their tour of duty depends on the results obtained during ongoing operations.

The fact is that for most Bolivi-

ans, U.S. military presence only serves to further complicate the country's already critical situation. This is especially true following the decisive decline in the price of tin on the world market in October of 1985.

Bolivia's Finance Minister Flavio Machicaco recently stated that the base of the country's economy has shifted from tin to coca, the Spanish name for the poppy plant from which cocaine is produced. "We would face runaway unemployment, protests and violence if the narcotics trade were to suddenly disappear," stated Mr. Machicaco.

Drug-related activity currently generates nearly one third of the country's gross national product, and is rapidly displacing tin-mining and natural gas extraction, formerly Bolivia's main economic activities. Cultivation and trafficking of drugs currently provide some kind of income for close to 400,000

people. The drug industry's activity is also complemented by the existence of 80,000 cocaine addicts in the country, according to official figures.

Over the years Bolivia's economy has become progressively addicted to the rising drug industry, now firmly rooted in most of the country's political and economic life. One of the more recent contributing factors has been the displacement of labor from shut-down tin mines to the poppy fields. For example, during 1986 the government has fired 8,000 miners, out of a total of 24,000 employed by this state-owned industry. These measures respond to the official logic concerning what needs to be done in order to gain international financial support, but many are bitterly opposed to them. Such is the case of the Bolivian Workers' Central, COB, which recently polled public opinion concerning the country's problems. Their findings revealed that 97.35% of

those consulted opposed servicing the country's foreign debt and were in favor of a new tax law.

The presence of U.S. troops and agents is deemed undesirable by many social and political groups in the country. Last August 1st, 21 political parties and 27 labor organizations formed the Council for the Defense of National Sovereignty in order to demand that U.S. military presence be removed. The Council's appearance coincided with a 24-hour shut-down in the city of Oruro and with a 20,000 strong peasant demonstration in Cochabamba. Their declaration stated that repression of delinquent activity should be aimed at drug processing and trafficking and not against producers of coca leaves. Many other massive demonstrations against U.S. military presence in Bolivia also took place during early August.

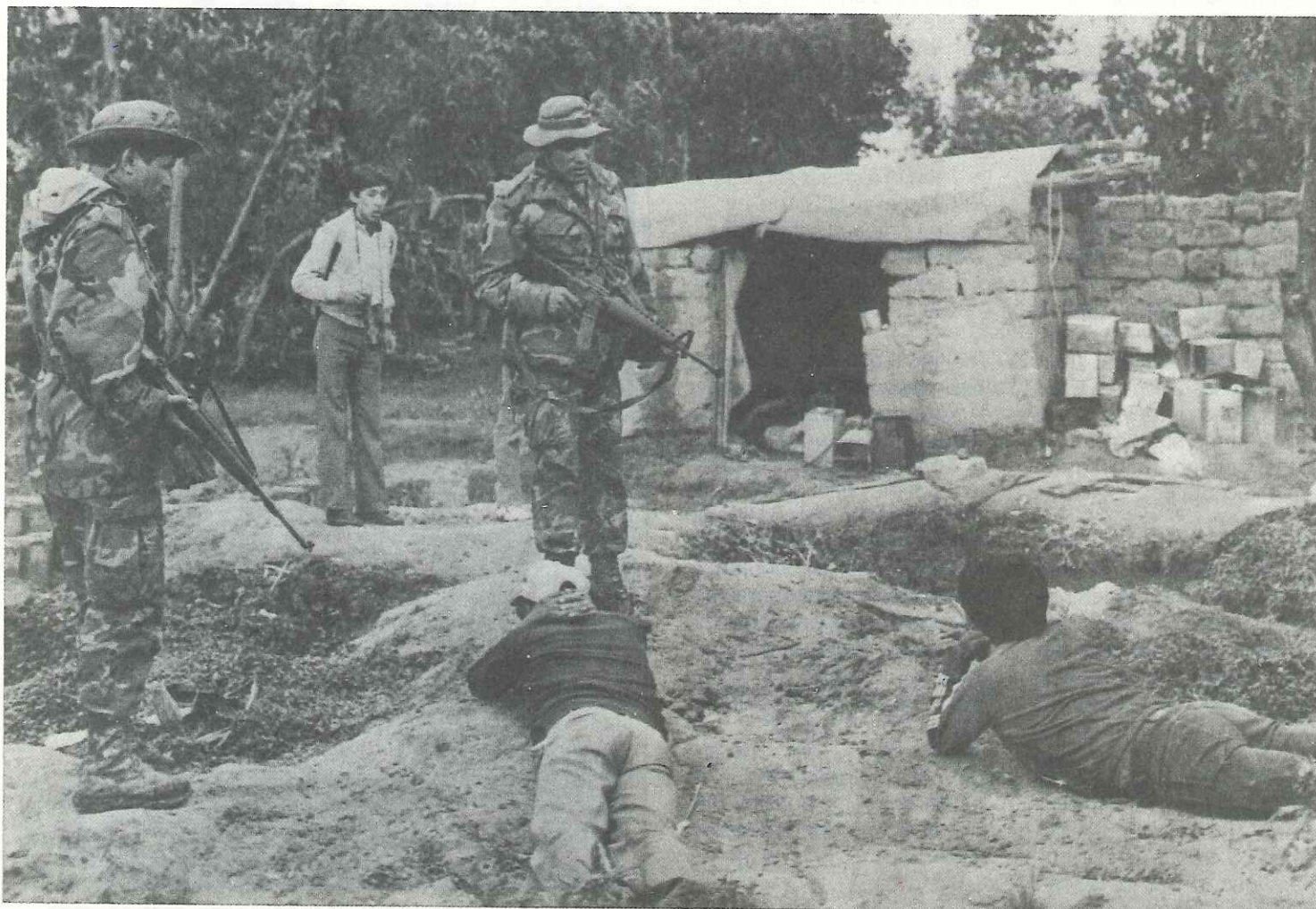


Photo taken from Cultural Survival Quarterly

Peasants arrested at cocaine processing laboratory in Cochabamba Valley.

Yet despite opposition to its policy, the Bolivian government continues to seek whatever kind of help it can get. On August 18, Minister of the Interior Guillermo Bedregal announced a new drug-fighting agreement between the United States and Bolivia which calls for the investment of \$360 million to support joint operations to eradicate the narcotics trade. Nonetheless, the wave of strikes and demonstrations called by the COB and the Federations of Bolivian Mine Workers to protest government policy against the mining industry and the resulting unemployment, have now taken up the central demand that U.S. military and logistical personnel leave the country immediately. This was a front-line demand during the 48-hour work-stoppage called by the COB in support of striking miners and during the March for Life undertaken by 5,000 miners, and it has been taken up by mine-workers on hunger strikes throughout the ailing industry.

Faced with mounting internal pressure, President Paz Estenssoro imposed a state of siege on August 28, and was immediately backed by Washington. The measure was widely advertised in Bolivia, and on September 14, two days after the 60-day limit for the stay of U.S. troops had expired, the Council for the Defense of National Sovereignty issued a communiqué stating their belief that current U.S. military presence is a pretext to set up a permanent military base in the country. On the very same day, Under-secretary of Defense Chapman Cox declared that given the success of the joint drug-fighting campaign, the Bolivian government "asked us to stay and we have accepted..." Cox added that conversations were underway with other countries interested in U.S. logistical and military support in the fight against drugs. One day later it was confirmed that U.S. troops would remain in Bolivia for another 60 days.

Thus, the problem seems to be projected on into the indefinite future. U.S. military presence

is regarded by most of the population as a form of meddling in "family affairs" and anything that seems to go against national sovereignty continues to provoke indignation and rejection.

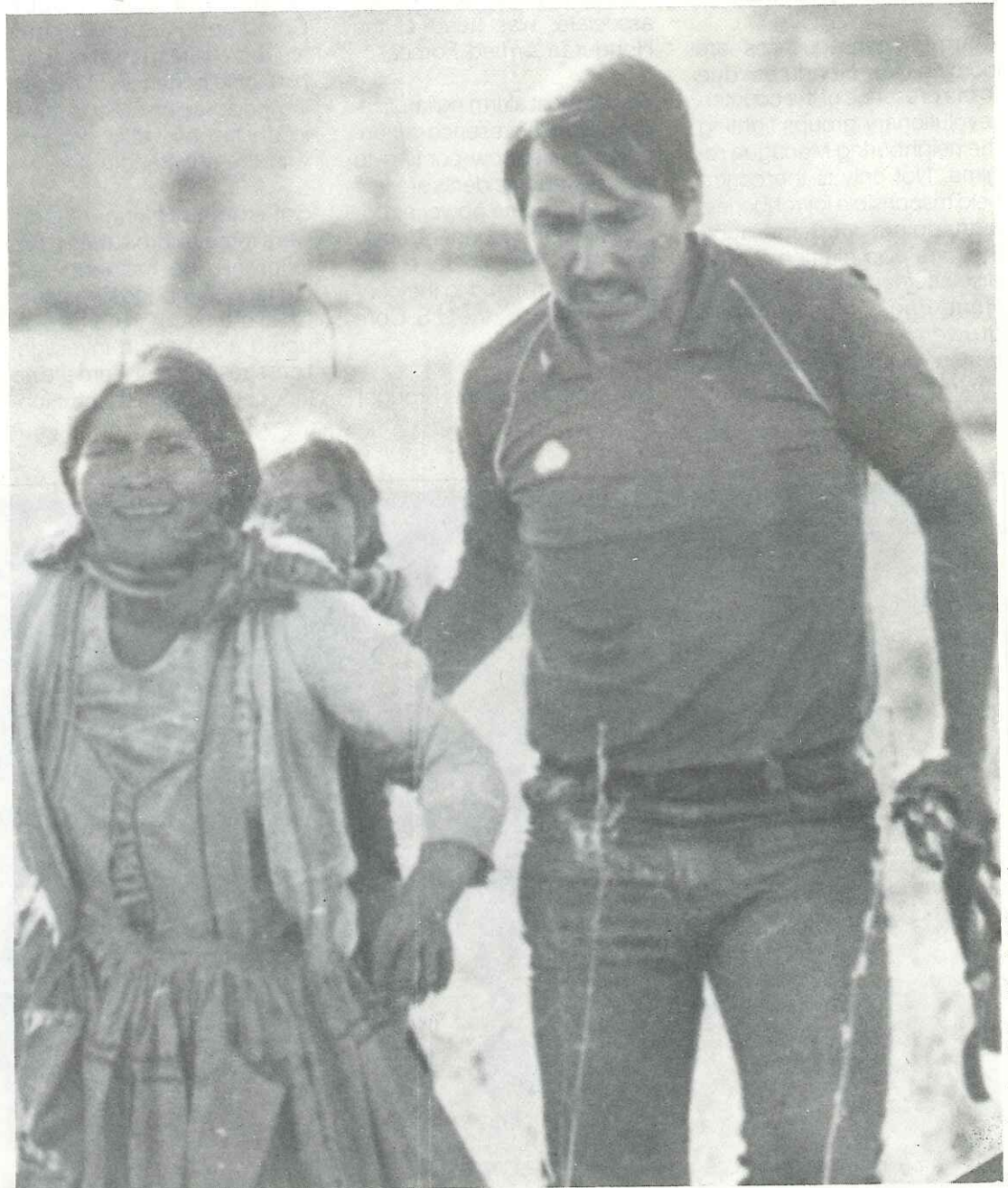
Bolivian fabric-salesman Mario Guzmán visited Mexico recently and gave us his point of view. "Bolivia is confronting a new situation in which we must deal with a drug-traffic industry which is part of society itself. This has given rise to a diversity of economic, sociopolitical and crime-related problems. Drug-related income is now four times as large as the rest of our nation-

al income, and this means a parallel economy in which the dollar is sovereign and in which the rate of exchange of our currency to the dollar is destabilized. These facts, along with our geographical enclosure (Bolivia has no coastline), our extreme poverty, the deteriorating price of tin and a lack of alternative economic activities, are some of the factors that explain the measures enacted by President Estenssoro. Yet truly, U.S. military presence does not contribute to solving Bolivia's overall problem..."

With little over a year in power, President Paz Estenssoro

is faced with increasing internal and foreign pressure, most of it related to the drug-traffic issue. The situation is particularly complex at a time when Bolivian authorities themselves have accepted that the eradication of cocaine processing and smuggling would seriously undermine the country's economy. Following 18 years of military regimes, the democratic process re-established in 1982 must now cope with both the economic crisis and political upheaval. The issues are drugs, national sovereignty and Bolivia's right to self-determination.★

Ernesto Rojas



Peasant woman arrested for involvement in coca paste making activities, the upper Cochabamba Valley.

Photo taken from Cultural Survival Quarterly