

of blood" and in whose defense ministry Mejia served.

The presence of General Mejia also signals the recovery of control by the older and senior officers in Guatemala's army, lost briefly to their juniors. It was by and large the junior officers—lieutenants, captains, majors—who put Rios Montt in office, and it was the colonels and generals who turned him out and put in Mejia. There is every expectation that Guatemala will now return to the old style of doing business—the days of sordid violence, of Hobbesian political warfare, of the death squads working the streets on behalf of this or that political faction. It is a country distinguished not so much by the extremism of its ideologies (the political spectrum has been lopped off somewhere to the right of center, and the only politics of the Left are practiced in the countryside by men with beards and Kalashnikovs) as by the extremism of the means its political chieftains will use to gain advantage.

To describe Guatemala's prospects in this way is not to say that Rios Montt's regime was the City of God on earth. It is reported, among other things, that during his brief tenure the number of Indians killed in the countryside increased drastically. But Rios Montt did make the streets of Guatemala's cities safer, did make inroads into the endemic corruption of the government by appointing a number of apolitical bureaucrats and technocrats. And he thought the tax necessary in a country with a shrinking economy (-3.5 per cent last year) and unemployment estimated at between 35 and 40 per cent.

Some might say that Rios Montt's heart, though hard, was in the right place. Most acknowledge that he was a bastard. But he was not, as Franklin Roosevelt once declared of Anastasio Somoza of Nicaragua, "our bastard."

*Richard O'Mara is Foreign Editor of the Baltimore Sun.*

## EXCURSUS 2

### Leonor Blum on COLOMBIA'S PEACE OFFENSIVE

Colombian President Belisario Betancur is convinced that it is possible to negotiate with guerrillas—and not only in his country but in the hottest of Central America's current conflicts as well.

Betancur's approach to negotiations in Colombia is two-pronged. One tactic is to implement social programs that will steal the guerrillas' thunder. "When you speak of guerrillas," he says, "you are touching on only one part of a complex problem. For that reason we speak of 'social disorder,' of the objective and subjective elements of subversion. The first—employment and the absence of minimum social guarantees—are the determinants of the second, that is to say, of violent actions whose purpose is to destabilize governments." His Conservative government has already begun to build new roads, introduce electric power lines, and improve health and educational services in the most guerrilla-infested areas, and it is distributing unused land to peasants, even to terrorists who have agreed to cooperate with the government.

The second tactic is to initiate a dialogue with the guerrillas, with the aim of convincing them to lay down their arms and participate in what is one of Latin America's few genuinely democratic political systems. So it was that last November the Colombia Congress passed a bill granting amnesty to guerrillas who were willing to cooperate with the government and had not resorted to murder or kidnapping.

Civil disturbances are nothing new to Colombia, but neither is compromise. Ideological differences between the two major parties, the Liberals and the Conservatives, were once so fierce that they frequently exploded into full-fledged civil wars; these politics by other means are estimated to have caused from 200,000 to 300,000 deaths. To put an end to *La Violencia*, as this phenomenon was called, the two parties agreed to sit down together. In 1957 they formed the National Front—an agreement to alternate the presidency between the two parties every four years for sixteen years and, during this time, to share equally the seats in Congress. In 1974, on schedule, the National Front was dissolved, and Colombia has held peacefully competitive elections every four years since. The first two were won by Liberal candidates. In the third, in 1982, Betancur led a Convergent government to victory. In each case the transition has been smooth and uneventful.

But a lessening of party rivalries did not curb other forms of violence in Colombia, which has been called the most violent country in Latin America. Urban street crime and rural banditry are a large part of the problem, but much is attributable to ideological warfare between left-wing guerrillas and right-wing ideologues. The Right has organized death squads known as MAS—*Muerte a los Secuestradores*, death to kidnappers—and many have close links with the Colombian military. Among the several left-wing guerrillas groups the largest are the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), a Moscow-line group affiliated with the Communist party of Colombia, and M-19, consisting primarily of students and intellectuals. It is M-19 that has specialized in the crimes which have captured worldwide headlines. Its members stole liberator Simón Bolívar's sword from a museum, claiming that the government did not deserve to own it; dug a tunnel under an army arsenal, "liberating" several thousand weapons; and, in February, 1980, took over the Dominican Republic's embassy while a party was in progress, holding hostage for two months the foreign dignitaries in their tuxedos.

So far the government's attempt to initiate a dialogue with the guerrillas has had mixed results. Several hundred were freed from jail, but only a minority of Colombia's estimated six thousand guerrilla fighters have agreed to talks, and leaders of M-19 and the FARC continue to press for concessions as a condition for sitting down with the government. All of the guerrilla groups have demanded energetic government prosecution of MAS members, which has begun. Among the strongest concessions demanded by M-19 and the FARC is the withdrawal of the military from guerrilla zones. There is strong resistance to this from the Colombian military in the face of a growing number of kidnappings and an increase in rural violence. The military, in fact, has urged Betancur to return the country to the state of siege under which Colombians were accustomed to live for thirty years. The president is resisting the pressure from both sides for hasty actions. He claims he is not looking for quick results but for gradual accommodation.

Both Conservatives and Liberals agree that, if anyone in the country can patch up the differences between Right and Left, it is Betancur. A popular president—the election, which he won handily, brought out a record number of voters—Betancur is one of the few Colombians who can call the guerrillas his brothers, as he did in his inauguration speech, and feel at home with bankers and businessmen. The same versatility marks his programs. For the massive rural education program and a dynamic low-cost housing program, he has attempted to involve the private sector to avoid overloading the public budget. Businessmen are pleased by the president's efforts to reactivate industry through special tax benefits for investors in the private sector and through

the release of special funds and credits to aid industrial expansion and export diversification. Bankers praise him for the speed with which he was able to halt a banking crisis last year—one precipitated by the bankruptcy of two major Colombian banks. Indeed, World Bank officials consider Colombia the most creditworthy nation in Latin America because of its rational economic management and low foreign debt.

For President Betancur, a peace settlement with domestic guerrillas will prove the validity of his approach for settling other Latin American conflicts. Since assuming office in August, 1982, Betancur has been a proponent of negotiated settlements between Central American governments and their guerrilla opposition, notably in the case of El Salvador. Together with other members of the Contadora Group, which includes Venezuela, Mexico, and Panama, he has condemned foreign intervention in Central America and is pushing for multilateral talks among the Central American nations without U.S. participation. He has publicly deplored United States naval maneuvers in the Caribbean, U.S. support of the Nicaraguan "Contras," and the opening of Washington-financed training camps in Honduras. He is equally critical of the Cuban arms flow to Nicaragua and Nicaraguan aid to the Salvadoran guerrillas. "The Central American turmoil cannot be resolved either with pressure or isolation, but with aid without discrimination and with ample dialogue," says Alvaro Gómez Hurtado, the Colombian presidential designate, or vice president.

It is Betancur's reputation for economic conservatism and Colombia's financial soundness that have enabled him to advocate such maverick policies without being accused of leftist leanings. Thus he is free to criticize President Reagan to his face, promote peace talks in Central America, urge his country's participation in the Non-Aligned Movement, espouse a conciliatory attitude toward Cuba and Nicaragua—all while enhancing Colombia's world image.

It is quite possible that Betancur will be the first Latin American leader to bring his guerrillas back into the democratic fold.

*Leonor Blum, a freelance writer, was a recent visitor to Colombia.*

## EXCURSUS 3

### Patrick D. Hazard on THE NEW CHINA DAILY

The editor who was showing me around the headquarters of *China Daily*, the PRC's two-year-old English-language newspaper, pointed out a color supplement issued on its first anniversary in June, 1982. "Children's Day," he explained with a smile. It struck me that the choice of subject for the anniversary supplement was a good one: Everywhere there is evidence of almost childlike enthusiasm for "catching up" with the Western media and an innocent openness to self-improvement, signified by the "self-criticism" bulletin board on which each successive issue is subjected to anonymous critiques. (Alas, not a little of the criticism by "foreign experts"—read China-sympathizers from Britain, the U.S., and Australia who have helped the fledgling paper get off the ground—consists of rather prissy put-downs of Chinglish, the enchanting dialect born of the marriage of English and Chinese syntax.)

It was last January, while studying at the Shanghai Foreign Language Institute, that I paid my call at the decrepit

building in Beijing that houses the *China Daily* offices. Decrepit outside, that is, but all high-tech within. At the time of my visit, the six-day-a-week eight-pager had a circulation of sixty thousand, including a same-day Hong Kong edition; a state-of-the-art Compugraphic typesetting system generates the disks that are airlifted from Beijing. Since the paper's second anniversary this past June, a New York edition has been available (China Daily Distribution Corp., 15 Mercer Street, Suite 401, New York, N.Y. 10012; 212-219-0130). Now North American readers can judge for themselves how well *China Daily* measures up to world-class journalistic standards.

As the editors tell it, the paper was initiated to help relieve the claustrophobia felt by American visitors in China. I certainly fit the pattern. A news junky, I had immediately tuned in to the English-language radio service offered by Radio Beijing, but found its presentations extremely curt; and the programs were offered at a time when, after a full morning's study of Mandarin, sleep tended to overcome all other drives. I became hooked on the newspaper during my winter in the PRC, and even paid \$69 for a quarter-year's overseas subscription when the paper promised an advance look at "Treasures From the Shanghai Museum"—the exhibit that will be touring the United States for eighteen months. I have never regretted the impulse.

Competition for Gannett's new *U.S.A. Today* the paper is not. Every issue betrays the agenda not of a news editor but of the Party. We students at the Institute always began with page eight—what we called the "disaster page"—offering news of some natural or man-made calamity back home. Still, on that trauma-ridden billboard one could pick up useful clues from "World Briefs" and "In the Third World," not to mention the serendipitous ads for Charlie's Cocktail Bar in the New Jianguo Hotel (Oven Fresh PIZZA every week on Tuesday and Thursday); China Asparagus, Flying Wheel Brand; Xuzhou Forging and Pressing Machinery; and China National Machinery Import and Export Corporation, Jiangsu Branch. The presence of advertising, once rejected as a form of bourgeois imperialism, carries its own message.

Page one invariably touts recent Party decisions: "Shanghai supports inland development" (industrialization is skewed to favor coastal areas in the northeast and south); "Conference on bicycle standards" (China will remain for decades a bike-ocracy, where mass transit is ruled by pedal); and "China, Rwanda stand for new economic order" (supported by a three-column photo of the president of Rwanda and premier Zhao Ziyang being greeted by a ceremonial covey of children in front of the Great Hall of the People, Beijing).

Page two deals with economics and finance: "Fodder industry improves China's livestock breeding" and "Shanghai knitwear sells well"—in short, a swatch of success stories salted with external signs of instability such as "Major industrial nations warn of energy danger." On the same page one finds a dubious bit of American advertising headlined *Non-Resident American University Degrees*: "It is possible—it is honestly possible—to earn good, usable Bachelor's, Master's, Doctorates, even Law Degrees from recognized American universities, without ever going to America." This followed by a Mendocino, California, address and telephone number! I am reminded that when I broke my eyeglass frames in Shanghai, the oculist who came to my aid had qualified forty years before—by correspondence from the Philadelphia Optical College.

Page three is "National News": "China develops medical services for 55 minorities." In this, China resembles the Soviet Union: much ado about respecting the rights of splinter minorities while majority civil rights remain in jeopardy. This page also has a revolving regional report, so that Canton, Shanghai, and the Northeast are not too frustrated by