

Swedish Journalist Primary Target Of Colombian Death Threats

Correspondent and regime critics targeted by former head of intelligence at Colombia's Stockholm embassy

Stockholm, 8 Jan. 2008 — A Swedish journalist with long experience of Latin America is the primary target of thinly veiled death threats from the former head of intelligence at Colombia's Stockholm embassy.

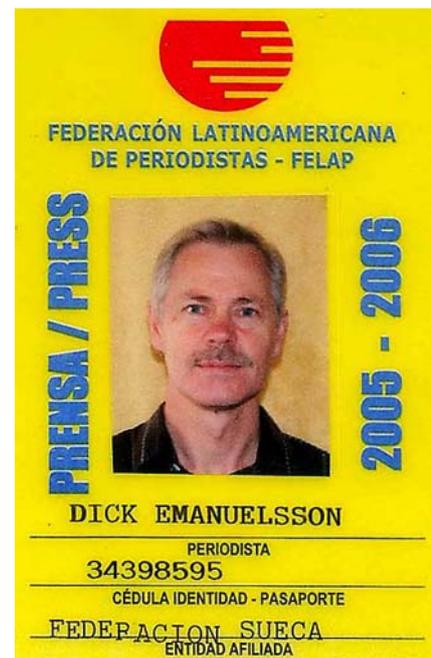
Writing in the leading Colombian weekly *El Espectador*, Ernesto Yamhure has accused reporter Dick Emanuelsson of being, among other things, "the FARC guerrillas' representative in Europe" and "one of FARC's more important ambassadors in Europe". Similar accusations have also been aimed at Swedish and Colombian parliamentarians, and two solidarity organizations based in Sweden (see "Yamhure's Targets", p. 3).¹

In the past, such accusations have often been followed by the torture and murder of the accused. Over 120 journalists are known to have been murdered in Colombia during the past twenty years, while others have fled into exile, sought safety in self-censorship or switched to less deadly occupations.

"Of course, there is not an ounce of truth in the absurd statements of Yamhure," says Dick Emanuelsson, who has reported from Latin America since 1980. "This is just one more example of the Uribe government and its henchmen attempting to frighten journalists and others into silence."

Ernesto Yamhure has particular grounds for displeasure with Emanuelsson, who in 2005 reported in Sweden's largest daily newspaper that the former "diplomat" was in fact the Stockholm embassy's head of intelligence whose duties included spying on Colombian exiles in Sweden.²

That was in July of 2005. Five months later, in early December, Emanuelsson moved out of Colombia at the urging of colleagues who warned that his life was seriously in danger. Thus, the recently published threats came as no surprise. "It's probably just as well that they have now been made openly," says Emanuelsson. "But I did not need a column in *El Espectador* to inform me that my life was in danger. Basically, any journalist who does a proper job in Colombia is bound to become a target of the Uribe government and the dark forces with which it has been shown to be associated."



Press card of Dick Emanuelsson

Now based in Central America, Emanuelsson says that his departure from Colombia only marginally improved his chances of survival. “Most security forces in Latin American cooperate with each other and with various agencies of the United States such as the C.I.A., Drug Enforcement Agency, etc. In fact, many key security personnel have attended the School of the Americas in Georgia and comprise a sort of ‘old boys network’ for torture, murder and intimidation.”³

Source of irritation

Emanuelsson’s reporting has been a source of irritation to brutal regimes in Latin America for over a quarter-century. He has also offended reactionary forces by countering the widespread propaganda against democratic movements in countries such as Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela.

Given its ferocity and devastating consequences, the decades-old conflict in Colombia has inevitably been a frequent subject of Emanuelsson’s reporting. The issues involved include state terrorism, the persecution of union activists, and the linkages between murderous paramilitary organizations, the Colombian government and multinational corporations. A series of articles on the illegal activities of Chiquita Brands— the quintessential banana-republic company formerly named United Fruit— caused the company’s chief representative in Sweden to protest (in vain, as it turned out) to the Danish and Swedish journals that published Emanuelsson’s reports.⁵

Inasmuch as Emanuelsson focuses on issues that are of greatest concern to the impoverished and often oppressed masses of Latin America, it is only rarely that his work finds its way into the mainstream press. Its perspective tends rather to coincide with the interests and propaganda of the unholy trinity that has long stifled human development in the region— the national elites, the United States and the Vatican.

Instead, Emanuelsson’s principal outlets are comparatively small alternative news sources that include *Liberación*, *Broderskap*, *Flamman* and the labour press in Sweden, and a variety of Spanish-language media such as the ARGENPRESS news agency in Argentina, *Rebelión* in Spain and Radio CX36 in Uruguay.

But despite his limited resources and modest platform, Emanuelsson has evidently managed to provoke the antipathy of reactionary forces in Colombia that are associated with the Uribe government— sufficiently to earn death threats published in one of the country’s most prominent journals.



Spymaster at work — and captured on film by Dick Emanuelsson who happened to be in Stockholm in the summer of 2005 when he spotted Ernesto Yamhure on the deck of the Gloria, photographing Colombian exiles who were demonstrating against the training ship’s official visit to Sweden. Emanuelsson’s exposé of such illegal surveillance activities may have hastened Yamhure’s departure from the Stockholm embassy.

(continued on page 4)

YAMHURE'S TARGETS

Dick Emanuelsson

Freelance Swedish journalist who has been covering Latin America since 1980 and has resided there permanently since 2000. The primary focus of his reporting is on the conditions of the impoverished masses, social and political movements to improve those conditions, and the repressive policies of dominant elites supported by the United States and the Vatican. Publishes in a variety of print and broadcast media in Scandinavia, Spain and Latin America.

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Jens Holm

Member of the Swedish Parliament for Sweden's Left Party. Author of *Young People on Daily Life in Colombia and Sweden* (published 1999 in both Swedish and Spanish). One of about ten MEPs from a broad spectrum of EU parties who have actively pursued the issue of human rights violations in Colombia, and thereby raised questions about the EU's relationship with that country.

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Gloria Ines Ramirez

Colombian senator and former head of national teachers' union. One of the most frequent targets of death threats in Colombia, she has narrowly survived two assassination attempts.

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Internet: <http://senadoragloriainsramirez.blogspot.com>

Columbia Network (Colombianätverket)

Solidarity organization comprised mainly of native Swedes. Public information activities in Sweden on human rights situation in Colombia, including persecution of the labour and student movements, the political opposition, small farmers and indigenous peoples. Conducts education project for internal refugees in Colombia with Swedish foreign aid funds.

Internet: www.colombianatverket.se

Asociacion Jaime Pardo Leal

Membership consists mainly of Colombian exiles in Sweden. Purpose is to demonstrate solidarity with the people of Colombia and to disseminate information to politicians, media and other opinion leaders in Sweden.

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Internet: www.ajpl.nu

Those threats are to be taken very seriously according to a spokesperson for the Jaime Pardo Leal Association of exiles in Sweden, who spoke on condition of anonymity out of concern for relatives in Colombia. "This is the first time we have felt insecure here in Sweden," she says. "As a result of Yamhure's published accusations, we feel much more exposed than previously, and we are anxious about the safety of family members back home.

"We are especially worried about the safety of Dick Emanuelsson. He is the only Swedish journalist we know who has consistently reported the reality of conditions in Colombia. That has required great courage, but Dick's continued presence in Latin America means that he is very much at risk."

Weak signals

Equally concerned is the Colombia Network, which consists primarily of native Swedes engaged in solidarity work. "We regard the attacks published in *El Espectador* against our organisation as part of an attempt to frighten critical voices into silence," says Fredrik Jansson of the organization's steering committee, "and the consequences could be dreadful for all Swedish citizens and organizations that are working in Colombia or with support activities here in Sweden. We feel that it is such a serious matter that the Swedish government should take very strong action to condemn and counteract the threats. To do less is to send a signal that such behaviour is acceptable."

Thus far, however, the signals emitted by the Swedish Foreign Ministry do not appear to have been very perceptible or robust. The Swedish embassy in Bogotá has "spoken with" Ernesto Yamhure and the matter was "discussed" with Colombian Vice President Francisco Santos Calderon during his visit to Sweden in November, according to Per Norström, head of the Latin American Section of the Foreign Ministry.

But what was said on those occasions has not been divulged, and there are no plans to publicly criticize either Yamhure or *El Espectador*. Whatever may have been said to Yamhure, it has certainly not dampened his accusatory zeal: His most virulent outburst to date was a column published on 15 December 2007, after he was "spoken to" by the Swedish embassy.

The options available to the Foreign Ministry are limited in this case, contends Per Norström. "That individuals or organizations can be accused in such a way as to expose them to risk is, of course, reprehensible. But that is a question of civil law, not something for the Swedish government or the Foreign Ministry to sort out. Inasmuch as these accusations were published in a privately owned journal, it is up to the Colombian courts to determine whether it was done in accordance with that country's laws on freedom of the press. Our point of view has been conveyed on several occasions and is well known to the relevant authorities. But it is not possible for the Foreign Minister to influence what is written by private persons in journals published in other countries."

That line of reasoning is not very convincing to Jens Holm. "Of course officials of the Swedish government can criticize *El Espectador*. They can and should do so in the form of a public statement and request that it be published in that journal. It is outrageous that individuals and solidarity groups are targeted in this way and linked to an organization that has been stigmatized as 'terrorist'," states the Swedish member of the European Parliament. "It is also outrageous, and really quite shocking, that *El Espectador*— which I have previously regarded as a fairly respectable journal— has allowed its pages to be used for that purpose.

(continued on page 6)

“Reply to a Terrorist”

is the headline of Ernesto Yamhure’s most recent attack on journalist Dick Emanuelsson, published in the 15 December 2007 issue of the Colombian weekly *El Espectador*. The text includes the following:

“He is no journalist. He is an errand boy for [the FARC guerrilla command].... To top it all off, we learned this week that a group of union activists in Denmark had announced a donation of USD 2000 to FARC. That action is illegal⁴ and was, of course, both instigated and co-ordinated by Emanuelsson, as a highly reliable source has been able to confirm. But all is not lost for this dangerous individual. There is still time for him to leave the organization, name his comrades... and serve his punishment in one of the prisons where [condemned paramilitary leaders] have been placed.”

But it is preposterous of Yamhure to question the journalistic credentials of others, given that his own are rather doubtful, to say the least. That is the view of Ernesto Carmona, a Chilean journalist and author who has published a lengthy critique of Yamhure’s attacks in several Spanish and Latin American media.*

*Ernesto Carmona’s critique, entitled “Dick Emanuelsson, un periodista sueco está en la mira del gobierno y los paramilitares colombianos [Dick Emanuelsson, a journalist in the sights of the Colombian government and paramilitaries]”, is available at: <http://colombia.indymedia.org/news/2007/12/76751.php>

Carmona has long personal experience of such matters, having been threatened and harassed for nearly two decades by the Pinochet regime in Chile. He is currently serving as executive secretary to the Committee of Investigation into the Murders of Journalists (“CIAP”) established by the Federation of Latin American Journalists (“FELAP”).



Yamhure is not a journalist, writes Carmona, but a “politologue” who is the scion of a wealthy Colombian family. He is also the godson of Carlos Holmes Trujillo who was consoled with the post of ambassador to Sweden after losing an election in 2003. There he was joined by Yamhure, now styled as a “diplomat”.

“In reality,” states Carmona, “Yamhure the ‘diplomat’ devoted himself to spying on Colombian exiles in Sweden and Europe. In addition, he tried to arouse the interest of [Nordic] political leaders in the activities of his exiled countrymen, and to persuade them to shut down an exile radio station in Stockholm and the Anncol news bureau in Copenhagen. He also issued threats against Swedes who disagreed with his government’s policies, as in the case of Dick Emanuelsson.”

According to Emanuelsson, “All of Yamhure’s charges are completely false, and they are becoming more and more bizarre with each new attack.

“I have, of course, demanded the self-evident right of reply; but months have passed and I have still not heard anything from *El Espectador*.”

“In a case like this, when the lives of Swedish citizens and political refugees under our protection are threatened, both the Foreign Ministry and the Swedish embassy in Bogotá should immediately and forcefully protest to the Colombian government and the editors of *El Espectador*,” says Holm. “But so far, I have seen very little evidence of such action.”

As for the notion that Yamhure is acting entirely on his own, “I don’t believe that for a minute,” retorts Jens Holm. “It is obvious that he is acting on behalf of the Uribe regime by testing how far it can go in threatening and attempting to intimidate journalists and others.”

That is also the view of the Jaime Pardo Leal Association. According to its spokesperson, “There is no doubt that Yamhure is still connected with the Uribe regime and is running its errands with his columns. What else could be the purpose of these published accusations?”

Another aspect of the Foreign Ministry’s position that has aroused scepticism is its stated unawareness of Yamhure’s reported spying activities or their likely significance for his departure from Sweden. “We have absolutely no information to support either assertion,” says Per Norström.

To that replies Dick Emanuelsson: “What the Foreign Ministry could not see or hear was noted by readers of *Aftonbladet*, the country’s largest-circulation daily, and of [the weekly] *Flamman*. What’s more, Yamhure has acknowledged in a radio broadcast that he photographed his exiled countrymen from the deck of the *Gloria* [see page 2]. This Swedish government’s standpoint is the exact opposite of its predecessors during the 1970s and 1980s, for example; they strived to protect exiles from the Pinochet regime against spying conducted from Chile’s embassy in Stockholm.

“As for Yamhure’s departure, I don’t think that he was recalled by the Uribe government for violating Swedish law. That was, after all, his job— to spy on his countrymen in exile, and attempt to neutralize international criticism of the regime in Bogotá. Rather, it was because the exposure of his activities limited his ability to pursue them.”

Compliant policy

The evident reluctance of the Foreign Ministry to forcefully and openly protest the threats published in *El Espectador* is consistent with a general shift in Swedish foreign policy that has taken place in recent years.

“Until about ten years ago, Sweden played a positive role in trying to bring about a peaceful solution to the conflict in Colombia,” notes Jens Holm. “But since then, both the former Social Democratic and the current centre-right government have been among the most loyal supporters of the Uribe regime in Europe— almost certainly at the urging of the United States.”

The country, which under the leadership of Prime Minister Olof Palme supported liberation movements and victims of oppression from Chile to Nicaragua and El Salvador, now does the bidding of the United States by conferring legitimacy on a so-called peace process that has been denounced as fraudulent and grossly unjust by human rights activists in Colombia and elsewhere.⁶

“The ‘peace process’ has been criticized for several reasons,” notes Nathalie Lucasson, an official of the Swedish Union of Civil Servants who has worked with programmes of support for the beleaguered civil population of Colombia. “One reason is that the right-wing paramilitaries can receive very mild sentences for the crimes they have committed....

“It is also not clear how [the victims] are ever going to receive any compensation from the government or the perpetrators of the crimes,” says Ms. Lucasson, “and it can be questioned as to whether the paramilitary structures have, in fact, been dismantled. Men and women are still being murdered, threatened and harassed by paramilitary groups.... There have emerged many scandals which indicate that state officials and members of the government have paid paramilitaries, which makes the situation of the people even more difficult because they cannot trust anyone.”

That criticism is among the mildest that has been directed at the dubious peace process and the Swedish government’s involvement in it.

Notes Fredrik Jansson of Colombia Network, “We have observed an increasing reluctance of the Swedish government to criticize the Uribe regime. Previously, Sweden played a much more positive role in promoting peace in Colombia. But since it began supporting the criticized demobilization of right-wing paramilitaries, it seems as though relations between the two governments have become much too friendly.

“We want to see a Swedish foreign policy and an embassy in Colombia that actively and unconditionally stand up for the rights of victims, grassroots organizations and social movements, including the rights of political opposition and freedom of expression,” says Jansson. “We also want to see sharp criticism of the Uribe government’s continual attacks in which the lives of regime critics are endangered by labelling them as guerrilla collaborators.

“Sweden has done and is doing much good in Colombia by supporting organizations and working for human rights with the help of foreign aid funding,” acknowledges Jansson. “But organizations in both Sweden and Colombia need the clear and unequivocal political support of the Swedish government. It is essential to openly and emphatically communicate that threats published by associates of the Colombian government are unacceptable. Such threats create risks for both the safety of individuals and for the success of foreign aid projects financed with Swedish tax revenues.

“So far, however, the government’s response has been far too weak,” says Jansson. “There is an evident reluctance to criticize the Uribe regime— in sharp contrast to so many other contexts in which our government proclaims its support for democratic movements, freedom of expression and so on.”

Lamb investigates the jaguar

Meanwhile, the principal target of Ernesto Yamhure’s ire appears to remain highly vulnerable and the Swedish Foreign Ministry has indicated that there is little it can do to ensure his safety. “In this particular case, we can only urge Emanuelsson to exercise caution and avoid unnecessary risks,” says Per Norström. “He should maintain close and regular contact with the Swedish embassy, and the embassy can also help him to contact the Colombian authorities that are responsible for protecting vulnerable groups and individuals.”

“Which Colombian authorities might they be?” asks Emanuelsson sardonically. “It is like urging the lamb to beg the puma for protection against the jaguar.”

For MEP Jens Holm, the issue is simple and clear-cut: “The Swedish embassy has a responsibility to protect Swedish citizens.”

Despite or perhaps because of his vulnerable situation, Emanuelsson intends to pursue the issues raised by Yamhure’s prominently displayed accusations. “Among other things, I would like to know what power the Uribe regime has over *El Espectador* that it would

allow its pages to be used to endanger the lives of journalists and others by labelling them as ‘terrorists’, ‘ambassadors for the FARC guerrillas’, etc.”

Emanuelsson is also eager to learn the reactions of professional organizations that claim to represent journalists and defend freedom of the press in Latin America: “What is the position of Reporters without Borders, the Inter-American Press Association, all the owners of mass media who have expressed so much concern about press freedom in countries like Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Cuba and Nicaragua, but have said very little about the situation in Colombia where over 120 journalists have been murdered during the past two decades.”

Thus far, such questions do not appear to be of any great concern to the editors of *El Espectador*. “Over two months have passed since I wrote them to demand an opportunity to reply to Yamhure’s accusations,” says Emanuelsson, “but I have yet to receive an answer.”

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NOTES

1. Published in *El Espectador* on 27 September, 2 December and 15 December 2007.
2. Emanuelsson, Dick. “Smutsigt flottbesök”, *Aftonbladet*. 27 July 2005.
3. Following disclosures of the lessons taught to Latin American security forces at the School of the Americas, including torture and assassination techniques, its name was altered to Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation. But its purpose and activities remain the same. See School of the Americas Watch at: www.soaw.org
4. Seven Danes charged with sponsoring terrorism by raising money for FARC and a Palestinian liberation movement were acquitted by a Danish court on 13 December 2007. The judges ruled that neither movement was guilty of terrorism, thereby rejecting the stigmatizing policy of Denmark, the European Union and the United States. See “T-shirt sellers not guilty in terrorism case” by Helen Pidd in *The Guardian*, 14 December 2007.
5. See for example, “Vem vill äta Chiquitas blodbesudlade bananer? [Who Wants to Eat Chiquita’s Blood-Stained Bananas?]” by Dick Emanuelsson in *Broderskap* (Stockholm), 12 April 2007. For a related article in English see, “In Terrorism-Law Case, Chiquita Points to U.S.” by Carol D. Leonnig in *Washington Post*, 2 August 2007.
6. The transformation of Sweden from widely respected, independent voice of reason in world affairs to just another vassal-state within U.S. empire has been orchestrated by a succession of Social Democratic and centre-right governments since the assassination of Olof Palme in 1986. For details see:
 - “Collateral Damage” at: www.nnn.se/nordic/damage.pdf
 - “O Sweden, Where Art Thou?”, p 47 ff. in *All Quieted on the Word Front* at: www.nnn.se/disinfo/ordfront.pdf