

Colombia's new President and the battle for continental unity

by Robyn Quijano, Ibero-America Editor

After two months in office, Colombian President Belisario Betancur has defined a totally new role for his nation among the republics of Ibero-America. During the Malvinas war, then-President Julio César Turbay Ayala backed the British colonialist war against Argentina, with the result of Colombia being ostracized on the continent as a U.S. puppet. Betancur, in contrast, backed Argentina from the first moments of the crisis, and put the United States on notice from the first days of his administration that there would be no "special relationship" between the two nations.

Not only did Betancur make a bid for leadership in the continent by proposing a heads-of-state meeting to be held in the Colombian coastal city of Cartagena before year's end, but he also declared that Colombia's interests lie more with the Non-Aligned nations than with Washington, D.C., and defined continental reality as having been transformed by the Malvinas conflict.

The unification approach

Latin American integration is key to Betancur's strategy. "We need to form a so-called bloc, to have continental-wide coordination, because we see that none of our countries alone can defend themselves from the aggression of the superpowers," Avila Bottia, special cabinet-level advisor to the President, told me last month in Bogotá. Such a strategy of integration for defense is based on the understanding that the Malvinas war was only one facet of a colonialist design; economic warfare and pressures against Mexico demand the same emergency coordination. Hence the importance of the Cartagena summit.

While the President's ideas on the new role of Colombia in assuring Ibero-American unity are well defined, traitors within the government are determined to maintain Colombia's traditional relationship as a pawn of the drug-money financier interests running U.S. foreign policy.

President Betancur, far and away the most popular Colombian President in nearly half a century, made an unnecessary, potentially fatal error when he appointed important cabinet ministers, governors, and state and federal officials from the opposition Liberal Party and opposing factions of his own Conservative Party. This coalition was put together to create a broad "national consensus," but holds the potential that individuals loyal to policy-making circles in opposition

to Betancur could sabotage the President's policies.

The President's foreign policy can be sabotaged in two ways that have been amply analyzed by the U.S. State Department. The Cartagena summit can be endlessly postponed until the government and nations of the continent are economically blackmailed, strangled and destabilized one by one; the potential for integration can be dashed by the outbreak of border conflicts well-studied by the Rand corporation and the U.S. State Department as short-fused detonators for continental chaos.

Colombian Foreign Minister Lloreda Caicedo announced in San José, Costa Rica on Oct. 4 that the Cartagena meeting would be postponed until February since a preparatory foreign ministers' meeting set to take place in Panama has not yet been scheduled. The Panama meeting, called by former Panamanian President Aristides Royo two days before a State Department-run coup against him, was widely analyzed as one of the key reasons for his ouster. The new Panamanian President thus has the capability of sabotaging the Cartagena summit, simply by refusing to call the preparatory meeting.

Border tensions were also inflamed during the first week of October with Guyanese President Forbes Burnham heating up the territorial conflict with Venezuela by buying arms from Brazil, claiming he would invite the Cubans in in case of a conflict, and threatening to use a bloc of African nations to keep Venezuela out of the Non-Aligned movement.

A San José summit of Foreign Ministers of Salvador, Costa Rica, Belize, Honduras, Jamaica, and Colombia on Oct. 4 was run by Latin America Undersecretary of State Thomas Enders for the explicit purpose of creating the kinds of tensions that will assure continental disintegration (see article, page 30).

The absence of Venezuela and Mexico, two democracies fighting for their lives against blackmail and destabilizations by the oligarchic families that run international banking, defined the tenor of the meeting. Both these countries are depending on unified backup by the nations of the continent. Colombia's presence was seen by many as throwing that nation back into the role of State Department pawn that President Betancur has so defiantly rejected.

Betancur and the Foreign Ministry

Colombia has its own border conflicts, which will be used

by the enemies of the President. Betancur is well aware of the necessity to cool out such tensions, as he demonstrated during his first weeks in office. He contradicted his foreign minister, who had stated that the Venezuela/Colombia disputed right to the sea and sea bed in the Gulf of Venezuela might have to go to an international court because of lack of cooperation on Venezuela's part. Betancur responded with an order to "leave the issue alone." Colombians have more important things to negotiate with Venezuela, he stated, emphasizing his program for integration.

In the talk I had with Foreign Minister Lloreda on Sept. 20, he assured me that there would be little problem with the Venezuela conflict. In San José on Oct. 4, however, he repeated provocative remarks on the subject. Colombia has made a great effort to negotiate, he said, but Venezuelan President Herrera Campins is not prepared to negotiate because "of deep-rooted prejudices in that country's public opinion."

Although enemy operations against continental unity around a common market and debt cartel have greatly expanded since I interviewed Lloreda, the process he defined so carefully even at the time seemed to me to lack the spirit of the President's convictions. There are two opposing views of the potentials of the continent. One defines the fight for a New World Economic Order in which the resolution of the debt crisis will bring new capabilities for trade and development which could pull the advanced sector out of the depression; a *same* policy for world monetary reorganization which echos the technological transfer and infrastructural development policy put forward by *EIR* founder Lyndon LaRouche in *Operation Juárez*. The opposite view, as espoused by Foreign Minister Lloreda, demands "equal sacrifice" from the advanced sector, the rewarding of countries who have "administered their debts reasonably," and an acceptance of the depression.

This latter is not the view of President Betancur, I would say, on the basis of dozens of discussions I had in Colombia with the President's collaborators and foes alike.

Betancur is known as one who organized throughout Colombia over a decade ago in support of Pope Paul VI's encyclical, *Populorum Progressio*. That document, a blueprint for a New World Economic Order of the sort that Lyndon LaRouche and López Portillo have proposed, defines, in a sense, what President Betancur would like to accomplish.

If the spirit of San José—a blueprint for continental disintegration—is not rudely disrupted, Colombia could slide back the role it was to have if López Michelsen, former President and losing candidate in the July elections, had won.

López Michelsen lost big. His cronies within the Conservative Party who preferred him to the wild card Betancur—a poor boy from a family of 22 children of which 17 died of starvation—are quietly but actively trying to ensure that the President gets tied down with terrorism, economic disintegration, and military maneuvering internally, and with a squabbling, chaotic continent.

Ibero-America's economic choices

From an interview with Colombian Foreign Minister Rodrigo Lloreda Caicedo, on Sept. 20 in Bogotá by EIR Ibero-America Editor Robyn Quijano:

Quijano: The international economic crisis has created a serious North-South confrontation, as was clearly seen in the International Monetary Fund meeting in Toronto. There, the Group of 24 developing nations called for a program for world recovery and a new international monetary system while the Group of 10 advanced-sector nations called for policies of austerity and a Malthusian program. How do you see this North-South question?

Lloreda Caicedo: The position of the developing countries is the result of deep-felt anguish. The reality is that the difference between the industrialized world, which has achieved an acceptable standard of living for its population, and the developing world, which is fighting to acquire capital and technology, to incorporate great masses of its population into the benefits of modern civilization, is rapidly increasing.

As always in such cases, there are reasons on both sides; I have no doubt that there is justified concern on the part of the developing nations for the high interest rates, for the prices of its basic products, for the slowness with which North-South negotiations have advanced, for the reluctance of the most advanced countries to sacrifice a part of their wealth to the benefit of the rest of humanity, for the political difficulties of those same countries so long accustomed to a certain living standard which has been affected in recent years by growing rates of unemployment. All these factors have contributed to postpone and, naturally, aggravate the economic situation of the countries fighting to overcome underdevelopment.

The answer of imposing greater austerity could have validity, not only for the countries which utilize international credit and for those countries affected by the world economic crisis, but also for those developed countries who spend more than is required and who preach but don't always apply the austerity which you mention is the proposal of the Group of 10. Colombia has the authority to speak on this theme because it has always practiced austerity regarding its international loans, and today enjoys a relatively balanced situation between its reserves and its foreign debt. But this fact does

not prevent us from placing ourselves alongside those countries who are demanding more just economic conditions: the New International Economic Order which has been spoken of for nearly two decades. It has definitely not yet arrived.

Quijano: President Belisario Betancur has called for a summit meeting in Cartagena of Latin American presidents. What do you think will emerge from this meeting?

Lloreda Caicedo: I believe that that meeting will respond to both a necessity and a desire—to the necessity that Latin America as well as the English-speaking nations of the Caribbean develop a consciousness of their own unity, of their common difficulties, and of the urgency in overcoming those obstacles which today appear to obstruct the process of economic and social development. This necessity is seen in a clearer light as a result of the problems that presented themselves in the South Atlantic; also as a result of the economic crisis that affects countries like Mexico, and of the growing debt that faces other nations of the hemisphere; as a result of the meeting just held in Caracas by the countries which make up SELA [the Latin American Economic System], where the need to resituate Latin America's relations with the United States, with the countries of the European Community, and with the nations of the Third World was made evident.

It is also a desire of identification, of solidarity, to join forces, to overcome barriers, to present a common front before a world which is moving dangerously along the steep paths of the arms race, of sporadic outbreaks of colonialism, of unjust trade situations, of amazing slowness in constructing an economic order which can give some hope to the developing-sector nations. That is why I have said that these meetings are a result of this uneasiness, of this urgency. The Latin American foreign ministers plan to meet shortly to examine all these points and to prepare a concrete basis for the meeting of heads of state to follow, which will naturally not meet to *initiate* discussion, but to *end* it, to arrive at some agreements.

Quijano: The Venezuelan Planning Minister, in conversations with this magazine, has said that Venezuela intends to act in solidarity with the rest of the continent to defend Mexico from the kinds of pressures and sanctions that were launched against Argentina. What is Colombia's position on this?

Lloreda Caicedo: I think that the situations of Mexico and of Argentina are different, for many reasons. Nevertheless, I cannot clearly see how international measures or sanctions can be imposed for an action which entirely corresponds to the internal policy of that country. The decision to nationalize the Mexican banks is a decision which may be debated in the terrain of ideas, or which from an economic viewpoint can be discussed pro or con, but that decision is within the framework of the autonomous capabilities and decisions of a sovereign state, such as Mexico. It would be, in my way of thinking, absurd, because by such an action, any kind of

reprisals could result. Certainly [such sanctions] would be unacceptable because they violate a basic principle, which is the free self-determination of every country and its right to establish its own laws and manage its own economy within the parameters it so chooses.

The external obligations of Mexico are a different question, because it has to arrive at negotiations with the credit institutions of those countries which support these obligations. But one situation cannot be confused with the other: the first is an act of the internal will of a country, the other is a problem of a financial nature, for which Mexico, I am certain, will have much support in seeking satisfactory solutions to overcome the indebtedness which presently affects its economy.

Quijano: Venezuelan President Herrera Campins, in a message sent to the IMF meeting in Toronto, said that drastic credit cuts to the developing sector can't be tolerated. Argentina's ambassador to Mexico recently said that developing sector indebtedness "is not a disadvantage, but an opportunity against the powerful," if the debtors act together. Such a cartel could impose sanity in the world economy, creating a new economic order which could benefit both advanced and developing sector nations. What is Colombia's position on this question?

Lloreda Caicedo: I think that the problem of the indebtedness of various Latin American countries as well as countries in other parts of the world must be faced realistically, and this realistic criteria must lead to a refinancing of the debt so that the international economic system can be maintained, so that there is not a financial collapse which could affect the world economy in unforeseen ways.

The countries themselves must find the capacity to resolve their situation, and must realize that the loans to which they subscribe must sooner or later be covered, because otherwise it will be an invitation to all countries which have reasonably managed their foreign debt problems to take the path of indenting themselves beyond their means and later seeking an easy way out of their commitments.

We will make common cause with any effort to resolve these financial problems which affect above all the Latin American nations who have made such a great effort to develop themselves and who, for various conjunctural factors, find themselves in difficulty today. I am certain that it would be of mutual interest to both creditors and debtors to reach an agreement on this, and this must be understood by both the countries and the lender institutions.

I do not think this can be arrived at through blackmail, as you suggest, because we cannot reach the point of saying that if there is no solution, there will be a collapse. The solution must be arrived at without force, without these type of threats. I think that the countries which seek a satisfactory solution to their problems know very well that the means of achieving it is not exactly that of the threat, but better that of constructive dialogue. All manner of negotiations and peaceable means

must be exhausted before resorting to a confrontation which could produce such negative effects on the world economy.

Quijano: The upcoming United Nations General Assembly, which will be addressed by many Third World leaders, including Brazilian President Figueiredo and Mexican President López Portillo, will likely prove to be a forum for these North-South issues, out of which could come negotiations or confrontation. How do you see this developing?

Lloreda Caicedo: I think a confrontation is inevitable, at least on a political level, because the climate has been created for this to occur. The countries fighting for development, which today present such a dramatic picture from the point of view of indebtedness, have to fight for their own survival through international pressure to convince the more developed nations that only through a satisfactory, civilized solution can there be a constructive climate created for the future. The collapse affects not only the debtor countries but those which are owed as well; in general, the entire economy.

Thus, the problem is not just that of Mexico, or of Brazil, or of Argentina, or of Poland, or of other countries which have an important foreign debt; it is a problem of the entire world, because, in the end, to borrow more than is advisable at this moment is not only a sin of those who borrow, but also of those who lend. It takes two in a credit operation, and if the banks and international institutions and the countries which support these credit operations don't learn how to evaluate the consequences of these acts, well, then they also bear a responsibility, because the risk is mutual. . . . We are approaching a very fragile period in which all countries will have to make sacrifices; what is important is that the sacrifices do not only fall on the heads of those countries less capable of making them. If the more developed countries can understand that—although they may have difficulties with their own populations—they must maintain a line of collaboration and economic cooperation with the rest of the world. Then any kind of call or invitation to austerity, to sacrifice, to a generalized policy of control of expenses and of careful management of available resources is more acceptable. But if, on the contrary, they are only going to demand of the countries which already have immense social and economic difficulties that they make still more sacrifices, I very much fear that this is politically impossible, and could lead to a confrontation much more severe than that which we are currently experiencing.

Quijano: It has been said that the only thing which could destroy continental unity would be wars, border conflicts. Do you see this danger in the territorial conflict between Colombia and Venezuela, the "*diferendo*," and with the conflict with Nicaragua?

Lloreda Caicedo: There are border problems in various strategic areas of Latin America, as in other countries. These difficulties existed from the moment countries were constituted, and there are regions over which there are discrepan-

cies or for which clear juridical definitions do not exist. In the case of Colombia, we have two completely different situations: one relates to Venezuela, in which an effort has been made to delimit marine, or submarine, areas on commonly shared coasts . . . a situation which has unfortunately taken a long time because there are not unanimous criteria. Negotiating efforts have been made, sometimes with more success than others, but we have definitely not yet defined the area, as we have not with many other countries. Nonetheless, this has not led to serious conflicts, or to a dramatic outlook; it is simply a delayed process, as the process of delimiting, or defining the rights of one country regarding others where areas of a sea are contiguous, can also be delayed. International rights in this matter are advancing. I believe that to the extent this happens, it opens the way for new possibilities for resolving the *diferendo*, as it has been called.

The case with Nicaragua is completely different. The situation regarding the archipelago of San Andres and Providencia is a situation juridically and historically defined. It is a sector of the Caribbean which has formed an integral part of Colombian territory for many many years, since the period of independence. . . . We have no doubt on this case, either juridically or historically. We are therefore tranquilly awaiting developments that may occur in this situation. I am certain that Nicaragua will have sufficient calmness of spirit and serenity to examine things from a just standpoint, and to avoid turning this into conflicts or differences which are not really worth it, and which don't really exist, either from the point of view of law or of history, or of practicality.

Quijano: Defense Minister Landazabal has called for a huge increase in arms financing, on the order of \$2.5 billion. Does this represent preparation for confronting an external danger?

Lloreda Caicedo: Landazabal's request is a lawful consequence of what is going on in the world. Countries like ours that should not be spending on armaments are being obliged to do so for various reasons. First, there is the interest of those countries which produce arms to sell them, and second, there is the stupidity of the countries which buy the arms for local reasons, for border-type conflicts, for eventualities which naturally no one understands but which nonetheless exist. I think it is truly a sad thing that countries which have not resolved their problems of health, of education, or social security, of communications and transportation infrastructure, have to deploy substantial resources for arms.

It is a pity, but I understand the position of the Colombian armed forces. They have a constitutional obligation to protect the national sovereignty, and naturally have to make a frank assessment of how it should be protected; and, as I said in the beginning, in a world driven senselessly to arm itself, anything can happen! We have seen the pitiful situation of developing countries which, with all the problems they have, have to divert resources that they need for other things to buy arms. I wish it weren't true, but it is.