

## **EIR Feature**

# **A 'NASA project' for Colombia: Build the Atrato-Truandó Canal!**

A multi-billion-dollar project to build the first Atlantic-to-Pacific sea-level canal was kicked off in Bogota, Colombia Aug. 8-9, at a meeting of 80 international experts, government, and business representatives. The proposed Atrato-Truandó Interoceanic Canal, whose construction the Colombian National Congress officially mandated in December 1984, will open up enormous potential for the economic development of Ibero-America, as well as of the entire Pacific Ocean basin.

The conference was sponsored by the Colombian Geographical Society, the Colombian Economists' Society (Bogota-Cundinamarca region), and the Fusion Energy Association of Colombia. The proceedings were keynoted by Guillermo Silva of the Economists' Society. The conference resolved to form a citizens' action group to organize the implementation of the project. The canal's construction, as several participants stressed, will not rely on financing from international money-center banks or from supranational agencies like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.

Colombian President Belisario Betancur, an enthusiastic supporter of the canal project, who has seen prospects of funding for it eliminated by IMF pressure, sent a message of greeting and support. A speaker at the conference was trade union leader Jorge Carrillo Rochas, who two weeks later was appointed labor minister in the Betancur government.

"The Atrato-Truandó Interoceanic Canal must be our NASA, our project of interplanetary travel, our colonization of the Moon." That is how one participant characterized the importance of the biggest infrastructural project ever undertaken by Colombia.

The work, indeed, will be monumental: The canal will be 166 kilometers long; 35 meters deep; 500 meters wide at its base and 600 meters at water level. The route of the canal will go from the Gulf of Urabá, on the Caribbean (Atlantic) side, to Humboldt Bay on the Pacific, following the valleys of the Atrato and Truandó Rivers. Of the total distance, 26 kilometers are appropriate for excavation with peaceful nuclear explosions (PNEs)—the most cost-effective method.

Major (ret.) Rafael Convers Pinzón, a civil engineer, outlined the scope of the project, stressing that the wealth of the region alone—wood, coal, oil, and the



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value of the land—could finance the canal. Forestry engineer Jorge Castro confirmed that the forest products of the canal area are estimated at \$2 billion. The cost of the canal is calculated at about \$5 billion.

Ramtanu Maitra, an engineer from India, editor of the magazine *Fusion Asia* and a member of the Fusion Energy Foundation, explained how an FEF organizing campaign in Thailand had succeeded in obtaining the support of important sectors of the government and population for a similar project, the construction of a canal through the Isthmus of Kra. The organizing drive there was successful, particularly because regional participation was encouraged from other countries that stand to gain from the program. This in turn provides a powerful means for overcoming regional political antagonisms.

These presentations overwhelmed the arguments of groups opposed to the canal, who prefer to see the Colombian economy subjected to the caprice of the international drug mafia and its bankers. Among the opponents of the plan are those anthropologists who argue that the rights of the Indians living in the region will be violated.

An Indian of the Ganapaga tribe, associated with the Catayumal Indian Foundation, countered this forcefully: "We Indians are not against the construction of the canal. We live in that region, but we are not going to close ourselves off, to stop the construction of the canal, until suddenly one day the waters of the canal sweep us away. The anthropologists and communists have wanted to brainwash us into opposing the development of the nation, the welfare of the nation. What we want is that our rights be respected, that we be given new lands, and that we be given direct participation in the project."

*Experts from Colombia and abroad met in Bogota to launch an organizing drive to build a sea-level canal across Colombia. Shown are (l. to r.) Ramtanu Maitra, Jorge Carrillo, Daniel Palacios Martínez, Guillermo Silva, Hans Bateman, and Major (ret.) Rafael Convers. There are two principal proposals for constructing an Atlantic-to-Pacific canal at sea level: One alternative is a second Panama Canal; the second would follow Route 25 across Colombia. The canal will provide for an enormous expansion of world trade.*



## Atrato-Truandó Canal