

## Andean Report by Javier Almarino

### Abstainers win Colombian election

*Less than 30% of the electorate turned out to choose a new Congress and a Liberal Party presidential candidate.*

Only 5.4 million Colombians, out of a total electorate of 17.5 million, went to the polls on March 13 to choose 102 senators, 163 congressional representatives, and the ruling Liberal Party's official candidate for President. Low voter turnout, the worst in the history of Colombian democracy, throws into question the legitimacy of the entire Colombian political elite, and demonstrates the serious apathy of the population toward institutions which they feel no longer function.

The lowest turnout was among younger adults who have been educated under criteria of the new world order, according to which a defense of national sovereignty, love of one's country and of God, is old hat. They have also been corrupted by New Age educational practices which teach that personal and immediate gratification is what counts, and that what cannot be touched, smelled, or tasted doesn't exist, and therefore is of no importance.

The M-19 Democratic Alliance, the group of narco-terrorists notorious for the 1985 Justice Palace massacre but who were legalized as the result of a "peace" agreement, has now practically disappeared from the political scene. The M-19 won 17 delegates to the national constituent assembly in 1990 with 20% of the vote, and captured nine Senate seats in the 1991 elections. This time, the M-19 did not win a single Senate seat, and barely held onto a mere two representatives to the Chamber of Deputies, despite backing from the Social Democratic International, the United Nations, and

the Colombian presidency.

The vote for the M-19 following its "legalization" can now be understood as little more than a "reward" for its having laid down its weapons. The population has had four years to watch the M-19 enjoy the privileges of ministerial, congressional, and bureaucratic posts within the government, and they have proven as corrupt and do-nothing as the traditional political parties.

The Colombian Communist Party, with the full backing of the narco-terrorist Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia which forced peasants at gunpoint to vote for the Communists in areas under their sway, barely elected a single senator.

These losses came despite the fact that in 1991 the M-19 and the Communists managed to alter the national constitution, changing the procedure for electing senators from statewide to nationwide representation. In this way, it was hoped that the legalized guerrilla groups and other minority parties could add their scattered votes from all over the country into sufficient numbers to capture senate seats.

At the same time, the traditional political machines of the Liberal and Conservative parties, historically based on the buying and selling of favors, are in the dumps. For example, Liberal Sen. Alberto Santofimio Botero—whose movement used to include the late drug trafficker Pablo Escobar Gaviria—had managed after 20 years to buy up 200,000 votes in the department of Tolima. And yet, on March 13, Santofimio garnered only 25,000 votes, the bare minimum re-

quired for a senatorial seat.

This decline in the fortunes of the Liberal Party chieftains can be attributed to a ban that was placed on congressional "slush funds," which cut deeply into the vote-buying apparatus. A clear case of this can be seen in the recent jailing of Senate candidate Rafael Forero Fetcuea, a partner of drug trafficker Gilberto Rodríguez Orejuela in the Workers Bank, during the 1980s. He built up his electoral machine by selling cheap or giving away land for housing construction, even though the land was frequently located in unauthorized construction zones.

One week before the March 13 elections, Forero's home was raided by police, and a box was discovered containing the registration cards for some 2,500 voters. Apparently, Forero had been holding onto the cards in order to guarantee that the votes he had bought would be cast for him. In the election, Forero came in 5,000 votes short of a senatorial seat, thereby losing his immunity from prosecution.

The issue of the slush funds is symptomatic of the population's general loss of confidence in ruling institutions. Corruption is rampant.

But in the midst of this general skepticism, a civil-military coalition of movements has emerged—without money, without an electoral machine—to offer an alternative. The alliance includes the Ibero-American Solidarity Movement, the National Participation Movement, and the Alliance of National Reserves. The alliance won a deputy's seat with 10,000 votes, and won 4,200 votes for its senatorial slate, 20% of the minimum required for a senator's seat. The alliance's program is defense of national sovereignty and of the national armed forces, and use of the country's oil wealth to industrialize Colombia.