

Andean Report by Javier Almario

Narco-democracy and apathy

Round one of presidential elections in Colombia in late May revealed the highest abstention rate since 1931.

A minority of Colombian voters will go to the polls June 19 to elect a President who is guaranteed to continue the policies of outgoing President César Gaviria Trujillo. Both leading candidates, "liberal" Ernesto Samper Pizano and "conservative" Andrés Pastrana Arango, have promised to maintain the economic and political programs which have driven the country into bankruptcy and its government into total disrepute.

Specifically, both candidates have promised to continue the so-called free-market "opening," which has destroyed industrial and agricultural production and yielded an annual trade deficit of \$4 billion, a deficit financed by the huge influx of narcotics, financial speculation, and unregistered private foreign credit.

In the middle of the electoral campaign, two bridges over the Ariari River sank, leaving half the country isolated, since virtually the only means of cargo transport in Colombia is by highway. Nonetheless, neither the candidates nor the Gaviria government offered any plan for their reconstruction. The problem is hardly unique; every highway in the country is in a perpetual state of collapse, frequently paralyzing the nation and reflecting the advanced state of crisis of national infrastructure.

In the first round of voting on May 29, only 5.7 million voters went to the polls, representing a 67% abstention rate. In those elections, the narco-terrorist M-19 "party," which belongs to the pro-terrorist São Paulo Forum, virtually disappeared from the political map. Its candidate, Antonio Na-

varro Wolf, received a mere 200,000 votes—3.8% of the total vote.

In the 1991 elections for the Constituent Assembly, Navarro took 30% of the vote and one-third of the delegates to that assembly, which literally gave the M-19 co-authorship of the new national constitution.

But by March of this year, the M-19 was unable to elect a single congressman. Navarro attempted in vain to barter his 200,000 votes with Pastrana or with Samper, in exchange for a sinecure, but the "image advisers" of the front-runners warned that accepting such an offer would probably lose the candidates more votes than it would gain them.

In addition to Navarro's political demise, the Communist Party (PCC) also disappeared as a political option. Communist candidate Alberto Mendoza Morales drew an absurd 30,000 votes, and this after the communists had pulled 200,000 in the presidential elections a decade earlier.

Enrique Parejo González, one of the few surviving heroes from Colombia's anti-drug wars, could have presented himself as an alternative to communism and free trade, but chose instead to ally himself with "ex-communists" and the anti-military witch-hunts of Amnesty International. The result? Parejo González got 29,000 votes.

The May 29 elections essentially proved a victory for Pastrana Arango who, despite having the same program as the ruling party candidate, managed to turn Samper's 20% lead in the polls at the beginning of the year into a 0.3% margin at the polls,

effectively a tie. The 39-year-old Pastrana's "victory" was, however, due to his cynical manipulation of popular opinion. This included giving himself gray temples and wrinkles to present a more "mature" image, exploiting a "sexy" image to win the feminine vote, and playing up his addiction to rock-and-roll to win the usually non-existent youth vote.

While Pastrana is the New Age candidate, Samper began his political career as the country's chief lobbyist for legalizing the drug trade, always backed by former President Alfonso López Michelsen, better known in the world of the drug cartels as "the godfather." In light of the widespread unpopularity of such a position (despite the recent legalization of drug consumption by the Constitutional Court), Samper has considerably toned down his rhetoric on the matter.

In the electoral campaign, only the Ibero-American Solidarity Movement (MSIA) came forward to present programmatic solutions of substance to the problems afflicting the country. Maximiliano Londoño, the president of the MSIA in Colombia, went on national television on May 27 to discuss the international financial crisis, and to explain why Colombia should use its newly found oil wealth to invest in developing the nation's physical infrastructure, precisely as U.S. economist and statesman Lyndon LaRouche has recommended.

Londoño also criticized the population for its passivity, in allowing President Gaviria to impose the 1991 Constitution which created a series of New Age institutions in the country, including the Constitutional Court which recently legalized drug consumption, homosexuality in the Armed Forces, and a radical sex education program in the schools which targets the family and Christian culture for destruction.