

Colombia is in crisis as Samper clings to power

by Javier Almario

Colombian President Ernesto Samper's refusal to step down from his post, despite the incontrovertible evidence that he arrived at the presidency thanks to substantial infusions of drug money into his campaign, has put the nation on the verge of disintegration.

Samper's defenders allege that all Colombians have benefitted in one way or another from drug money, and that therefore no Colombian should throw the first stone. Citizens in the jails, the majority of whom haven't the money to pay for a defense lawyer, ask themselves why they are in jail if Samper, who received \$6.2 million from the drug cartels, is still in the presidency. Many demoralized Colombian youth have come to the conclusion that only thieves have a future in their country.

Added to this moral crisis is the fact that Samper is giving all kinds of concessions to foreign governments, in exchange for support for his continuing in the presidency. The Presidents of the so-called Rio Group, made up of the majority of Ibero-American countries, endorsed Samper at a meeting in Quito, Ecuador on Sept. 6, for his alleged "determination and efficiency in the war on drugs."

Nicaraguan President Violeta Chamorro also signed the support statement for Samper; her backing didn't come free. In a meeting with her, Samper agreed that Colombia is now prepared to discuss Nicaragua's claims on the islands of San Andrés and Providencia, which have long been held by Colombia. Samper's statement is a serious concession to Nicaragua, because Colombia has a treaty with that country dating back to the 1920s, which established strict maritime boundaries in the area.

But this is the least of it. Samper is a weakened President, a condition which many on both the domestic and international level hope to exploit. Recently, Colombia's investment risk rating, determined by Great Britain's Barings Corp. and by the New York banks, was significantly improved. Samper has in turn used those ratings to show that foreign investors believe in his government. This, despite the fact that narco-terrorists have kidnapped 50 foreign businessmen this year already, and repeatedly attack foreign companies' subsidiaries in Colombia.

The improved rating didn't come free, either. Samper has made it clear that he intends to radically alter petroleum contracts, to permit foreign participation in the profits of oil

exploitation to rise from 50%, to 100%. This is a major concession to the British, whose flag company, British Petroleum, is the leading investor in Colombian oil.

Justice, or blackmail?

At the same time, Washington is now in possession of still more evidence which could pull the plug on Samper, if the Clinton administration so chooses. Guillermo Pallomari, a Chilean who served as the chief accountant and paymaster of Cali Cartel bosses Gilberto and Miguel Rodríguez Orejuela, is now in the United States under the protection of the Drug Enforcement Administration. Upon his surrender, Pallomari handed over computer disks, dossiers, photographs, and information on trafficking routes, networks, and cartel payoffs to Colombian officials. Pallomari also confirmed everything that Samper's imprisoned former campaign treasurer Santiago Medina, has confessed, specifically the fact that Samper had personally authorized the acceptance of drug money for his presidential campaign.

Sources have told *EIR* that Samper is promising the United States anything, to not use the information from Pallomari against him. It is in this context that one must view the Sept. 22 press conference by U.S. Ambassador to Colombia Myles Frechette, during which he demanded that Colombia sign a deal with Washington to protect U.S. investments in Colombia. Frechette was specific that the deal should be modeled on a treaty signed between former President César Gaviria and Great Britain, which committed the Colombian government to not expropriate British investments in Colombia under any circumstances (which violates the Colombian Constitution), and to pay any damages resulting from narco-terrorist attacks on British installations in the country.

Perhaps most serious of all is Samper's agreement that the Urabá region in northwestern Colombia be overseen by the United Nations. In 1995 alone, there have been 750 assassinations in this region, close to the border with Panama. The FARC narco-terrorists have carried out at least 10 massacres, in order to eliminate any leader who might oppose their terrorist stranglehold in the region. Given the State's failure to deal with the situation, self-defense groups have emerged, which respond with "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," massacring anyone they think supports the FARC.

In the face of such permanent terror, human rights non-governmental organizations have brainwashed many inhabitants of Urabá to demand a supranational deployment of U.N. "blue helmets" to keep peace in the region. Army Commander Gen. Harold Bedoya has warned that the chaos in the region could create "a new Panama," referring to the turn-of-the-century manipulations by Theodore Roosevelt to split Panama — then a part of Colombia — away from the national territory, by exploiting the civil war then plaguing Colombia. Samper's highly malleable presidency could easily cede territory under current circumstances, which would only contribute to the "balkanization" of Ibero-America.