
Colombia

Strike call issued to topple Samper regime

by Andrea Olivieri

Following hard on the heels of the U.S. decertification of the Samper regime in Colombia because of its manifest collusion with that country's drug cartels, patriotic forces within the Colombian business community are attempting to organize a nationwide "civic strike" that would force President Ernesto Samper Pizano and his corrupt cronies from power. Germán Holguín, president of the Permanent Business Council of Valle department, has issued a call to the Catholic Church, the business community, and "to all honest citizens" to join him in what he has dubbed a "crusade" to remove Samper from power and to "recover the country's ethical and moral values."

Holguín stressed that Colombians need to achieve "a profound political reform which will enable the country to rescue its three wrecked institutions: We need a government that is credible and able to rule; a congress made up in its majority of honest people; and a judiciary with the ability to sentence, punish, and defeat impunity."

Endorsing Holguín's call was Presidential aspirant Noemi Sanín, Samper's former ambassador to London and a powerful political figure within the opposition Conservative Party. Sanín sent Holguín an open letter praising his courage and leadership, and urging that the strike also include students, women, the media, and the church. "The fight against drugs and corruption," Sanín emphasized, "is not a class issue."

Holguín has told the press that he is receiving many calls in support of his stand from business and civil leaders. He urged those Colombians who only voice their complaints in private, to finally take a public stand: "It is time to act openly, because all this diplomacy is hurting us." As to when the strike will occur, he said: "We will strike when our patience is at an end. No government can survive a strike" of this kind.

Narco-dictatorship

Before the strike mobilization has a chance to go into high gear, Samper and his allies are trying to silence opposition leaders by using the terror and intimidation tactics that have become the hallmark of this corrupt regime. Samper's congressional allies have demanded that Holguín, Sanín, and other anti-Samper forces appear before Congress to explain why they should not be charged with sedition, for trying to

overthrow the government. These are, not surprisingly, the same congressmen who are writing legislation for a blanket amnesty, that would prevent themselves, Samper, and his cartel cronies from doing any prison time.

Samper has accused Holguín and other strike organizers of being "subversives" out to "cause economic panic," and he has ominously warned that their organizing against his regime is "unforgiveable." Holguín himself reports receiving anonymous death threats in response to his strike call.

At the same time, *EIR*, which has been in the forefront of exposing Samper's drug connections, continues to come under attack. It received official notification on March 18 that a "judicial investigation" of its Bogotá offices would be conducted by search warrant on March 20, pursuant to an unidentified legal case. *EIR* immediately sent out an international news release demanding to know why the Samper regime, which has been unable to find the resources to provide police protection for *EIR* staffers who have been receiving constant death threats for over a year, was suddenly able to come up with the resources to launch an investigation—of *EIR* itself! When representatives of the investigative police, SIJIN, the Attorney General's office, and the Prosecutor General's office showed up at *EIR*'s offices, they limited their actions—thus far—to compiling a list of employees. They were concerned at the international attention that *EIR*'s press release had drawn, and insisted that they were merely pursuing *EIR*'s request for security protection. That protection, of course, has yet to be provided.

On Samper's side of the fence, however, is the Colombian Communist Party, which editorialized March 13 in its weekly newspaper *Voz* that a civic strike along the lines that Holguín is promoting could pave the way for "undemocratic" alternatives to Samper, such as "a civil-military junta run from the White House." A similar line is being promoted by the communists within the trade union movement. The CUT labor federation, a Communist Party front, issued a statement March 11 charging that the civic strike was a U.S. maneuver, through its "Colombian puppets," to create chaos in the country, and warning that any companies or factories shut down in a businessmen's strike would be seized and occupied by "the masses."

Samper's troubles grew again, when the Supreme Court announced the opening of criminal investigations into three more of Samper's cabinet ministers: Interior Minister Horacio Serpa Uribe, Foreign Minister Rodrigo Pardo, and Communications Minister Juan Manuel Turbay. All three held senior positions in Samper's 1994 Presidential campaign and are charged with conspiring, with Samper, to cover up the infiltration of up to \$6 million in drug money into his campaign. Already, Pardo has asked for a "temporary" leave of absence, until his legal situation is "cleared up." Serpa, less sanguine, told a journalist he expects to end up behind bars. This, of course, tightens the prosecutorial noose around Samper's own neck.