

## Pastrana victory in Colombia opens door for policy shift

by Gretchen Small

In a final round of voting on June 21, Conservative Party candidate Andrés Pastrana was elected the next President of Colombia, defeating the Liberal Party's Horacio Serpa, 50.4% to 46.5%. Running on a broad-based ticket called the Great Alliance for Change, Pastrana received a record number of votes for any Colombian Presidential election (6.1 million), and with them, a clear mandate to bring about what he promised: a change from the drug-dominated government of President Ernesto Samper Pizano, in which Horacio Serpa had served as Interior Minister.

The voter turnout was larger than projected, and so was Serpa's defeat. Serpa had run a demagogic campaign, mobilized a strong showing from the Liberal Party machine, and enjoyed the backing of the Samper regime, and the powers that placed and kept Samper in office: the Dope, Inc. apparatus. Colombians proved themselves, however, not yet so demoralized as to capitulate to a continuation of a narco government which has brought the country to the brink of anarchy and disintegration.

Samper, associated with the drug mob since the late 1970s when he first campaigned for drug legalization, had been elected President in 1994 with the aid of at least \$6 million from the Cali drug cartel. After the votes were tallied, proof that the cartel had bought the 1994 election was released by Pastrana, Samper's opponent in that election. Samper claimed that he "never knew."

Honest Colombians launched a mobilization to drive Samper out of office, and the symbol of resistance became the elephant, after some prominent individual remarked that not knowing \$6 million in drug monies financed your campaign, was as credible as claiming you didn't notice an elephant sitting in your living room. The United States weighed in, when President Clinton decertified the Samper regime as a non-cooperating nation in the battle against narcotics, and

then denied Samper a visa to visit the United States.

The regime held, however, through bribery and murder inside the country, overt political and economic backing from London, and a failure of nerve in other international quarters, including the U.S. State Department. A Colombian Congress elected by cartel monies, ruled that the President could not be held responsible for the fact that the cartels bought his election. When Colombian civilian and military leaders reportedly consulted U.S. Ambassador Myles Frechette in 1995 on their plans for a civic-military alliance to oust the narco-dictatorship, Frechette told them that any government which overthrew Samper would be harshly treated as a pariah state, since he had been "democratically elected." Subsequently, several leading opponents of the Samper-Serpa regime were assassinated, terrorizing other opponents of the narco-regime into silence.

But when Colombians had the opportunity on June 21, they delivered their own verdict on the Samper-Serpa regime: guilty, and booted out. Pastrana will take office on Aug. 7 with a clean slate, and an opportunity to change course.

### Elephant-herding time

The change in government in Colombia also offers a window of opportunity for the United States to initiate a regional offensive to drive Dope, Inc.'s "elephant" out of its Andean lair entirely. There now exists a potential combination to deliver a regional blow against narco-terrorism: U.S.-Peruvian anti-drug cooperation has achieved uncontested successes; the Banzer government of Bolivia is seeking similar U.S. and other international aid for its determination to free Bolivia from the drug trade during its five-year term of office; and now, despite the depth of cartel penetration of Colombian institutions, the people of Colombia are rallying.

As *EIR* has outlined in a recent series of analyses on narco-

terrorism in the Andes, a major policy battle has been raging for months within the Clinton administration over U.S. policy toward Colombia. To contribute to that discussion, we publish below the views of two Colombians active in organizing resistance to the cartel takeover: former Presidential candidate and retired general Harold Bedoya; and Lyndon LaRouche's associate Max Londoño.

There are two particularly dangerous false axioms which must be addressed. The first is the nasty piece of sophistry that narco-terrorism does not exist. At this stage, only such fanatics as the *New York Times* and George Soros's drug legalizers dispute that Colombia's two main terrorist groups, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN), are up to their eyeballs in the drug trade. Yet, nonetheless, the line prevails within parts of the U.S. government — in particular, the State Department — that since the guerrillas “only” run dope for the money, they can be turned against the drug trade as part of a peace deal which offers them a share in power. Ergo, the United States should encourage power-sharing negotiations with them.

The second, related, axiom, is that Colombia's Armed Forces constitute an equal threat to democracy, if not a bigger one, than the “guerrillas.”

This piece of wild lunacy was most recently reiterated by the *New York Times* in a June 22 lead editorial which called upon the Clinton administration to “terminate” aid to the Colombian military, because “support for the army undermines Colombia's various civilian institutions.” The *Times* objected to the fact that the White House anti-drug office and others in the U.S. military still speak of “narco-guerrillas,” a concept, they wrote, which the State Department says is merely “a label invented by the Colombian military to allow it to use the aid to fight guerrillas.”

Not surprisingly, the same arguments most recently appeared in the Hollinger Corporation's flagship paper, London's *Sunday Telegraph*. In two columns published on June 7 and 14, BBC World Affairs Editor John Simpson reminded his readers that Britain has a strategic interest in the outcome of Colombia's elections. He urged peace talks with the FARC and ELN, declared the war on drugs “unwinnable,” and suggested a deal be cut with the coca-growers.

## Reality menaces

President-elect Pastrana has declared that his two top priorities are to secure peace and to restore economic stability to Colombia. But his strategy thus far for achieving these praiseworthy goals will not work. He will either have to change course, or he will fail.

The global financial and economic crisis began to hit Colombia with great force this spring. Unemployment officially stands at 14.5%, portending a major social crisis if not reversed. Financially, the situation has become precarious: The prices of two of Colombia's major exports, oil and coffee, are plummeting; the government's fiscal deficit hit 5%, and is

rising; and disinvestment from the stock market and other capital flight drove the peso down to new lows, to which the Samper government responded by raising interest rates to record levels (80% at one point in June).

But Pastrana, ideologically close to the Republican neo-conservative crowd in the United States, is a devoted free-trader, and he has already announced that he will draw up a plan for a “serious adjustment program” to entice “the international financial community” to bring investments into Colombia. This is hardly a viable proposition, in today's international financial maelstrom.

Likewise, on the terror and drug front. Pastrana has committed his government to reaching a “peace” deal with the narco-terrorists, and he has made various proposals to entice the FARC and ELN to the negotiating table. On June 9, he promised that he would treat coca cultivation as a social problem, and end all fumigation and eradication programs. The weekend before the elections, he sent a representative, Victor Ricardo, to meet with the legendary head of the FARC, Manuel Marulanda Vélez (alias Tirofijo, or Sureshot). The FARC used the opportunity to build up their clandestine chief's image as a folk hero, releasing a picture of Tirofijo meeting Pastrana's representative, the first photo of Tirofijo released in ten years.

Upon election, Pastrana promised that on inauguration day, he intends to order the military to withdraw from five municipalities demanded by the FARC — an area totalling some 40,000 square kilometers — to signal his willingness to negotiate. He suggested that the FARC would agree to wipe out coca-growing in areas under their control, and added that he wished to meet, personally with Tirofijo, if possible, that very week.

There are no signs, however, that the FARC is sitting around waiting for nice offers. Tirofijo will not meet, nor will negotiations begin, until five conditions are met, the FARC's Mexico-based international spokesman Marcos Calarcá replied: 1) Paramilitary groups are to be dismantled; 2) all “social protest” will be permitted; 3) rewards offered for the capture of guerrilla leaders will be cancelled; 4) the military must pull its troops out of the south of the country; and 5) last, but not least, the government must commit itself never to link the FARC to the drug trade, nor even to use the expression “narco-guerrillas.”

As for the illusion that the FARC has an interest in reducing coca cultivation, Calarcá reiterated that the FARC “at no time can take responsibility for eradicating these crops.”

Indeed. In April 1998, Colombian Defense Minister Gilberto Echeverri Mejía told Argentina's *Clarín* daily that, in November 1996, the Samper government had requested of novelist Gabriel García Márquez that he ask his friend Fidel Castro to use Cuba's contacts with the FARC, to encourage the FARC to negotiate. The FARC's answer, conveyed by Cuba, was simple: “The FARC says that they are not going to negotiate, because they are winning the war.”