

Andean Report by Valerie Rush

Good news! Banzer defeated in Bolivia

The dope mob's setback gives Bolivia a respite, but the new President seems to have already sold out to the IMF.

The good news is that Gen. Hugo Banzer was defeated in Bolivia's presidential contest. The bad news is that Víctor Paz Estenssoro was the victor. The long-suffering Bolivian nation deserves better.

When neither Banzer nor Paz were able to win an absolute majority in the popular election of July 14, the final decision went to the Bolivian Congress. After a marathon horsetrading session on Aug. 3, Congressional factions joined forces behind Paz Estenssoro. As one Congressman from the party of outgoing President Siles Zuazo put it, it was a case of the lesser evil: "Nothing united us to Paz Estenssoro, but everything separated us from Banzer."

The Congress's choice of the 77-year old, three-time President Paz Estenssoro was universally recognized as an anti-Banzer vote. General Banzer's 1971-78 dictatorship was not only infamous for its open alliance with Nazis like "Butcher of Lyons" Klaus Barbie, but also for opening the country up to the international dope mob, which then proceeded to take over the government outright in the 1980 "cocaine coup."

Banzer's ties to the continent's cocaine traffickers are not merely political and economic, but familial as well. He himself, as well as members of his immediate family—daughter and son-in-law, cousin, and wife—have all been directly implicated in drug trafficking operations. Son-in-law Jorge Arroyo is currently on trial in Houston, Texas, facing nine counts for cocaine trafficking.

Banzer is also the man who, in a bloody military coup in 1971, overthrew nationalist Gen. Juan José Torres and proceeded to slaughter the nation's trade union and opposition forces. Barbie and other Nazis were hired by Banzer to serve as his "security consultants" in the government's notorious torture chambers.

Banzer's candidacy this time around received the unabashed support of the Kissingerians in the Republican Party and U.S. State Department. The Republicans invited Banzer to attend their annual convention in Dallas last year as an "honored guest," along with fellow drug pusher and fascist José Angel Conchello of the Mexican PAN party. In fact, so certain of Banzer's victory were the Kissingerians that representatives of Bolivia's future economics team were fêted at Republican barbecues in Washington.

However, with all the economic devastation that Bolivia has undergone, the country's legislators were equally certain that a second Banzer/Dope, Inc. government would seal the doom of Bolivia as a nation. Many of the smaller centrist and center-left parties which agreed to back Paz against Banzer did so in the hope that the new government could be pressured into taking a more nationalist posture than Paz's own inclinations promised. The example of President Alan García in next-door Peru is there to show the way.

Thus far, however, the newly inaugurated Paz Estenssoro is following a path which will prove not only dis-

astrous for Bolivia as a country, but suicidal for his own administration as well. On his first day in office, Paz announced plans to implement a drastic austerity program as part of his intended rapprochement with the International Monetary Fund and renewal of debt payments.

The program will include, among other measures, a maxi-devaluation of the already worthless Bolivian peso to "stimulate" mineral exports, ending subsidies on basic food items like wheat, sugar, and rice, and raising the price of gasoline and other fuels. The end of food subsidies will spell genocide for a population barely surviving at subsistence levels now.

In addition, Paz's campaign pledge to seek a refinancing of the country's \$5 billion foreign debt can only mean embracing the already flourishing drug trade as a source of revenue for servicing the debt.

The Bolivian military, which has repeatedly staged coup d'états over the past decade, has for the moment apparently accepted the congressional consensus behind Paz as a guarantee of at least minimal stability in the new government. Armed Forces commander-in-chief Gen. Simon Sejas greeted the inauguration of Paz with a reaffirmation of the military's respect for the constitution, pledging that the armed forces would serve as "the firmest pillar of support that guarantees democratic liberties."

Nonetheless, if Paz pursues the IMF austerity regimen he is promising, he is more than likely to destroy the delicate congressional alliance which placed him in power. In that event, the Banzer forces—already predicting that "Paz won't last four years"—could more easily pull off a coup d'état against the new government, which they threatened during the days before the congressional vote.