

Colombian voters demand total war on the drug cartels

by José Restrepo

The landslide victory of anti-drug candidate César Gaviria Trujillo in the presidential primary election on March 11, and the smashing defeat of Ernesto Samper Pizano, the darling of the international pro-drug legalization forces, are a dramatic testimony to the will of Colombians to win the war on drugs, despite a barrage of worldwide media propaganda to the contrary. Gaviria was the only candidate for the Liberal Party's presidential nomination who did not support negotiations with the drug traffickers, and who backed a policy of extraditing the mafiosi.

Despite threats by the drug mafia and by the Castro-linked narco-terrorist National Liberal Army (ELN), wrote the anti-drug newspaper *El Espectador* in its editorial on March 13, "democracy triumphed. Just as in Eastern Europe, it was the people who decided, peacefully, testifying to the efforts of the government and of the Armed Forces."

Luis Carlos Galán, the most popular candidate for the presidential bid, was assassinated on Aug. 18, 1989 by the drug cartels, in the opening salvo of a war to force the country to its knees, to accept drug legalization and "negotiation" that would amnesty the drug lords, forbid their extradition for their crimes, and admit them as "respectable businessmen" into national economic and political life. But this strategy failed: The assassination of Galán triggered a backlash, when President Virgilio Barco launched a war on drugs from which he has refused to back down in the intervening months.

Galán had founded his movement in 1981 with Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, and they decided to expel drug trafficker Pablo Escobar when he tried to infiltrate their movement. In 1984, Pablo Escobar ordered his assassins to kill Lara Bonilla, who, as justice minister, had begun a serious war on drugs.

César Gaviria was the manager of Galán's presidential campaign when Galán was killed, and was designated as Galán's successor by Galán's family and congressional supporters.

In the March 11 vote, with 77.91% of the vote counted as of March 15, Gaviria had obtained 50.39% of the vote. His most important opponents, Hernando Durán Dussán, Ernesto Samper Pizano, and Alberto Santofimio Botero, won 22.61%, 18.9%, and 5.61% respectively. In May, when

the presidential election is held, a victory by Gaviria over Conservative presidential candidate Rodrigo Lloreda Caicedo is virtually assured.

Commenting on his success, Gaviria said, "Citizens, this is the victory of Luis Carlos Galán," and added that it was also the victory of Galán's family and "all of those who accompanied him in his long and difficult path in our public life. It is the victory of his conceptual clarity, of his faith in Colombia. This is a great and tragic moment, that his death was necessary for the triumph of his ideals."

No to the drug legalizers

Ernesto Samper Pizano, who for more than a decade has led the lobby for drug legalization in Colombia, and who in 1982 took money from convicted drug trafficker Carlos Lehder to support the presidential campaign of former President Alfonso López Michelsen, reportedly wept bitterly on hearing of his defeat. He had believed so strongly that he would win, as was promised by his international supporters, that he was the last contender for the nomination to appear on television and admit defeat. In his speech, he pledged to abandon politics and spend time with his family. Sources close to him say he is now in deep depression and under medical supervision.

"Defeated" also by the election results were the press in Europe and in the United States, which falsely portrayed Samper as an "anti-drug candidate," as "Galán's successor," and as the likely next President of Colombia.

Samper was a political creation of López Michelsen, a political advocate for the drug mafia since 1984, when he met with the top Colombian drug lords in Panama, to set the groundwork for an amnesty. Again this year, López Michelsen met with a representative of Pablo Escobar in order to negotiate "peace" with the Extraditables, as the drug cartel likes to be called.

After Galán's assassination, Samper made drug legalization, the promise that he would not extradite anyone to face drug-trafficking charges in the United States, and negotiation with the drug traffickers into the central issues of his campaign. He even went to Europe to rally international support

for his candidacy in November 1989. But the distribution there by the Schiller Institute and various national anti-drug coalitions of a fact sheet exposing his true colors, prevented more decisive international support for his campaign. (See *EIR*, Oct. 13, 1989, for a full dossier on Samper.)

Still, the support for Samper continued in the international press. Fortunately, it was the voters of Colombia who determined the March 11 election results, not newspaper editors in Washington and London.

Narcos' electoral machinery defeated

Congressional and local elections, held the same day as the presidential primary, also resulted in victory for the anti-drug majority. The same *El Espectador* editorial cited above, noted that there was "notorious abstentionism in the vote for Congress, which, if confirmed, would indicate the ill repute into which many of its members—who have not hesitated to sell their consciences to the worst criminals, the drug chieftains—have fallen."

Alberto Santofimio, so notorious for his links to Pablo Escobar that even the U.S. State Department canceled his visa to visit the United States, only obtained 4% of the vote. His political machine lost the post of mayor of Ibagué, the capital of the Tolima district, where Santofimio's machine has long been based. Other cities in which corrupt electoral machines lost mayoral races include Cali, Boyacá, Medellín, Neiva, and Barranquilla.

Jairo Ortega Ramírez, Santofimio's supporter in Medellín made famous by being Pablo Escobar's congressional alternate in Congress, lost his seat in the House of Representatives. Samuel Escruceria Manzi, whose father is in jail in the United States for drug trafficking, also lost his seat. There will be a new look in the Colombian Congress this term, when 30 new faces will replace many corrupt congressmen.

El Tiempo's editorial on March 13 speculated that President Barco's war on drugs helped defeat the corrupt political machines by cutting the funds given to them by the drug traffickers. "Fortunately, 'hot money' did not appear in sectors where [drug traffickers'] support was expected for individuals linked in one way or another to their activities. They failed them. They left them twisting in the wind. Thank God—and we don't know if it was a result of the blows they received—dirty money did not play a fundamental part in bribing the consciences of Colombians," the paper wrote.

Gaviria's life in danger

After months of telling U.S. readers that Samper was to be the next Colombian President and that he was an "anti-drug fighter," the *Washington Post* recognized on March 13 that Gaviria was "the only major candidate to openly favor extradition of suspected drug traffickers to the United States and to fully support Barco's all-out war against cocaine barons." The *Post* said that Pablo Escobar, the leader of the Medellín Cartel, has personally ordered Gaviria's assassina-

tion, and has told associates that Gaviria "is a dead man."

Gaviria's hard line against drug trafficking, said the *Post*, has "made him a prime target for the Medellín cocaine cartel, whose gunmen killed Galán on Aug. 18." The *Financial Times* of London reported that "as Galán's successor with a firm anti-drug stance, he will also be in the traffickers' gunsight."

Refusing to admit defeat, mafia front-man López Michelsen is trying to revive his protégé Samper and get him a share of power in the next administration. López called the vote "a revolution" and, while not admitting that he was himself a target of that "revolution," did confess that Gaviria won because "he represented the opponents of the traditional Liberal establishment."

As part of López's pressure tactics, Samper's campaign manager Horacio Serpa Uribe said that Samper's forces won more seats in Congress and have emerged as the second Liberal force in the country. "The movement will advance," he said, "because it is a long-term political project which is not subordinate to a single electoral moment." With that argument, Samper's men are trying to force Gaviria to name Samper as his campaign manager.

El Tiempo columnist and Samper supporter "D'Artagnan," in his column of March 14, called on Gaviria to accept the tutelage of the "electoral barons" of the Liberal party, and to endorse the so-called "Economic Opening" to free-market economics demanded by the international bankers.

The British news agency Reuters is supporting this line in its coverage of Colombia. It claimed that "anti-drug candidate" Samper Pizano lost and that Gaviria is "moderate" on the question of drugs, and it quoted a sociologist, Orlando Fals-Borda, who said that Gaviria would be "more realistic than Barco, he will try to accommodate, not only the traffickers but also the guerrillas."

A problem for the drug lords

The drug mafia has two alternatives: to kill Gaviria or make him compromise with the López-Samper political faction. However, the problem is that Colombians have voted their demand that the drug mafia apparatus be absolutely wiped out. As *El Espectador* pointed out, "Now, given the size of his vote, Dr. Gaviria should put to rest any doubts about secret pacts with other candidates of his party for a sharing of the future government." In particular, emphasized the newspaper's editors, Gaviria does not need Samper's help, because "he doesn't need to make any under-the-table deals to win the Colombian presidency with general support."

Alfonso Cano, the brother of *El Espectador's* editor Guillermo Cano who was murdered by the drug mafia, wrote in the newspaper on March 13 that Gaviria's election as Liberal Party presidential candidate "was done freely by the people, and not by the barons of corruption. Therefore, Dr. Gaviria owes them nothing, and can govern with complete independence."