



Interview: Maximiliano Londoño

A turning point for Colombian politics

On May 30, the Colombian electorate went to the polls in unprecedented numbers to choose a new president. The man they chose was Belisario Betancur, the first Conservative Party candidate elected in free and open elections in more than three decades. Betancur will assume office on Aug. 7.

The significance of a Conservative victory over the majority Liberal Party for Colombia's future was the subject of an interview EIR's Valerie Rush held June 4 with Maximiliano Londoño, the Secretary-General of the Colombian-based Andean Labor Party (PLAN), who was in New York at the time of the election. Mr. Londoño, a political economist, was a candidate for the Colombian Senate in this year's congressional elections and his party has played a prominent role in promoting region-wide industrialization as a solution for Colombia. On June 17, EIR held its first seminar in Bogotá, which was extensively and favorably covered in a leading Colombian daily, El Espectador.

EIR: The recent presidential elections have opened up a new political dimension in your country. . . .

Londoño: The recent election of Belisario Betancur as president demonstrates, first, that the Colombian population violently rejected López Michelsen, who was the president in the period of 1974-78 [and Betancur's principal challenger—V.R.]; second, the Colombian popu-

lation has increasingly favored support of Argentina in its fight against the British Empire; and third, fundamentally, the Colombian population wants a change in economic policy.

The rejection of López Michelsen is very important, because traditionally the Liberal Party he represented has been a majority party in Colombia. Nonetheless, Belisario Betancur won by nearly a half million votes. There is no clearer proof that the Colombian people want a policy change. López represented an aggregate of Friedmanite measures—credit restriction, fiscal reform, and a free hand to the financial sector. This created the conditions for turning Colombia into a drug economy; it is today the leading producer of marijuana and refined cocaine in the world.

The options posed are now clear. Colombia must again take a leadership role in the hemisphere—it is presently outside the hemisphere for all intents and purposes because of its support for Britain in the Malvinas crisis. Internally, Colombia must forge a program of economic development based on long-term low interest rates for investment in heavy industry.

EIR: How did Betancur, a representative of the minority Conservative Party, win? How does your party expect to influence his administration?

Londoño: Not accidentally, both the Betancur campaign and that of [Liberal Party dissident candidate] Luis Carlos Galán reflected in good measure the marginal but nonetheless crucial influence of the Andean Labor Party. Their campaign themes were ours. One of them focused on the country's industrial bankruptcy. Both Betancur and Galán were obliged to attack Milton Friedman as the cause of the productive sector's utter bankruptcy; they had to say that long-term low-interest credits were vital for the economy's recovery; they had to denounce the monetarist policies which allowed the financial sector to grow at the expense of the productive sector. They implied that it was these policies which led to the growth of the drug economy. Those were all themes introduced by the PLAN campaign, and they had to be taken up by Betancur and Galán if they wanted votes, plain and simple.

Now we have already had several victories. The first was in the congressional elections in March, when we defeated the drug-trafficking financier Ernesto Samper Pizano, who was the campaign manager for López. He was on the López slate for Senate in Bogotá, and lost dramatically. And of course this was compounded by López's defeat in the presidential elections. We believe that appropriate conditions now exist for both Betancur and the opposition led by Galán to carry forward some of the initiatives we have proposed for Colombia's recovery. The program we will be presenting is the best weapon

we can have for educating these forces.

EIR: Under the outgoing Turbay government, Colombia allied itself with the United States, Trinidad-Tobago, and Chile in voting against Argentina at the recent OAS meetings. Is Colombia's position now likely to change under Betancur?

Londoño: Colombia was a leader in the creation of the Organization of American States, and it is now playing the role of grave-digger in burying it; it has set itself up against the interests of the hemisphere. The worst thing Colombia could have done was to ally itself with the United States in this situation. What happened is that, particularly regarding the Caribbean, under the influence of the Haig State Department Colombia has played the role of increasing tensions in the area toward an eventual confrontation with the Soviet Union. This is an absurd role for Colombia, because if we were to confront the Cubans the battle would not last two hours; we would be devastated. The State Department is sending Colombia to its suicide, something the people of my country obviously do not want.

But this is in fact a still larger game, because what we are talking about is the concept of NATO out-of-area deployments—the United States wants to set up a NATO base on Colombia's islands of San Andrés and Providencia. The islands would be a beachhead and, in a division of labor with the British, would give the United States control of the entire South Atlantic—playing with fire.

I think Betancur may make some changes in this, if his statements in the recent period and those of his campaign manager can be taken seriously. His campaign chief Augusto Ramírez Ocampo said about a month ago, before the elections, that the United States had shattered the continental alliance, had destroyed the Monroe Doctrine, that Latin America had to reorganize itself, and that the Colombian government position was absurd. These statements clearly had an effect on the vote, because the population knew that a vote for López would mean a continuation of the government's pro-British line on the Malvinas issue. What we await now is for Betancur to fulfill his promises, and we are applying the necessary pressure to see that he does.

EIR: The PLAN has in the past characterized the Conservative Party as the domain of people like Alvaro Gómez Hurtado, who is a self-proclaimed fascist. What does it mean that a candidate supported by Gómez, as well as by the other factions of the Conservative Party, has reached the presidency?

Londoño: The Conservative Party continues to be divided into two basic factions. One faction is headed by Gómez Hurtado—who is linked to the European Center for Documentation and Information in Madrid, a Hapsburg and European oligarchy-run intelligence center.

The other faction is led by ex-President Misael Pastrana Barrero. Pastrana's faction is made up of many tendencies, but among them are some industrial interests. Gómez hoped to become the candidate of the Conservative Party but was massively defeated at the nominating convention, and was forced to accept Betancur as the compromise candidate. With Betancur in the presidency, Gómez will nonetheless have a certain influence in the government, controlling perhaps 20 percent of the Conservative machine. It is worth remembering, however, that Gómez was the principal partner in government of López Michelsen during his four years in office, and controlled an estimated 40 percent of the government machine. Whether Gómez will be able to increase his control remains to be seen.

Remember that there are other forces which helped put Betancur in power, including the Catholic Church. The Church opted for Betancur over López because the former is nominally a Catholic, rejects abortion (which López favored), and his policy would be to sign a treaty with the Vatican to renew the Concordat, which López would not have renewed. Furthermore, López had written a letter to Willy Brandt pledging that the moment he was elected the Liberal Party would join the Socialist International. The Colombian elections proved that the Liberals did not want to be social democrats, and in fact preferred to go Conservative in that case.

The military was very worried that López government would turn Colombia into another El Salvador under a policy of permitting terrorists to legally enter politics; that is, that they would have full rights to political participation under a broad amnesty. This was López's program—what he cynically called his "plan for peace"—and would have meant destabilization for Colombia and the region as a whole.

EIR: The Liberal Party is the majority party in Colombia and has many factions within it. Has López Michelsen's defeat sealed the fate of the Liberal Party?

Londoño: The only thing the Liberal Party can do now is to carefully review the causes that led to its defeat and rescue some of the more positive elements that it has had in its history, exemplified by the government of López Pumarejo in 1934-38 and again in 1942 through 1945. They must realize that the policy of López Pumarejo, which was to forge an alliance between the working class and the industrial sector to develop a basic industrial infrastructure, was once the foundation of the Liberal Party's success. But slowly, thanks to the influence of certain anglophile agents like [ex-President] Alberto Lleras Camargo, these policies were eliminated from the party program. If the Liberal Party wants to have a future—and it can have one still under the kind of new forces Galán has tended to represent—it must recapture its tradition. It must again become a party representing

labor and industry in favor of economic progress. In other words, only with a capital-intensive and high-technology development program can the Liberal Party recover the leadership it has lost.

EIR: Can you describe in more detail the programmatic solutions your party offers to Colombia?

Londoño: First let me note that the Andean Labor Party will hold its Second Annual Congress on June 18 and 19, and the centerpiece of that congress will be a presentation of our program on how Colombia can be turned into an advanced-sector nation between now and the year 2000. This program that we will be presenting, a global program counterposed to the [Carter administration's] Malthusian *Global 2000 Report*, was produced by a team of experts from the Fusion Energy Foundation and the *Executive Intelligence Review*. It was headed by FEF research director Uwe Parpart, and included Peter Rush, Dr. Steven Bardwell, and Sylvia Brewda, among others.

What we did was take a look at the historical balance of how the Colombia economy has behaved over, say, the past decade. We found some interesting things. First, that the oil crisis did not strike the Colombian economy with the same intensity that it did many other Western countries. This has given Colombia a certain advantage with respect to its potential to expand its economy. Nonetheless, when in 1974 López Michelsen became president, the impact was immediately visible in the statistics. By 1976, there was a drastic fall in the coefficients which express the reproductive capacity of the economy as well as its level of productivity. One can see a redirection of the bulk of investment capital toward light industry and labor-intensive agriculture to the detriment of the capital-goods industrial sector.

This represented a phase-change in the economy. It is now devoted to producing consumer goods for the emerging class, the middle class—particularly those sectors linked to hotels, to services, to the drug trade, those sectors stimulated by the financial activities López promoted.

What we found is a classic demonstration of the effects of a Friedmanite package: drugs, fiscal reform, Stockman-style budget cuts; simply put, the thermodynamic destruction of an economy. We also prepared an alternative history, that is, what would have occurred if in 1974-78 we had continued with the modest rates of growth—say 2-3 percent—that existed in the heavy industry sector until 1974. Our model showed that Colombia would have been in significantly better shape. Now the final model run we prepared goes much further, because what we proposed is achieving levels of living and culture by the year 2000 comparable to those in Western Europe today. This is the purpose of the program, to show what investments are required to reach these goals.

EIR: Colombia has been promoted as a developing-sector model for the reduction of population growth on the continent. How does the PLAN program view the issue of population growth?

Londoño: The LaRouche-Riemann econometric model that we used for our method of analysis considers the question of population as fundamental. It views the wealth of a nation as made up precisely of the development of the intellectual powers of that nation's labor force. This is the core of the program. This is in fact at the center of a fierce battle against the current "supply-side" economic theories and all the other monetarist theories, because the key question to be asked is, how do you expand the real economy? How do you distinguish between productive activities that represent an expansion of useful processes and unproductive activities?

We want to bring out this issue of population in the Colombian case, because here we have a classic case. A significant reduction in the growth rate has actually been achieved, from 3.5 percent annual growth some 12 to 15 years ago to the present 1.9 percent. This has been achieved essentially through reducing living standards, dis-investment, credit reduction. In our program we propose that there be a significant expansion of the population. The program has been designed to prove that with a larger Colombian population better conditions can be created; we're not just talking about feeding a larger population but of developing future generations.

EIR: Belisario Betancur has been somewhat of a populist in his campaign. One of the proposals that earned him his popularity was "long-distance education" [courses by mail and television/radio—V.R.] This sounds similar to the PLAN's programmatic emphasis on raising skill levels. Is there a difference?

Londoño: There is a substantial difference. The people's mandate in voting for Betancur was for change, substantial change. However, we know that certain interests associated with Betancur's campaign hope to turn his administration in certain undesirable directions. For example, in the area of education, certain entities of the United Nations linked to Ervin Lazslo and other such individuals have been working to create programs for rural and peasant communities which are referred to as "saturated areas." That is, they have "too many engineers," or "too many skilled professionals." Therefore they seek to provide very specific forms of training for labor-intensive activities, for manual labor, for "appropriate" technologies. This has us deeply concerned, which is why we seek to educate the country's leaders on the need for *more* scientists, *more* engineers and technicians. We want to eliminate the absurd theories of the World Bank and the Brandt Commission, which speak of a so-called contradiction between employment and technology.