
INTERVIEW: Jorge Carrillo Rojas

'We grasp the importance of beam weapons; LaRouche's ideas will proliferate everywhere'

This interview with Jorge Carrillo Rojas, vice-president of the Union of Colombian Workers (UTC) and president of its largest region, Bogotá and Cundinamarca, was conducted by EIR's Valerie Rush and Maximiliano Londono Nov. 9.

EIR: The UTC has proposed the formation of a debtors' cartel to pressure for the collective renegotiation of the continent's foreign debt. Why do you think this is an appropriate action at this time?

Carrillo: Colombian workers feel that there is no possibility for improving the living standards of the population while we must pay extremely high interest rates for the debt we owe to the international banks. The most developed countries of Latin America are in a precarious position. For example, Argentina, which has become an industrialized country and producer and exporter of food, finds itself in a situation of simply not being able to pay its extremely high debt of \$40 billion, or even the interest on this debt. Brazil and Mexico are in a situation which is even worse. Peru and Chile are countries which are at the edge of a serious social crisis, due also in large part to their high foreign debt.

Thus there are no possibilities for paying that debt at the moment, at least not if the population is not to be starved to death to pay the debt. The problem right now is that either the banks are saved or the Latin American countries are saved. We as Colombian workers believe that logically it is the Colombian people who must be saved, and thus we agree to the proposal for the formation of a debtors' club, so that the banks accept a moratorium on payment of the interest and they give us a grace period of 10 to 16 years, while we are able to develop our economies to be able to pay. Otherwise, if we are not given this opportunity, you will start seeing defaults, as has already begun to occur.

EIR: What do you say to those who argue that Colombia is an exception to the rest of the continent?

Carrillo: Colombia in comparison to, say, Venezuela, is in a worse situation. While Venezuela's debt is some \$40 billion, its exports are high. Our debt, compared to what we produce for exports for foreign exchange, is extremely high. Thus our situation is certainly no better than that of our brothers. It is a situation equal if not worse. Besides, we have

said that we cannot base our economic recovery on the ruin of our neighbors. It's ironic. What is occurring with Venezuela, with Ecuador, is affecting us. For example, the Venezuelans have stopped buying many of our goods, the Ecuadorians the same. Therefore those who say that Colombia is a different case are playing a game with the international financial community.

EIR: But there are those who insist that Colombia is the favorite of the banks, that they are giving us credits when no one else is getting them, that we are getting favorable interest rates. How do the Colombian workers view this?

Carrillo: In the first place, there are *promises* of new credit, mere promises, but they are not coming through. Besides, the interest rates are very high, because the devaluation of the Colombian peso has accelerated over the past six months; we already have a devaluation rate so far this year of nearly 27 percent. If we add the interest they are asking, which is 1½ percent above LIBOR, we have an actual interest rate of some 40 percent. So that the possible loans that may come through can only aggravate an already serious condition. There is no guarantee that the banks are going to give us money. What there have been are *conditions*, such as those the country has already accepted: the increase in public service rates which has put the population in serious straits, the devaluation of the peso, the fact that we no longer insist on lower domestic interest rates because they threaten us with flight capital, and lower prices for the materials we export.

EIR: In this context, do you see a connection among the various conflicts Colombia is presently having, with Chase Manhattan, Morgan Guaranty, Banco Ambrosiano, and other such banks?

Carrillo: The problem is that these banks are in a highly illiquid state. They have no money, and thus are doing everything they can to save themselves. Colombia has been a very good client to them. We have met all the commitments imposed on us, we have religiously paid our debt—principal and interest. But we have reached the point where there are other possible international financial sectors which could help us: European and Japanese banks other than the traditional ones Colombia has dealt with up until now. So, they want to

see Colombia under their control. And it is possible that with the disappearance of the \$13.5 million from Chase, that with the problem with the Banco Ambrosiano, they are resorting to underhanded ways to keep Colombia subordinate to these banks.

EIR: Usually these banks demand that the arbitration of loan contracts be under New York or British law, that this is protocol. What influence do you see this having on Colombia's relations with the banks?

Carrillo: This is a fundamental problem, a problem of whether our nation is truly independent or not, if the wars of independence which we fought truly gave our people autonomy, or if we continue dependent on foreign governments and foreign legislation. Colombia has its own constitution, its own legislation; the Colombian people has its own idiosyncracies, its values. It cannot subject itself to British or American law, for this would mean turning over not merely a part of our sovereignty, but its entirety. So the moment has come for our country and our people to make clear what the consequences would be if contracts were signed under Colombian law—which is acceptable—or under foreign law. Because to sign under foreign law is to accept that foreign agents of international finance involve themselves in our affairs.

EIR: Recently the UTC held a private meeting with President Belisario Betancur. What is your assessment of that meeting?

Carrillo: The UTC has agreed with President Betancur on various things, first and foremost the defense of the nation, for a sound nationalism in demonstrating that Colombia has power. In the recent meeting with President Betancur, we emphasized several things: First, we cannot accept wage policies to the detriment of the Colombian people, that our workers receive a wage which not only permits them to live decently but to advance; second, that wages are not in fact the cause of inflation, but rather inflation has been caused by the conditions imposed by the international financial community. We also expressed our concern over the foreign debt of the country, which is \$10.9 billion, and that we are spending nearly 40 percent of our earnings on interest payment on that debt. We told him that in the event that they lend us another \$5 billion, the situation would only get worse, since the potential for expanding our exports is limited, and therefore ability to meet the payments on the new loans. We have insisted that Colombia must join with the rest of the continent to enter into collective renegotiation of the foreign debt with the private foreign banks.

The President said in regard to wage policy that there will be no parameters, as set by the finance minister, that there will be no guidelines of the government, in the sense of holding to 18 percent in the collective bargaining process, nor will the minimum wage have a ceiling of 18 percent, when the cost of living this year shows signs of surpassing

20 percent. This is very good on the President's part, and we told him that Colombian workers are prepared to support him in all the policies that favor the population. But we also told him that we will reject those policies which would subject us to the oversight of the international banks.

EIR: Recently the Swiss paper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* reported that Colombia receives some \$2 to \$3 billion from "diversified illegal exports," and that if President Betancur continued his moralizing campaign [against drugs], this income will collapse, and simultaneously, so will Colombia's prestige with the international banks. What do you think of this?

Carrillo: In the first place it is highly debatable that Colombia in fact receives billions from illegal exports. These exports, that is to say the drug traffic, benefit very few, a handful of Colombian drug traffickers who in the majority leave their earnings outside the country.

Confrontation with the Soviet Union will occur if the U.S. stagnates in all areas, because the Russians are not stopping but are advancing with their war preparations. If the U.S. does not take care, world war will occur very soon. When the U.S. moves forward with its program for laser weapons, peace will be assured.

On the other hand, the damage that the drug traffic is causing to our population, to our youth, our commerce, the military, the fact that with all our resources we have been unable to eradicate this evil, has led us to the edge of a precipice. The children in the schools who are consuming drugs today, tomorrow will not be good Colombians. They will not be good workers, good providers, or good citizens. And the adult population is also consuming these drugs, it is destroying itself. What will we do with a military or police force where drug consumption is high? We will be at the mercy of any small but well-organized group who enters our coasts or seizes our islands. The drug traffic is a grave problem not only because of the exports to other countries, but also because of the internal consumption, which is also very high.

Fortunately there seems to be a growing awareness of this danger at all levels, of the government, of the armed forces, the Church, the unions, and the parents, to eradicate this evil. . . .

EIR: Regarding the debate on how to eradicate this evil, Fausto Charris of the Colombian Anti-Drug Coalition has proposed a program similar to that used by Mexico, including the use of paraquat.

Carrillo: If we are to eliminate the drugs, we must eradicate the plantations of marijuana which are extensive throughout the country. There are two ways of eradicating the marijuana—one is to pull up the plants one by one, by hand; that way, we may have eradicated 1 percent by the year 2000. The other is to use all the modern means to eliminate drugs, herbicides. They are a much more effective way to destroy the marijuana and we must use them.

EIR: Lyndon LaRouche, the founder of *EIR*, has announced for the presidency of the United States. He has proposed a policy of collective debt renegotiation with Ibero-America, and he was a founder of the National Anti-Drug Coalition. How do you think his electoral campaign will influence Ibero-America?

Carrillo: The ideas of Mr. LaRouche are well known in this country. What I would like to see from his campaign is that the U.S. population understands the full range of his proposals. . . . It is possible that because of the very breadth and size of the U.S. population, the program of Mr. LaRouche may not be well known yet. But I know that it is well known in Brazil, in Argentina, in Colombia, in Europe, and in India. The work that is to be done in the U.S. is arduous, to get the message of LaRouche to the American unions, to housewives, and so on, because the problem of the United States is also seen in the industrial process which has stagnated, which has also occurred in agriculture.

The U.S. also has a problem of leadership, which it is losing. We, free and democratic trade unionists and friends of the U.S. population, express our concern that our leading ally is losing ground in this respect, is no longer on top of the situation.

So we are happy to see programs for industrial recovery, to end unemployment, to improve agricultural production, to allow American scientists to continue their research for the benefit of humanity unimpeded, without taking away from the defense industry. We understand in this context the importance of the proposal for developing defensive beam weapons.

So this to us is the significance of Mr. LaRouche's campaign. He may not make it to the presidency, but this does not mean that his ideas will not proliferate everywhere. We will one day reach the point where the enemies of progress will be finally overthrown.

EIR: On March 23 President Ronald Reagan proposed the creation of laser weapons for eliminating the terror of nuclear war which currently exists. There is presently a grave crisis between the superpowers. How do you evaluate this situation?

Carrillo: Here we must look at what is the situation of the allies of the United States. We consider ourselves among of

the allies of the U.S., but the problem is that the allies of the U.S. are in the majority hungry people, where the democratic system has not always been implemented. What is needed, therefore, is that these allies of the U.S. be strengthened, that they be helped to come out from under their economic crises. There must be a Marshall Plan from Mexico to Argentina.

This is what the president of the UTC proposed, what President Betancur proposed to the United Nations last month. We don't want the help to come with tanks and military advisers. We do want help now.

In regard to the confrontation with the Soviet Union, there is no doubt that this confrontation will occur to the extent that the U.S. stagnates in all areas, because the Russians are not stopping but are advancing with their war preparations, their expansionism. To the extent that the U.S. does not take care, world war will occur very soon. The moment the U.S. moves forward with its program for laser weapons, peace will be assured.

EIR: On Jan. 9 the heads of state of Ibero-America will meet in Quito, Ecuador to prepare concrete proposals for addressing the economic crisis. What message do the Colombian trade unions want President Betancur to bring to that meeting?

Carrillo: The UTC hopes that the Colombian government, which has made important changes in foreign policy and which has rectified the earlier government's mistaken policy toward the Malvinas conflict, will be on the side of the Latin American countries. The President of Ecuador has approved the proposals of the UTC for the creation of a Latin American debtors' club, to enter into negotiations on the foreign debt. Therefore we hope that our government supports this, because we too are victims of economic aggression on the part of the international banks.

Colombia has just reached the 50th anniversary of the debt moratorium of 1933, when President Olaya Herrera declared a moratorium on foreign debt payments, because Colombia was in a state of penury similar to that which we have seen on the continent today. Therefore if at the Quito meeting the Latin American governments decide to take resolute action, they will have the support of not only the Colombian working class, but the working class of all Latin America.

EIR: In December, Aurelio Peccei of the Club of Rome will come to Colombia to hold a conference on food policy. What is your opinion of the Club of Rome and Peccei?

Carrillo: I have not personally heard the gentleman speak . . . but the problem of the world today is food production. Without increases in production, there will be hunger. . . . To the extent Peccei is opposed to this, and advocates that we return to subsistence levels, he is an enemy of progress, and I don't know what he intends to do in Colombia with these proposals.