

Andean Report by Peter Rush

Voters reject Barco policies

Colombia's March 13 election results repudiate the ineffectual anti-drug and anti-terrorism policies of the government.

The Social Conservative Party scored an important victory in first-ever mayoral elections held in Colombia March 13. They not only took the mayoral posts of Colombia's two largest cities, Bogota and Medellin, but did well throughout the country, while the pro-Communist left did much more poorly than expected. The Liberal Party's losses, especially in the capital city of Bogota, places the agenda of the Liberal administration of President Virgilio Barco, including its plans for constitutional reform, in doubt for the remainder of its four-year term.

The elections were intended to coax the leftist guerrillas out of their insurgency and into the legitimate political process. Instead, without abandoning its terrorist activities, the Communist-run FARC guerrillas set up a legal electoral front, the Patriotic Union (UP), expecting to capture the rural areas it terrorized. However, UPers running under their own banner, only took 14 mayoralties. The number they gained in alliance with elements of the Liberal Party remains to be seen.

Having lost over 200 of their candidates to political violence during the campaign, and having won little apparent electoral recompense, the UP may very well be tossed aside like an empty shell when its militants return to the mountains. FARC violence can be expected to consequently escalate.

Violence and drugs overshadowed the entire election. The months preceding Sunday's voting saw a wave of assassinations, unprecedented since

the 1950s *Violencia* period, that claimed the lives of numerous prominent Liberals and Conservatives, along with the UPers and other leftists.

In Medellin, Colombia's violence-ridden second major city, and the home base of the "Medellin Cartel" of drug traffickers, Juan Gómez Martínez took the mayoral post as a popular repudiation of the mob. Gómez is known as a strong proponent of fighting back hard against the drug mafia, and was the rare survivor of an attempted kidnap-murder last November, presumably ordered by the cartel. The attempt was foiled by Gómez's neighbors and bodyguards.

Three days before the election, Gómez was "warned" again, through the bombing of his newspaper, *El Colombiano*, which killed one employee and wounded eight.

In Bogota, Andrés Pastrana, the son of former President Misael Pastrana, won with a plurality of 323,800 votes against a split Liberal ticket. Pastrana surged to the top of the field in the wake of his kidnaping at the end of January by the Medellin Cartel, from which he was rescued by the police after a week in captivity. His victory makes him a strong contender for becoming the Conservative candidate for President in 1990.

Both Gómez and Pastrana clearly won by riding the backlash of disgust with President Barco's tolerance of the drug mob, but it remains to be seen whether, now in power, they will find the moral strength to withstand the mafia's blackmail.

In other races, the electorate rejected several openly pro-drug candidates. In Bogota, the business partner of drug trafficker Gilberto Rodríguez Orejuela, Rafael Forera Fetecua, lost his bid to become a city councilman. Rodríguez now reigns as cocaine boss of Colombia's southwest. In Cucuta, Cong. Félix Salcedo Baldión, who was arrested last year in Venezuela with sizeable quantities of cocaine, but whose parliamentary immunity saved him from prosecution, lost his race. Eduardo Mestre Sarmiento, a member of the five-man directorate of the Liberal Party and another associate of Rodríguez, lost his political bid in Bucaramanga.

In Barranquilla, the fourth city of Colombia, despite the expenditure of 1.2 billion pesos (\$4 million) on his behalf by pro-drug circles, Gustavo Certain lost, although by such a slim margin that a recount is under way. The town is reportedly on the verge of civil war, because his election would be considered tantamount to the rule of dirty money, corruption, and the drug gangs.

In Quindío, Carlos Lehder, the Medellin Cartel chieftain now on trial in Florida, lost his council bid, receiving only 415 votes, down from 12,000 in an earlier election.

The population's repudiation of such brazen efforts by the mob to take power is evident. However, it would be wrong to conclude that the cocaine cartel lost power in the election. As before, an unknown number of posts were bought by the cartel long before election day. For example, in Tuluá, a key southwestern entrepôt for drugs flowing from the jungle to the cities, cartel favorite, homosexual "writer" Gustavo Alvarez Gardeázabal, was elected mayor. It can be assumed he will implement his proposal for direct government negotiations with the drug mafia.