

A breathing spell for Colombian politics

by Cynthia Rush

The inauguration of Colombia's new Conservative President, Belisario Betancur Cuartas, took place in an environment not unlike that which surrounded the 1981 inauguration of Ronald Reagan. Sixty thousand enthusiastic well-wishers gathered on Aug. 7 to witness the outdoor inauguration and bid good riddance to a regime that had plagued the country with immorality and economic stagnation.

Belisario Betancur's landslide election on May 30 testified to the Colombian population's demand for growth and progress. The candidate had campaigned against former Liberal president Alfonso López Michelsen on a platform of reversing the monetarist credit policies of the previous eight years, expanding education and jobs, and attacking the enormous financial and speculative apparatus produced as an offshoot of the nation's drug trade. Betancur was backed by an array of forces from both the Liberal and Conservative parties, and enjoyed especially strong support from the country's Catholic Church.

No clearcut predictions can be made at this time as to whether Betancur will be able to carry out his program. As a look at the cabinet reveals, the new administration is an amalgam of political tendencies, including some unsavory Maoist and Solidarist elements; and pressures on the new President to accede to one or another group will be great.

Events in the rest of Ibero-America, where the disposition of foreign debt, defense of economic sovereignty, and reorganization of the Inter-American system are being intensely debated, can also be expected to influence Colombian politics. Betancur has already expressed interest in shaping that debate, even suggesting that his government could shift away from more traditional foreign alliances toward affiliation with groups like the Non-Aligned movement. The Colombian President's statements thus far bolster neighboring Venezuela at a time when it is under increasing attack from the international financial community.

Inside Colombia, the collaborators of *EIR* founder Lyndon LaRouche in the Andean Labor Party (PLAN) and the Colombian Fusion Energy Foundation have taken on the responsibility to ensure that Betancur makes good on his campaign promises by focusing national attention on a program to transform Colombia into a modern, industrialized nation by the year 2000.

Elaborated by the *EIR* and the New York-based Fusion

Energy Foundation earlier this year, the "Colombia in the Year 2000" program was formally presented in an *EIR* seminar in Bogotá last June, and has been disseminated among government, business, student, and trade-union circles in several cities around the country. The program's specific proposals for building major infrastructural projects, developing nuclear energy and capital-goods industries, and carrying out sweeping currency and monetary reform to eliminate the black market, have been presented and debated in universities and science centers and at labor and business conferences in Bogotá, Medellín, and Cali. Future conferences are planned for Barranquilla and Barrancabermeja.

The environment created by the PLAN will partly determine which way Belisario Betancur moves. By itself, his cabinet cannot be relied upon to formulate the initiatives the country requires. The varying political loyalties of its members reveal why this is true.

- Finance Minister Edgard Gutiérrez is a young economist identified with the Liberal Party faction of Medellín politician Hernando Agudelo Villa. He is opposed to monetarist policies and is studying proposals for lowering the current prohibitively high interest-rates and attacking the speculation promoted by financial entities such as that led by Banco de Colombia president Jaime Michelsen Uribe.

- Justice Minister Bernardo Gaitán Mahecha and Agriculture Minister Roberto Junguito have both publicly advocated the legalization of the drug trade. Junguito, formerly associated with the think tank run by arch-monetarist Rodrigo Botero Montoya, said in an interview with *EIR* last March that "drugs are not a problem in Colombia," and that the country would apply "autonomous" methods of drug enforcement that would probably exclude the use of herbicides such as paraquat. (Botero Montoya, a former Finance Minister, is a member of the World Bank's Brandt Commission; *EIR* has repeatedly exposed the World Bank's outright promotion of drug-crop cultivation.)

- Foreign minister Rodrigo Lloreda Caicedo comes from one of the leading oligarchic families in the Valle de Cauca region, and is a political ally of Conservative party leader and former President Misael Pastrana Borrero. Pastrana, in turn, an avid supporter of the Club of Rome's depopulation program, is also a member of the international oligarchy's Order of the Knights of Malta. It remains to be seen whether Lloreda Caicedo will defend independent foreign-policy initiatives, if Betancur launches them, or push British schemes for dismantling nation-states and replacing them with supranational structures defended by his friend Pastrana.

- Betancur's nominee for Health Minister is highly suspect. Jorge García Gómez has declared that his first priority in office will be the creation of an army of 12 million "bare-foot doctors," who, as in China, will administer "basic health care" to the population as a means of eliminating the need for high-technology hospital facilities. "I have been in China," García Gómez declared recently, and "we Colombians could do the same thing."