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## COLOMBIA

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# Election overtakes the political parties

by Valerie Rush

Politics in Colombia will definitely not be returning to "business as usual" after last week's events. The March 11 *mitaca* (mid-term) elections saw the emergence of a new political movement, under the banner of "Nuevo Liberalismo," which could well shatter the oligarchy's hold over the political parties in that country while opening the way for a nationalist bipartisan movement, the successor to President Betancur's "National Movement."

And, while Colombians went to the polls to register its disgust with the dope mafia's politicians, the military, national police and state security agencies were dismantling the largest cocaine processing operation in the world in the southern department of Caquetá. Retaliation assaults against Florencia, Caquetá's capital, by guerrilla commando units failed to capture the city. However, they did confirm what *EIR* has been documenting for years: that the drug trade is the "mother" of both black and red terrorism globally.

### Support for Galán and Lara Bonilla

The strong showing for "anti-establishment" figure Luis Carlos Galán, head of the "Nuevo Liberalismo" dissident faction within the Liberal Party, was less significant in terms of absolute numbers than in the sheer breadth of his campaign, which ran in all 23 departments in Colombia and in every important municipality. Most importantly, Galán's slate swept the capital of Bogotá, long the stronghold of the "*oficialista*" wing of the Liberal Party represented by former Presidents López Michelsen and Turbay Ayala.

The *oficialistas* attempted to defeat Galán and defuse the hostility of the population against them by splitting their forces into more than a half-dozen well-heeled "rival" electoral slates for the same posts. The tactic, partially successful in Colombia's outlying regions, could not prevent the Galanistas from taking an estimated 60 percent of the vote in Bogotá.

With two years to go before the next presidential election, Galán and allied forces within the Conservative camp (the *Belisaristas*) will have ample time to build their new machine. Galán is already considered a front-runner for the presidential nomination and has rejected the appeals of the *oficialistas* to rejoin the fold in the name of Liberal unity.

It remains to be seen how Galán will give programmatic content to his new movement. The rapid deterioration of the Colombian economy under the combined assault of the international banks and the local drug mafia presents Galán with an unavoidable challenge.

The showing for Galán was also a plebescite of support for Betancur's Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, the only "*Galanista*" in the present cabinet. Lara Bonilla just managed to survive the latest in a series of threats and scandals thrown against him by the political allies of the drug mafia, and the popular mandate for Galán can be expected to strengthen his own position inside the government.

Vindication for Lara Bonilla's controversial war on drugs came with a huge cocaine raid the weekend of March 9 in the department of Caquetá. A virtual city, Named "Villa Coca," was turned up by a 200-man government assault unit deep within the jungle.

In addition to five modern laboratories, microwave ovens for drying the coca paste, and elaborate communications systems, Villa Coca had been stocked with weapons, cars, tractors, refrigerators, washing machines, helicopters and a small flotilla of private lanes. Vast quantities of chemicals, 1,500 kilos of processed cocaine, and hundreds of cartons of *bazuco* (reefers of marijuana and/or coca paste) were turned up.

### Escobar's operation?

The 40 laboratory operatives captured in the first raid were all from the city of Medellín, the base of operations of the infamous cocaine billionaire and alternate congressman Pablo Escobar Gaviria. The national police have tentatively identified Escobar, Guillermo Ochoa, and Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha as the brains behind the Caquetá operation.

Escobar was fingered last year by Lara Bonilla as the "big fish" of Colombia's drug trade, and brought up on charges of drug trafficking, conspiracy, and murder. However, one of Escobar's pet judges succeeded in dismissing the evidence as "inconclusive," and overturned the arrest warrant against him, despite Lara Bonilla's fierce public opposition.

Ochoa, along with Escobar, is considered the founder of the right-wing terror squad MAS, which has declared open season on the guerrilla movements. And yet, at the Caquetá laboratories, dozens of guerrilla uniforms were discovered along with evidence that the leftist M-19 was serving as the hired gun of the cocaine mafia. Further evidence of the alliance between right/left subversion and the mafia occurred one day after the drug bust, when 500 M-19 guerrillas raided the capital of Caquetá in retaliation for the government raid.

A state of siege now exists in Caquetá and in three neighboring departments. Defense Minister Gustavo Matamoros has since declared that documents captured in Caquetá reveal the location of numerous other important cocaine processing laboratories in the country, which the government expects to dismantle over the coming days.