

Colombian left backs Santos in election's second round

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14 June 2014

This Sunday, a runoff presidential election is to take place in Colombia, between incumbent president Juan Manuel Santos (*Partido Social de Unidad Nacional*, Social Party of National Unity, PSUN) and challenger Oscar Ivan Zuluaga (*Centro Democrático*, Democratic Center, CD).

Less than a month ago, on May 25, five political parties competed in presidential and congressional elections in Colombia. None of the candidates was able to obtain a simple majority of 50 percent plus one vote for its presidential candidate. Under Colombian law, the leading two candidates will appear on this Sunday's ballots.

Both Zuluaga and Santos represent the interests of the Colombian capitalist ruling stratum, which is based on agribusiness, mining and oil production as well as those of the transnational banks and corporations. Both are committed to employing the military, police, and private armies to defend the ruling elite's power and privileges through naked terror.

Sunday's second round candidates both came out of the administration of ex-president Alvaro Uribe (2002-2010). The right-wing Uribe regime closely aligned itself with and was backed by the United States, as does Santos, Uribe's former defense minister. Colombian courts barred Uribe from running for a third term on constitutional grounds.

Both *uribista* candidates are supported by US imperialism and by the international financial and energy cartels. It stands to reason that to endorse either one of them as a lesser of two evils is to give legitimacy to state terrorism in Colombia. For a political formation that pretends to be socialist to do that is a gross betrayal.

Behind an appearance of democracy and free elections exists a ruthless cabal, a handful of families, well represented by Uribe, Zuluaga and Santos, with its private armies and institutionalized state terror machine, accustomed to wiping out any opposition through extra-

judicial killings, the expulsion of millions of small farmers, peasants and agricultural workers from their communities, and outright bloody massacres.

That being said, the results of the May 25 vote have thrown into crisis the pseudo-left-liberal opposition to Santos and Zuluaga represented by the Alternative Democratic Pole coalition (*Polo Democrático Alternativo*, PDA).

A layer of PDA leaders now openly supports Santos as the lesser of evils to prevent the "fascist" Zuluaga from taking power. Among those Santos supporters is the PDA's presidential candidate Clara López Obregón.

The PDA party leadership, however, decided neither to endorse nor repudiate Santos. Instead PDA supporters are directed to make an individual choice: Santos, Zuluaga, a blank ballot, or abstention. This cowardly and politically unprincipled position exposes the real role of Colombian Stalinism and the pseudo-left. In its statements, the PDA has made it clear that, following the vote, its role will be that of a loyal parliamentary opposition to the murderous and corrupt *uribista* regime, as it integrates itself into the machinery of the state.

Such rotten politics are fully consistent with the short history of the PDA, an unprincipled coalition of pseudo-left radicals, Stalinists, ex-guerrilla leaders, union bureaucrats and political liberals, formed in 2005.

On May 25 the PDA candidate obtained some 2 million votes—a substantial increase over its 2010 total.

The big news of the first round of voting was that out of 33 million eligible voters, nearly 20 million, 60 percent, did not vote. Why should they vote after all? Nothing in the bitter experiences of the past half-century of violence and oppression can possibly inspire confidence in the electoral process.

Out of those that did vote, Zuluaga, closely aligned with Uribe, won the first round with 29.27 percent of the vote, followed by Santos with 25.69 percent.

For the second round, Marta Lucía Ramirez, of the Colombian Conservative Party directed her supporters to vote for Zuluaga. In the first election she had come in third with 15.52 percent.

Ramirez, like Uribe and Zuluaga, opposes on-going peace talks with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, FARC). During a run-off debate with Santos, Zuluaga did not completely rule out negotiations, but implied that the incumbent was giving away too much.

The first round rejection by a significant majority of this election is testimony to the social and historical contradictions that dominate the lives of all Colombians. This includes centrally the historic failure of the Colombian bourgeoisie to resolve the land question. Alongside minute peasant farms exist gigantic extensions of land controlled by a handful of Colombian families and by US agribusiness.

It was over this very issue that the FARC came into existence 50 years ago last month, as a coalition of the Stalinist Communist Party and radicalized Liberal Party guerrillas. Its first armed engagement in 1964 was precisely the defense of a peasant community that was being threatened by paramilitary forces of the landed oligarchy.

Like the PDA, the FARC also supports a vote for Santos—offering the government a unilateral cease-fire for the election while loudly denouncing Zuluaga—and also seeks to become part of the state apparatus.

In negotiations in Havana between the FARC and Santos, the question of land reform appears to have been settled in May 2013.

The historic demand of every democratic revolution for the expropriation of the feudal estates, the nationalization of the land and its redistribution to the peasantry has given way to a cosmetic reform: the distribution of marginal fallow lands, of land expropriated from drug cartels, coupled with government subsidies. As part of this agreement, the FARC negotiated a seat at the table for itself in administering the land reform.

As with all previous “land reforms” across Latin America in the 1960s and 70s, these palliative measures are not worth the ink that that they are written with.

In the 1980s, the colonization of marginal lands was utilized as a pretext for the enclosure and expulsion of peasant farmers from the core agricultural and mining areas. Since 1985, over 3 million peasant farmers have been expelled from their lands, resulting in an increased concentration of land into the hands of the oligarchy,

according to a 2009 study by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). Hundreds of thousands of the displaced peasants made their way into Bogotá and other cities, where there are no jobs, forming an army of unemployed, contingent laborers, self employed peddlers (*cuenta propistas*) driving down living standards and creating the illusion of economic progress based on hunger wages.

The UNDP study also pointed out that, with a GINI coefficient of 0.86 in land ownership [where 1.0 represents absolute inequality and 0.0 absolute equality] land wealth in Colombia is one of the most unequal in the world. Among the reasons it gave for this state of affairs were free market forces, the drug trade, paramilitary armies, and a rent-seeking culture of easy wealth.

In Bogotá and other cities, Colombian workers confront a daily reality of unemployment and contingent employment, lack of health care and education, and homelessness. This process is accompanied by a proliferation of employment agencies (*Empresas de Servicios Temporales*, EST) profiting from the human misery of contingent employment, *tercerización*. According to a 2013 study by the National Trade Union College (*Escuela Nacional Sindical*), 51 percent of urban jobs, and over 40 percent of industrial jobs, are now under EST contracts. These workers earn 39 percent less than their counterparts and receive fewer benefits. In rural areas things are even worse, 60 percent of workers are employed through ESTs.

Most of these jobs pay wages of 320 US dollars a month, one half what, on average, a family needs to pay for food, rent, health services, education, recreation and culture. Under these conditions there has been an escalation in mass protests and mobilizations across the country. Thousands of workers in towns that exist under virtual paramilitary and police occupation each year defy repression and death.

It is under those conditions that the PDA, and the FARC now offer their services to Santos and the Colombian State.



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