Plan Colombia Vindicated: Colombia Rejects Peace

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The mood in this improvised Colombian town on the Caribbean coast is somber tonight. The national peace plebiscite was just defeated by a mere 0.43% or 60,000 votes.

The government of Colombia and the FARC insurgents signed peace accords six days ago to much public jubilation. Today the peace accords were put to a public vote. Polls predicted a landslide approval of 60%.

The public airwaves had been saturated with advertisements for “si” to approve the accords. Practically every wall to I passed here on the coast and earlier this week in the capital of Bogota was plastered with “si” posters.

The “no” side appeared absent except for a fringe represented by former president Uribe and his right-wing cohorts. The Catholic Church, the current Santos government, and the entirety of progressive civil society – unions, Indigenous, Afro-descendants, campesinos – were campaigning for “si.” The outcome seemed preordained.

Yet when the polls opened today, the usual long lines were absent. Turnout was low, allowing an upset victory for “no.”

The right-wing had been threatening activists – many had already been assassinated – to disrupt the peace process. Hence our delegation of North Americans to accompany targeted Colombian activists to provide them some protection by raising their international visibility. The Alliance for Global Justice along with the National Lawyers Guild came to Colombia at the invitation of FENSUAGRO, an agrarian workers federation, Marcha Patriotica, a large progressive coalition, and Lazos de Dignidad, a human rights organization.

The accords would have ended the 52-year civil war – the longest in modern history. The FARC’s position during the intense four years of negotiations in Havana with the Colombian government was there could be no peace without justice. That it makes no sense to end the armed conflict if the conditions that generated that conflict were not addressed. The accords accordingly had provisions for agrarian reform, political participation for the insurgents,

transitions from an illicit drug economy, and reparations for victims of the conflict.

Campesino leaders in the rough and rundown frontier town of Maicau on the Venezuelan border, where drug running and sales of contraband are mainstays of the local economy, spoke about the agrarian struggle. The “oligarchs,” they explained, want to “ethically clean” the countryside of small farmers to make way for transnational agribusiness. Yesterday they spoke of the great hope they had for a “si” vote to defeat the oligarchy.

Today Colombia voted against peace and against that hope.

The Obama administration, while giving lip service in support of the peace process, has massively increased lethal aid and transfer of the latest military technology to the Colombian government under the rubric of Plan Colombia. Presumptive president-elect Hillary Clinton has been on the campaign trail stomping for Plan Colombia as the world model for the military subjugation of those who oppose the extension of the US neoliberal empire.

The October 2nd “no” vote on peace in Colombia will have repercussions around the world.