

pero sólo escribiendo se restaura el eros.

Buenos Aires, 6 y 11 de octubre de 2000

Victor Bulmer-Thomas

Perspectives on US Latin American Policy

With the election (or should we say judicial selection?) of a new president in the United States (US) out of the way, it is an opportune moment to consider how US policy towards Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) might change in the next few years.

George W. Bush, the president-elect, is no stranger to Latino politics in the United States. A (modest) Spanish-speaker himself, with a Mexican sister-in-law and a brother who governs Florida with its diverse range of immigrants from LAC countries, George W. Bush has learnt from the voters in Texas about the main issues of interest to Latin America and has already made it clear that bringing the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) to a successful conclusion will be one of his highest priorities.

This is good news for the 32 LAC countries that are currently negotiating with the US and Canada. Although a draft text of a treaty will be available for discussion at the meeting of trade ministers in March 2001 in Buenos Aires, there is a widespread feeling that progress will not be made in ironing out the points of disagreement without a demonstration of US leadership.

Like President Clinton, George W. Bush will be faced with the thorny issue of winning fast-track negotiating authority from the US Congress. If he drops all reference to labour and environmental standards, he may just be able to win approval from the small Republican majority. This might seem the logical step to take. However, it goes against the trend of recent US trade policy. The recently concluded free trade agreement with Jordan includes labour and environmental standards not as side agreements (as in NAFTA), but as clauses in the main text. The same will happen in the free trade agreement with Chile, on which negotiations are about to begin. Thus the President-elect may prefer to win fast-track authority with some reference to labour and environmental standards, knowing that for every Republican defector he may be able to recruit at least one Democrat.

A successful meeting in Buenos Aires would indicate that the FTAA is on track to be launched by 2005 (some LAC countries are suggesting that the timetable be brought forward). This would be very helpful for President Bush (as he will then be known) as he heads to Ottawa in April 2001 for the next Summit of the Americas. The Canadians, as the hosts, control the agenda, but the Canadian government is very interested in hemispheric integration and will no doubt use the occasion to push ahead to try and remove the remaining obstacles.

Canada, however, is also likely to include on the agenda the normalisation of relations between Cuba and the United States. This will be much more problematic for George W. Bush. The business interests that funded his campaign are interested in gaining access to the Cuban market before other foreign companies become too deeply entrenched. Yet Bush's narrow electoral victory owed much to the overw-

helming support he received from the Cuban-Americans in Florida. Not only did 85 per cent of them vote for him, but their protest in Miami-Dade County was crucial in leading the electoral officials to abandon the manual recount.

It is safe to assume that Bush will not want to take any risks on Cuba. With so much of US policy towards the island now controlled by Congress, the last thing he wants is a bruising battle to amend or repeal the Helms-Burton law or roll back the powers given to Congress under the recent legislation permitting the sale of food and medicines to Cuba. Marginal changes, relaxing further the trade embargo or the conditions under which remittances and visits can be made, might be possible, but this is as far as Bush will want to go as long as Fidel Castro remains in power. If Fidel were to die, however, the options would change completely.

It is widely accepted that President Clinton leaves office at a time when there is no US policy towards Latin America and the Caribbean. There is a policy towards Mexico, which is forged out of all the different departments that deal with the United States' southern neighbour, but beyond Mexico there is no single policy – only a series of priorities according to the country or countries in question. Thus, immigration issues loom large in US dealings with Central America, the drugs trade in US relations with the Caribbean states and the Andean countries, trade policy in US concerns towards the southern cone.

President Bush will inherit this set of priorities, but one is likely to dominate the agenda in the next year whatever the president-elect's personal preferences. The issue is drugs and the country is Colombia. This is a consequence of Plan Colombia and the \$1.3 billion aid that the US Congress has authorised to President Pastrana.

The link between drug-traffickers and the guerrilla in Colombia means that any attempt to crack down on the drugs trade involves an assault on the guerrillas themselves.

Colombia cannot implement the military aspects of Plan Colombia without US assistance and the US armed forces will be forced to play a greater role than hitherto. As human rights abuses multiply, the US administration will come under pressure either to pull out or to intervene further to prevent the problems from escalating. The FARC and the other guerrilla groups know this and will exploit it to the maximum. Colombia is likely to be one of President Bush's greatest foreign affairs headaches and he will receive little support from his European allies who are extremely nervous of being associated with the militarisation of the Colombian situation.

In other areas US policy will tend to be more passive. Bush will have to react to events as they occur. Some of these events are relatively easy to predict, others are more difficult if not impossible. Who would have guessed four years ago, for example, that the Fujimori regime would collapse in disgrace or that General Pinochet might be put on trial in Chile for murder? Bush will face a similar problem and many of these events will be handled by his foreign affairs and national security team rather than the president himself. With Colin Powell slated to become Secretary of State and Condoleezza Rice the National Security Adviser, both officials with impressive credentials, Bush may well find it unnecessary to become too closely involved in many issues affecting LAC countries.

One issue that seems certain to arise is dollarisation. Following Ecuador's replacement of the sucre by the US dollar, El Salvador will be allowing from 1 January the

dollar to circulate legally alongside the colon while the Guatemalan Congress is currently considering a similar proposal. Other countries may follow suit, including some of the smaller states in the Caribbean. The US administration will find it difficult not to respond at some point since there are inevitably implications for US monetary policy when other countries adopt the US dollar as legal tender.

Another issue is the recovery of the left and the anti-Americanism that is often associated with it. President Chavez's consolidation on power has been noted in Washington, D.C., with little enthusiasm, where he is seen as a nuisance rather than a serious threat. However, the US administration faces the possibility of a return to power of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua next year after ten years in opposition. George W. Bush will need no reminding of the problems that Nicaragua caused his father before the Sandinistas were defeated by Violeta Chamorro in the 1990 presidential elections. And the political situation in many LAC countries is now highly unstable, leading to an uncertain outcome.

With the larger countries, however, President Bush faces an easier task. Brazil looks set to continue on its path of economic and political modernisation with the new President in 2002 likely to pose no real threat to US interests. Argentina, ever more dependent on the IMF and other Washington-based institutions, is certain to be supportive. And with President Fox in Mexico, George W. Bush has a partner who speaks the same language – literally and metaphorically – and whose main foreign policy priority is to deepen the links with the US through reforms to NAFTA. This may be further than President Bush will want to go, particularly with regard to immigration, but it is not a bad starting point for a bilateral relations-

hip in which George W. Bush holds most of the crucial cards.

Victor Bulmer-Thomas is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Latin American Studies (ILAS), London, and Emeritus Professor of Economics at London University. He is also a Director of the Schroder Emerging Countries Fund. His books include: The Political Economy of Central America since 1920 (CUP, 1987) and The Economic History of Latin America since Independence (CUP, 1995).

Eduardo A. Gamarra

La región andina y la política de Estados Unidos

“¿Cuando se jodió el Perú?”, es la pregunta irreverente con la cual Mario Vargas Llosa comenzó su famosa novela *Conversación en la catedral*. En el año dos mil, sería pertinente preguntarse lo mismo acerca de toda la región andina, donde la palabra crisis ya no se aplica para describir únicamente una situación temporal. Múltiples crisis de carácter diverso azotan en la actualidad a toda la región. Los conflictos con guerrillas, grupos paramilitares y traficantes de drogas parecen interminables. Sistemas de partido que colapsan, el fraude electoral y los golpes militares han llevado al poder a líderes populares con dudosa vocación democrática. Los incrementos en delitos urbanos y protestas rurales han creado una inseguridad cívica generalizada. Más aún, las estrategias para el crecimiento económico han fallado en mejorar los estándares de vida de la gran mayoría de la