

***La Violencia* in Colombia: An Anomaly in Terrorism**

by
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*Colombia es una nacion de cosas muy singulares;
Los civiles dan la guerra, y la paz los militares.¹*

Viewed from a historical perspective, the years 1948-1965 in Colombia, known as *La Violencia*, resulted from a combination of many factors: ideology (conservatives, liberals, communists, Catholics, Protestants), geography (rural areas, urban areas, prosperous areas, poor areas, mountainous areas, flatlands), economy (wealthy elites, poor peasantry, prosperous small farmers, bandits). Each of these provided motivation to different groups. Ideological guerrillas fought because radical or minority groups were excluded first from partisan participation and later from the *Frente Nacional*; liberal and conservative bands fought for revenge, greed or tradition; *violentos*² spread violence for economic gain; Catholics fought Protestants for influence over the population. All these factors coincided during *La Violencia* to produce a brand of terrorism that, if not new to the world, was at least unique in Latin America.³

In the early 1900s, Colombian politics were to some extent based on the spoils system. The enfranchised voted into power a president and a political party (the predominant parties have always been *Liberales* or *Conservadores*), who then appointed all other officials in the government, from cabinet members down to local policemen. In addition, the powerful oligarchies had developed a political system that allowed them to share power with little interference from the popular masses, while keeping intact conventional democratic procedures.⁴ But in the early 1930s, liberal President Alfonso Lopez introduced drastic reforms to the Colombian government: he expanded the electorate, started land reform, protected labor movements, inaugurated a progressive income tax system, and passed laws to separate the Catholic Church from the secular government. These reforms came at a time of tremendous growth and prosperity. As a result of both these conditions, the stakes involved in subsequent elections rose dramatically. The spoils no longer involved just the partitioning of a few government offices in Bogota and ambassadorships abroad: entire bureaucracies were created to control business, taxation, customhouses, social services, the armed forces. In short, the liberals created a bureaucracy for anything they thought the government could or should control. Given the attitude toward the government held by the typical official (that the office was there to create personal wealth), these reforms were significant. A career in the government seemed more lucrative and profitable.

Due to a split among the liberals, the conservatives won the 1946 election. When the results were announced, the conservatives were elated, and immediately took to the streets in celebration. Smarting from many years of

"liberal oppression," they also began persecuting the liberals, claiming their reforms subverted the nation. But a generalized type of violence did not begin then, though sporadic street fighting did erupt in the departments surrounding Bogota. *La Violencia* proper was sparked by the murder of the populist (liberal) leader Jorge Eliecer Gaitan in 1948. Liberals throughout the entire nation then took to arms, fearing a general massacre within their ranks. Because so many of the policemen (from the ranks of the liberals) joined in the rampage, the armed forces were called in to put a stop to the violence in the Bogota.⁵ But the revolt spread to towns and villages throughout central and south Colombia. Knowing that judges would never convict fellow party members for crimes of revenge against the opposition, looting of stores and farms throughout Colombia became common. This generalized rural violence cost Colombia close to 200,000 lives, took over twenty years to resolve, and left a legacy that has not yet been eradicated.

The Time Periods of *La Violencia*

Although the dates assigned differ somewhat, most students of this episode in Colombia's history agree that the twenty years of *La Violencia* can be divided into several distinct periods. Russell Ramsey, for example, divided the era into four distinct periods.⁶ Phase I began with the rise of the conservatives to power in 1946. The conservatives sought revenge for the strong-arm tactics the liberals had used while instituting their liberal reforms. The fighting was limited to the rural areas in Santander, Norte de Santander, Boyaca, and Cundinamarca.

Phase II began when an insane man assassinated liberal leader Jorge Eliecer Gaitan in Bogota in April of 1948. In retaliation, liberal and communist groups took up arms against the conservatives, looting and rioting in the streets of Bogota. Prisons were opened, and the police refused to obey government orders and calls for peace. Many policemen, in fact, joined the rebels wholeheartedly. The freed criminals, many of them jailed for political reasons, banded together with other rebels to form the core of the *cuadrillas*.⁷ They operated mainly in the *Llanos Orientales*, the eastern plains, but eventually moved into Boyaca, Meta, Antioquia, Cundinamarca, and Tolima. The fighting reached a peak in 1952, with approximately 26,000 liberals opposing the (neutral) armed forces and conservative police departments.

Phase III of *La Violencia* was a reaction to the rule of General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, who was asked by a bipartisan group of civilians to take over because of popular discontent with the government of Laureano Gomez and its inability to separate the warring parties. After consulting with top military advisors, Rojas Pinilla uttered the famous words "*Asumo el mando de la nacion*."⁸ He then attempted to convert military neutralism into an apolitical military government, with moderate success. He instituted several liberal reforms (social services, mostly), negotiated a general amnesty for all guerrillas, and militarized the police forces. To this day, the Colombian police force retains its military structure, with rank and pay equal to that of

the armed forces. Fortunately, the military (and the new police force) were able to remain politically neutral. There were isolated individual cases of corruption, but these were the exception rather than the rule. Partisan politics, however, did not stop in the civilian ranks, and the military was forced to become involved in the fight to separate the warring parties.

By 1958, when the military turned over the government to the new *Frente Nacional* (National Front), the fighting had become deeply institutionalized banditry. This began Phase IV: the armed forces once again separated the two hostile factions. By the early 1960s, it succeeded: most of the violence was no longer politically motivated, as there was a unanimous consensus not only within the government but also among the populace that the time to control the situation had arrived. By 1965 the armed forces had done just that, by isolating the fighting groups. The government also undercut the reasons for political unrest by putting into practice many social reforms in the regions affected by the violence.⁹

Geography Of *La Violencia*

The majority of Colombia's population lives in the central highlands. The three *cordilleras* (ranges) forming the Andes Mountains create two long valleys running on a north-south axis through the western half of Colombia. In these valleys, and in the small valleys within the ranges themselves, are the fertile farmlands that provide work and food for a large portion of Colombia's population. Contrary to the popular theory that rebellion and violence are endemic to the poorer sections of a population, *La Violencia* was fiercest in these relatively prosperous valleys.

Though the violence that began during the *Bogotazo* in 1948 reached most of Colombia, it quickly settled into the central regions. In the areas covered by the departments of Tolima, Caldas, Valle, and parts of Cundinamarca, the bandits used the rough terrain to their advantage, forcing the police and armed forces to rely on transportation accessible to both sides. In other words, airplanes, helicopters, and self-propelled guns could not be used successfully in the mountains. The army was forced to use horses, burros, and rifles, the same equipment used by the *violentos*.

By the early 1960s, however, the military gained control, forcing the bandits to relocate to the eastern plains. There they were quickly conquered, because the military could press its technological advantage, and because the bandits were unaccustomed to fighting without the cover of mountains. Some of the larger groups (the internationally funded communist *cuadrillas*) entered the cities, though not very successfully.

The Terrorists

From the beginning, but predominantly toward the end of *La Violencia*, several non-politically motivated groups emerged. These were criminals taking advantage of the general lawlessness to enrich themselves. They tended to remain in smaller gangs, and operated principally as bandits and highway

robbers. Some imitated the political *cuadrillas*, demanding "taxes" or protection money from wealthy landowners. But, lacking the logistical support and numbers available to the political groups, they were not as successful in these types of fund-raising. They were perhaps more difficult for the military to conquer, because they tended to form small cliques and were more difficult to infiltrate than the political *cuadrillas*. The leaders trusted few individuals, and perhaps lacked trust completely, even within their band. These groups were an obvious result of a volatile political and economic history, products of their times.

Many studies have been written about the terrorists themselves, though there is little consensus regarding what exactly constituted a *violento*.¹⁰ Only four things were common to the *violentos*: they were all young, they all took on nicknames, the *cuadrillas* were individually localized and protected their "turf" from other *cuadrillas*, and they all used rather macabre methods to kill their victims.

The first feature the *violentos* had in common was their youth. There were exceptions, of course, but ages of between 14 and 22 years was the norm.¹¹ The use of nicknames is relatively simple to understand: they masked the *violentos'* identity. By using a nickname and a disguise, a peasant could perpetrate his crimes and then go home to his farm chores. He could thus hope to escape identification and possible conviction. As he committed more crimes without detection, a good nickname could help propagate fear or fame, depending on the notoriety of his actions. A liberal bandit harassing conservatives successfully could become quite a legend among other liberals, and his fame enlist both aid and recruits, if needed. All terrorists used nicknames, though not all became famous: successful banditry resulted from good organization and sufficient funding, not from using a good nickname. But for the most part, the bandits who succeeded in gaining fame also had catchy nicknames. Almost all used either a descriptive or an animal nickname. Examples of notorious *violentos* include: Manuel Marulanda Velez—*Tirofio* (Sure Shot), Teofilo Rojas Varon—*Chispas* (Sparks), Jose William Angel Aranguren—*Desquite* (Vindication), and Medardo Trejos—*Capitan Venganza* (Captain Revenge). Perhaps equally vile, but certainly not as notorious were: *Avispa* (Wasp), Agustin Bonilla—*El Diablo* (The Devil), Grillo Marin (Cricket), Manuel Cedeno—*El Mico* (The Monkey), and *Pastillas* (Pills).

For the most part, the bandits remained within a localized area of operations, seldom straying from their claimed "turfs." The area covered by a turf varied with the size of the *cuadrilla*: some only included one or two villages and the outlying farms, while others, such as that of *Capitan Venganza*, included almost an entire Department (the Quindio region of Caldas). Each *cuadrilla* ruled its region as it saw fit, and this, of course, varied with the personality of the leader. Bandits such as *Zarpazo* (Conrado Salazar) preferred extortion as the method of collecting taxes, killing and taking over the farms of those who refused. Others, such as *Pedro Brincos* (Roberto Gonzalez Prieto), proclaiming their aim was a communist state in Colombia, relied on bank robberies and forced loans from businessmen. There were a few

exceptional cases, such as that of *Captain Venganza* (Medardo Terjos), who established a government on their turf, complete with taxation, judicial courts, and police forces.¹²

Enforcement varied as much as the method of rule, but generally it followed the same pattern: the better the organization, the less the violence. *Capitan Venganza* was no less macabre than other *violentos*, but he was more predictable, and resorted less often to violence. His rule was apparently quite popular, and tolerated by both the populace and the national government, if only because the region remained relatively peaceful—and inaccessible to the army and police forces. But discipline was harsh: his second in command, *Sargento Garcia*, and another subordinate, *El Ovejo*, were executed for insubordination. One had refused to carry out an order, and the other had killed a government agent without *Venganza's* approval.

Other bandits were much more savage. Perhaps it was the traditional emotionalism involved in national and partisan politics that inspired such violence. Whatever the reason, bandits took great pride in developing and naming new methods of killing their victims. The *Corte de Franela* was quite popular: it consisted of cutting the victim's throat by starting at the chin and removing the skin clear to both collarbones. The *Corte Corbata* (necktie cut) consisted of opening a hole in the larynx and pulling the victim's tongue out through the hole to hang there like a necktie. The *Corte de Mico* (monkey cut) consisted of beheading the victim and then tying the hair tightly in a knot at the back of the head, contorting the face into a toothy grin like that of a spider monkey. All these "popular cuts" were performed with either machetes or small knives: this, of course, meant the *violento* was in direct contact with his victim. Such violence is indicative of the emotionalism and sensationalism caused by the style of power politics of the pre-*Violencia* period in Colombia's history. That this type of crime also spread fear and promoted cooperation or prompt response to a bandit's demands is readily understood.

ANALYSIS OF LA VIOLENCIA

La Violencia produced a unique phenomenon of terror. The type of terrorism prevalent from 1948-1965 in Colombia violated all current notions of what constitutes terrorism and guerrilla warfare, in that:

It was partisan, but not organized.

It was rural, seldom urban.

It was seldom anti-establishment, but was sometimes encouraged by the establishment

It was not against a dictatorship, but it created a dictatorship.

It was not religiously oriented.

It was not among the poor, but rather predominantly among the prosperous small farmers.

It was not against the armed forces, but was finally controlled by the armed forces.

It actually spawned a political solution to Colombia's political difficulties.

These criteria present an interesting situation in the attempt to define terrorism and violence in Latin America. *La Violencia* does not fit many of the normal definitions or parameters of terrorism or of revolt or revolution. *La Violencia*, as an anomaly in the history of terrorism, must be studied within its own context.

Partisan, Not Organized

La Violencia was a partisan phenomena, but not an organized one. At first glance, this condition apparently deviates from "standard" terrorism, but in reality it does not. For a vast majority of the population, Colombian politics before 1948 was of the armchair variety. Because of the relatively small size and importance of the national government in Bogota, most people thought that it mattered little what they thought or voted for. The affairs of state could be watched by anyone, but only a privileged few could participate. Only on the local level did politics become useful, because on this level participation was at least possible. Individual political affiliation was generally hereditary and geographical, rather than ideological. Whether the terms conservative or liberal meant anything political to individuals was irrelevant: adherence to the family party was very relevant.

Political persuasion, in other words, was not an individual decision. Party affiliation was a badge of honor, to be upheld as strongly as the family name, regardless of whether the adherent knew the meaning of the terms conservative or liberal. Using this definition, politics was intertwined with the individual ego: one would never call a fellow conservative a liberal without fear of violent, and sometimes fatal, reprisals.

From this viewpoint, that battle-lines were drawn along political lines was not surprising. But the political leaders were not necessarily involved in the violence, and certainly did not take part in an official capacity. Officials participated to be sure, but on a personal level, and most probably because of greed or because a family member or friend had become the victim of a crime or their personal honor and position had been threatened. The elites were involved more on an intellectual level than on the action level,¹³ but because all government positions were appointed by the party in power, it became easy for a person assuming office to seek "reparations" for all actions taken under the previous regime.

Rural, Not Urban

La Violencia was a rural phenomena, seldom an urban one. The initial strike was in Bogota, but it only lasted a short time. The army quickly contained the rioting, and prevented it altogether in other cities. But the rural areas of Colombia were not to be controlled so easily. The liberals, in power during the reform years, had revelled in their new importance and power. Conservative farmers had been harassed and run off their lands so liberal

farmers could take over. Police officers and judges were appointed by the liberal party in Bogota, who adhered to strict partisan guidelines. The harassed conservative victims could not expect justice from liberal magistrates, and this was particularly true if the perpetrator was a known liberal. The prosperity that had allowed the liberal reforms to take place had also given rise to a class of small coffee-growing landowners. This was the class involved in the conflict—there was no real counterpart to this sort in the cities.

When the conservatives assumed power in 1946, they immediately replaced the liberal officials. Once firmly in control, they sought "reparations" for the sixteen years of "liberal oppression." In other words, the liberals received a taste of their own medicine: conservative farmers returned to reclaim their farms. Because the land and property in question had usually been taken forcibly, the returning owners felt no compunction to use any other means. Though this type of property transfer was not wholesale, it did contribute to an escalation in the cycle of crime and lawlessness.

Seldom Anti-Establishment

La Violencia was seldom anti-establishment, and, at times, the establishment encouraged it. This aspect of the period is one that makes *La Violencia* unique in the history of terrorism. The two political parties created an environment in which resorting to violence was a simple and viable solution to long-standing grievances. That the establishment—the two political parties—at first encouraged the criminal behavior and allowed corruption to flourish is seldom questioned. Very shortly after the assassination of Gaitan, however, the parties quickly distance themselves from terrorism, and condemned the violence caused in their names. But their condemnation came too late to stop the momentum of the warring parties. Thus the Colombian political tradition, in essence, provided an environment in which terrorism flourished: local power politics—power through the use of violence—was possible, and even encouraged. Individuals in the system took full advantage of their positions, and used the unrest to further their individual ambitions. Thus, while the political parties condemned *La Violencia*, its members encouraged and even revelled in it.

While it is true that individuals encouraged the violence, crimes were committed not against the opposing political party or the government in general, but rather against individuals. Traditionally liberal peasants were forced off their farms by traditionally conservative peasants or gangs in predominantly conservative regions. The opposite was true in predominantly liberal regions. Local minority party members were at grave risk of being either forced off their farms or killed if they refused to leave. While the terrorism was politically motivated, it was not at all anti-establishment. The peasants simply took advantage of a political tradition created by the establishment, to further their individual ambitions, be they political, economic, or simply emotional.

Not Anti-Dictatorship

If *La Violencia* was not anti-establishment, then, it was also not against a dictatorship. In fact, it created one of the few dictatorships Colombia has ever experienced. General Rojas Pinilla's rise to power resulted from the inability of the political parties to control their members and bring about a cessation to the hostilities. A military leader—not the military as a unit—was then asked by a bipartisan group of leaders to intervene, hoping he could create a new, non-partisan government and thus solve the political problems causing the violence. The traditional role of the military as the "savior of the nation" was invoked, and Rojas Pinilla was asked to assume power. But he could not create such a solution, being too conservative for the liberals, and too liberal for the conservatives. He did not dismantle the liberal reforms, and did not further them, either: instead, he (unsuccessfully) attempted to establish a sort of "benevolent dictatorship." Eventually partisan politics proved too strong for even the civilian leaders. They united in a demand for Rojas Pinilla's resignation, which they received.

Rojas Pinilla did start a process potentially able to control the violence. In 1953 he offered anyone involved in political crime an unconditional amnesty: *violentos* were encouraged to turn in their weapons in exchange for a full and free pardon. This amnesty program was only temporarily successful, though. Many groups had already developed intense rivalries with other *cuadrillas*, and used the cease-fire process to further entrench and prepare for the renewal of hostilities. Rojas Pinilla then increased the scope and intensity of the role played by the armed forces. From this role came the saying mentioned under the title: the armed forces separated the warring factions and thus stopped the violence. Partisan politics, the realm of the civilians, had caused and continued the war: the armed forces, usually charged with waging war, had to intervene to keep the peace. And the armed forces' success at separating and isolating the combatants finally brought an end to *La Violencia* in the mid-1960s.¹⁴

Not Religiously Oriented

La Violencia was not a religious conflict, though violence was sometimes encouraged by the Catholic Church, when carried out against Protestants. Here, as in the political arena, individuals (Catholic priests and bishops) fomented violence for their personal ambitions (and to eliminate Protestants). In many cases, atrocities and persecution against Protestants did occur, but not necessarily because of religion. Protestants tended to be liberals, and crimes against them tended to be politically motivated.

There was, however, a significant amount of religious persecution. Incited by Catholic priests, many cases of discrimination occurred: couples were refused marriage licences without the priest's consent; patients were not cared for in hospitals without first attending a Catholic confessional; police confiscated Bibles and interrupted Protestant religious services. This pattern conformed to the religious traditions of Colombia. Orlando Fals-Borda, one of the first to analyze *La Violencia*, pointed out that "religion means principally

to meet the requirements of the Church and to follow the dictates of the priests—a devotion to the Church as an institution rather than to Christianity as a way of life"¹⁵ Allegiance to the Church simply meant following the priest's or the bishop's directives, not participation in a set of religious traditions or doctrine. Catholic priests were for the most part conservatives, and thus exhorted their followers to conform to conservative ideals. If that meant killing (Protestant) liberals, so much the better.

The Concordat of 1887 (signed by the religious and political leaders of Colombia) declared Roman Catholicism the official religion of Colombia.¹⁶ The Catholic Church was loath to give up any of this prestige and power to Protestant churches, and several zealous individuals within the Church did exploit the situation to their advantage. The general population would not contradict Catholic priests, and violence had become an accepted way of life in many rural areas. That priests resorted to terrorism came as a surprise to no one: Protestants, for their part, were working to demote the Catholic Church from its official position. While not anti-Catholic, the liberal political party was to a great extent anti-clerical, and viewed religion as an individual issue. That such a position could reduce the political power of the Catholic Church no doubt crossed more than one liberal's mind. Catholic leaders knew this, and were quick to associate Protestants with liberals: killing a Protestant was equated with killing a liberal. Thus *La Violencia* could not be categorized as having strictly religious overtones: everything was couched in terms of partisan politics. Once again, the violence was not the work of an organization, but rather of many individuals taking advantage of a situation created by the political traditions of the nation.

Not Among the Poor

Another characteristic of *La Violencia* was its predominance among the prosperous small farmers, rather than among the poor. Colombia is divided ethnically, culturally, climatically, and traditionally into five distinct regions.¹⁷ *La Violencia* affected primarily only one of these, the Andean region, where the prosperous farmers were located, where approximately 70% of the nation's economy and population were located. The poorer areas of Colombia, such as the states bordering on the Caribbean, Pacific, or those in the far south were, if not exempt, at least spared the worst of the violence. *Costenos* (inhabitants of the coasts), for example, were traditionally opposed to violence: highlanders still consider them unambitious.¹⁸ Other regions also escaped the turmoil for similar reasons.

The problem began when the liberal party increased governmental control over the nation's economy: wealth and a centrally planned economy became the basis of the conflict.¹⁹ From this viewpoint, it is readily understandable why the poorer areas of the nation were spared the worst manifestations of the unrest. Areas with access to a world market and its promises of prosperity, such as Tolima, where much of Colombia's coffee was grown, or Antioquia, the center for textile manufacturing and industrial capital of Colombia, were hit hard by the terrorism and its effects.

Colombia's wealth came primarily from its fertile farmlands. Thus, it is easy to understand why the conflict affected rural areas such as Tolima, and not the large cities. Land was the basis of wealth, and the struggle for control of the land was one of the major characterizations of *La Violencia*. Under this interpretation, peasant farmers were not necessarily forced off their properties because they were liberals or conservatives, but because other landowners resorted to crime to obtain their land. The fact that only farms owned by minority political adherents were taken over was not irrelevant, but it was not necessarily the deciding factor. In like manner, extortion and hostage-taking was prevalent only in the prosperous areas of Colombia. Wealth was the deciding factor.²⁰

Not Against The Armed Forces

Another peculiar aspect of *La Violencia* was the role of the armed forces. As mentioned earlier, the conflict was not against the government, nor was it against the armed forces. But the armed forces did finally control the violence: they broke up the major *cuadrillas* and drove the remaining insurgents into a terrain so unfamiliar that defeating them became easier. The armed forces were much larger, better organized, and better equipped than the insurgents. The army was thus able to coordinate efforts over areas larger than the domain of any one rebel *cuadrilla*, isolating and defeating them one by one.

One of the anomalies of *La Violencia* was the relationship between the armed forces and the government. All governments in Latin America are praetorian to a certain degree: the military is the power behind the scenes. Traditionally, the military is seen as the "savior of the nation": when civilian governments cannot control events or manage a situation, the military is called on to restore order. The military is usually the only institution with an infrastructure disciplined enough to maintain control. When enemies threaten, either from within or from without, the army is responsible for repelling that threat. In the case of Colombia, the armed forces were called upon to do something about *La Violencia* when the political parties could no longer control the insurgents. As a result of this tradition, the military could accept its role as the "savior of the nation" without compromising its professional standards.²¹ Domestic security is, if not the principal mission, at least a corollary mission of the Colombian armed forces, and political turmoil is considered a threat to the nation's security. During *La Violencia* this threat was very real.

It may be argued that this is still a form of praetorianism. There is no denying it, if only because of the definition placed on the professional status of the military. If professionalism means that the military can only act against an external threat, and any involvement in a conflict (political or otherwise) within the country is defined as intervention, then the Colombian military did violate its standards. But if the military's mission consists of not only meeting external threats, but also internal subversive threats, then praetorianism is acceptable. The Colombian military consistently maintained a professional attitude throughout *La Violencia*. It did not usurp the power of

the government, and resisted the temptation to support one party against the other.

Accusations of partiality abounded (and still abound), of course, but the nature of those accusations varied with the location of the supposed infraction and the particular bias of the accuser. Were the army to enter a predominantly liberal region and attack a conservative rebel, other conservatives in the area would accuse the military of backing the liberals. The opposite would also be true. So the military realized from the start that either way accusations would be thrown, and maintained as impartial an attitude as possible. After the government recognized this, and lent its support to the counterinsurgency mission the armed forces assumed, a solution was finally in sight.

***La Violencia* Spawned a Political Solution**

Surprisingly, given the volatile nature of the era, *La Violencia* actually spawned a political solution to Colombia's political difficulties. Unable to control the violence, the political parties recognized that their political system, a system based on the spoils of office, had created the situation. As the crime wave increased, the party leadership decided that compromise was preferable to death, and after much arguing and negotiating, they reached a solution. In 1958, the two parties formed the *Frente Nacional*, agreeing to share power equally for a period of 16 years. During this time they were the only two political parties permitted by law. Minority groups were forced to either function only as splinter groups or go underground to evade the power of the coalition. The two major parties agreed to share all governmental power, and to alternate the presidency during four terms of four years each. General elections would no longer choose the political party to name a president: they became primaries, essentially, held to elect presidential candidates only. The party whose turn it was to appoint the president would do so based on the election results.

Colombian politics, in essence, became boring. Party allegiance lost its tremendous pull, because it no longer mattered: if one party was not in power, within four years it was guaranteed the control of the government. The *Frente Nacional* only allowed for two parties to share power, so third parties (usually splinter groups) vied for marginal participation. Leftist or communist parties had literally no power at all. With the introduction of boredom and predictability into politics, the violence quickly diminished.

CONCLUSION

When the *Frente Nacional* emerged as a workable solution, a majority of the peasants involved in political crime accepted the second amnesty proposal (1958). Only the hardened *violentos* and ideologically motivated insurgents stayed in the hills. There were several reasons for their refusal to join the new political system. The ideological insurgents had by this time become so distanced from the political reality of Colombia that they adhered to Marxist communism or other radical doctrines. This group of *violentos* had no real alternative: either they took over the government by force or they admitted

their cause was hopeless and quit. Few were willing to choose the latter, and with a steady income and support from Castro in Cuba, other leftist groups, extortion, and robberies, they remained in their *cuadrillas*. Many of them acknowledged and solicited aid from international terrorist groups, communist nations, and more recently, narcotics smugglers. Because of this support some *cuadrillas* have survived until current times.²²

Colombia is a land of contrasts. It has traditionally been fiscally conservative, maintained a stable economy, enjoyed relative wealth and prosperity, and maintained a tradition of political, democratic pluralism. Despite all this, Colombia has suffered from a type of violence unprecedented and unique in the history of Latin America. This violence was characterized by radical ideological guerrilla warfare, violence marked by sadism, and anarchy in geographical and social areas usually inaccessible to most terrorists, namely, the prosperous rural regions. This violence was unique because individuals were responsible for the violence, not the government or its opponents. Political traditions and an unstable system of democracy set the stage for the violence: individuals, both within the government and in the general populace, took advantage of that instability. Crimes begat crimes of revenge, sparking a vicious cycle that took twenty years to stop. Through a combination of social reforms, infiltration, and force, the Colombian armed forces were finally able to isolate the hostile factions. The civilian government, through a combination of amnesty programs and finally, a liberalization of national politics, was able to regain control of the situation, and bring about an end to *La Violencia*.

But the legacy of violence continues: terrorism has not left the political arena of Colombia. Political discontent, supported by international groups and foreign governments, has kept alive the traditional resort to violence. In this type of environment, it is not surprising that the cycle of violence should continue. Lawlessness and banditry for economic gain has once more joined the political rebellion. The stakes are higher this time, however, and make a resolution much harder to achieve.

In the early 1960s the Colombian armed forces broke up the rebel groups through the use of better equipment, intelligence, logistical support, and the support of a unified political front. But the new generation of rebels, backed by money from the drug cartels, now have the finances to successfully compete with the armed forces, and ignore or threaten the political players. This makes the government's task of coping with the new cycle of violence much more difficult. Amnesty offers have not worked as well as in the 1950s, and political reorganization will not solve the crisis either. The new (drug-related) violence is not an isolated, indigenous problem. Its sources are international and will require international cooperation to eradicate. Compromise between the governmental leaders worked in the 1950s. What compromise will work in the 1980s and 1990s remains to be seen. Colombia's troubles are no longer an anomaly in terrorism, as they were during *La Violencia*.

 Endnotes

- 1 Colombia is a nation of very unique things; the civilians wage war, and peace, the military-Colombian saying.
- 2 Bandits and guerrillas who took part in *La Violencia* were called *violentos* (violent ones).
- 3 Much has been written about *La Violencia*. Orlando Fals-Borda's book *La Subversion en Colombia* (Bogota: Tercer Mundo, 1967) was one of the first to study the era. More recent studies include Paul Oquist's *Violence, Conflict, and Politics in Colombia* (New York: Academic Press, 1980), James L. Payne's *Patterns of Conflict in Colombia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), and Gonzalo Sanchez' review of literature, "La Violencia in Colombia: New Research, New Questions," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 65, no. 4 (1985), pp. 789-807.
- 4 Robert Wesson, *Politics, Policies and Economic Development in Latin America* (New York: Praeger, 1984), p. 35.
- 5 The role of the Colombian armed forces in solving *La Violencia* was the topic of several interviews with Coronel Gustavo Pardo-Ariza, Colombian Army, International Fellow at the National Defense University, Fort McNair, Washington, D.C., May-June 1989.
- 6 In Evelio Buitrago Salazar, *Zarpazo The Bandit: Memoirs of an Undercover Agent of the Colombian Army*, translated by M. Murray Lasley, edited by Russell W. Ramsey (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1977), pp. vii-xvi.
- 7 A *cuadrilla* was a band or group of *violentos*.
- 8 I assume the command of the nation.
- 9 Alfred Molano, *Los Anos del Tropel: Relatos de la Violencia* (Bogota: Fondo Editorial CEREC, 1985), p. 28.
- 10 Several studies have been written on this topic, such as Gonzalo Sanchez and Donny Meertens, *Bandoleros Gamonales y Campesinos: el caso de la Violencia en Colombia* (Bogota: El Ancora Editores, 1983), and Carlos Miguel Ortiz S., "Las Guerrillas Liberales de los Anos 50 y 60 en el Quindio," *Anuario Colombiano de Historia Social y de la Cultura* Numero 12 (1984), pp. 103-153.
- 11 Carlos Miguel Ortiz S., "Las guerrillas liberales," pp. 103-153.
- 12 For more on these bandits and their methods, there are several good works. Examples would include: German Guzman Campos, Orlando Fals-Borda, Eduardo Umana Luna, *La Violencia en Colombia: Estudio de un Proceso Social*, V. 1 (Bogota: Ediciones Tercer Mundo, 1963), James D. Henderson, *When Colombia Bled: A History of the Violencia in Tolima* (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1985), and Sanchez and Meertens, *Bandoleros, gamonales y campesinos: El caso de la Violencia en Colombia*.
- 13 John Walton, *Reluctant Rebels: Comparative Studies of Revolution and Underdevelopment* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 96.
- 14 See endnote 4 above.
- 15 Orlando Fals-Borda, *Peasant Society in the Colombian Andes: A Sociological Study of Saucio* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1955), p. 227.
- 16 "The Roman Catholic Apostolic Religion is the religion of Colombia; the Public Powers recognize it as an essential element of the social order, and they are bound to protect and enforce respect for it and its ministers, leaving to it at the same time the full enjoyment of its rights and prerogatives," in James Ernest Goff, "The Persecution of Protestant Christians in Colombia 1948-1958, With an Investigation of its Background and Causes," (Dissertation, San Francisco Theological Seminary, 1965. Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms), p. 33.
- 17 These five regions consist of the following: the Andes (Tolima, Huila, Quindio, Caldas, Cundinamarca, Antioquia, Santander, Santander del Norte); the Atlantic Coast (Bolívar,

Cordoba, Atlantico, Magdalena, Cesar, Sucre, Guajira); the Eastern Plains (Meta, Arauca, Boyaca, Guaviare, Casanare, Vichada, Vaupes, Guainia); the South (the southern area of Valle del Cauca, Cauca, Narino, Caqueta, Putumayo, Amazonas); and the Pacific (Choco, the Uraba area of Antioquia, the coastal areas of Valle del Cauca, Narino, and Cauca). Each of these has a different racial composition, cultural mixture, climate, resources. Each has its typical music, food, customs, and folklore. John Walton mentions these regional divisions while introducing his chapter on *La Violencia*, p. 76; as does Robert Dix in his book *Colombia: The Political Dimensions of Change* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), pp. 3-4.

- 18 The *costenos* are credited with the saying "Cuando es a comer, a comer; cuando es a bailar, a bailar; cuando es a pelear, a correr!"--When it's time to eat, let's eat; when it's time to dance, let's dance; when it's time to fight, let's run!
- 19 Wealth was generally defined in terms of real estate. See Walton, pp. 82-89.
- 20 Alejandro Angulo, in his prologue of Alfredo Molano's book, *Los Anos del Tropol: Relatos de la Violencia*, p. 16. Molano also comments on this topic in his introduction, p. 25.
- 21 For a very readable, if slightly biased, account of the role of the Colombian armed forces during *La Violencia*, see Buitrago Salazar, *Zapazo The Bandit: Memoirs of an Undercover Agent of the Colombian Army*.
- 22 The principal example being Manuel Marulanda Velez-(*Tirofijo*)'s Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC).