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One Hundred Years of Solitude or Solidarity? Colombia's Forgotten Revolution

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Colombia remains a 'black hole' on the Latin American continent. For more than half a century this has been made possible through repressive oligarchical rule (Villar and Cottle 2012). Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* described the enduring violence throughout Colombia's history; the nation's potential for revolutionary change yet its tendency to wage war on itself. This violent history has been marked by discontinuous conflict and many wars. From the mid-twentieth century, a 'forgotten' war waged by the world's oldest rebel organization, *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia—Ejército del Pueblo* (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—People's Army, FARC-EP), has encompassed a revolutionary war traceable to the Wars of Independence against Spain (Hylton 2006). Although there are

other studies of the Colombian question which explore its violence, sociology and political economy (Hylton 2006; Brittain 2010; Stokes 2005; Leech 2011; Pearce 1990; Livingstone 2003; Taussig 2003; Richani 2002; Scott 2003; Ospina 2008; Ruiz 2009; Suarez 2003; Beckley 2002; Bergquist, Peñaranda, and Sanchez 2001; FARC-EP 2000; Downes 1999; Marks 2002; Passage 2000; Chernick 2007; Arenas 1985; Guaraca 1999; Randall 1992; Rabasa and Chalk 2001; Kirk 2003; Pérez and Lenguita 2005; Thoumi 1995; Ruiz 2001; Aviles 2006; Bouvier 2004; Braun 2003; Dudley 2004; Green 2003; McFarlane 1993; Murillo 2003; Osterling 1989; Sánchez, Meertens, and Hynds 2001), this article will offer an historical analysis of the dynamics of Colombia's forgotten revolutionary struggle. The central argument is that a reassessment of the FARC is critically important in relation to what can be described as a 'forgotten' or largely 'invisible' revolution. The article therefore tackles a critical problem prevalent in the existing literature: despite the end of the Cold War and other liberation struggles in Latin America, how does the FARC continue to exist in Colombia?

Revolutionary politics in Latin America in the twenty first century is identified with the Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, Evo Morales of Bolivia, Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua, and other populist leaders who work within liberal political institutions and markets. Like Colombia itself the struggle of the FARC remains captive to the US 'War on Drugs and Terror' propaganda. An understanding how such a movement exists in extraordinary times demands an examination of the FARC and the forces supporting and resisting the revolutionary war in Colombia.

Liberation from Spanish rule in 1810 brought to Colombia two dominant electoral parties and traditions, the Liberal and Conservative. These two ideological traditions were often in violent conflict. Conservatives sought a centralized government with ties to the Catholic Church and limited manhood suffrage based on property ownership. Liberals wanted a decentralized government with home rule, the separation of church and state, and voting rights for men of property and wealth (Pearce 1990). Both parties have fostered generational loyalties through traditional Creole beliefs (Green 2003). The parties embraced a racism

toward Indians, a 'holy' crusade against atheist forces, and a fear of revolution from 'below' (Garcia 1955). Beyond these parties, grew a hatred of the oligarchy's 'democracy' limited to its own members ruling elite. Ruling class hatred of the popular masses and its brutality when challenged has periodically united radical factions and splinter groups of the Left, historically led by Communists. Colombia's land problem and the failure of the Liberal and Conservative parties to resolve it unleashed a virtual civil war, *La Violencia*, from 1948 until 1958.

In the 1946 presidential election, a Liberal Party candidate Jorge Eliecer Gaitán, represented its most radical faction which included Generals Rafael Uribe Uribe and Benjamin Herrera, who fought the Conservatives during Colombia's War of a Thousand Days (1899-1903) (Green 2003). The radical liberalism of nineteenth and early twentieth century Colombia rhetorically identified with socialism to win working class voters. Prominent 'Left-liberals' and 'Gaitanistas' made repeated references to Uribe Uribe's prediction that if Liberalism did not become 'socialism' it would eventually disappear into irrelevancy (Green 2003). Uribe Uribe and Herrera were remembered by their supporters as Liberal defenders of the working class. Gaitán rekindled this radical liberal tradition. He promised to save the 'real country' from the 'political country' of the oligarchy.

'Gaitanismo' attempted to unite the majority of Colombians with a genuine hatred for the 'oligarchy.' His appeal was to the shopkeepers and professionals of the petite-bourgeoisie as well as to the workers and the peasantry (Pearce 1990). The Conservatives saw Gaitán as their natural enemy who promised land reform. The Liberal Party structure and the Colombian Communist Party leadership (*Partido Comunista de Colombia*, PCC) presented Gaitán as a political rival. Left-liberal Gaitanistas, majority rank and file PCC members, and more crucially, workers, sympathized or became Gaitán's supporters. Political battles between the Liberal and Communist parties were fought within Colombia's trade unions (Green 2003). The Liberal Party machine controlled the countryside where the majority of Colombians lived but Gaitán was the hope of the city streets and barrios across Colombia. The broad left was divided between Liberal and

Communist party leadership. Divisions were orchestrated by the ruling class. Colombia's Communists were accused of being 'Agents of Moscow' and Gaitán was compared to Argentina's Perón (Green 2000).¹ Perón relied upon the mobilization of a solid urban working class base. Unlike Perón's 'third position,' which rhetorically stood in 'between' and 'beyond' capitalism and communism, Gaitán's support was both divided and was never consolidated. Leaders of the Liberal Party accused Gaitán of being a communist, whereas he identified himself as a 'socialist' (Green 2003). Preoccupied with the struggle against Fascism in Europe in the 1930s and 1940s, the PCC failed to capitalize on the powerful mass campaign of Gaitán that Washington viewed as an emerging revolutionary situation in Colombia (U.S. State Department 1943; Federal Bureau of Investigation 1945). The Liberal Party chose Gabriel Turbay instead of Gaitán as presidential candidate. The Liberals lost the 1946 election to the Conservatives for the first time since 1930.

In a political atmosphere of intensified class conflict, multi-class convenience, and ideological rivalries, a popular revolt with the support of sections of the Bogotá police was set in motion. It was an insurrection unprecedented anywhere in history except for the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, rivalling only the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) (Ramsey 1973). The *Bogotázo* of the urban poor and the subsequent civil war occurred when Gaitán was gunned down on April 9, 1948 (Idels 2002; Weiner 2008).

The Colombian people rose from their solitude abandoning the 'tyranny of their prejudices' and the 'fixed ideas of the past' as the nation descended into class war. Gaitanistas and Communists blamed the new Conservative government for the murder of Gaitán (FARC-EP 2000). Radicalized students from the *Universidad Nacional* called for *juntas revolucionarias* in reference to political bodies formed during the Wars of

¹ It is worth noting that similar to the Colombian Liberal Party in that time, Perón in Argentina also represented unionists and Leftists who would eventually be persecuted by the Right. Some interesting parallels can be drawn with 'La Violencia' in Colombia and the 'dirty war' in Argentina where at least 30,000 leftists 'disappeared' with Washington's approval. See "Kissinger To the Argentine Generals in 1976: If There Are Things That Have To Be Done, You Should Do Them Quickly," The National Security Archive, accessed October 18, 2010, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB133/index.htm>.

Independence (Hylton 2006). Workers and city dwellers, the middle class and small traders stormed the city attacking police stations and government offices, which symbolized a system that excluded and impoverished them, instigating *La Violencia*.

Insurgents called for a 'new revolutionary order' but the popular rage failed to bring a revolutionary transformation (Hylton 2006). Apart from ideological divisions and the lack of revolutionary organization in the cities, Colombia's urban-rural divide united in class conflict. Conservatives formed paramilitary groups in the cities with wealthy landowners in rural and remote areas, reigniting an older Spanish colonial war against the landless peasants (Richani 2002). The government called upon all armed bodies of the state including the military to fire on crowds. The army and police were purged of Liberals. All public officials were appointed by Conservatives. The upsurge convulsed Colombia, sweeping through the countryside (Hobsbawm 1963). Paramilitary groups of civilians and police, such as the *aplanchadores* ('flatteners' from Antioquía Department), *chulavitas* (volunteers from Chulavita in Boyaca Department), *penca ancha* ('heavy whip' from Sucre), and the infamous *pájaros* ('birds' or assassins for hire from Valle and Caldas) carried out military operations against known Communists and Gaitanistas (Sánchez, Meertens, and Hynds 2001).

Defections from the Liberal Party were expressed in banditry and rebellion, which drew some Liberals into the Communist ranks. The PCC called for the 'people's mass self-defence,' advancing the revolutionary slogan, 'Reply to the violence of the reactionaries with the organized violence of the masses' (Partido Comunista de Colombia 1960). The mountains of Colombia became the only place where resistance to the state terror could be organized. Reflecting a long guerrilla tradition dating back to the Independence Wars, the PCC played a pivotal role in founding guerrilla camps and reorganizing the peasant resistance for self-defence. Communists founded a training school for guerrilla warfare in the Viota Department of Cundinamarca (Bailey 1967). Complete with a revolutionary program for a 'Popular Movement of National Liberation,' principal

guerrilla leaders who participated in the *Bogotázo* began military operations against the State (Hylton 2006).

The Conservative government of Mariano Ospina Perez, which won the 1946 election, did little to end ruling class divisions. In 1950 the Conservative Laureano Gómez won the presidency because Liberals refused to participate. Gómez established a Falangist style dictatorship that organized political repression and openly supported Franco's Spain.² The Conservative Party and the Catholic Church promoted the ideology of '*hispanidad*,' a Colombian version of Falangism which appealed to national patriotism by attacking the "twin imperialisms" of capitalism and communism with military authoritarianism and unchallenged Catholicism (Laqueur 1978; Hylton 2006). Gómez temporarily ceded the presidency to Roberto Urdaneta Arbelaez after suffering a heart attack. Gómez resumed power but was overthrown by a coup led by General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla in 1953 supported by factions within both traditional parties and Washington (Bailey 1967; Molano 2000). Rojas attempted to end *La Violencia* by declaring a general amnesty for all guerrilla fighters. Approximately 6,500 Liberal guerrillas surrendered, a considerable number for irregular forces. At the time of the general amnesty, up to 30,000 armed guerrillas were reported to have been active (Campos, Borda, and Luna 1963). Communist guerrillas held out in the highlands, expecting further military operations against them.

Divorced from Liberal politics and politicians, peasant protest movements emerged in the mid 1950s. The Colombian State rapidly changed its political tone from 'guerrillas' to 'bandoleros' (bandits) to demonize the popular insurgency (Ramsey 1973). In remote areas where agrarian extortion and land expropriation had been taking place the Colombian State described the formation of 'Soviet Republics' (Bailey 1967). With the exception of these 'Soviet Republics' formed by the revolutionaries, reactionary terror worked with criminal groups and urban gangsters to exterminate any political opposition (Campos, Borda, and Luna 1963).

² As in the United States, a section of the Colombian bourgeoisie regarded Liberal reformism as Bolshevik.

In 1956 Conservative and Liberal leaders joined forces to overturn the Rojas dictatorship to form another dictatorship led by their political parties (Bailey 1967). Washington's Cold War policy of anti-Communism helped to unify the Conservative and Liberal parties through the Frente Nacional (National Front). It was a dictatorship of ruling class unity between Colombia's landowners and the urban bourgeoisie (Richani 2002). The political arrangement was to settle differences between Conservatives and Liberals with alternating presidencies: Alberto Lleras Camargo (Liberal) 1958–62; Guillermo León Valencia (Conservative) 1962–66; Carlos Lleras Restrepo (Liberal) 1966–70; Misael Pastrana Borrero (Conservative) 1970–74. This rotating form of dictatorships was sustained through state repression against all revolutionary elements.

'*La Violencia*' was the largest armed conflict in the Western Hemisphere since the Mexican Revolution (1910–20). As in Mexico, Colombian revolutionaries were described as "*bandoleros*," "gangs," "barbarians," or "terrorists" (Ramsey 1973). Like the Spanish Civil War (1936–39), much of the literature describes *La Violencia* simply as a "civil war" fuelled by revenge, families, and generations pitted against each other through political loyalties. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Gabriel García Márquez (1967 [1978]) describes how houses were painted red (Liberal) or blue (Conservative), marking the official color of each party. But *La Violencia* went far beyond political loyalties and party conflict. It was a major ideological conflict, which divided a nation in support and rejection of the 'oligarchy.' *La Violencia* revealed Colombia's class antagonisms through national conflict.

La Violencia is described as a "rural phenomenon,"³ but the masses waged revolutionary war in the mountains, the jungle, and the plains, and the cities. The poor landless peasantry of Colombia waged an unremitting war against the feudal *latifundista* (big landlord). The poor peasantry became no longer 'hands' for the landlord but makers of their own fate. Without Communist leadership this rural uprising would not have been possible. The *Bogotázo* triggered an aborted classic social revolution which,

³ See Ramsey's "Critical Bibliography." In his massive survey of the critical literature on *La Violencia* Ramsey concludes it was a rural phenomenon.

having spontaneously flared up, settled back into a “smoky mass showing only an occasional glimmer” (Hobsbawm 1963, 249).

A nascent revolutionary movement was created in response to state terror, which beheaded, crucified and hanged its victims. Political prisoners were thrown from airplanes, infants bayoneted, school children raped, pregnant women disembowelled, ears were severed and heads scalped (Campos, Borda, and Luna 1963; Brittain 2010). The ‘Colombian necktie’ popular in later American gangster films found its origins in *La Violencia*. Such violence paralleled the bloodletting of the Spanish *conquistadores* (Bailey 1967).⁴

La Violencia cost the lives of approximately 300,000 Colombians, with 600,000 wounded, maimed and traumatized in the name of protecting the nation’s ‘institutions’ (FARC-EP 2000; Campos, Borda, and Luna 1963; Hecht 1977). Conservatives were condemned by Communists and revolutionary Liberals as ‘*Falangistas*’ for their state terrorism (Campos, Borda, and Luna 1963). *La Violencia* came to its official end with the National Front’s ascendancy in which Conservatives and Liberals shared public office. Class conflict did not end. Instead, ‘the violence’ was concentrated in the countryside. The Colombian forms of fascism and liberalism masked the continuing class warfare. In Colombia, the popular masses were made silent. US imperialism brought order to the divisions within the Colombian oligarchy.

La Violencia’s conclusion ensured the landless remained landless and the oligarchy’s hold over land. In the cities the social peace was maintained by state repression of worker resistance (Pearce 1990). In the late 1950s enemies of the state were seen as revolutionary outlaws by the silenced masses. They included Manuel Marulanda Velez ‘Tiro Fijo’ (Sure Shot, later the FARC’s leader), Colonel Enrique Lister (a famous Communist leader of the Spanish civil war), Dumar Aljure, ‘Zarpazo’ (Conrado Salazar), the indigenous leader Quintín Lame, Pedro Brincos, Medardo Terjos ‘Capitán Venganza’ (Captain Vengeance), Teófilo Rojas Varón ‘Chispas’ (Sparks), José William Angel Aranguren ‘Desquite’

⁴ The Spanish crushed the ‘Comunero Rebellion’ (1779-81) of peasants and artisans protesting high taxes. Its leaders were dismembered and hung on pikes along the highways until their flesh rotted.

(Retaliation), Agustín Bonilla ‘El Diablo’ (The Devil), Grillo Marín (The Cricket), Manuel Cedeño ‘El Mica’ (The Monkey) and others. Most were communist guerillas or aligned with communists on State death lists (Ramírez 1959; Zackrison 1989; Salazar 1978; Maullín 1969). To erase any popular memory of *La Violencia*, the National Front blamed the social explosion on communism. The National Front, through the *Ministerio de Gobierno*, centralized all information on the State’s enemies, known or suspected. Pacification programs or ‘military civic action’ forced poor peasants into ‘rehabilitation programs,’ as Communist guerrillas remained at large (Gómez 1967). These operations were constructed under the direction of US aid programs (Vieira 1965). The ‘land problem’ was replaced by the ‘national problem’ of *bandoleros y terroristas* to erase the memory of the causes of *La Violencia*. Guided by Washington, the Colombian ruling class redefined the root causes of the national conflict. Over time the middle and upper class Colombians learned and understood the ‘national problem.’⁵

With US aid and assistance Colombia became a showcase for President Kennedy’s Alliance for Progress (AFP) of 1961. Commercial export-oriented agriculture thrived and major landowners dominated the government. The AFP was a program to make Latin America more reliant upon the US and offset the radicalizing effect of the Cuban Revolution (1959) through military, technical assistance and economic aid (Hylton 2006). Colombia followed the Alliance’s emphasis on self-help by undertaking selective agrarian reforms (Gott 1970). The areas selected were Communist held regions of Nariño, Cauca, Huila (a part of Tolima) seized from *latifundistas*, and in Bolívar, Atlántico and Magdalena on the Atlantic coast (Hobsbawm 1963).

With US intelligence, the Colombian military knew that Communist forces who survived *La Violencia* had regrouped in the regions of Villarrica, Sumapaz, and the south of Tolima, remote areas, mountainous and jungle. In the *Guerra de Villarrica* of 1955, Colombian security forces led by

⁵ To this day, the standard view on *La Violencia* remains fixated on the Colombian bourgeoisie’s argument that political activity in Colombia transpired into mere banditry, not revolutionary transformation.

General Rojas Pinilla began an extermination campaign with a blitz of 5,000 troops and an aerial bombardment of napalm at Villarrica in Tolima Department (Pérez and Lenguita 2005). For six months guerrillas entrenched themselves in fixed positions to form a 200-kilometer 'Cortina' (Curtain) (FARC-EP 2000). Aerial supremacy with more than fifty warplanes including US donated F-47's and B-268 bombers forced the insurgency into guerrilla warfare and organized flight (Ospina 2008; Hylton 2006). The revolutionary potential of the *Bogotázo* was neutralized in the urban areas as resistance was hunted down in remote rural Colombia.

One hundred thousand peasant families were displaced by the *Guerra de Villarrica* (Hylton 2006). At Tolima, a nucleus of no more than several hundred guerrillas defended 20,000 peasant families fleeing toward different directions (FARC-EP 2000; Pérez and Lenguita 2005). A legendary long march covering hundreds of miles and comprised of two main columns was formed by the PCC (FARC-EP 2000; Hylton 2006). Under constant attack by the army and air force, half the Communist guerrillas made one column retreating to Sumapaz passing through Cundinamarca. The other trekked toward the eastern cordillera crossing the Magdalena River to find settlements in El Guayabero in Western Meta and El Pato in northwestern Caqueta. The number of guerrillas and peasants slaughtered is unclear, but range in the hundreds to several thousand; fighters captured were sent to the 'Cunday Concentration Camp' to be interrogated, tortured and killed (Hylton 2006; Partido Comunista de Colombia 1960; Pérez and Lenguita 2005). Trade union and peasant leaders became guerrilla commanders inspired by the Paris Commune (1871) and the Chinese Revolution (1949) and built Marquetalia, the principal rebel agrarian community, and others in Rio Chiquito, El Pato, Guayabero, and Santa Barbara (Kirk 2003; Arenas 1972). The renewal of *La Violencia* led to a general strike and street protests in the capital. The Conservative and Liberal parties responded by forcing General Rojas Pinilla's resignation in 1957.

On May 18, 1964 a US counterinsurgency operation with 16,000 troops, tanks, helicopters, and warplanes was unleashed against

Marquetalia (Colby 1996). US advisors and Colombian veterans of the Chinese Civil War (1945-1949) and the Korean War directed the campaign (Grandin 2006). 'Operation Marquetalia' forced the insurgency to become a mobile force rather than a defensive militia. It was the first numerous counterinsurgent failures by the State (Hylton 2006). The PCC led peasant army retreated to the agricultural frontiers of Amazonia beyond reach of the State (Schneider 2000). The Cuban Revolution sustained morale amongst the Colombian rebel forces. In 1964 *La Violencia* veterans Jacobo Arenas and Manuel Marulanda Vélez (*Tiro Fijo*, 'Sure shot') founded the FARC-EP. Arenas was a trade union leader and a PCC member when he met Marulanda, a young Liberal peasant leader. Influenced by Arenas, 'Tiro Fijo' joined the PCC to become a revolutionary leader until his death in 2008 at 84 years of age (Petras 2008). On January 1966 during the 10th Congress of the PCC, Colombian liberation forces were officially recognized as a guerrilla movement by Castro's Cuba, the Soviet Union, and People's Republic of China (Gott 1970; FARC-EP 2000).

The Liberal Party, Colombia's largest electoral party of Colombia, was now divided between the official Liberals of post-Gaitanismo and the *Movimiento Revolucionario Liberal* (Revolutionary Liberal Movement, MRL) founded by Alfonso Lopez Michelsen (Hobsbawm 1963). The MRL broke away from the Liberal Party in 1959, when Gaitanistas and former Liberal guerrillas swelled its membership. *Fidelistas* (Castroists), as they were known, stood in opposition to the PCC. They formed the *Frente Unido de Acción Revolucionaria* (United Front of Revolutionary Action, FUAR), a coalition of mostly left-wing intellectuals. Until the mid 1960s, the official line of the PCC did not support armed struggle. The FUAR and a group of Bogotá students called the *Movimiento de Obreros, Estudiantes y Campesinos* (Movement of Workers, Students and Peasants, MOEC) failed to build a guerrilla movement (Bethell 1995). The FUAR and MOEC members were devoted to 'Gaitanismo' through the involvement of Gaitán's daughter and son in law (Hobsbawm 1963). Through the 1960s and 1970s, the broad Colombian Left was the essentially Gaitanista MRL (Hobsbawm 1963).

In 1965 disgruntled militants from the FUAR and MOEC formed the Cuban inspired National Liberation Army (ELN), combining Marxism-Leninism with Christian Liberation Theology. In 1968 the Maoist oriented *Ejército Popular de Liberación* (Popular Liberation Army, EPL) was also established to wage revolutionary war in the countryside against the National Front dictatorship. In contrast to the peasant based FARC, the ELN and EPL were led by urban middle class intellectuals. The EPL emerged because of the Sino-Soviet split and the ELN remained opposed to the PCC even though the party supported rural insurgency. The PCC's change in policy was due to a number of factors. The increasing prestige of the Cuban regime among left-wing forces in Latin America and its friendship with the Soviet Union meant that the PCC faced growing competition by ELN and EPL fighters. But most importantly, widespread opposition to the National Front by the Colombian Left and dissatisfaction with the MRL Gaitanistas compelled the PCC to endorse the armed movement and the FARC which steadily grew in strength (Bethell 1995). Between 1970 and 1982 the FARC grew from a nucleus of 500 campesinos to a revolutionary army of 3,000 peasant rebels (FARC-EP 2000).

The collapse in Tsarist Russia by the Bolsheviks, Republican China by the Maoists, and Cuba by the Castroists was achieved with outright military victories. Since the formation of the FARC and other Marxist forces in the mid 1960s, the Colombian revolutionary war has maintained a war of position against the Colombian State. A revolutionary moment like the *Bogotázo* of 1948 had been contained by the oligarchy and Washington. A blueprint for two Colombias was created. One was connected to coffee and manufacturing in Antioquía, the Western Andean Departments of Valle, Caldas, Risaralda, Quindio, and the Caribbean port of Barranquilla. This 'richer' Colombia has received government assistance and foreign direct investment (Hylton 2006). The five percent of Colombians who own more than half of the land received half of the national income and represented developed Colombia (Hylton 2006). The other Colombia covered 70 percent of its remaining territory. Blacks, Indians, frontier settlers, mostly poor landless Colombians, lived and toiled in the second undeveloped Colombia of the Southern and Eastern plains, lowlands, the Pacific and

Atlantic Coasts. This Colombia was ignored by the state. It received no electricity, few public services and minimal infrastructure (Richani 2002). The rural landless poor both lived and supported the FARC in this second Colombia (Brittain 2010). Support for FARC from the urban proletariat and trade unions in the first Colombia continued (Petras 2001). Since the formation of the guerrilla groups, the FARC has functioned as a virtual state making force in the second backward Colombia abandoned by a weak central government.

By 1974 the National Front period ended when the Liberal president Alfonso López Michelsen was elected. In spite of his Gaitanista past, López sought to make Colombia, the “Japan of South America,” using Pinochet’s Chile as a model (Zamosc 1986, 122). This was made possible with Colombia’s growing cocaine trade, which linked drug money with state power. The rising power of Colombian traffickers channelled funds to the political campaigns of both Liberal and Conservative parties (Strong 1995). Money-laundering through the *Banco de la República* was virtually unhindered under President López (Hylton 2006). López had promised land reform, but brought on shock therapy to the economy, laying off many public sector workers and increasing state repression. On September 14, 1977 a national strike of over 5 million workers by Colombia’s four largest trade unions (the UTC, CTC, CSTC and CGT)⁶ paralyzed the nation for several days (Hecht 1977). The strike was the first general strike in the nation’s history. The López government described it as “a small April 9”—in reference to the 1948 *Bogotázo*—and replied with armed repression leaving 80 workers dead and 2,000 injured (Hanratty and Meditz 1988; Hecht 1977).

Latin America in the late 1970s was ruled by US backed military juntas intent on combating Communist guerrillas. The national security doctrine within the Southern Cone was “narco-terrorism,” which linked left-wing insurgencies with the drug trade (Scott and Marshall 1998). US President Nixon’s “War on Drugs” coupled with narco-terrorism national

⁶ The Conservative, Union de Trabajadores Colombianos (UTC); Liberal, Confederacion de Trabajadores Colombianos (CTC); Communist, Confederacion Sindical de Trabajadores de Colombia (CSTC) and the smaller Confederacion General del Trabajo (CGT).

security doctrine determined Washington's response to revolutionary forces inside the Western Hemisphere throughout the coming decade.

The neo-liberal transition away from National Front politics saw successive Colombian presidents fail to destroy the FARC. López faced a resurgence of FARC and ELN activity throughout the countryside and an urban-based insurgency named the *Movimiento 19 de Abril* (19th of April Movement, M-19). After the "final eradication" of FARC by Conservative President Misael Pastrana Borreo (1970-74), Washington shifted its attention to drugs rather than communism. Under pressure from US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, the issue of drugs became paramount in Bogotá. After Kissinger's fact finding trip to Colombia the Nixon administration concluded: López was "totally committed" to "go to war" against drugs, a policy which President Gerald Ford continued (Friman and Andreas 1999, 148). López' neo-liberal 'reforms' coincided with the rise of the informal sector, meaning cocaine money had become a narco-economy that would employ more than half of the urban workforce by 1980 (Hylton 2006).

President Reagan declared a war on narco-terrorism in Colombia, linking the drug war to the FARC, the Soviet Union, and other left-wing forces (Scott and Marshall 1998). The War on Drugs in the 1980s was Colombia's "cocaine decade" when the Medellin and Cali cartels competed for supremacy. The drug cartels, compradors, with rural allies in the landlord class determined Colombia's fate with National Front style extremism and a huge US market for cocaine (Richani 2002; Lee 1998). The CIA worked with Colombian military officers to reorganize Colombia's intelligence network, strengthen pre-existing anti-guerrilla death squads with direct links to drug cartels, and to wage a counterinsurgency war against the FARC (Scott 2003; Stich 2001).

Growing class conflict threatened the peace of the "first Colombia" as the working class mobilized with industrial actions throughout the 1980s. A paramilitary organization called *Muerte a los Secuestradores* (Death to Kidnappers, MAS) was established to kill guerrillas who kidnapped members of the national business class for ransom. MAS also

targeted leftists, trade unionists, civil rights activists and peasants working with the FARC (Scott 2003).

Conservative President Belisario Betancur (1982–86) extended the crackdown on subversives undertaken by Liberal Julio César Turbay Ayala (1978-82). The Liberal Party found new sources of funding and support from an emerging ‘narco-bourgeoisie,’ which spelt the beginning of the end of Conservative party rule in Colombia (Hylton 2006). In 1985 the FARC founded the political party the *Union Patriótica* (Patriotic Union, UP) as part of an insurgent strategy to combine “all forms of struggle” with peace negotiations that the guerrillas and sectors of the Colombian left had initiated with the Betancur administration (Dudley 2004). From the mid 1980s to the mid 1990s, 5,000 activists and leaders including elected officials, candidates and community organizers of the UP were assassinated in a “deliberate policy of political murder” by the Colombian military and government (Amnesty International 1988, 1). Two of the UP’s presidential candidates, eight congressmen, seventy councillors, dozens of deputies and mayors and hundreds of trade unionists and peasant leaders were slain (Dudley 2004; Brittain 2010). Any illusions of a possible Colombian parliamentary road to socialism were eliminated.

Since the 1980s, a virtual ‘narco-state’ subservient to US imperialism controls the first Colombia (Villar and Cottle 2011). An electoral regime in Bogotá runs ‘stable’ Colombia, which is gripped by fear both of revolutionary change and a state of terror where paramilitary death squads arrest, torture and kill those indentified as ‘enemies’ (RPASUR 2012, Robles 2012).

Between 1987 and the early 1990s, the FARC and ELN formed the *Coordinadora Guerrillera Simón Bolívar* (Simon Bolivar Guerrilla Coordination, CGSB). The popular armed movements together with M-19, a short lived indigenous rebel group named the *Quintín Lame*, and the *Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores* (Workers Revolutionary Party of Colombia, PRT) formed an armed united front (FARC-EP 2000). In the 1980s the EPL broke with the Maoist principle of prolonged war and the leadership role of the peasantry (Richani 2002). By 1991, the EPL had been infiltrated and absorbed into MAS’s successor paramilitary organization,

the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia, AUC) (Hylton 2006). The AUC were death squads formed by landlords and cattlemen with links to politicians and businessmen to hunt and kill rebel forces. In response, FARC moved to eliminate the EPL-paramilitary contingent whose mission was to liquidate the FARC. In 1991 the EPL initiated ‘peace talks’ with the César Gaviria Trujillo government, whereupon 2,000 EPL fighters ‘demobilized’ to form the political party *Esperanza, Paz y Libertad* (Hope, Peace and Liberty) (Bouvier 2004). The FARC and ELN condemned the EPL party as traitors and collaborators. A splinter group within the EPL named the EPL–Dissident Line waged a military campaign against *Esperanza* with FARC and ELN support (Human Rights Watch 1998).

The M-19 also demobilized after membership evaporated after its failed siege of the Palace of Justice in Bogotá on November 6, 1985. Many of the M-19’s leaders were murdered by MAS-AUC hit men (Lee 1998). Like *Esperanza*, the M-19 formed a political party, the *Alianza Democrática M-19* (M-19 Democratic Alliance, AD/M-19), espousing with radical rhetoric but renouncing the armed struggle.

By the end of the cocaine decade in 1989 progressive writers and intellectuals including Gabriel García Márquez wrote to the FARC and ELN to lay down their arms. They argued that the wheel of history had turned and for the insurgents to pursue reform through peaceful means (Hylton 2006). The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 confirmed a debate in the West about the ‘evils’ and ‘failures’ of Soviet Communism. The end of the Cold War led the US to sponsor the Central American Peace Accords (Huntington 1991; Fukuyama 1992). This move demobilized leftist insurgencies and armed struggles against the US backed juntas in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras and Guatemala (Huntington 1991). Despite the expectations in Bogotá and Washington, it did not change the revolutionary war in Colombia.

In 1991, a US Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) report identified the Liberal Colombian senator Alvaro Uribe Vélez as one of the “more important Colombian narco-traffickers contracted by the Colombian narcotics cartels for security, transportation, distribution, collection and

enforcement of narcotics operations in both the US and Colombia” (The National Security Archive 2004). Between 1995 and 1997, Uribe established a civilian-military force known as ‘*Convivir*’ (meaning to ‘cohabitate’) as Governor of Antioquía, which were absorbed by the AUC. By the mid 1990s, over 500 *convivir* existed throughout the country coercing rural civilians to act as paramilitaries under its local military command (Avilés 2006; Tate 2002). Thousands of trade unionists, students and human rights workers were murdered, disappeared or displaced (Feiling 2004). The creation of civilian militias were endorsed by a RAND study called the “Colombian Labyrinth,” which argued for the restructuring of US counterinsurgency operations (Rabasa and Chalk 2001). A DIA top secret report concluded that the FARC could defeat Colombia’s military within five years unless the armed forces were drastically restructured (Farah 1998).

In response to this prediction US President Clinton authorized ‘Plan Colombia,’ a \$1.3 billion US package to fight the War on Drugs in 2000. The plan provided greater military assistance, including helicopters, planes, and training, a massive chemical and biological warfare effort, as well as electronic surveillance technology (Storrs and Serafino 2002; Villar, Cottle, and Keys 2003). The Plan Colombia’s budget expanded to \$7.5 billion, of which the Colombian government originally pledged \$4 billion, the US \$1.3 billion, and the European Union and other countries \$2.2 billion (Livingstone 2003).

The CIA’s relationship with the paramilitary death squads was assured through ‘Plan Colombia,’ which carried out most of the political killings in Colombia (The National Security Archive 2008; Amnesty International 2001). The Clinton intervention completely militarized Colombia and strengthened the growing narco-bourgeoisie. By the late 1990s, Colombia’s Central Bank estimated that 30 percent of Colombia’s total wealth derived from the cocaine trade (Villar 2007).

During the presidency of Andrés Pastrana Arango (1998-2002), FARC controlled San Vicente Del Caguán, known as the *zona de despeje* or the demilitarised zone (DMZ). The DMZ consisted of five municipalities the size of Switzerland, where tens of thousands of workers and peasants lived

and participated in its daily management (Leech 2002). London's *Telegraph* described San Vicente Del Caguán as "FARClandia, the world's newest country" (Lamb 2000; Novak 1999). To justify invading the DMZ, on February 21, 2002 Pastrana accused the FARC of running a lucrative drug-trafficking business and of hiding kidnapping victims in the zone (Ruth 2002). Under pressure from US President George W. Bush to wage war on terrorism, Pastrana ordered the Colombian military to invade the zone and the Colombian air force to bomb its communities. The FARC's 'Soviet Republic' was the safest region in all Colombia (Hylton 2006). Anticipating a military attack on San Vicente's population, FARC ordered residents to evacuate and retreat to nearby mountain jungles where most of the guerrillas were located. As with Marquetalia in 1964, the Colombian military offensive on San Vicente Del Caguán was to destroy FARC's efforts to construct an alternative socialist society.

In 2001, President Bush added \$550 million to Plan Colombia, to terminate narco-terrorism (Giordano 2001). Between 1996 and 2001 US military aid to Colombia increased fifteen-fold from \$67 million to \$1 billion (Tickner 2003). Pastrana's support for the Bush "War on Terror" prepared the political rise of Alvaro Uribe, the former Antioquían Governor, Bogotá Mayor, who became president from 2002 to 2010. When Uribe succeeded Pastrana as president, Colombia was still a country at war with itself. Uribe ran as an independent Liberal presidential candidate on a war platform to defeat the FARC and ELN. 'Uribismo' found its coherence in *Colombia Primero* (Colombia First), a political movement of the far-right (Ospina 2008). Uribe declared there was no conflict in the country, whereas past presidents acknowledged that FARC and ELN were an inherent part of the nation's troubled history (Gardner 2000). Uribe declared that "narco-terrorists" were attempting to overthrow a democratic state. "If Colombia [did] not have drugs, it would not have terrorists," Uribe said in a speech to the Organization of American States (OAS) Permanent Council in 2004 (2004).

In October 2002, US special operations teams were ordered to eliminate "all high officers of the FARC," and "scattering those who escape to the remote corners of the Amazon" (Garamone 2004; Gorman 2002). In

2008 FARC's chief negotiator, Comandante Raúl Reyes, and another senior member, Ivan Ríos, were murdered under Uribe's Plan Patriota. On March 3, in a mountainous area of the western department of Caldas, Ríos was shot in the forehead by Pedro Pablo Montoya 'Rojas,' his personal bodyguard. After also killing Ríos' partner, Rojas delivered a severed right hand, a laptop computer, and an ID to the army for proof of death. Rojas stated that he was 'betrayed' by State authorities, who had offered a reward for Ríos' death as part of a military operation. Rojas was imprisoned for 54 years for kidnapping and rebellion, but not for the murder of Ríos and his partner (RCN Radio 2011). Raúl Reyes was slain in a targeted killing by army and air force personnel. On March 26, the legendary eighty four year old Manuel Marulanda (Tiro Fijo) died of natural causes. The international media concluded that these deaths had weakened the FARC prompting "desertions" and "organizational decay" (Brittain 2010). Uribe claimed victories over the FARC, which involved false body counts or *Falsos Positivos* in which thousands of young men from slum districts were murdered by the Colombian military then dressed as guerrillas killed in combat (The National Security Archive 2009). Uribe dismissed these revelations as "false accusations" invented by the FARC (McDermott 2009; Terra Colombia 2008).

In contrast to the restoration of liberal democracy in Argentina, Chile, Uruguay and Central America in the late twentieth century; Colombian working class, radical, and leftist parties have been violently repressed under the presidencies of Uribe and his successor, Juan Manuel Santos. Both have consolidated the extreme expression of oligarchic rule (Ospina 2011). Where the National Front ended bipartisan party conflict in the twentieth century, Uribismo destroyed Colombia's two party system through far right extremism and narco-paramilitarism. The Conservative Party is a hollow shell. Many right-wing Liberals are grouped into a new party the *Partido Social de Unidad Nacional* (Social Party of National Unity), led by Juan Manuel Santos. As a party of former *Uribistas*, power brokers, and leading members of the Colombian elite, they stand in radical opposition to the FARC and ELN. Political differences between Uribe and Santos over FARC have surfaced. Nevertheless, Santos has introduced

legislation which provides reparations to victims of the conflict and the restoration of lands seized from peasants by right-wing paramilitaries and landowners. Uribe argues Santos has yielded in his opposition to the FARC and has criticized him for establishing friendly diplomatic relations with Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez (Boadle 2011).

On March 1, 2008, relations between Colombia and Venezuela were broken when Uribe ordered the Colombian air force to bomb a FARC encampment near the Ecuadorian border. The FARC emissary Raúl Reyes and 24 foreign sympathizers (including 4 Mexicans and an Ecuadorian) died in the bombing raid (Marcella 2008). It provoked the worst crisis of inter-American diplomacy of the last decade. Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa ordered his army to the border and suspended diplomatic relations with Colombia. Chávez mobilized troops on the border. The Venezuelan president had begun mediations between FARC and Colombian government representatives before Uribe terminated the talks and launched the bombing raid (Marcella 2008). After the raid, Chávez urged the FARC to free its prisoners of war and end the armed struggle (BBC News 2008).

In the mid 2000s a center-left social-democratic party named the *Polo Democrático Alternativo* (Alternative Democratic Pole, PDA) emerged to oppose the *Uribistas* in the Colombian electoral system. The PDA seeks to reform Colombian capitalism but is incapable of challenging the oligarchy (Leech 2011). In a country where almost half of the population does not vote a parliamentary resolution to Colombia's internal conflict remains unachievable, despite calls for peace and reconciliation with the FARC by supporters of Bogotá mayor Gustavo Petro, a former M-19 guerrilla (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance 2010). The Bogotá mayor may represent a shift in consciousness among sections of the urban middle class, yet political assassinations of the revolutionary left continue (Leech 2011).

Between 2007 and 2008, state repression intensified as the number of FARC guerrilla attacks across Colombia rose (Brittain 2010). This prompted Uribe to extradite paramilitary leaders outside his inner circle to the United States on charges of drug trafficking. Salvatore Mancuso, the

leader of the former AUC testified, “I am proof positive of state paramilitarism in Colombia” (Forero 2007). What became known as the ‘parapolítica’ scandal had no affect on the Uribe government. If anything, it confirmed a reality about the country that may be described as narco-fascism, an outgrowth of twentieth century Colombian *Falangism* (Villar 2012).

Narco-fascism is different to twentieth century *Falangism* in that the Colombian oligarchy maintains power through mass violence, social exclusion, centralized authority and a continuing dependency upon the US. Unlike the *Falangistas*, the *Uribistas* under Santos have unrestrained political and military power backed by an evolving War on Terror under US President Obama. During the *Bogotázo* and throughout *La Violencia*, the ruling class fought for the middle and upper class interests through its parliamentary parties against *Gaitanismo*. Having lost the poor peasantry and sections of the urban proletariat to the FARC, the Uribe-Santos regime practices a form of narco-fascism by combining limited few elections with state terrorism and the flourishing cocaine trade. Following the Bush presidency, Obama has continued the fight against narco-terrorism by providing \$600 million in military aid to Colombia to protect “a potentially failed state under terrorist siege” (Shifter 2010; DeYoung and Duque 2011). In 2010 Obama praised the Colombian security forces for the murder of FARC Comandante Jorge Briceno (Mono Jojoy) (Feller 2010).

The Colombian people face unrelenting political repression. Both FARC and the Colombian state remain at war. Former US ambassador to El Salvador Robert White and Colombian historian Herbert Braun have argued that FARC will not and cannot be defeated (Braun 2003; Chernick 2007; Ungerman and Brohy 2003). As a discontinuous war of many wars the principle forces of imperialism and revolution have yet to resolve this conflict. Defections from the Colombian military are not uncommon just as the State’s victory propaganda over the FARC continues. The Colombian ruling class are accustomed to internal conflict and ideological disorientation. The Colombian revolutionary war is a long war stretched by historical variables and ruling class reaction. It is a modern revolutionary war of the twenty first century where reaction is disguised, state technology

overwhelming, and where the revolutionary forces are dismissed as narco-terrorists.

The Colombian class war has been shaped by the country's geographical differences of mountain, coast, jungle and plains typified by "two Colombias." In a geographical sense, Colombia is split by a contested dual power. In the new millennium, the FARC's "war of position" had intensified its "war of manoeuvre," consolidating popular support amongst the poorest in Colombian society through revolutionary warfare. It is difficult to predict what dynamics may trigger another *Bogotázo* or whether such a classical revolutionary event is possible, although it does appear that FARC is leading a peasant revolution. In regions under FARC control land has been redistributed to the peasants (Richani 2002; Brittain 2010). In the cities, FARC militias and support bases exist in an ephemeral clandestine form where unions, NGOs and intellectuals are violently repressed by the Colombian State (Petras 2001; Brittain 2010; Villar 2012). In 1993, the FARC formed the Clandestine Communist Party (*Partido Comunista Clandestino Colombiano*, PCCC) as a result of a split with the PCC. Factions within the PCC argued that the international correlation of forces did not favor armed struggle and to pursue parliamentary politics. The FARC argued there were no conditions for open political work in Colombia as the State terror had not ceased. The real number of the PCCC and the FARC is unknown as the majority of media and 'experts' simply view them as 'narco-terrorists.'⁷ In September 2011, the Colombian State's weakness was exposed when almost its entire intelligence database was made public. In a worsening security crisis denied by the State President Santos replaced the entire military command with the exception of the national police director (Alsema 2011; Noto 2011). Is FARC encircling the cities? Will Colombian workers simply await the arrival of the guerrilla liberators?

The Colombian revolution sparked by the *Bogotázo* was not simply about Liberal and Conservative party loyalties nor did it deteriorate into the

⁷ Estimates range from 6,500 to 10,000, but given the FARC's number of fighting forces in the mid-2000s such figures appear mistakenly exaggerated or manufactured.

narco-terrorism of the Colombian bourgeoisie aided by US imperialism. The National Front blamed *'bandoleros'* and *'terroristas'* as the 'national problem' to deny class justice and negate the land problem. The Colombian state historically has never had total control of the country. There have been regional elites that preferred to defend their local fiefdoms over a nation under siege. Along with most of Latin America, Spanish colonialism left a legacy for US imperialism to restore a wealthy, landowning comprador oligarchy that fears and despises the poor non-white majority and which is often in conflict with itself.

The central government is held together only by massive US military aid. The richer regions of the 'first' Colombia have become citadels of capital fortified by state terrorism. How the revolutionary war may be won is still unclear. In Republican China, the balance of power began to favor patriotic and revolutionary forces only when the Japanese directly intervened in the class war. Whether a direct US military intervention in Colombia sometime in the future will offer similar outcomes is open to debate.

Conclusion

In the past two decades more than 250,000 leftists have 'disappeared.' Colombian state repression breaks Guatemala's record of 200,000 leftists killed in the 1980s and eclipses Argentina's record in the 1970s by the tens of thousands if not hundreds of thousands (Robles 2011). From 2009 38,255 Colombian leftists were disappeared during President Alvaro Uribe Vélez's second term in office and the election of his successor, Juan Manuel Santos in 2010. Colombia's twenty first century *desaparecidos* outnumber the recorded mass murders committed by the military juntas of Guatemala (200,000), Argentina (30,000), Chile (3,000), and Uruguay (600) in the previous century (Robles 2011). The numbers of Colombians who were disappeared have been reduced by the use of crematory ovens and mass graves, resembling the Nazi programmes before and during World War Two. According to Azalea Robles, a Colombian investigative journalist, since 2005 173,183 political assassinations of leftists were carried out. Nearly 10,000 political prisoners

ranging from academics, unionists, students, to guerrilla combatants are incarcerated without trial in Colombia (Peace and Justice for Colombia 2006).⁸ With a population of over 46 million Colombia has 5.2 million displaced persons, mostly poor peasants, by the Colombian state's counterinsurgency against the FARC insurgency (Manus 2011).

A powerful revolutionary movement exists in Colombia. Along with the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (National Liberation Army, ELN) and a criminalized broad left within the trade union movement, the FARC is at the forefront of the resistance against a State characterized by far right extremism and narco-paramilitarism (Villar 2012). The regime relies on terror to break and defeat the FARC. In 2000, the FARC comprised of nearly 30,000 fighters on 60 fronts with support bases in *barrios* across the country (Brittain 2010). In the capital Bogotá with a population of over 7 million FARC militias number at least 2,000 to 2,500. In other regional cities their numbers range from 4 to 6,000 (Brittain 2010). At its peak in the late 1990s to the mid-2000s, FARC numbered between 40,000 to 50,000 fighters (Brittain 2010). In recent years the FARC have been reorganizing and adjusting their politico-military strategy. As León Valencia explains, "They have a new structure and a new strategy that has given them good results." There has been political debates over the level of morale within Colombian security forces as the FARC recruited and engaged with social movements: "they're putting more focus on conquering the [hearts and minds of the] population" (Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris 2011). In contrast, the dominant media view is the FARC is on its last legs after the murder of its leader, Alfonso Canos, who replaced Manuel Marulanda Velez in 2008. The FARC's new leader Timochenko stated, "The continuance of the strategic plan to take power for the people is guaranteed" (Muse 2011). Despite the propaganda war, the FARC remain a standing regular 'army of the people' as its name confirms.

The Colombian war is rooted in the inequalities of landownership, the legacy of Spanish colonialism (Richani 2002; Glennie 2011). The Colombian 'land problem' reflects an archaic feudal class system with a sharp urban-rural divide. Colombia has a largely backward agrarian

⁸ Robles estimates 7,500 political prisoners.

economy dominated by big and often absentee landlords (Livingstone 2003). In Colombia *latifundistas* and landless rural workers represent the historically unresolved 'land problem.' In urban areas, it is well known that paramilitary death squads murder trade unionists and suspected guerrilla sympathizers. Colombia's economy has a miniscule industrial base employing a small number of industrial proletarians. Its industrial core is in Bogotá, Medellín, Cali, and Barranquilla where only 13% comprise the industrial workforce (Central Intelligence Agency 2011). Regions of rural Colombia are rich in reserves of petroleum, coal, and coffee growing. Rural workers are the most exploited and represent a potential revolutionary force. Because of a sustained campaign of murder by the State Colombia registers the lowest unionization rate in Latin America (Stokes 2005; Leech 2011).

Colombia's close economic and political ties to US imperialism ensure continual support and funding by Washington. Colombia receives massive US military aid and training (The Center for Public Integrity 2007). In 2010, the US attempted to establish seven new military bases in Colombia to contain the FARC. Immediate priorities in two major theatres of war (Iraq and Afghanistan/Pakistan) and budgetary restraint negated this plan.

In recent developments US combat commanders from Iraq and Afghanistan have been sent to Colombia (Lindsay-Poland 2012). 'Exploratory talks' have also taken place between the Santos government and the FARC to find a political solution to the historical conflict (Pitts 2012). It has always been a policy of the FARC to seek dialogue with the government. Like Afghanistan, the fact that talks have been held (and planned for outside Colombia, in Norway or Cuba) is an indication of compromise on the part of the Colombian ruling class. However, for the talks to be successful Bogotá and Washington will have to accept prisoner releases, demilitarization of Colombian society and an opening of democratic space for the revolutionary left. The FARC remains well equipped with a new generation of leaders and fighters to continue the armed struggle. In a nation where poor peasants—over 68 percent of the population—own less than 5 percent of Colombian land and forty-two

percent of the fertile land is controlled by the “drug mafia” (Knoester 1998), the unequal distribution of land creates explosive landlord-tenant relations in which the FARC takes up the cause of the landless. Moreover, the birth of the *Marcha Patriótica* (Patriotic March) movement last April saw at least 150,000 workers march into the capital Bogotá, with reports of up to 450,000 across different cities in a call to end the political violence, oppression, and poverty; and for a negotiated settlement of the armed conflict and social justice (Telsur 2012; Marchapatriotica.org 2012b, 2012a). As in the past, Colombia’s business class with power and influence in over every sector of the Colombian economy, its foreign markets including the international cocaine trade views such developments as a security threat (Villar and Cottle 2012).

Colombia’s forgotten revolution has stood the test of time. In 1963, Eric Hobsbawm wrote, “any observer who believes that Colombia is living through anything but a pause of exhaustion is likely to have a very sharp awakening” (Hobsbawm 1963, 258). This revolution might well be remembered or learnt quickly when the forces of US imperialism are once again caught by surprise. This time led by an organized revolutionary force that is free from the illusions of the past and present, and whose people; have nothing to lose but their chains.

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