

The Underlying Dynamics of Colombia's Civil War

Author: Oliver Dodd

Source: *Midlands Historical Review*, Vol. 2 (2018)

Published: 09/01/2018

URL: <http://www.midlandshistoricalreview.com/the-underlying-dynamics-of-colombias-civil-war/>

The Underlying Dynamics of Colombia's Civil War

OLIVER DODD

Introduction

This article attempts to explain the underlying dynamics of Colombia's Civil War from a historical materialist approach. It is not possible, however, to appreciate the underlying dynamics of the armed conflict which characterised the period 1964-2002, without first looking at how the country's transition to capitalism resulted in *La Violencia* (1948-1958) – a violent class struggle that helped to pave the way for the Civil War of some twenty years later. Hence, to position capitalist structuring conditions as driving Colombia's Civil War, it has been essential to historicise processes of political and economic development, which date back some decades before the insurgency 'officially' began.

The article will be divided into four empirical sections. Section one will argue that *La Violencia* matured out of a frustrated social revolution, which allowed sectors of the communist party (PCC) to organise politically the peasant forces that would go on to construct the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). This became the largest of the armed non-state actors during Colombia's Civil War. Section two will analyse how *La Violencia* was politically resolved based on a historical bloc led by internationally-oriented social-class forces. It will be shown that this historical bloc excluded the peasantry as a social-class force, thus making it possible for leftist insurgents to grow in strength. Section three will advance the view that capitalist class forces, fearful of insurgent expansion, unwittingly facilitated insurgents politically by sponsoring paramilitaries that used terror as a weapon against peasants. Finally, section four will argue that during the 1990s, transnational social-class forces took advantage of the worsening situation in Colombia to advance neoliberal structural readjustment, a project that, as the insurgents approached victory militarily, brought the nationally-oriented and transnationally-oriented capitalists together to focus on defeating the FARC through violence. Nevertheless, it will be held that this combined response by capitalist class forces sustained the type of contradictions that gave rise to the leftist insurgency in the first place.

Civil War as Class Struggle at the Level of the State

Towards 'La Violencia': The Origins of the FARC

La Violencia was a violent conflict that broke out in 1948, exacerbated by Liberal and Conservative party elites. However, as these entities represented capitalist fractions¹ – nationally-oriented capitalists supported protectionism, while internationally-oriented capitalists had an interest in free-trade – the experience was firmly rooted in processes of economic change occurring around Colombia's integration into global capitalism during the early Twentieth Century. In fifty or so years, what could previously be described as a peasant-nation, had emerged with a thriving export market, an industrial foundation, and a mainly wage based economy.² The capitalist camp was divided between those who wanted to protect their economic investments from foreign capital, such as the transnational corporations (TNC's), and those who sought this international investment to boost production and therefore maximise profit.

The economic transformation sparked political demands from social-class forces excluded from state institutions, especially among the emerging proletariat. Such pressures challenged the hegemony of the bipartisan system, which had hitherto been represented by property holders. Consequently, this section makes two central claims. First, Colombia's incorporation into the world capitalist system led to increasing political struggles being waged from below, which resulted in the breakout of *La Violencia*. Second, out of this violent class struggle came the intervention of the Communist Party, which through its leadership, organised the peasants that served as the nucleus of the FARC. Hence, this section argues that Colombia's insurgency, which started officially in 1964, cannot be disconnected from *La Violencia*.

Social and political tensions between classes matured in the decades advancing to *La Violencia* in 1948. The Great Banana Strike of 1928, where the military slaughtered hundreds of striking workers at the behest of the UFC,³ symbolises this. Meanwhile, peasant-led campaigns for land reform were being regularly waged and crushed.⁴ Colombia's export-oriented economy was facing high rates of demand on the world market – known as “Dance of the Millions” – a fact that provoked capitalist expansion

¹ For example, nationally-oriented social-class forces, engendered by national production facilities producing for the domestic market, are likely to demand protectionism to safeguard their markets. Internationally-oriented social-class forces, engendered by national production facilities producing for export, and transnational social-class forces, engendered by transnational production, by contrast, are interested in open markets and deregulation.

² M. Palacios, *Between Legitimacy and Violence: A History of Colombia, 1875-2002*, (London, 2006), pp. 6-7.

³ M. Bucheli, *Bananas and Business: The United Fruit Company in Colombia, 1899-2000*, (London, 2005), pp. 178-180

⁴ F. Thomson, 'The Agrarian Question and Violence in Colombia: Conflict and Development', *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 11/3, (2011), p. 334.

of production. This intensified the rate of exploitation – in the form of longer working days for workers – to reduce the costs associated with labour, ‘bringing no respite to struggling hill-farmers, tenants, and sharecroppers, much less artisans and proletarians’.⁵ Such events allowed Communist Party activists, as well as radically-oriented liberals, to organise and channel workers’ grievances against capitalist classes.

When the Great Depression undermined the export-economy in 1929, large numbers of peasants and proletarians were left unemployed with no support from the government.⁶ Whereas Liberal and Conservative elites had proclaimed in their party manifestos that capitalist expansion would benefit all Colombians, worker/peasant expectations relating to improved standards of living collapsed, as politicians from petty-bourgeois backgrounds, such as Jorge Gaitan, manoeuvred to capture the hearts and minds of the lower classes with inflammatory rhetoric used against the “rival factions of the socioeconomic elite”.⁷ Until this period, “middle-sector politicians were neither wealthy nor well connected”.⁸ But the workers who were becoming radicalised provided the social foundations for a left-populism to gain appeal throughout the country, thereby threatening the dominance of capitalist social-class forces politically.

Gaitanismo, a radical wing of the Liberal Party, moved beyond other leftist currents in Colombia. It brought a “broad swath of peasants, artisans, workers, and sectors of the middle class together in a movement that challenged Colombia’s elites and was not afraid to talk about class struggle”.⁹ The collapse of exports, which was followed by mass-migration to the cities, meant that the proletariat was becoming a potentially revolutionary, class-orientated force for the first time in Colombia’s history. Workers increased their calls for higher wages, shorter working weeks, health and safety laws, and improved living conditions.¹⁰ Thus, this radicalising proletariat pressed the political establishment to consider incorporating workers’ demands into their party programmes, or face the risk of a labour movement that acted independently, hence threatening Colombia’s economic system altogether. Regarding this materialising workers’ movement, Eric Hobsbawm writes that it was “undermining the entire basis of the two-party oligarchy, for it threatened to turn the

⁵ F. Hylton, *An Evil Hour in Colombia*, (London, 2006), p. 29.

⁶ H. Braun, *The Assassination of Gaitán Public Life and Urban Violence in Colombia*. (London, 1985), p. 33.

⁷ Hylton, *An Evil Hour*, pp. 28-30.

⁸ M. Roldán, *Blood and Fire: La Violencia in Antioquia, Colombia, 1946-1953*, (London, 2002), p. 17.

⁹ L. Gill, *A Century of Violence in a Red City: Popular Struggle, Counterinsurgency, and Human Rights in Colombia*, (London, 2016), p. 55.

¹⁰ Gill, *A Century of Violence*, pp. 56-57.

parties into social movements and, what is more, to transform the Liberal Party, with its appeal to the poor, into the permanent and overwhelming majority party”.¹¹

Channelling the working class politically was not a simple task. Party leaders faced the basic reality of presiding over an economy that was integrated into the world economy. It was, therefore, subject to conditions that inevitably involved the exploitation of the proletariat to sustain/increase profit rates. Furthermore, politicians, having come from property-holding social backgrounds, generally had little experience representing the proletariat politically and tended to think that ‘democracy should not give way to a levelling process and a “republic of equals” in which “anarchy” reigned’.¹² Even so, to guarantee economic stability, they had no choice other than to devise a political strategy to gain the acceptance of exploited classes.

With this background in mind, Liberals and Conservatives tried to incorporate the working class into their support base. The Liberals sought to control the labour movement using the populist Jorge Gaitán,¹³ and the Conservatives, with their landed-capitalist base concerned about international trade’s strengthening of internationally-oriented social-class forces, relied on the ‘Church to attack the secular and materialist tendencies of foreign capitalism’.¹⁴ Because the Catholic Church stressed the importance of submission, obedience, and morality, as opposed to unregulated capitalism, there was a natural connection between the nationally-oriented bourgeoisie and the Church. Significantly, when Conservatives were struggling to achieve the support of the proletariat resulting from their hostility to rapid economic advancement in urban sectors, they were compelled to redouble “efforts to rule unopposed in rural areas to make up for territory won by liberals in the cities”.¹⁵ However, the Conservatives were ruthless campaigners. With the Liberals favouring greater economic development in urban areas, which boosted employment for workers, widespread polls suggested that the Conservative Party faced political defeat indefinitely.¹⁶ To combat this, a Conservative-led alliance was formed with the Church, which mobilised sections of the peasantry on sectarian grounds, against ‘atheistic Liberalism,’ and a campaign of repression was implemented against Liberal strongholds.¹⁷ In some areas, Conservatives mobilised peasants to massacre Liberals, and made “political polarisation and paramilitary

¹¹ E. Hobsbawm, *Viva la revolución*, (London, 2016), p. 62.

¹² Hylton, *An Evil Hour*, p. 19.

¹³ J. Henderson, *When Colombia Bled: A History of Violence in Tolima*, (London, 1985), p. 106.

¹⁴ Braun, *The Assassination of Gaitán*, pp. 29-30.

¹⁵ Hylton, *An Evil Hour*, p. 32.

¹⁶ Thomson, ‘The Agrarian Question’, p. 335.

¹⁷ Henderson, *When Colombia Bled*, p. 3.

violence [spread] incrementally all through the 1930s and 40s".¹⁸ Because the peasants were commonly dependent on landowners for credit and favours, and were influenced by the Church more than other classes, they had cause to sympathise with Conservatives.

Overall, the strategy employed by the Liberal Party proved more useful. With the working class not having been represented politically, they responded positively to Gaitan's calls for modernisation, higher wages, and an extension of the democratic franchise.¹⁹ Meanwhile, the Communist Party (PCC), complaining to the Communist International that most of its members were peasants and not urban workers, pursued a policy of organising peasants against the spreading sectarian conflict.²⁰ Indeed, as the violence first spread throughout Colombia, communists gained a reputation for governing over the few areas that remained completely free from sectarian violence,²¹ a reality that provoked larger numbers of peasants to support them politically, and migrate to those relatively safe and independent areas.

These processes can be traced to the economic changes occurring around the social relations of production, which gave rise to powerfully organised, but politically excluded, social-class forces. Indeed, Colombia had moved towards a social revolution for the first time in its history. The left-wing Jorge Gaitan was set to win the presidential elections of 1946, politically representing the proletariat that 'was emerging from the economic growth of the first three decades of the century'.²² Workers were politically organised, not only through the Liberal Party but also through radical trade-unions such as the Nation Union of the Revolutionary Left (UNIR).²³ In response, moderate Conservatives and Liberals worked together to side-line the Left-Populist Movement led by Jorge Gaitan.²⁴

The challenge of Gaitan internalised the popular expectations calling for a fairer distribution of wealth and political power. From the standpoint of the capitalists, the proletariat threatened to become a politically independent social-class force. Gaitan's mobilisation of the proletariat under the banner of the Liberal Party, however, posed the dilemma of offering internationally-oriented capitalists a distinct advantage in elections at the expense of the Conservatives. Subsequently, moderate Liberals could not just reject Gaitan because that

¹⁸ F. Hylton, 'An Evil Hour: Uribe's Colombia in Historical Perspective', *New Left Review*. 23/1, (2003), p. 64.

¹⁹ Braun, *The Assassination of Gaitán*, p. 85.

²⁰ J. Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change in Colombia: The Origin and Direction of the FARC-EP*, (London, 2010), p. 3.

²¹ S. Daly, 'Organizational Legacies of Violence Conditions Favouring Insurgency Onset in Colombia, 1964-1984', *Journal of Peace Research*, 49/3, (2012), p. 486.

²² Braun, *The Assassination of Gaitán*, p. 8.

²³ Hylton, *An Evil Hour*, p. 32.

²⁴ Hylton, *An Evil Hour*, p. 36.

risked losing the party the support it needed in elections. Moreover, doing this would have opened the road for an independent labour movement more confrontation with capital while separate from Liberal Party influence, to be formed. As a compromise, elite Liberals supported a moderate candidate to contest the presidency, to stand against Jorge Gaitan and the Conservatives in the elections of 1946.²⁵ In the end, with more than one candidate, the Liberal Party polled above 60% – losing to the Conservatives.²⁶ However, this election outcome, with Gaitan losing due to the scheming of party traditionalists, all but guaranteed that Gaitan would be the sole Liberal on the ballot-paper in elections two years later.

Alas, Jorge Gaitan was assassinated on the streets of Bogota during the election campaign in 1948. The political response was immediate. The largest insurrection in Colombia's history attacked government buildings, businesses, churches, and banks, in what became known as the 'Bogotazo'.²⁷ The police took the side of the Gaitanistas, while revolutionaries broke into radio stations calling for the overthrow of the state.²⁸ In some provinces, the workers' representatives replaced the government authorities.²⁹ However, because of the spontaneous character of the insurrection, and with Gaitan dead, 'there was no one to direct or organise it'.³⁰ The Communist Party, influenced by Soviet orthodoxy, had regarded Gaitan as a 'social fascist' and, consequently, 'did not recognise what was happening until it was too late'.³¹ With a military response to the insurrection being initiated by the Conservatives in Bogota, supported by American accusations that the 'Bogotazo' was the cunning work of 'international communism...the country subsided into [a] state of disorganisation, civil war and local anarchy'.³² With the military actively supporting the Conservative Party, Jorge Gaitan dead, and moderately-inclined Liberals discouraged by the spread of left-wing populism amongst the working class, the escalating terror that followed 'disorganised worker and peasant organisations and ensured that class conflicts remained within the clientelist political structures of Colombia's two-party system'.³³

Even so, this trajectory towards revolutionary social change assisted communists based in the rural periphery to construct models of political, social, and economic independence, separate from the terror and violence, providing the foundations for a future communist

²⁵ Hylton, *An Evil Hour*, p. 36.

²⁶ Hylton, *An Evil Hour*, pp. 36-37.

²⁷ Henderson, *When Colombia Bled*, pp. 119-120.

²⁸ Henderson, *When Colombia Bled*, p. 120.

²⁹ Henderson, *When Colombia Bled*, p. 120.

³⁰ Hobsbawm, *Viva la revolución*, p. 59.

³¹ Hobsbawm, *Viva la revolución*, p. 59.

³² Hobsbawm, *Viva la revolución*, p. 59.

³³ Gill, *A Century of Violence*, p. 56.

insurgency. If state institutions had failed to moderate the differences between the various social-class forces, the history of the Communist Party's organising of peasants during this period had served as the basis for what eventually would become FARC. This next section will show how these communist-led communities developed in the context of an inter-capitalist compromise seeking to resolve the dilemma of *La Violencia*.

The National Front Agreement and Accelerated Economic Development

First, it is important to note how *La Violencia* was formally ended with a peace agreement involving Liberal and Conservative elites. While this initiative, the National Front Agreement (NFA), reduced violence between the partisan-supporters of the two principal political parties, at the same time it excluded, institutionally, the peasantry as a class. Specifically, the NFA permitted the bi-partisan system to be reproduced in a way that strengthened capitalism, while incorporating some elements of social support for the proletariat. This amounted to the construction of a new historical bloc which privileged internationally-oriented capital, while protecting the national-bourgeoisie at the same time through state subsidies. This meant that the internationally-oriented sectors were leading a passive revolution, which is the Gramscian/historical materialist way of saying that gradual, rather than fundamentally transformative, social change occurred under the leadership of a certain class-fraction.³⁴ Such a passive revolution in turn made possible the waging of a strategic campaign to remove the communist 'self-defence zones,' organised during *La Violencia*. This repression of peasants was followed by an economic strategy of 'accelerated economic development,' which intended to replace small-scale production with capital intensive production based on large farms.³⁵ Hence, in this section, it is suggested that, because peasants represented a barrier to capital accumulation efforts based on the emerging historical bloc, Colombia's state authority responded aggressively to independent peasant communities organised by communists, furnishing the conditions for a class-oriented armed insurgency.

The NFA committed the 'Conservatives and Liberals to share power equally between the two parties, while alternating occupation of the presidency and parity of representation at all levels of government'.³⁶ Business leaders, the Church, as well as the party elites, argued that this would result in political and economic stability.³⁷ However, as Colombia was

³⁴ A. Morton, *Unravelling Gramsci: Hegemony and Passive Revolution in the Global Economy*. (London, 2007), pp. 34-39.

³⁵ Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change*, pp. 64-66.

³⁶ Hylton, *An Evil Hour*, p. 52.

³⁷ Hylton, *An Evil Hour*, p. 52.

integrated into global capitalism and relied on the state budget to guarantee a minimal level of social security, stability depended on economic expansion of the considerably more productive internationally-oriented sectors. The influence of the Conservatives had been reduced due to merchants having invested in land,³⁸ a class fraction which, to boost their commercial interests, supported free-trade. Even so, to overcome fractional tensions and give confidence to landowners, taxes from coffee exports were used through the state budget as a subsidy.³⁹ Simultaneously, basic levels of social security were offered to the proletariat,⁴⁰ which would allow the country to avert the possibility of another popular insurrection. These concerns of the capitalist classes regarding the proletariat were confirmed publicly since all political entities, except Liberals and Conservatives, were banned from actively supporting candidates in elections.⁴¹ Such exclusion on institutional grounds delegitimised and ultimately blocked the type of left-populism that had proven popular with workers, which was assisted by the appeal of Jorge Gaitan and centred on trade-unions.

Strictly speaking, the NFA, like other countries after The Second World War, sought to reduce social-class tensions through the framework of embedded liberalism,⁴² based on policies of free-trade and protection for Colombia's social forces. It highlights how no social-class force in the country could achieve hegemony by itself. The period of *La Violencia* benefited none of the fractions of capital. The insecurity of those days was such that institutional structures for moderating grievances between social-class forces broke down. At the same time, the productive capacity of the economy reduced, creating widespread unemployment, and left the state with a smaller budget to boost investment.⁴³ Overall, because of the economic insecurity, the dominant classes could not guarantee their investments, which endangered the entire social order.⁴⁴

Accordingly, there was a strong incentive for Colombia's social forces to support the NFA. Still, there was a contradiction involved in the process of doing so. To secure the benefits of

³⁸ Thomson, 'The Agrarian Question', p. 322, 335.

³⁹ Hylton, *An Evil Hour*, p. 53.

⁴⁰ R. Karl, *Forgotten Peace: Reform, Violence, and the Making of Contemporary Colombia*, (Berkeley, CA., 2017), p. 81.

⁴¹ Gill, *A Century of Violence*, p. 63

⁴² Defined by Harvey as a situation where "market processes and entrepreneurial and corporate activities were surrounded by a web of social and political constraints". See: D. Harvey, *A Brief History of Neo-Liberalism*, (Oxford, 2005), p. 11. Put differently, embedded liberalism seeks to support economic growth through capitalist production, while at the same time, secure provisions of welfare for citizens to ensure relative political and economic stability, thereby protecting capitalism from breakdown.

⁴³ Thomson, 'The Agrarian Question', p. 335.

⁴⁴ Braun, *The Assassination of Gaitán*, p. 192

embedded liberalism, such as the costs of social welfare, including subsidies for the local bourgeoisie, the state was still required to rely on capitalist production for the world market – a feature that granted internationally-oriented capital structural power over the institutional state. Without the collection of taxes from exports, which were sustained by international as opposed to domestic demand,⁴⁵ it would be too expensive for landowners and proletarians to be protected through state-subsidies – this meant that the historical bloc had to be spearheaded and led by merchant-exporters. Yet, at the same time, the consent of landed wealth and the proletariat was needed to prevent the type of social instability that had previously led to the breakdown of *La Violencia*.

This contradiction explains why the NFA can be characterised by its overarching economic strategy which encouraged economic growth under an export-model of capitalist development, alongside the repression a politically-conscious and organised peasantry. As long as organised political/social movements hampered the profitability of capital based on export methods of economic development, the model which permitted the consolidation of embedded liberalism, a primary component of the NFA necessarily had to entail the suppression of ‘dangerous’ independent labour movements. Indeed, if any of Colombia’s social-class forces remained excluded from the framework of embedded liberalism politically, it was the peasantry. From the perspective of Colombia’s capitalist fractions, peasant production was inefficient and provided little purchasing power for economic growth nationally.⁴⁶ Subsequently, in the name of ‘economic development,’ there was a premeditated attempt to replace small-scale independent farming with large-scale capitalist production using economic coercion and violence.

Accelerated Economic Development (AED) was the title given to this policy. It is characterised by the view that small peasant production was inefficient and unproductive and sought its replacement by large-scale agricultural production based on wage-labour.⁴⁷ This entailed the destruction of the peasantry as a class, and their incorporation into the proletariat. However, as communists had successfully been able to organise peasants during *La Violencia*, establishing local militias, legal systems, and political structures,⁴⁸ these organised ‘self-defence zones’ represented a significant obstacle to the policy of AED, not to mention a threat to the emerging social order based around a historical bloc led by internationally-oriented capital. When combined with the Cuban Revolution taking place in 1959, which initially, from peasant foundations, went on to consolidate socialism

⁴⁵ Hylton, *An Evil Hour*, p. 53.

⁴⁶ Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change*, pp. 68-69.

⁴⁷ Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change*, pp. 335-336.

⁴⁸ Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change*, p. 42.

officially in 1965,⁴⁹ Colombia's political and economic elites were concerned about the internal threat posed by the peasantry in the context of 'international communism'. In the case of Colombia, "Anticommunism united diverse regional elites, who feared a return of the instability and class warfare of *La Violencia*, and it justified the use of violence against critics of the status quo".⁵⁰

In 1964, the existence of the communist 'self-defence zones' provoked a US-sponsored military campaign using a third of Colombia's military.⁵¹ It has been argued that it gave the Americans their first opportunity to 'try out napalm' in preparation for a general offensive against communist insurgents.⁵² The political threat represented by the targeted communities in Colombia was expressed in several ways. First, because communists organised the 'self-defence zones', these communities became training grounds' for revolutionary groups to be formed, rallying 'against the state and the ruling class therein'.⁵³ Indeed, a 'cross-cultural and geographic class linkage between the city and the countryside' was established, as peasants and workers were materially prepared and organised to defend themselves in case of state-led aggression.⁵⁴ Also, as these territories existed to address local peasant grievances, they served as an example for what exploited classes could do if they organised collectively, at the same time as being relatively independent of capitalism. In the context of Cuba's moral and material support for revolutionary guerrilla activity throughout Latin America,⁵⁵ Guevara's call and strategic plan for arranging a continental revolution,⁵⁶ and the fact that AED implicated the destruction of the peasantry as a class, the most successful example of independent peasant organising in Colombia had to be countered and overcome.

With political consensus guaranteed by the NFA, combined with the assistance of the of C.I.A., the Colombian government launched a military offensive, nicknamed Operation Marquetalia, against the so-called 'independent Republics', attempting to integrate them into Colombia's economic and political structures.⁵⁷ These aggressive measures, however,

⁴⁹ R. Gott, *Cuba: A New History*, (London, 2005), p. 154.

⁵⁰ Gill, *A Century of Violence*, p. 71.

⁵¹ This represented, according to Brittain, "the most aggressive military campaign in Colombia's history." The U.S. provided training, arms, and intelligence to support a third of Colombia's military against the peasant rebels. See: Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change*, p. 12.

⁵² Hylton, *An Evil Hour*, p. 40.

⁵³ Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change*, p. 5.

⁵⁴ Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change*, pp. 3-5.

⁵⁵ Gott, *Cuba*, pp. 215-216.

⁵⁶ C. Guevara, 'Message to the Tricontinental', (1967), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/guevara/1967/04/16.htm>, Accessed 15/08/2017.

⁵⁷ Gill, *A Century of Violence*, p. 66.

implied that the statements of communists were correct: an oligarchy mostly governed Colombia. As such, the PCC's class-orientated strategy of organising peasants had already prepared the targeted populations for the transition from static self-defence formations to a political-military stage if necessary. This was called the 'strategic retreat,' an elementary step in guerrilla warfare originally coined by the military theorist Mao Zedong.⁵⁸ With the support of a class-conscious and politically active peasantry that benefited from links with the working class in the towns and cities,⁵⁹ the foundations of the FARC were laid, as a counter to the military manoeuvres orchestrated to eliminate the rebellious peasant communities. By the time the more than one hundred helicopters attacked, most of the armed peasants had retreated to the mountains to organise the 'Southern Bloc' of what would become the FARC, convinced of two political realities: firstly, that capitalists dominated Colombia's state-formation, and secondly, and that only through armed struggle could class exploitation be abolished.⁶⁰

Growth of the FARC and Dominant Class Reactionism

In contrast with Cuban-inspired insurgents, who tended to believe that the intervention of dedicated and selfless revolutionaries, serving as the 'focus' and 'good examples' to be followed, could create the objective conditions for revolution,⁶¹ the FARC grew out of real class tensions. From its inception, rather than being led by intellectuals and students, the FARC can be characterised as rooted in the rural periphery.⁶² Had it not been for *La Violencia*, there would have been no pressing need to build the self-defence zones that proved so attractive to peasants, which opened the possibility for the FARC to develop as a militant organisation with popular social support. In this sense, Colombia's process of capitalist development came violently for many peasants, leading to insurgent groups forming in the countryside.

The rapid increase of the FARC's strength during the 1970s was met with retaliation by capitalists. As FARC have been dependent on peasants to sustain its operations, the counter-insurgent strategy employed to stop them has taken on a character that is hostile to the peasantry as a class. Landowners who felt threatened, and were being charged a 'revolutionary tax' (extortion) to continue operating, sponsored paramilitary groups that

⁵⁸ M. Zedong, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, (London, 2007), p. 41.

⁵⁹ G. Leech, *The FARC: The Longest Insurgency*, (London, 2011), pp. 14-15.

⁶⁰ Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change*, p. 47.

⁶¹ R. Debray, *REVOLUTION IN THE REVOLUTION? Armed Struggle and Political Struggle In Latin America*, (London, 1967), pp. 28-29.

⁶² W. Mancera, 'Guerrilla y Población Civil. La trayectoria de las FARC, 1949-2013. Informe del Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica', *Historia y Memoria*, 9/1, (2013), pp. 315-316.

employed terror to depopulate areas,⁶³ thereby depriving the guerrillas of the support base upon which they depend. In Maoist terminology, 'separating the fish (guerrilla) from the water (people)',⁶⁴ made it possible to exterminate revolutionaries. With the FARC outlining a Marxist-Leninist programme for revolutionary social change, they revealed themselves as dedicated to standing against the economic system of capitalism, providing a strong motive for all capitalist fractions to regard them as a dangerous and uncompromising social-class force. Speaking about the Colombian situation, Thomson points out the class nature of the conflict, and "how the use of violence to achieve certain ends is not confined to repressed, marginalised groups and poor groups, but is also used by elite classes to maintain and impose a particular development model".⁶⁵

The FARC was not the only insurgent group working to win the favour of exploited classes. The National Liberation Army (ELN), through the taxation of wealthy business owners, fought to guarantee a living-wage to families, a trend that discouraged outside investment and hurt the competitiveness of the targeted markets, especially in relation to multinational corporations invested in oil.⁶⁶ Because the ELN uses the countryside as its base of operations, and relies on the civilian population for intelligence, it is complicated for corporate security forces to prevent guerrilla attacks against the many pipelines running through the country. As a result, a recurring component of successive counter-insurgency strategies in the country has been to protect economic development on capitalist grounds from the mobilisation efforts of peasant and proletarian social forces, thereby revealing Colombia's form of state as heavily moulded by capitalist interests.

Consequently, the rebels have responded to this by organising local popular-civilian structures existing in parallel with the state, and took advantage of the lack of democracy in the capitalist workplace.⁶⁷ This policy served to undermine the bipartisan system that alternated power between social forces representing the capitalists. James Brittain,⁶⁸ an anthropologist who spent considerable time with the FARC, argues that "FARC-EP's revolutionary push threatens Colombia's political-economic stability as it erodes the state from below." Along these lines, Colombia's development model, founded on class exploitation, which in turn sparked social-class-oriented grievances, gave armed non-state actors the opportunity to intervene politically on a basis that would win support.

⁶³ Leech, *The FARC*, pp. 61-66.

⁶⁴ Zedong, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, p. 43.

⁶⁵ Thomson, 'The Agrarian Question', p. 322.

⁶⁶ Gill, *A Century of Violence*, pp. 90-92.

⁶⁷ Gill, *A Century of Violence*, p. 77.

⁶⁸ Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change*, p. 22.

On the capitalist market, fluctuations in the price of cash-crops served to assist rebel-led recruitment efforts. With the price of coffee crashing, farmers realised that their family's livelihoods could be improved, and their suffering lessened, by cultivating coca for cocaine from the 1980s onwards.⁶⁹ Indeed, Tansey and Worsley noted at the time that "[including Colombia] Three Latin American countries now rely on the production of an illicit export commodity, cocaine, to maintain their economies".⁷⁰ This change provided the FARC with an opportunity to 'tax' the cultivation of coca,⁷¹ in addition to their existing policy of 'revolutionary taxation.' In other words, the crisis in commodity prices, resulting in severe poverty for peasants, provided the FARC with the chance to profit from a more strategic source of revenue for upgrading and expanding their political-military operations.

Taxation of the drug-trade served several purposes. First, because collecting taxes in urban areas usually entails having to transfer the money to the political leaders of dozens of fronts in rural locations, vulnerabilities are exposed that allow government intelligence services to intercept, and then manipulate, those members responsible for transporting the fruits of taxation. Instead, by taxing the production of coca in the mountains, the guerrilla groups can avoid the dangers that come with organising regular routes from the cities to the countryside. Second, taxation has enabled the FARC to invest in infrastructure, such as healthcare and schools, which in turn allows them to undermine and challenge state structures, and win the support of the peasantry. Third, a correlation between the taxation of the drug-trade and the growth of the FARC has been detected.⁷² It costs huge amounts of money to feed thousands of fighters' three meals a day, let alone pay for everything else, such as weapons, clothing, and medicine. Hence, capitalist development, which following the collapse of cash-crops on world markets, provoked some peasants to look for more dependable alternative, thereby assisting FARC military operations.

Even so, taxation of capitalists was arguably counter-productive for insurgents. Intimidation of wealthy business owners, combined with the rapid expansion of the socialist movement through the 1980s, created an incentive for capitalist sponsorship of paramilitary groups to protect their economic interests. Indeed, during the 1980s and early 1990s, FARC embraced peace negotiations with the state and organised *Union Patriótica* (UP) to contest elections, working on the understanding that the ballot would replace the bullet.⁷³ However, with land-

⁶⁹ Leech, *The FARC*, p. 65.

⁷⁰ G. Tansey & T. Worsley, *The Food System: A Guide*, (New York, 1985), p. 47

⁷¹ Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change in Colombia*, pp. 89-90.

⁷² O. Villar, & D. Cottle, *Cocaine, Death Squads, and the War on Terror: U.S. Imperialism and Class Struggle in Colombia*, (New York, 2011), p. 27.

⁷³ Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change*, p. 206.

reform a key element of the agenda,⁷⁴ sections of the national bourgeoisie, mainly related to land and drugs, a 'narco-bourgeoisie,' retaliated with premeditated violence. Although UP did much better than expected in the democratic sphere, winning thousands of local seats across the country, as well as three seats in congressional elections,⁷⁵ in the period of UP's five-year existence, paramilitary forces murdered three thousand of their members – disproportionately affecting those in leadership positions.⁷⁶

In this context of political terror unleashed by dominant elites against leftists, many socialists took to the mountains and joined the insurgents.⁷⁷ Still, because the drug-trade had generated a narco-bourgeoisie, terrorism also became an efficient tool to be employed. FARC's taxation of the drug-trade, and their rural roots, undermined capital accumulation efforts. As paramilitary units profiting from the drug-trade have little-to-no interest in 'winning hearts and minds,' they have tended to employ violence with such cruelty that peasants flee permanently, leaving behind the land for coca to be cultivated by the narco-bourgeoisie. This has led to two different outcomes from the perspective of capital. First, the occupation of formerly peasant land permitted the narco-bourgeoisie to build up paramilitary forces on a massive scale.⁷⁸ Secondly, and as a consequence, they created an army of landless and aggrieved peasants who could fill the ranks of FARC and ELN. In other words, Colombia's political-economy organised around coca tended to intensify the contradictions of class relations, leading to an escalation of the armed struggle.

Military planners were concerned that the significant expansion of the FARC throughout the 1980s and 1990s would mean the rebels would be able to overwhelm Colombia's disorganised armed forces.⁷⁹ With the country bordering Panama, Brazil, Peru, and Ecuador, and having the potential for an 'all-round balanced economy',⁸⁰ a socialist Colombia could threaten all capitalist interests in the region, not to mention U.S. corporations. Hence, internationally-oriented capitalists, understanding the broader implications of FARC's political-military achievements, were given added reason to oppose the threat. Likewise, they had cause to fear the growing influence of the national-bourgeoisie vis-à-vis the paramilitary and the drug trade that accounted for twenty-two per cent of exports.⁸¹ Hence,

⁷⁴ Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change*, p. 207.

⁷⁵ N. Chomsky, *Plan Colombia*, (2000), <https://chomsky.info/roquestates08/>, Accessed: 28/08/2017.

⁷⁶ Chomsky, *Plan Colombia*

⁷⁷ Leech, *The FARC*, p. 32.

⁷⁸ Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change*, pp. 130-131.

⁷⁹ A. Cala, 'The Enigmatic Guerrilla: FARC's Manuel Marulanda', *Current History*, 99/1, (2000), p. 56.

⁸⁰ Hobsbawm, *Viva la revolución*, p. 60.

⁸¹ Hylton, *An Evil Hour*, pp. 93-95.

the paramilitary forces and their involvement became instrumental to capitalist accumulation generally. Indeed, the use of such forces as proxies in conflict is highlighted by counter-insurgency theorists as a highly effective strategy⁸²— yet, in the case of Colombia during the 1990s, the intervention of these forces arguably saved the existing social-order, thereby allowing the U.S. and Colombian governments time to “focus instead on eliminating left insurgencies by strengthening the Colombian military and police”.⁸³

While paramilitary units proved effective in damaging the insurgents militarily, their involvement has been cited as a case of ‘proxy warfare gone wrong’.⁸⁴ When it came to economic competitiveness, the decentralised and violent nature of the paramilitary forces ultimately undermined capitalist trade. The delegation of repression eventually “weakened and delegitimised the central government authority it was supposed to support.”⁸⁵ At the same time, as paramilitaries primarily represented landed wealth, once transnational capital became more actively involved through the initiative of Plan Colombia, the utility of paramilitaries lessened. Ultimately, a continued inability to degrade FARC, combined with increasing penetration of transnational capital into Colombia’s economy and military structures, set the scene for the development of a comprehensive counter-insurgency strategy implemented against the leftist insurgency.

Civil War as Class Struggle at the Level of World Order

Neoliberalism, Plan Colombia, and the Strategy of ‘Democratic Security.’

The offensives of the FARC were putting the Colombian state at a disadvantage militarily. Although the country historically gained a reputation for paying off international debts, the governments’ deteriorating position, reflected in numerous military defeats, combined with an expansion of the FARC to an estimated 30,000 combatants during the 1990s,⁸⁶ put transnationally social-class forces in a strong position to take advantage of the predicament. While the World Bank has long argued that such uncertainty ‘presents dangers for the survival of the capitalist system’, these instances have conjointly ‘provided opportunities for Western institutions to impose their ‘remedies’ and to demand ‘market-orientated reforms’’.⁸⁷ Indeed, without generating legitimacy and upgrading security infrastructures,

⁸² U.S. Army, *Counter Insurgency Field Manual*, (London, 2007), pp. 133-134.

⁸³ Hylton, *An Evil Hour*, p. 96.

⁸⁴ B. Saab, & A. Taylor, ‘Criminality and Armed Groups: A Comparative Study of FARC and Paramilitary Groups in Colombia’, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 32/6, (2008), p. 470.

⁸⁵ Hylton, *An Evil Hour*, p. 96.

⁸⁶ Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change*, p. 19, 43

⁸⁷ T. Hayter, *The Creation of World Poverty*, (London, 1990), p. 7.

warned the leaders of the Washington Consensus,⁸⁸ Colombia would become the first post-Cold War socialist state. Following this logic, the next section argues that the challenge of FARC endangered all capitalist forces, which in turn allowed transnational social-class forces, working with President Alvaro Uribe, the chance to advance a programme of structural readjustment at the expense of the labour movement, thereby simultaneously sustaining the leftist insurgency.

In funding the campaign against insurgents, the government relied on three sources. First, it rested on capitalist social relations to generate profits, and by doing so, the government received a portion in taxes to fund counter-insurgency operations. However, because the funds for the state budget are derived from exploitation in a capitalist economy, any tax increases tend to lead to capital's intensification of exploitation to sustain competitiveness, and/or acts as a 'deterrent to trade, investment, and profit maximisation'.⁸⁹ This is because sharp tax increases creates an unpredictable climate for businesses to operate in. Moreover, as capitalists need to remain competitive, they respond to sudden spikes in taxes in ways that protect profitability, for example, through cutting costs associated with maintaining labour.⁹⁰ Hence, when Colombia's government charged a 20 percent 'war tax' on the local bourgeoisie to counteract FARC's military expansion, these social-class forces tended to 'indirectly transfer [the taxes] onto the backs of the urban and rural working class'.⁹¹

With capitalists increasing the rate of exploitation to cope with the economic uncertainty provoked by the insurgent advance, the revolutionaries have been able to implement alternative economic projects as part of a broader counter-hegemonic strategy. Gary Leech argues that, by "implementing social projects in many regions...Colombia's dire economic condition [for peasants and workers]...led to increasing numbers of Colombians migrating to rebel controlled regions".⁹² With insurgents implementing land reform, building infrastructure like roads and schools, and establishing civilian-political structures to meet the concerns of communities neglected by the government, FARC made an economic strategy rooted in national-taxation difficult.

⁸⁸ Briefly, according to Moreno-Brid, the 'three pillars' of the Washington Consensus, advanced by the U.S. government, as well as institutions such as the World Bank and IMF, can be understood as "privatization, liberalization, and macroeconomic stability". See: J. Moreno-Brid, 'The Washington Consensus: A Latin American Perspective Fifteen Years Later', *Journal of Post Keynesian Economics*, 27/2, (2004), p. 355.

⁸⁹ Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change*, p. 228.

⁹⁰ G. Kozlov, *Political Economy: Capitalism*, (Moscow, 1977), p. 215.

⁹¹ Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change*, p. 228.

⁹² Leech, *The FARC*, p. 34.

Therefore, a second way the Colombian government came to rely on financial support to expand counter-insurgency operations was by enlarging the country's debt to transnational social-class forces.⁹³ With the huge cost of the war only partially recouped by taxation of national-orientated fractions (an increase in which would have had counter-productive effects), the government was compelled to work with the World Bank and IMF – two international institutions dedicated to the promotion of global capitalism.⁹⁴ Subsequently, by agreeing to implement policies that denationalised Colombia's markets, the government could invest more in the security that was needed to strengthen economic stability overall.⁹⁵ Accordingly, import tariffs were reduced, state assets were sold off, and free-trade agreements were pursued internationally. The "International Development Bank (IDB), for example, promoted the privatization of public infrastructure, including [Colombia's] telecommunications, energy, and even its social security system, all as a way to address the government's budget woes".⁹⁶

While economic growth improved due to heightened investment from abroad, poverty and unemployment spread because of the states' emphasis on capital accumulation under a neoliberal framework.⁹⁷ With little central control over such an economic model, and with concentrations of wealth in the hands of property owners, regularly based outside Colombia, Ticker has revealed, 'neoliberal reforms have given rise to alarming levels of poverty and inequality; approximately 55 percent of Colombia's population lives below the poverty level' and 'this situation has been aggravated by an acute crisis in agriculture, itself a result of the neoliberal program'.⁹⁸ Consequently, this development strategy made the country more vulnerable to outside investment and as a result, the country overall was less accountable to social-class forces organised nationally and more structurally vulnerable to foreign investment. Therefore, in gaining the vital support of supra-national institutions like the World Bank, the package of neoliberal economic restructuring that followed made circumstances for lower classes increasingly precarious. As multinationals buy cash-crops in larger amounts, so they can increase their rate of profit overall,⁹⁹ they are able to squeeze the price they pay to the producer. This dynamic has 'pushed peasants and workers into the arms of the insurgents'.¹⁰⁰ In many cases, the insurgents have been able to recruit from the ranks of

⁹³ M. Murillo, *Colombia and the United States: War, Unrest and Destabilization*, (New York, 2004), p. 132.

⁹⁴ Hayter, *The Creation of World Poverty*, p. 66.

⁹⁵ Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change*, p. 229.

⁹⁶ Murillo, *Colombia and the United States*, p. 132.

⁹⁷ Leech, *The FARC*, p. 45.

⁹⁸ Cited in Chomsky, *Plan Colombia*

⁹⁹ Kozlov, *Political Economy*, p. 319.

¹⁰⁰ Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change*, p. 231.

these unemployed people. Hence, neoliberal restructuring, though it provided more money to finance counter-insurgency operations in the short-term, was setting the scene for the ranks of insurgent forces to grow.

As the Colombian economy became structurally dependent on outside loans to fund the war-effort, Colombia's turn to neoliberalism could not be reversed – it needed to generate the taxes from the neoliberal opening to pay for the war debts.¹⁰¹ With the economic strategy failing to resolve the contradictions that sustained the insurgency, the reliance on transnational capitalist social forces was extended. Murillo states that this step “practically marked the end of Colombia's agricultural sector [based on small and medium producers], sending “many local farmers into bankruptcy and [pushing] unemployment above 20 per cent in the coffee-growing region, making it easier for guerrillas... to recruit the rising number of unemployed youth”.¹⁰² Meanwhile, as neoliberal reforms opened Colombia's borders to heavily subsidized corporations from the United States which undercut the prices of small farmers, there was little Colombians could do other than organise and fight back.

However, as the process of neoliberalism heavily incorporated transnational social relations into Colombia's state-formation,¹⁰³ to guarantee economic stability, the Colombian government was compelled to implement policies that attracted foreign investment, particularly related to sectors based in the U.S. This concern can be noted in the form of an international initiative, called Plan Colombia. This agreement involved Colombia, the U.S., the EU, the IMF, and the World Bank. It was put into place in 1999, the year when the FARC was most potent militarily.¹⁰⁴ The plan made Colombia the “leading recipient of US military and police assistance” and a bigger recipient of US military aid “than the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean combined”.¹⁰⁵ Implemented during the start of peace negotiations with the FARC, Plan Colombia made possible the construction of the first long-term counter-insurgency strategy.¹⁰⁶ Importantly, it replaced the need for the paramilitary, and ensured that, should peace negotiations fail four years later (which they did), Colombia would have capable security forces, and a robust counter-insurgency strategy in place, which could protect capitalist development, not to mention the invested capital of transnational social-class forces.

¹⁰¹ Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change*, p. 228.

¹⁰² Murillo, *Colombia and the United States*, p. 129.

¹⁰³ Brittain, *Revolutionary Social*, p. 229.

¹⁰⁴ Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change*, p. 17.

¹⁰⁵ Chomsky, *Plan Colombia*

¹⁰⁶ D. Davis, D. Kilcullen, G. Mills, & D. Spencer, *A Great Perhaps? Colombia: Conflict and Convergence*, (London, 2016), p. 9.

Although initially Plan Colombia was described as a measure to combat drugs,¹⁰⁷ U.S. planners argued that insurgents were no different than other major criminal entities engaged in the cocaine trade. Resembling the statements of greed theorists, the phrase ‘narco-guerrilla’ was used to depict the FARC as a ruthless ‘terrorist’ organisation. It has been emphasised that “by labelling FARC members narco-guerrillas, the Clinton administration used the war on drugs to justify the escalation of its military intervention in Colombia’s civil war” – an escalation that was aimed at the clearest threat to capitalist interests: the leftist insurgency.¹⁰⁸ However, while the enforcers of Plan Colombia claimed that they did not intend to counter left-wing insurgents, “the targets of the Colombia Plan are guerrilla forces based on the peasantry and [those] calling for internal social change, which would interfere with integration of Colombia into the global system on the terms that the US demands”.¹⁰⁹ Whereas criminal cartels exporting cocaine to the U.S. in the North were not the targets of Plan Colombia,¹¹⁰ the U.S. incorporated into the plan the fumigation of large areas of the Colombian countryside,¹¹¹ targeting rebel supporters and forcing the peasant-producers to migrate, leaving behind the fertile land to be occupied by capitalists.

When peace negotiations failed in 2002, Alvaro Uribe, whose landowning father had been killed by insurgents, won the presidency promising to make the military defeat of FARC his top priority. His strategic initiative was called ‘Democratic Security.’ This project mostly sought to generate confidence in the economy through the protection of ‘strategic areas’ using armed forces trained and equipped by Washington.¹¹² Writing in *Democracy for Whom?* Elhawary claims that “progress has mainly occurred in the main urban centres and areas of strategic economic importance.”¹¹³ Because it was put into place at the turn of the Twenty-First century, ‘Democratic Security’ can also be conceived as trying to safeguard the country’s turn towards neoliberalism since the early 1990s, by focusing on protecting the economic changes achieved hitherto, and making the country available for additional foreign investment. As one military commander revealed, “Our mission [in counter-insurgency operations] ... is to find, track down and kill the terrorists before they attack [economic infrastructure].”¹¹⁴ Overall, democratic security could gain the confidence of capitalist forces

¹⁰⁷ T. Franza, ‘Plan Colombia: Illegal Drugs, Economic Development and Counterinsurgency – a Political Economy Analysis of Colombia’s Failed War’, *Development Policy Review*, 34/4, (2016), p. 564.

¹⁰⁸ Leech, *The FARC*, p. 68.

¹⁰⁹ Chomsky, *Plan Colombia*

¹¹⁰ Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change*, pp. 147-148.

¹¹¹ Leech, *The FARC*, pp. 59-61.

¹¹² Murillo, *Colombia and the United States*, pp. 128-130.

¹¹³ S. Elhawary, ‘Security for Whom? Stabilisation and Civilian Protection in Colombia’, *Disasters*, 34/3, (2010), p. 395.

¹¹⁴ Cited in Murillo, *Colombia and the United States*, p. 144.

by focusing on the clearest immediate danger to capitalist stability. To afford this expensive campaign, however, required assistance on the scale of Plan Colombia – the international initiative providing the material support for the development of widespread and effective counterinsurgency operations.¹¹⁵

This task put the state under considerable pressure. Safeguarding capitalist development under conditions of Civil War, paying off debts to international monetary institutions, making Colombia attractive to foreign capital, and beating the rebels on the battlefield, entailed having to contain exploited classes politically, and reduce the social tensions growing from the need to accumulate capital to fund the war effort. With workers and peasants limiting capital accumulation through trade-unions, any comprehensive counter-insurgency strategy would likely affect the independence and strength of the labour movement in civil society. In effect, such people were “placed under extreme pressure to support the military objectives of each armed actor, and even the perception of not doing so can lead to arrests, assassinations, and massacres”.¹¹⁶

Considering the rebels emphasised a strategy of ‘combining all forms of struggle’, meaning they actively worked within civil society to achieve their political objectives, counter-insurgents could not distinguish precisely between ‘terrorists’ and ‘sympathisers.’ Rather, counter-insurgency operations legitimized the criminalisation of ‘Left-Wing’ identities on the grounds of ‘national security’.¹¹⁷ Because it was leftist social forces that posed a threat to capital accumulation directly from the workplace, the state assisted such processes of capitalist development by targeting workers and peasants. Subsequently, in practice, capitalist processes of development were institutionalised/legitimatised under counter-insurgency operations, which in turn provided the rationale for the suppression and repression of the labour movement. This paved the way for the armed struggle to win sympathy among exploited classes.

This section has held that the development of insurgency served the interests of transnational capitalist forces by allowing them to take advantage of the deteriorating military situation. Because of this, neoliberalism could be properly initiated. However, this section has also argued that due to the severity of the threat posed by the insurgency, all capitalists, both nationally-oriented and transnationally-oriented, found unity under the security-focused banner of President Uribe and his campaign for a military-solution. At the same time,

¹¹⁵ Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change*, pp. 222-223.

¹¹⁶ Elhawary, ‘Security for Whom?’, p. 395.

¹¹⁷ Elhawary, ‘Security for Whom?’, p. 395.

needing to offset the social damage caused by the anti-labour orientation of the neoliberal development model, state-agents had little choice but to target the revolutionary movement. In doing so, because insurgents were waging a war where they combined 'all forms of struggle' – legal and illegal – the government struggled to differentiate between legal political activists and armed political activists. Thus, in Colombia, capitalist development has meant death and destruction for left-wing activists.

Conclusion

The central argument of this article has been that social forces have consistently failed to prevent the class-contradictions contained within the capitalist process from developing into political/social antagonisms. Rather than trying to resolve such conflicts through the incorporation of all class interests into a cohesive historical bloc, capitalists have sought the exclusion of one social-class force or the other from political/institutional power. Regarding this claim, this article has argued that, as a result of Colombia's incorporation into global capitalism, the country was heading towards a social revolution led by the proletariat and the Left-Populist, Jorge Gaitan. Instead of achieving that goal, the objectives of these labour struggles were frustrated, first through the assassination of its leader, and then through the Conservative-backed destruction of workers' organisations – leaving the country in a state of anarchy. This article has also argued that the way in which *La Violencia* was ended repressed the peasantry as a class, because it was regarded by capitalist social forces as a hindrance to capital accumulation. Thus, the growth of insurgency largely occurred as a consequence of the immediate threat left-wing insurgents posed to capitalist interests, particularly concerning landowners based in the countryside. The response by landowners was militaristic. Assisted and encouraged by the fruits of the drug-trade, an emerging 'narco-bourgeoisie,' sponsored paramilitaries that employed terror to depopulate areas. This served two purposes: it separated the 'fish' from the 'water' and opened the way for areas to be used for coca-cultivation. Finally, transnational social-class forces took advantage of the Colombian states' deteriorating military situation to introduce neoliberal reforms, thereby benefiting such forces economically. Meanwhile, this process of structural readjustment meant that the interests of the transnational-oriented sectors became increasingly intertwined with Colombia's economy: they, therefore, had more interest to make sure that the increasingly dangerous insurgents were defeated. This was reflected in the international initiative, Plan Colombia, put into practice under Alvaro Uribe's 'Democratic Security strategy,' which won favour among all capitalist fractions based on making the defeat of FARC number one priority. Significantly, each of these economically-grounded developments provoked political reactions by representatives of exploited classes, specifically the FARC and ELN. Because in each stage of the insurgency outlined here,

interests tended to be shaped by the structuring conditions of global capitalism, classes have hitherto struggled to resolve politically the real tensions that existed between them.

Subsequently, in Colombia, capitalist development, through its processes of exploitation, set the stage for social-class forces to choose political violence.

Bibliography

- Albertus, M., & Kaplan O., 'Land Reform as a Counterinsurgency Policy: Evidence from Colombia', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 57/2, (2013), pp. 198-231.
- Banks, C., & Sokolowski, J., 'From War on Drugs to War against Terrorism: Modeling the Evolution of Colombia's Counter-Insurgency', *Social Science Research*, 38/1, (2009), pp. 146-154.
- Bieler, A., & Morton, A., 'A Critical Theory Route to Hegemony, World Order and Historical Change: Neo-Gramscian Perspectives in International Relations', *Capital & Class*, 28/2, (2004), pp. 85-113.
- Bieler, A., *Global Capitalism, Global Crisis, Global War*, (Cambridge, Forthcoming).
- Bieler, A., 'Transnational Labour Solidarity in (the) Crisis', *Global Labour Journal*, 5/2, (2014), pp. 114-133.
- Braun, H., *The Assassination of Gaitán Public Life and Urban Violence in Colombia*, (London, 1985).
- Brittain, J., *Revolutionary Social Change in Colombia: The Origin and Direction of the FARC-EP*, (London, 2010).
- Brittain, J., 'A Theory of Accelerating Rural Violence: Lauchlin Currie's Role in Underdeveloping Colombia', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 32/2, (2011), pp. 335-360.
- Bucheli, M., *Bananas and Business: The United Fruit Company in Colombia, 1899-2000*, (London, 2005).
- Cala, A., 'The Enigmatic Guerrilla: FARC's Manuel Marulanda', *Current History*, 99/1, (2000), pp. 56-59.
- Chodor, T., *Neoliberal Hegemony and the Pink Tide in Latin America: Breaking Up With TINA?*, (London, 2015).
- Chomsky, N., *Plan Colombia (2000)*, <https://chomsky.info/roquestates08/>.

Collier, P., *Wars, Guns and Votes: Democracy in Dangerous Places*, (New York, 2010).

Cornforth, M., *Historical Materialism*, (Surrey, 1974).

Cox, R., *Production, Power, and World Order*, (New York, 1987).

Crandall, R., *Driven by Drugs: US Policy Toward Colombia*, (London, 2008).

Daly, S., 'Organizational Legacies of Violence Conditions Favouring Insurgency Onset in Colombia, 1964–1984', *Journal of Peace Research*, 49/3, (2012), pp. 473-491.

Davis, D., Kilcullen, D., Mills, G., & Spencer, D., *A Great Perhaps? Colombia: Conflict and Convergence*, (London, 2016).

Dunning, T., & Wirpsa, L., 'Oil and the Political Economy of Conflict in Colombia and Beyond: a Linkages Approach', *Geopolitics*, 9 /1, (2004), pp. 81-108.

Elhawary, S., 'Security for Whom? Stabilisation and Civilian Protection in Colombia', *Disasters*, 34/3, (2010), pp. 388–405.

FARC-EP., *Estatuto de las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo (1993)*, <http://www.farc-ep.co/octava-conferencia/estatuto-farc-ep.html>. Last accessed 17/06/2017.

Flores, T., 'Vertical Inequality, Land Reform, and Insurgency in Colombia', *Peace Economics, Peace Science and Public Policy*, 20/1, (2014), pp. 5-31.

Franza, T., 'Plan Colombia: Illegal Drugs, Economic Development and Counterinsurgency – a Political Economy Analysis of Colombia's Failed War', *Development Policy Review*, 34/4, (2016), pp. 563-591.

Galeano, E., *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*, (London, 2009).

Galula, D., *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, (London, 2006).

Gill, L., *A Century of Violence in a Red City: Popular Struggle, Counterinsurgency, and Human Rights in Colombia*, (London, 2016).

Gott, R., *Cuba: A New History*, (London, 2005).

Guevara, E., *Guerrilla Warfare*, (London, 2006).

Guevara, C., *Message to the Tricontinental* (1967), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/guevara/1967/04/16.htm>.

Gurr, T., *Why Men Rebel*, (Princeton, NJ., 1971).

Harvey, D., *A Brief History of Neo-Liberalism*, (Oxford, 2005).

Harvey, D., 'Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction', *Geografiska Annaler*, 88/2, (2006), pp. 145–158.

Harvey, D., *The Enigma of Capital and Crises of Capitalism*, (London, 2010).

Harvey, D., *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism*, (London, 2014).

Hayter, T., *The Creation of World Poverty*, (London, 1990).

Henao, F., "‘And They Shall Make War No More’": Lessons about Peace-Making and Overcoming Conflict from Colombia', *New Blackfriars*. 96/1062, (2014), pp. 177-191.

Henderson, J., *When Colombia Bled: A History of Violence in Tolima*, (London, 1985).

Hobsbawm, E., *Viva la revolución*, (London, 2016).

Holmes, J., & Gutierrez de Pineres, S., 'Violence and the State: Lessons from Colombia', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 25/2, (2014), pp. 372-403.

Hylton, F., 'An Evil Hour: Uribe's Colombia in Historical Perspective', *New Left Review*, 23/1, (2003), pp. 50-93.

Hylton, F., *An Evil Hour in Colombia*, (London, 2006).

Karl, R., *Forgotten Peace: Reform, Violence, and the Making of Contemporary Colombia*, (California, IL., 2017).

Keen, D., 'Greed and Grievance in Civil War', *International Affairs*, 88/4, (2012), pp. 757–777.

Keen, D. 'Incentives and Disincentives for Violence', in M. Berdal, & D. Malone (Eds.), *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars*, (London, 2000), pp. 19-41.

Kilcullen, D., *The Accidental Guerrilla*, (Oxford, 2009).

Kozlov, G., *Political Economy: Capitalism*. Moscow, 1977).

Leech, G., *The FARC: The Longest Insurgency*, (London, 2011).

Mancera, W., 'Guerrilla y Población Civil. La trayectoria de las FARC, 1949-2013. Informe del Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica', *Historia y Memoria*, 9/1, (2013), pp. 315-318.

McDougall, A., 'State Power and Its Implications for Civil War Colombia', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 32/4, (2009), pp. 322-345.

McGreevey, W., *An Economic History of Colombia 1845-1930*, (London, 1971).

Moreno-Brid, J., 'The Washington Consensus: A Latin American Perspective Fifteen Years Later', *Journal of Post Keynesian Economics*, 27/2, (2004), pp. 345-365.

Morton, A., *Unravelling Gramsci: Hegemony and Passive Revolution in the Global Economy*, (London, 2007).

Murillo, M., *Colombia and the United States: War, Unrest and Destabilization*, (New York, 2004).

Palacios, M., *Between Legitimacy and Violence: A History of Colombia, 1875-2002*, (London, 2006).

Pedraja, R., *Wars of Latin America, 1948-1982*, (London, 2013).

Richani, N., *Systems of Violence: The Political Economy of War and Peace in Colombia*, (New York, 2nd Ed., 2013).

Rodriguez, M. & Daza, A., 'Determinants of Civil Conflict in Colombia: How Robust are They?', *Defence and Peace Economics*, 23/2, (2012), pp. 109-131.

Roldán, M., *Blood and Fire: La Violencia in Antioquia, Colombia, 1946-1953*, (London, 2002).

Rosen, J., *The Losing War: Plan Colombia and Beyond*, (New York, 2004).

Saab, B., & Taylor, A., 'Criminality and Armed Groups: A Comparative Study of FARC and Paramilitary Groups in Colombia', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 32/6, (2008), pp. 455-475.

Skidmore, T., *Modern Latin America*, (Oxford, 7th Ed., 2009).

Soysa, I., 'The Resource Curse: Are Civil Wars Driven by Rapacity or Paucity', in M. Berdal & D. Malone (Eds.), *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars*, (London, 2000), pp. 113-136.

Stokes, D., *America's Other War: Terrorizing Colombia*, (London, 2005).

Taber, R., *War of the Flea: The Classic Study of Guerrilla Warfare*, (Washington, 2002).

Tansey, G., & Worsley, T., *The Food System: A Guide*, (New York, 1995).

Tate, W., *Counting the Dead: The Culture and Politics of Human Rights Activism in Colombia*, (London, 2007).

Thomson, F., 'The Agrarian Question and Violence in Colombia: Conflict and Development', *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 11/3, (2011), pp. 321-356.

Tickner, A., 'Colombia: Chronicle of a Crisis Foretold', *Current History*, 97/5, (1998), pp. 61-65.

U.S. Army, *Counter Insurgency Field Manual*, (London, 2007).

Villar, O., & Cottle, D., *Cocaine, Death Squads, and the War on Terror: U.S. Imperialism and Class Struggle in Colombia*, (New York, 2011).

Waltz, K., *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis*, (New York, 1959).

Waltz, K., *Theory of International Politics*, (Boston, MA., 1979).

Zedong, M., *On Guerrilla Warfare*, (London, 2007).