

Bautista's intervention, Fidel Castro decide to give Vásquez Castaño refuge. Today, he lives in a psychiatric hospital in Cuba.

In late 1974 and early 1975, the Army once again surrounded the ELN in the department of César. The remaining forces of the ELN would probably have been captured or killed, had it not been for the order of then-President Alfonso López Michelsen to suspend the military siege because, supposedly, the ELN was going to surrender.

The ELN's influence was relatively insignificant from that moment until 1982, when President Belisario Betancur began his policy of "negotiating the peace" with the different terrorist groups. Also in this period, the enormous donations from Occidental Petroleum enabled the ELN to rearm, buy new uniforms, and subject the peasants in the oil regions to their control.

In 1984, the ELN joined up with the FARC, the M-19, and the Hope, Peace, and Freedom movement (EPL), in the so-called Simón Bolívar Guerrilla Coordinator. This immediately meant that the ELN would participate in the drug trade that the FARC dominated.

Despite its economic power, the ELN suffered another severe hit in 1993, when the Army captured its number-three man in Bucaramanga, Gerardo Bermúdez, alias Francisco Galán, who was drunk, high on drugs, and in the midst of a homosexual orgy at the time of his arrest. Galán is charged with innumerable kidnappings and assassinations. This did not stop the U.N. Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions, an NGO, from issuing a statement in July 1995 demanding his release from prison, arguing that he had been arrested illegally.

## In Colombia, life under narco-terrorist dictatorship

*Vicente is a 50-year-old Colombian farmer who lives in a town of about 5,000 people, about 150 miles from Bogotá, the capital of Colombia. It is a town where nothing is said or done without the authorization of the commander of a "guerrilla" squad of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Vicente owns 10 hectares of land on the outskirts of town. We are withholding Vicente's real name, and the name of the town and department where he lives, to prevent reprisals being taken against him and his family. For the same reason, we omit the details of how Vicente came to*

*tell us his life story. This is what he told us:*

I am the father of eight children, of whom four have already died, and two more, I don't know where they are, nor even if they are alive or dead. I will speak first of those two. Once, several persons who called themselves guerrillas came to my home and said that I had to give them 4 million pesos to help finance "the cause." I told them I had no money, that I am a poor farmer. Then they threatened they would burn down my house and my farm if I didn't give them 4 million pesos, which is what happened to a neighbor of mine who had to flee here, and now lives in Bogotá begging on the streets.

The next day they came back to demand the 4 million pesos. This time, they were armed with rifles and revolvers. There were 15 of them. They said they were hungry and that I had to feed them. I had to kill five chickens to carry out their orders. Then they said they had another proposal for me, that they had already verified that I didn't have 4 million pesos, but that I could contribute to the cause by handing over my eldest son to do "military service" with the FARC. He was barely 13 years old, but he helped me a lot in my work. I told him he was my best helper and that I didn't want him to leave me. Then they put us all against the wall of my house. The leader shouted: "Ready, aim, fire!" We heard them lift their weapons and we expected to fall down dead, but they shot into the air. Then we heard the leader: "Tomorrow we will come for your decision." Then my eldest son said, in front of them, that he was going to become a guerrilla so that they wouldn't kill me. We said good-bye, and I have never seen him again.

This was done throughout the town. They also took the son of my neighbor, but he decided to run away. He told us he had been forced to kill some people because they were supposedly "Army informants," and that when they forced him to attack the police station in a town, he fled in the confusion of the gunfire. A few days later, the head of the guerrillas came to our town and went to my neighbor's home. They didn't find the "deserter," because he had already left, so they took the whole family to the main park in town. The guerrillas went door to door to force people to go to the park. Then they took one of the sons of my neighbor and shot him. The guerrilla leader said this was in reprisal for the desertion of his brother, and that if the "deserter" didn't return, they would kill each and every member of the family. And that's what they did. After they had killed them all, they brought a family who had been promised land, to occupy my neighbor's property. From then on, the boys they take never run away, out of fear that they will assassinate all of their loved ones.

One day, they again appeared and told me that comrade "Juancho" needed a sex partner, because he couldn't take the loneliness. So they took my oldest daughter. She was 12 years old, and hadn't even had her first period. We never saw

her again.

They killed my next daughter. It turns out that a group of Army soldiers was coming, which was very unusual. The guerrillas had told us that they had detected the soldiers' presence, but that they weren't planning to fight them in town. They ordered everyone not to give or even sell food to the soldiers on pain of death for collaborating with the enemy. Two days later, the soldiers arrived and came to the marketplace, and no one wanted to sell them anything. But it seems that my daughter, who was then 14 years old, went out to the street to look at the soldiers. She liked one of the soldiers, and winked at him. The soldier smiled at her, but continued to follow the other soldiers. Two days later, the guerrilla chief took her and, after calling a meeting, killed her because she had smiled at the soldiers, which was an act of treason.

### **The narco/terror symbiosis**

My next son was also killed. One day, the guerrillas called us all together in the plaza. They told us that they had reached a deal with some men who were going to distribute some seeds, and that they would pay us well for the crops we would have. The guerrillas let us sow, on condition that we would pay them 20% of what we produced to "support the cause." A few days later, these guys came by helicopter, gave us the seed, and offered us a good price for the crop. It turns out this was seed for coca bushes, from which they make cocaine. I told my son I didn't want to get involved in that, but he said he wasn't going to be a fool and live a miserable life like I had. He didn't pay any attention to me. The men soon came to the town, with the guerrillas' permission, bought the crop, and carried it off in the helicopters. Afterwards, they made an airstrip for their airplanes to land and later constructed a laboratory to process cocaine. The laboratory was guarded day and night by the guerrillas.

One day, the anti-drug police arrived in planes and helicopters, destroyed the lab, bombed the airstrip, and sprayed the coca. There were fights, but everyone was taken by surprise, since the reconnaissance planes and helicopters hadn't been detected. Later, when the people came to buy up the crop, they had a fight with my son. They told him they had already paid him half, and that he should return the money or hand over the crop. They refused to believe that the police had destroyed the coca. They said they were sure my son had sold the coca to others, and they were going to make him pay. Before leaving, they shot at him, and he died.

Later, the narcos fought with the guerrillas, because they hadn't carried out the agreement to protect the crops and the laboratory. The guerrillas then set up a camouflaged laboratory and said that from then on, they would be administering everything directly. The narcos, in revenge, killed some deputies from the [FARC-linked] Patriotic Union. But later, they reached an agreement, according to which the guerrillas' quota would rise to 30% of the take from what was produced

in the laboratory, and the narcos pledged to pay part of the percentage with weapons, grenades, and ammunition. The narcos also promised to transport the guerrillas abroad to get special training or to do business. The guerrillas said that to prevent something like [the raid] from happening again, there had to be a march to the capital of the department to demand an end to crop fumigation. We all had to go, otherwise they would have killed us or demanded 3 million pesos to help pay for the march.

### **U.N. promises territory**

Before we left on the march, they explained to us that soon the United Nations was going to grant the guerrillas control over a good piece of national territory. That they were then going to make a deal with Venezuela, so that Venezuela would recognize the existence of a new state under their control, in exchange for halting kidnappings and other guerrilla activity inside Venezuelan territory. They said that they would be controlling Urabá very soon, that this was a strategic zone because of its proximity to the oceans, and that they were going to reach an agreement with Panama, and therefore, indirectly, with the United States, which is the true owner of Panama. They said that things were more difficult along the border with Ecuador and with Brazil. But they said that the regions the U.N. would recognize as belonging to them had oil, banana, gold, coca, and coal, and that the oil multinationals were already paying a "war tax" to them because they are so powerful that the "multis" have to deal with them.

They also said that soon, they would launch a definitive attack on Bogotá from the territories they are going to control, and that they would lay siege to the capital, and that people were going to die of hunger because they weren't going to allow water, electricity, food, or fuel to enter the city.

There was a period where, for the space of two years more or less, the Army controlled the town. The Army arrived one day and took it over. There was fighting and the guerrillas withdrew or disguised themselves as farmers. After a while, the Army was winning the people's confidence. They began to talk to us about not supporting the guerrillas, that this was bad, and we began to trust that the reign of terror had ended. Then those with the Patriotic Union began a debate in Congress, saying that someone here had created a paramilitary force and that the government had to stop the Army from forming paramilitary groups. The scandal was so great that the lieutenant who commanded the troops here was put on trial in Bogotá for violating human rights. One of the guerrillas from here served as a witness against the lieutenant. Then the government decided to abandon us. That's when life got complicated. The guerrillas took revenge for our collaboration with the Army, and mined our fields so that we couldn't sow and so that we would starve. One of those mines, the so-called "footbreakers," killed another son of mine, only nine

years old. I also lost a horse that was very useful to me. Even now, once in a while, a mine that was placed years ago explodes, despite the fact that they have taken control of the town once again.

Here, we are all silent. No one talks anymore, we are barely able to greet each other. Anything we say can get us in trouble. All friendship here is ended. My wife cries every night thinking about the six children we will never see again. She takes out the images of the Virgin and of Jesus Christ that are hidden, and she prays. And to think that the guerrillas began here by winning over the people because they assaulted the Agrarian Bank, after attacking the police station. At that time, they stole all the money in the bank and burned the bank's files. Then we were all happy because they had taken a great debt from us, since the bank now didn't know who owed or who had paid. They also told us they would defend the farmer from the greed of the landowners and that they would defend the wages of the day-workers.

### **Theology of liberation allies**

The government never replaced the police. Later, they threw out the village priest. They wanted the priest to use his robes, and transport weapons in his camper. He refused, and had to flee. The guerrillas thought the priest was the competition, because here, you did whatever the priest said. For a while the [Catholic] Church remained shut down. They told us that religion is the opiate of the people and that it was good that the priest had left. These guys didn't like to see Christs or Virgins. We kept our images of Christ and the Virgin hidden. Although now, since there is a new priest who works with them, they half-tolerate it when the people pray. But I think that he is not a priest, but a guerrilla with black robes. The priest talks more to us about revolution than about Jesus Christ and God, and says that now the church has a theology of liberation.

So that is how we lost four children. Of another two, we don't know if they are alive or dead. Each time we ask the guerrillas for them, they answer us: "Old ones, don't worry about them; they are alive and fighting." We have only two children left, which is going to be very hard for them when we can no longer work and they will have to support us.

Coca production this year is going to end, it seems. After they jailed the chiefs of the Cali Cartel, no one comes here anymore to buy coca leaf, the laboratory which the guerrillas guarded has been abandoned, and the people have no interest in renewing that crop. Many are asking the guerrillas for permission to emigrate, and the coca crops that the police destroyed are no longer being replaced. The guerrillas are very worried, and it looks like now they are going to replace the coca income with kidnappings, but for a long time there has been no one to kidnap here. It also seems that they are directly exporting the cocaine to the United States, and are going to use the networks of the distribution bosses.

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## Venezuela

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# Chávez organizes SPF's military wing

by David Ramonet and Cynthia Rush

The nation of Venezuela is a flashpoint for a new "Chiapas" on the Ibero-American continent, in which the Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement-200 (MBR-200), founded by Lt. Col. Hugo Chávez Frías (ret.), will play the leading role. In fact, the MBR-200 is a case study for how the São Paulo Forum is retreading itself continentally. In the December 1993 Presidential elections, the Forum's affiliated Radical Cause (Causa R) party failed miserably in its efforts to defeat Rafael Caldera. While Causa R maintains a facade of promoting the electoral route, the MBR-200 is actively pursuing the path of armed revolt.

All the elements for Venezuela's destabilization are present: There is a direct British role in the attempt to overthrow President Caldera, using the still-intact political apparatus of deposed former President Carlos Andrés Pérez, as well as organized financial warfare executed through house organs of British economic policy, including the *Wall Street Journal*, the London *Financial Times*, and the London *Economist*. The latter publication insultingly refers to Caldera as a "cockroach."

### **Unique characteristics**

An MBR-200 insurgency in Venezuela would not have the indigenist characteristics of Mexico's EZLN—there is no sizable Indian population of that sort in Venezuela. What makes Chávez's operation unique on the continent is, first, the involvement in his movement of military personnel, many of whom participated in the two coup attempts against the government of Carlos Andrés Pérez (CAP) in 1992. Second, during Chávez's December 1994 visit to Cuba, President Fidel Castro received the MBR-200 leader with State honors, and personally anointed him as the "commander, not only of the Venezuelan Army, but of the continental revolution which is under way."

Chávez's organizational stronghold in Venezuela is the region bordering Colombia, where the drug-linked ELN guerrillas operate right across the border. Chávez recognizes both the ELN and the FARC as "belligerent parties," has reportedly met with their leaders, and demands that the Caldera government negotiate with them directly.