

COLOMBIA

The world's most dangerous place for unionized workers



According to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the U.N., Colombia is the most dangerous place in the world for organized labour. On average, one trade unionist is assassinated every three days!

Horror in Colombia!

45,000 people were killed in armed violence between 1986 and 1995.

36,000 of them were civilians.

On average one person is killed every 15 to 20 minutes.

Political killings have doubled, from an average of ten deaths a day in the 1980s to almost 20 a day today.



About 2.5 million people have had to flee their homes over the last decade due to the violence—more than 300,000 in 2001 alone (75% were women and children).

Over 3,800 trade unionists have been murdered since 1986.

169 unionists were murdered in 2001. That's more than twice the rest of the world combined.

** MOST ORDINARY COLOMBIANS WANT PEACE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE. THEY URGENTLY NEED OUR SUPPORT ...*





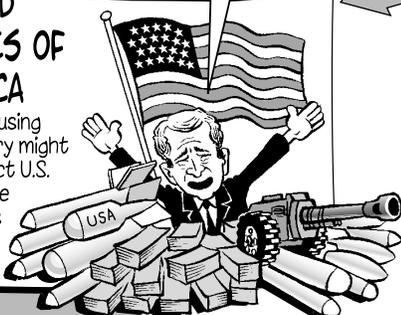
A QUICK LOOK AT THE BIG PICTURE SHOWS SOME OF THE MAJOR PLAYERS INVOLVED AND WHAT THEY'RE UP TO

CONFLICT IN COLOMBIA THE BIG PICTURE

COLOMBIA, HERE ARE SOME NICE WAR TOYS AND TONS OF CASH TO FIGHT ...UH... DRUG PRODUCERS...YEAH, THAT'S IT. SO WE CAN GET DRUGS OFF THE STREETS OF AMERICA.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

As usual, using its military might to protect U.S. corporate interests abroad.



MILITARY AID & TRAINING

COLOMBIA, WE ORDER YOU TO CUT HEALTH AND EDUCATION SPENDING, PRIVATIZE YOUR PUBLIC SERVICES, AND MAKE THINGS EASIER FOR FOREIGN COMPANIES TO MAKE PROFITS.

STRONG LOBBYING TO SUPPORT U.S.

MILITARY AID TO COLOMBIA

IMF, WTO, WORLD BANK

Supreme rulers of the global economy.



PRESSURE for structural adjustment to the economy

COLOMBIA IS OPEN FOR BUSINESS !!

COLOMBIA, WE LIKE YOUR OIL, YOUR MINERALS, YOUR HYDRO POTENTIAL, AND YOUR PRIVATIZED SERVICES. A CHEAP, UNORGANIZED WORKFORCE WOULD BE NICE TOO, AS WELL AS AN OBEDIENT POPULATION. LET'S DO BUSINESS !!

TRANSNATIONAL CORPORATIONS

Many are U.S. companies after Colombia's oil. They're helping to ruin the environment and the lives of many communities. Generally, they are very happy with the activities of the brutal right-wing paramilitary death squads.



COLOMBIAN GOVERNMENT

Only too happy to receive U.S. military aid, implement neoliberal policies, and repress public opposition.

Privatizations, mass layoffs, deregulation, attacks on labour laws



FOREIGN INVESTMENT (i.e. resource extraction, big profits)

COLOMBIAN MILITARY

A fairly typical repressive army using violence against its own citizens. But for the real dirty work (like assassinations) they rely on the right-wing paramilitaries to get the job done.



ORDERS

ORDERS

WE SAY
NO TO PRIVATIZATION!
NO TO U.S. MILITARY AID!
NO TO OIL EXPLOITATION ON INDIGENOUS LANDS!
YES TO SOCIAL JUSTICE!
YES TO HUMAN RIGHTS!
YES TO WORKERS RIGHTS!
YES TO PEACE!

RIGHT-WING PARAMILITARIES

A nasty group of armed thugs who make things safe for corporate profits.



WE ARE THE "UNITED SELF DEFENCE FORCES OF COLOMBIA"

MURDERS
ABDUCTIONS
TORTURE
MASSACRES

POPULAR RESISTANCE

- union leaders
- women's organizations
- indigenous and rural communities
- church leaders
- ordinary men, women and children



Responsible for up to 80% of all human rights violations, political killings and massacres in Colombia

UNION ACTIVISTS ARE HERE

THE "WAR AGAINST TERRORISM"

THE "WAR ON DRUGS"
bombs, harassment, mass herbicide sprays

CIVIL WAR

LEFT-WING GUERRILLAS

Some noble ideas, but these guys are no strangers to using violence to get their message across.



WE WANT SOCIAL JUSTICE, EQUALITY, AND LAND REFORM FOR COLOMBIAN PEOPLE, AND WE'RE WILLING TO KILL TO GET IT !!

POOR PEASANT FARMERS

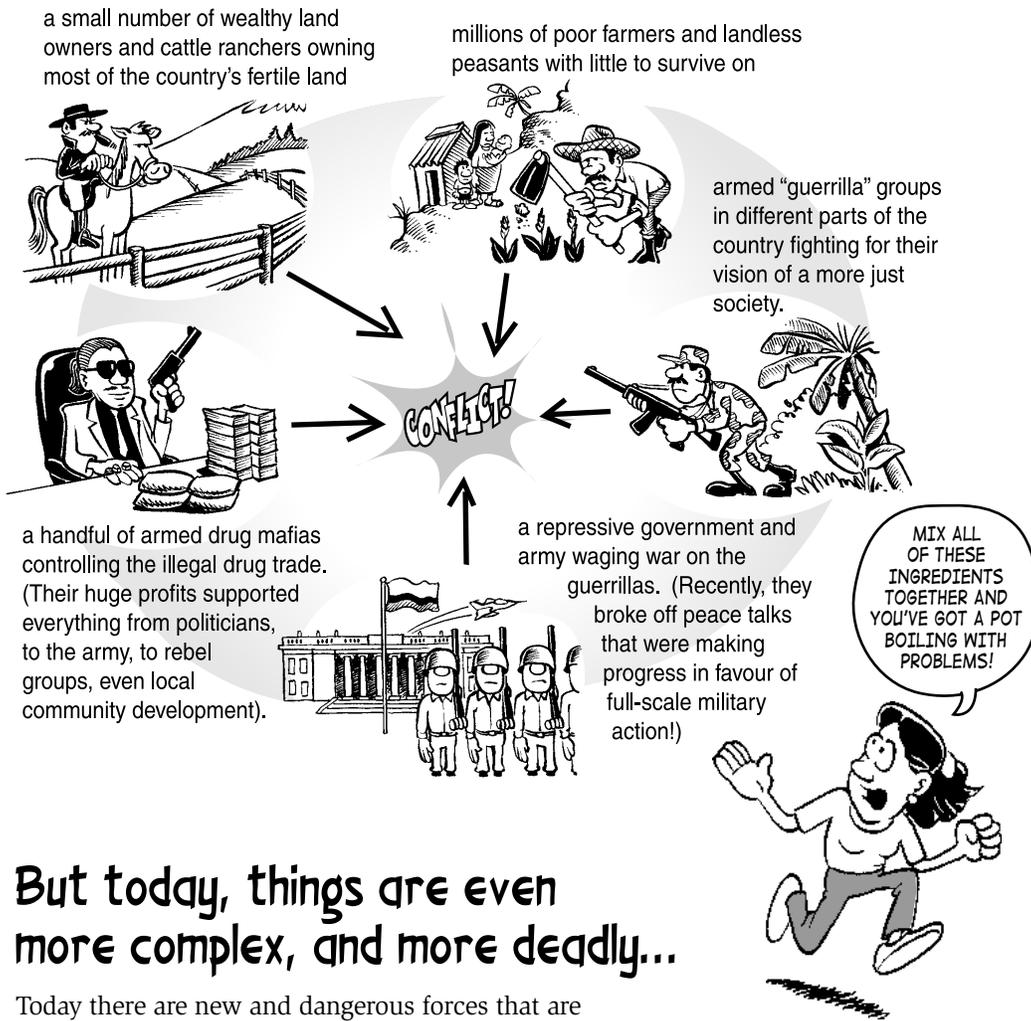
Poor farming communities are being poisoned by mass aerial herbicide sprays.



THANKS TO GLOBALIZATION, WE CAN'T SURVIVE BY GROWING FOOD CROPS ANY MORE. EITHER WE GROW COCA LEAVES AND POPPIES OR WE STARVE!

What are the roots of Colombia's conflict?

We'd need a whole book to answer that question — in many ways it goes all the way back to the days of Spanish colonialism. For now, let's just say that for the last 50 years Colombia has been a country with the perfect mix of ingredients for violence and instability:



But today, things are even more complex, and more deadly...

Today there are new and dangerous forces that are threatening the people of Colombia and unionized workers, both from inside and outside the country. Today you've got....

- 1 ...the international forces of corporate globalization and greed changing the country's economy... 
- 2 ...a group of brutal murderers called the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (otherwise known as Right-wing Paramilitary Death Squads)... 
- 3 ...guerrilla forces controlling large territories who are responsible for committing human rights abuses against the very people they say they're fighting for... 
- 4 ...the United States pouring huge amounts of military aid into the country, supposedly to fight the "war against drugs". 

Colombia: a country rich in diversity and natural wealth!

Colombia is a country rich in biodiversity and natural resources. Its 41 million people are ethnically and culturally diverse. There are 82 indigenous cultures and a large Afro-Colombian population of between 8 to 10.5 million (about 20% of the population). It has an interesting geography that includes coasts, tropical rain forests, high mountains, deep valleys, and vast inland plains. Colombia has 1,780 bird species – the greatest number of bird species of any country in the world! Colombia is the world's second largest coffee producer after Brazil, and the third largest producer and exporter of bananas. It also exports emeralds, pharmaceuticals and flowers. It has rich gold deposits and vast energy resources such as oil, natural gas and coal.



TO UNDERSTAND COLOMBIA'S CONFLICT TODAY, WE NEED TO LOOK AT THE DAMAGE DONE BY RECENT NEOLIBERAL ECONOMIC POLICIES.



THE INTERNATIONAL FORCES OF CORPORATE GLOBALIZATION AND GREED



Colombia's neoliberal reforms in the 1990s

Colombia, like most developing countries, has been under pressure by the organizations that control the global economy to put in place "neoliberal," economic policies.



- CUT HEALTH EDUCATION & PUBLIC PENSIONS
- PRIVATIZE EVERYTHING
- INCREASE FOREIGN INVESTMENT
- INCREASE CASH CROPS
- STOP SUBSIDIES
- DEVALUE CURRENCY

Structural adjustment

When developing countries like Colombia have huge foreign debts to pay, they become slaves to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. These organizations twist the arms of poor countries to "structurally adjust" their economies. That usually means cutting public services like health, education and pensions. It means making things more "attractive" to foreign companies by easing up on labour and environmental laws. It means privatizing public services and infrastructure. It means getting rid of economic help for local food producers and industries. And it means making many other similar changes.

Trade liberalization

Colombia has also been pressured to open itself up to corporate globalization. "Trade liberalization" is similar to structural adjustment. It's about getting rid of regulations and about giving corporations **new rights** to make profits — in just about any **thing** and any **way** they please, no matter what people, workers or communities think.

Neoliberal policies bring more poverty, more inequality to Colombia

Neoliberal policies like structural adjustment and trade liberalization are now well known around the world to cause increasing poverty, hardship and hunger for the majority of people, while a few individuals and transnational corporations get richer. Colombia is no exception. In addition to a recent economic crisis, these neoliberal policies have helped to increase poverty and inequality in the country.

- 60% of Colombia's 41 million people live in poverty.
- Unemployment has gone from 9% in 1990 to 21% today (the highest in Latin America). 3.5 million Colombians are without work.
- 10 million Colombians (or between 56-60% of the labour force) work in the informal sector in unstable, unsafe jobs.
- 2.5 million children are forced to work.
- Two million children and youth have no access to education.
- 15 million Colombians (41% of the population) have no access to health or social security benefits.

The result: mass privatizations and layoffs...

The Colombian government has been only too happy to go along with all of these changes. They've cut health and education spending, and closed many state agencies. Thousands of public workers have been laid off. They've gone on a privatization frenzy — sea ports, railways, state banks, chemical companies, hydroelectric plants, and much more. They've also opened up their rich oil resources for foreign companies to explore. The U.S. is **very** interested in Colombia's oil.





Making labour "flexible"

In Colombia, the government and its security forces are **deadly** serious about keeping the country's labour "flexible" for the benefit of foreign companies. Making labour "flexible" is one of the goals of neoliberal economic policies. As most workers know, what flexible really means is "cheaper and easier to abuse." It means taking away workers' rights. Of course, unions tend to get in the way of this particular goal.

THEY'RE GOING TO EXTRAORDINARY LENGTHS TO SHUT DOWN THE VOICE OF ORGANIZED LABOUR.



They're changing labour laws

In 1990 and '91, Colombia changed its labour laws to make it easier for employers to fire workers. Permanent employment (with all the benefits like social security, unemployment insurance, vacations, shift premiums, etc.,) is being replaced by a system of short-term contracts and casual work. Employers can now take on workers under "service rendering contracts." If a worker is found to be part of a union — too bad: the company can refuse to renew the worker's contract!

They're making union activities "criminal"

According to the ICFTU, authorities have even used the penal code to punish union activity. Strikes are now seen as acts of "terrorism", "sabotage," or a "violation of the right to work". Those found guilty can get 20 years in prison!

Battered and bruised, Colombia's labour movement continues the fight for justice!!

Despite the vicious attacks against organized labour, Colombia's labour movement has managed to stay strong. This is partly because of the heroic efforts of the CUT (the Unified Central of Colombian Workers). The CUT is the largest trade union federation in the country, with 746 affiliated unions representing close to 600,000 workers. The federation's entire executive committee has to go around with full-time body guards because of the on-going death threats they receive!

The CUT has recently worked with many other kinds of organizations to build a mass popular movement for peace and social justice across the country. They call this new movement the **Social and Political Front** (Frente Social y Politico, FSP).



The movement opposes neoliberal economic policies. It opposes control by private corporations of the country's natural resources. It opposes the U.S. sending military aid to Colombia. And it supports a negotiated solution to the civil war.

In October 2001, at least 6 members of the Petroleum Workers Union (Union Sindical Obrera, USO) were on a 24-hour work stoppage at the state-run oil company, Ecopetrol, demanding an end to violent attacks against unions. They were arrested and charged with "rebellion". Only two months later, Aury Sara-Marrugo, President of a USO local in the city of Cartagena, was found murdered...



Worst of all, they're actually KILLING off union members!



Aury Sara-Marrugo, President, Cartagena local of USO, found murdered after being abducted by paramilitaries (Dec. 5, 2001).





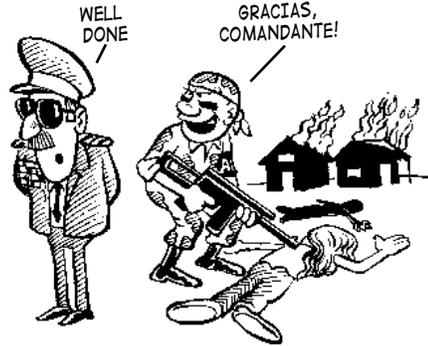
THE RIGHT-WING PARAMILITARIES

The paramilitaries are private right-wing armies. They are financed by profits from the drug trade and funds provided by wealthy elites. They defend the interests of wealthy Colombians and transnational corporations — those who benefit from neoliberal economic policies. They are responsible for **80% of the human rights violations, political killings and massacres in Colombia.**



According to reports by organizations like Human Rights Watch, the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights and others, **the paramilitaries have close ties to the Colombian army.**

Basically, they're doing the army's dirty work. There's even evidence that some corporations have used the services of these criminals against uncooperative workers and communities!



WHO'S ON THE PARAMILITARY'S DEATH LIST?



Outspoken union members who defend workers' rights and organize job actions



Indigenous leaders who oppose oil exploration on their lands, or who disagree with their lands being flooded by hydro-electric dams



Church leaders, politicians and court judges who denounce the paramilitary's atrocities



Whole communities of men, women and children who stand up for their rights and resist the abuses of transnational corporations

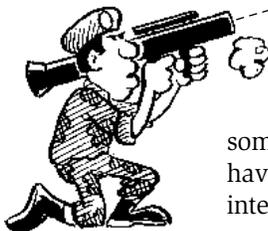
And the list goes on!



THE LEFT-WING GUERRILLAS



The guerrilla groups, such as the FARC (which means the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), control large areas of remote mountains and jungle. They say they're fighting for the rights of poor Colombians. But all too often these days, these very people are being harassed and sometimes even killed by the guerrillas. Human rights organizations have increasingly accused certain guerrilla groups of violating international humanitarian law.



U.S. MILITARY AID: THROWING GASOLINE ON THE FIRE!

The United States is giving billions of dollars of aid and assistance to Colombia's military under a little deal they call "Plan Colombia." They say it's to fight the "war against drugs." The idea is to

help Colombia's police and army stop the **supply** of illegal drugs by destroying all of the country's coca and poppy crops. How? Mainly by blanketing the countryside with herbicides sprayed from the air. The problem with this idea is that they're spraying over much more than just drug crops. Towns, villages, food crops, drinking water, soil, tropical rainforest, people — all are being poisoned.



Besides being violent and unethical, as a drug strategy it doesn't even work! There's plenty of evidence showing that mass herbicide sprayings don't do anything to stop the flow of drugs! Studies have shown that the millions of dollars the U.S. is spending on herbicide sprayings would be **twenty three times more effective** at reducing America's drug addiction problem if it were spent at home on drug treatment programs!



Targeting farmers: is it fair?

Due to neoliberal economic policies pushed by the U.S. and other developed countries, prices for food crops and cash crops like coffee are so low that farmers can't even feed their families. Many Colombian farmers have been forced to turn to the one crop that gives them any kind of living at all: drugs. As long as neoliberal economic policies cause poverty, desperate people will be forced to do desperate things to survive. Let's change unjust economic policies instead of destroying people and their environment

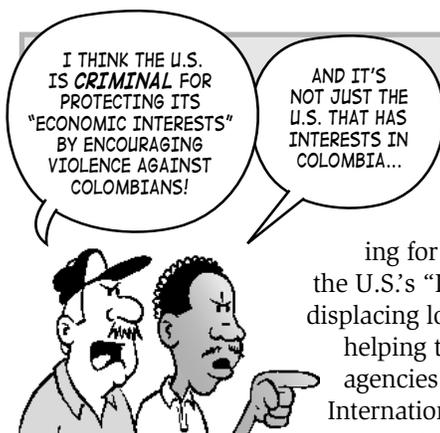


Other interests

The U.S.'s real goal behind Plan Colombia is to **protect their economic interests in the region**. These interests—especially oil interests—are threatened by guerrillas who sometimes sabotage oil pipelines. They are also threatened by growing numbers of civilians who don't agree with

neoliberal policies like free trade. So the idea is to strengthen Colombia's military and help them push into remote areas. The problem? The U.S. Congress doesn't support giving official "military aid" to a country with such a poor human rights record. The solution? Just call it a "war against drugs," and that's something **everyone** can support. So the aid keeps flowing. But lately the U.S. President has been getting impatient. He wants to give Colombia **full and open military support**. So now he's talking about the need to fight the "war

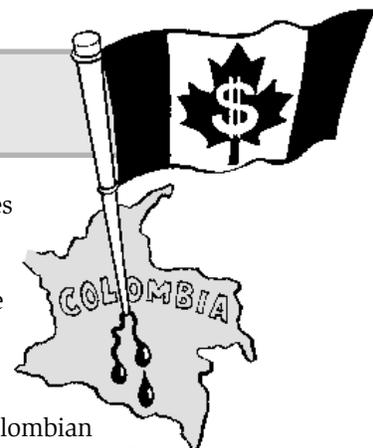
against terrorism" in Colombia. With that kind of language, he's sure to get the approval he needs to increase aid. But the irony is, by supporting the Colombian military, the U.S. is indirectly supporting the worst Colombian terrorists of all: the **right-wing paramilitary death squads!**



CANADIAN COMPANIES ARE IN COLOMBIA TOO!

Dozens of Canadian companies are in Colombia. Companies like Quadra Resources, Gulf Sands and Talisman are exploring for oil. Some, like Alberta Energy, are active in the areas where the U.S.'s "Plan Colombia" is unleashing violence. Mining companies are displacing local, small-scale mine operators, and the paramilitaries are helping to force people to leave. Even our government's own agencies are guilty of abusing the rights of Colombians. The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) has provided funds to the Colombian government to help change the country's mining codes. This will make it easier to push

people out of the mining areas — legally. Another one, the Export Development Corporation (EDC), gave \$18 million dollars in loan guarantees for the construction of a dam on the traditional lands of the Embera Katio people, without their consent. Community leaders who have led their people in protest have been killed by paramilitaries!



COLOMBIAN PEOPLE ARE STRUGGLING AGAINST VIOLENCE AND INJUSTICE

THEY NEED OUR HELP NOW!



HERE'S WHAT YOU CAN DO

- ➔ Educating Canadians on Colombia is the first step in taking action. Contact a solidarity group to organize an event in your local or community.
- ➔ Join the "Permanent S.O.S." campaign for the protection of Colombia's social popular movements. For more information contact the Canada-Colombia Solidarity Campaign at mingacolombia@yahoo.ca
- ➔ Mobilize your local or union to sponsor Colombian trade unionists or social movement activists who have been forced to flee as refugees. For more information contact the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) about implementing its "sponsorship agreement".
- ➔ Contact your elected representatives to demand strong federal government controls and scrutiny of Canadian foreign policy and investment in Colombia. Demand that they look at agencies such as EDC, CIDA and other federal and crown corporations, and ensure that projects in Colombia respect labour, human rights and environmental standards.
- ➔ Promote a "moratorium on foreign and Canadian investment" in territories where armed-conflict is present and where crimes against humanity are being committed.
- ➔ Promote fair trade initiatives between Canadians and Colombians in the form of workers' cooperatives, small-scale owners and producers and farmers' cooperatives.

Written, illustrated and designed by Tony Biddle

Tony Biddle creates illustrated popular education materials for progressive organizations on a wide range of issues — from the environment to labour, from food and health to social and economic justice and much more. For more information visit www.perfectworldproductions.com

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Canadian solidarity action grows

The labour movement has been involved in solidarity with Colombian workers for years, and the movement is growing. If you want to get involved in solidarity activities or you want more information, you can contact any of the following organizations:



Canadian Labour Congress (CLC)

Website: <http://www.clc-ctc.ca>

The Canada-Colombia Solidarity Campaign

Website: <http://tao.ca/~ccsc>

E-mail: mingacolombia@yahoo.ca

The Canadian-Colombian Association

E-mail: cca_toronto@hotmail.com

KAIROS (Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives)

Website: <http://www.kairoscanada.org>

E-mail: kprice@kairoscanada.org

Resources on the net



Colombian Labor Monitor

<http://www.prairienet.org/clm>

Znet Colombia Watch

<http://www.zmag.org/crisescurevts/colombia/colombiatop/htm>

Colombia Update (news distribution list of Canada-Colombia Working Group)

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/colombiaupdate>

Nizkor

<http://www.derechos.org/nizkor/colombia>

Human Rights Watch

<http://www.hrw.org>

Colombia Human Rights Network

<http://www.igc.org/colhrnet>

Colombia Support Network

<http://www.colombiasupport.net>

Washington Office on Latin America

<http://www.wola.org>

Murderers on trial!

The "Stop Impunity...Colombia Demands Justice" campaign is an important international effort to expose the crimes against humanity committed by specific individuals and groups in Colombia. One of their strategies is to hold tribunals in different countries outside Colombia. <http://colnodo.apc.org/ffi-col>

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