

Rightist Gangs Murdering Trade Unionists in Colombia

By [Tom Burghardt](#)

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In the wake of recent mass demonstrations against state and paramilitary violence across Colombia, four trade union activists who helped coordinate the events were brutally murdered.

Convened by the National Movement of Victims of State Crimes (**MOVICE**), the March 6 mobilization denounced the complicity of the Uribe regime with paramilitary gangsters, aided and abetted by the Bush administration's on-going sponsorship of rightist atrocities through Plan Colombia.

According to the [Center for International Policy](#), MOVICE organizer Iván Cepeda Castro reported in the Colombian weekly *El Espectador*, that the assassinated union leaders were:

- * Carmen Cecilia Carvajal, teacher. Killed 4 March, in Ocaña, Norte de Santander.
- * Leonidas Gómez Roza, member of the bankworkers union, Unión Nacional de Empleados Bancarios (Uneb), president of the CITY-BANK Branco. Killed on 5 March, in Bogotá.
- * Gildardo Gómez Alzate, teacher and activist of the Asociación de Institutores de Antioquia (Adida). Killed 7 March, in Medellín.
- * Carlos Burbano, vice-president of the Hospitalworkers Union, Asociación Nacional de Trabajadores Hospitalarios. Killed 11 March, San Vicente del Caguán, Caquetá.

Castro went on to describe how,

Carlos Burbano...was disappeared on 9 March in San Vicente del Caguán. He had led the local March 6 demonstration. His corpse was found at the municipal rubbish dump with his face disfigured by acid. ("A Serious Wave of Threats," The Center for International Policy, March 18, 2008)

That these murders were preceded by provocative allegations denouncing the march by dodgy state figures is hardly surprising. José Obdulio Gaviria, an advisor to president Álvaro Uribe, impugned MOVICE when he declared on February 10 that the demonstrations were being "convened by the FARC," a virtual death sentence for anyone publicly tarred with the "narcoguerrilla" brush. This, despite the fact that MOVICE leaders had "denounced parallel calls by armed groups" to participate, according to Castro.

Gaviria's inflammatory pronouncement was echoed, as if on cue February 11, when the paramilitary Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC), a fascist death squad with documented links to [narcotrafficking](#), "affirmed that the march was instigated by the guerrillas."

This was followed March 12, when a communiqué appeared on the Colombian [Indymedia](#) website from the shadowy far-right gang Aguilas Negras or Black Eagles. The anonymous author declared "all those entities, institutions, diplomatic representations and common people who receive this virtual communiqué are declared PHASE A MILITARY OBJECTIVES."

In the context of contemporary Colombia society, such rhetoric is not taken lightly.

That these union leaders were "disappeared," cruelly tortured and then assassinated by state-aligned paramilitaries is ironic, given that the U.S. [State Department](#) in its annual "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Colombia," last week claimed there aren't any new paramilitary groups in Colombia. That such mendacity passes muster in an official government report is indicative of the Bush regime's panic at proverbial "facts on the ground." As Latin America moves left, rejecting IMF/World Bank "privatization" (resource extraction) schemes, a corporatist façade of "democratic leaders" committed to "market reforms" and "the rule of law," drive the North American ruling class and their proxies, to create their own hollow realities.

As analyst [Garry Leech](#) points out:

In reality, there is a wealth of evidence showing that there are dozens of new paramilitary groups waging a dirty war in Colombia. Numerous human rights groups have shown that new paramilitary groups operating under names such as the New Generation or the Black Eagles do indeed exist and that they are responsible for a significant percentage of the country's political violence. In 2006, the Colombian NGO Indepaz reported that 43 new paramilitary groups totaling almost 4,000 fighters had been formed in 23 of the country's 32 departments. Last year, the OAS estimated that there were 20 new paramilitary groups with 3,000 fighters operating in Colombia. According to Alirio Uribe, a leading Colombian human rights lawyer with the José Alvear Restrepo Lawyers' Collective:

"There are forty-three new paramilitary groups but, according to the Ministry of Defense, these new paramilitary groups have nothing to do with the old ones. But the truth is, they are the same. Before they were the AUC, now they are called the New Generation AUC. They have the same collusion with the army and the police. It is a farce." ("Bush Administration Fails to Acknowledge Existence of New Paramilitary Groups in Colombia," Colombia Journal, Monday, March 17, 2008)

These are dangerous times for leftists and union organizers in Colombia. Since 1985 more than 4,000 union leaders and rank-and-file members have been murdered, either by the U.S.-backed Army or their paramilitary stand-ins. Often enough, activists have been killed or "disappeared" while organizing workers or during strike actions at giant American-owned firms. U.S. multinational corporations alleged to have collaborated with narcotrafficking rightist gangs include: the [Coca-Cola Corporation](#), [Chiquita Brands](#), Alabama-based [Drummond Coal](#), to name but a few of the well-heeled U.S. companies pushing for a "free trade" deal with the death squad state.

Ironically, while praised by George W. Bush, Uribe was linked to drug traffickers by the Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) back in 1991. Citing [documents](#) published by the National Security Archive, according to [Bill Van Auken](#),

The confidential DIA report described Uribe in the following terms: "A Colombian politician and senator dedicated to collaboration with the Medellín Cartel at high government levels. Uribe was linked to a business involved in narcotics activities in the US. His father was murdered in Colombia for his connection with the narcotics traffickers. Uribe has worked for the Medellín Cartel and is a close personal friend of Pablo Escobar Gaviria." It added that Uribe had "attacked all forms of the extradition treaty" that Washington had sought to bring Colombian drug traffickers to trial in the US.

Uribe and his spokesmen rushed to deny the veracity of the document, pointing to factual errors in its findings. ... They failed, however, to dispute what many have charged is the key allegation in the document: that Uribe enjoyed a close personal association with Escobar and the Medellín Cartel. ("Colombia's Uribe: US ally in 'war on terror' named as drug trafficker," World Socialist Web Site, 5 August 2004)

Today's plague of violence and mayhem is the deranged offspring of U.S. counterinsurgency doctrines taught in Colombia. Back in 1962, a proposal to organize "irregular" forces in tandem with regular Army units was made by a top-level U.S. Special Warfare team from Ft. Bragg. According to historian Michael McClintock,

General [William P.] Yarborough...pressed for a stay-behind irregular force and its immediate deployment to eliminate communists representing a future threat:

[A] concerted country team effort should be made now to select civilian and military personnel for clandestine training in resistance operations in case they are needed later. This should be done with a view toward development of a civil and military structure for exploitation in the event the Colombian internal security system deteriorates further. This structure should be used to pressure toward reforms known to be needed, perform counter-agent and counter-propaganda functions and as necessary execute paramilitary, sabotage and/or terrorist activities against known communist proponents. It should be backed by the United States. (Instruments of Statecraft, New York: Pantheon Books, 1992, p. 222)

Fast forward more than 40 years and tens of thousands of deaths later: "communists" in the form of union leaders, peasant organizers, human rights workers, or indeed, anyone who dares raise their voice against the oppressive social and economic policies of a narcostate backed by the full weight of the imperialist "Colossus to the North" is a target worthy of "elimination."

Tom Burghardt is a researcher and activist based in the San Francisco Bay Area. In addition to publishing in Covert Action Quarterly, Love & Rage and Antifa Forum, he is the editor of Police State America: U.S. Military "Civil Disturbance" Planning, distributed by AK Press.

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