

PRESSURE GROUPS AND THE DOWNFALL OF GENERAL
GUSTAVO ROJAS PINILLA (1953-1957)

by

John Palaschak, III

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

In the Graduate College

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

1 9 6 7

STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

This thesis has been submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for an advanced degree at The University of Arizona and is deposited in the University Library to be made available to borrowers under rules of the Library.

Brief quotations from this thesis are allowable without special permission, provided that accurate acknowledgment of source is made. Requests for permission for extended quotation from or reproduction of this manuscript in whole or in part may be granted by the head of the major department or the Dean of the Graduate College when in his judgment the proposed use of the material is in the interests of scholarship. In all other instances, however, permission must be obtained from the author.

SIGNED:

John Palaschak, III

APPROVAL BY THESIS DIRECTOR

This thesis has been approved on the date shown below:

Russell C. Ewing
Dr. Russell C. Ewing

Aug. 4, 1967
Date

PREFACE

In Colombia, May 10 has been elevated to the position of a national holiday. For most Colombians it is a day of patriotic celebrations, but dissenters are among the crowds. Though popular opinion varies a great deal and the subject is still laden with emotion, Rojas Pinilla has been judged by the groups now in control of the government. But his specter continues to haunt the congressional halls, and his ideas are sounded by the representatives of Colombia's third largest political party. Admittedly, this very contemporary aspect of the dictatorship allows for a plethora of opinions that tend to obscure the facts. Furthermore, much information has purposely been quashed to protect various individuals who were associated with the regime.

On gathering the factual material concerning Rojas Pinilla and his government, I quickly discovered that to concentrate solely on the politics of his regime and its opponents would be inadequate for a meaningful understanding. The economic and social ramifications are indispensable, although I do not pretend to examine more than certain underlying themes.

The title indicates that economic, political, and social pressure groups destroyed the dictatorship. But then the question remains as to who were these groups, what social roles did they play, what kind of power did they wield. It is conceded that there are infinite complexities in this undertaking and that one can easily be led astray by impressionistic evaluations. On the other hand, I found after residing

in Colombia for five months that these power groups are adequately identifiable for purposes of this paper. An interested visitor is immediately struck by the high correlation of the intellectual, financial, and political leadership (elitism) with the upper social strata, which has its roots in history as well as a sizeable portion of the national wealth. Genealogies, club memberships, recent marriage accounts, and social columns in newspapers became indispensable in finding out who belonged to what social category.

A special debt of gratitude is owed to Dr. Russell C. Ewing for his helpful criticism and direction. I also want to extend a word of appreciation to Dr. Robert Stevens for his assistance in preparing this thesis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE	iii
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	vi
ABSTRACT	vii
CHAPTER	
I. CONSERVATIVE AND LIBERAL LEADERSHIP	1
II. THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL OPPOSITION	12
III. THE PRESIDENT VERSUS THE PRESS	35
IV. ECONOMIC DETERIORATION UNDER ROJAS PINILLA	63
V. THE POLITICAL POSITION OF THE CHURCH	79
VI. THE FALL OF THE DICTATORSHIP	89
REFERENCES	105

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

ILLUSTRATION	PAGE
1. NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAP OF COLOMBIA	104

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of the Colombian military in conflict with the norms and institutions of the upper classes. Increasingly before the overthrow of President Laureano Gómez, the patrician class felt itself threatened by the violent political situation. General Rojas Pinilla took this opportunity to seize control, but to the dismay of established ruling groups, his government only brought more chaos. With the precedents of Juan Domingo Perón in mind, he unskillfully attempted to gain the support of labor unions, government bureaucrats, and just about anyone else who would support his autocratic methods. Fiscal irresponsibility, repression of the press, and profanation of the political system were interpreted by influential non-military groups as a definite threat. As a result, Liberals and Conservatives forgot their past antagonisms and united against the regime. The Church along with financial and industrial leaders also joined the coalition. These sectors, in turn, decidedly influenced student and labor groups to throw their lot against the dictatorship. Ultimately, the Armed Forces agreed to oust their incompetent chief.

CHAPTER I. CONSERVATIVE AND LIBERAL LEADERSHIP

Government by the people in Colombia has always meant rule by the wealthy. The limited democracy that did evolve after the 1930's was tailored by and for the upper class. Not the least of reasons why Colombian politics has remained dominated by a minority of the wealthy is the fact that there is no real cleavage between the upper class, based on wealth, and the elite, that sector of society which has achieved positions of leadership and influence in all legitimate endeavors. That is, political leadership has seldom come from the broad base of the Colombian population. Almost without question, national and regional leaders have enjoyed a high economic and social standing before entering politics. Even some of the important spokesmen for the labor movement have their origins in the upper social strata. This type of pre-condition for political success also has tended to determine the upward mobility within the Church hierarchy and intellectual circles. Moreover, the retarded educational system and the limited industrialization of the country have hindered significant upward mobility from the lower ranks, and, in turn, have served to reinforce a semi-colonial-type ruling class with strong antecedents in the nineteenth century. Birthright to social rank was, and still is, a recognized condition of class prerogative which has continued to circumscribe equality of opportunity to within arbitrary and narrow limits. Broadly speaking, the social structure has exhibited in relief divisions and allegiances that influence nearly every aspect of one's existence.

Colombia has had no modernizing process comparable to the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) but rather a very slow evolutionary movement which, in fact, has represented more of a strategic political retreat on the part of the ruling class than any real endeavor to enforce a more equitable distribution of the nation's wealth.

During the 1950's, approximately ninety per cent of the country's wealth was concentrated in the hands of three per cent of the population.¹ Though percentages of this sort are at their best approximations, other reliable sources ascribe affluence to the upper five per cent of the population.² These figures, too, closely coincide with the amount of popular participation in politics, although admittedly no statistics are available as to the social and economic status of the average voter. Most of Colombia has been, and still is, politically inert.

Land ownership before World War I was the traditional source of wealth and power, but by the time of Rojas Pinilla's government, other sources of income had become decisive in maintaining the upper class. About one-half of the national income in the 1950's was coming from some type of dividend earnings which meant a few relatively idle rich existing on the labor of many.³ Thus the investment of capital in national industry and abroad has served as a hedge against disruption of

1. Vernon Lee Fluharty, Dance of the Millions (Pittsburg, University of Pittsburg Press, 1957), p. 146.

2. El Tiempo (Bogotá), September 22, 1957, as cited in Hispanic American Report, X, No. 9 (September, 1957), p. 480.

3. Fluharty, op. cit., p. 146.

the status quo. The old landed oligarchy of the nineteenth century in fact has adjusted very well to the forces of industrialization and has taken the opportunity to shift part of their capital into the development of light industry. Consequently, the post-Independence oligarchy is essentially intact and has maintained its hegemony, though there are a number of families that have risen to upper-class status in the twentieth century by means of enterprise and intermarriage.

Caucasian physiognomies and wealth are identified with education, political control, and social prerogative. In obvious contrast is a mestizo-mulatto conglomeration of humanity with poverty as its common denominator. Racial discrimination in Colombia is a fact seldom expressed vocally, but everywhere apparent. The difficulty in defining race, however, is the economic and cultural complications. Thus far poverty itself has kept lower-class, and lower-caste, Colombians to a distinctly more indigenous culture shaped more by the physical environment rather than any pre-conceived notions about the "right" way to live. On the other hand, rich, "white" Colombians try to emulate a European style of life, particularly French, but really have succeeded only in cultivating the superficial aspects of European culture which they believe to be aristocratic. Increasingly, as Colombia becomes more an economic anachronism in the world about her, these social values which the upper class has so steadfastly maintained since Independence will become more out of pace with the times.

To be sure, advancement toward social justice has been stifled, and the resulting polarization between the upper and lower classes has become an explosive issue. Rojas Pinilla, especially in the last year

of his regime, demagogically played upon the social and economic inequalities in Colombia to rally support from the lower income groups. Though the general was unsuccessful, he failed to recognize the alarm he created among the ruling groups. This appeal was taken by many as adventuristic nationalism which could only drive the country into deeper chaos.

Ideally, according to Colombian thinking, the ruling class is paternalistic and the rest of the citizenry is submissive, but in reality this concept has become more of an illusion with the passage of time.⁴ Workers are demanding more than the patricians are willing or, indeed, able to concede. Unfortunately, Colombia since 1954 has not been able to keep agricultural and industrial production apace with the population growth. Therefore, any improvement in the living standards would necessarily curtail the consumption of the upper economic groups. Under the presidency of Laureano Gómez (1950-1953), the political machinery of the country was particularly disturbed by popular uprisings of the peasantry, and the insistence of the leadership of the Liberal and Conservative parties to concentrate on violent partisan politics rather than minister to the real needs of the nation. Until the rise of Lieutenant General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla in 1953, Colombia was torn by two developments: first, the inability of patrician leaders of the Liberal and Conservative parties to reach a compromise but instead to cause the

4. This statement and the following undocumented material in this chapter was gathered by observation while in the country. See also Vernon Lee Fluharty, Dance of the Millions (Pittsburg: Pittsburg University Press, 1957), and John D. Martz, Colombia: A Contemporary Political Survey (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962).

blood of thousands of peasants to be spilled because of inter-party strife; and second, the growing tendency, which continued into the military regime, of the peasantry to plunder the properties of the regional upper class and absentee landholders.

Unfortunately, Colombia had not developed a middle class by the 1950's capable of cushioning the reaction between the social extremes. In fact, the most middle-class thinking group in Colombia was the officer's corps of the Armed Forces, but even they traditionally sided with the interests of the patrician elite. The rank and file of the civilian middle class could rarely trace their family origins from the lower ranks of society. On the contrary, they were usually the progeny of distinguished families who had entered the professions, small businesses, or, indeed, politics as the only alternative for maintaining an acceptable standard of living. Unlike the United States, the population growth of Colombia has not been commensurate with economic growth, and, therefore, there were few openings in the middle ranks for newcomers from the lower strata; there was no large immigration of Europeans to transplant middle-class values. In aspirations, identities, and style of life, when possible, the middle class followed the example set by its patrician relatives. Its family names and values were inextricably bound to the upper class which, in fact, made the middle class little more than a poorer version of patrician society. There is also significant mobility between these two classes but seldom to any lower status. The distance between the middle-class professional and the proletariat or peasant is very great. This social reality coupled with the fact that so few Colombians have a decent standard of living make the concept of

a middle class in Colombia difficult to apply under the American definition.

Nearly all wealthy Colombians are associated in some way with politics or politicians. Political participation, as well as education, especially in the humanities, are a part of the patrician ideal and valuable in conducting business. But, considering the social composition of the political oligarchy, it is not incorrect to say the bi-party system dating back to the early post-Independence period is essentially two conservative parties in spite of their names Liberal and Conservative. Though both parties have the same objective, that is, the maintenance of the upper class in political control, Colombians are accustomed to making subtle, scholastic distinctions between Liberal and Conservative ideologies. Only under some common threat to patrician hegemony have the two parties been able to forget their differences.

There is, too, the tendency for each respective party to fraction behind the leadership of two or more personalist leaders. For example, during the 1946 presidential elections, the reigning Liberal party split the ticket between two candidates, Gabriel Turbay and Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, and consequently lost the election to the Conservatives. Only when the Liberals began undergoing persecution at the hands of the Conservatives during the administration of President Mariano Ospina Pérez and Laureano Gómez was the Liberal party reunited under the leadership of Alberto Lleras Camargo. On the other hand, the Conservative party now firmly in control under President Ospina Pérez began showing fissures. Moreover, by the time of the military coup on June 13, 1953, Conservatives were divided into three factions with the

followers of President Laureano Gómez maintaining an unsteady hegemony. At the same time, the disunited Conservative party was engaging in violent repression of the Liberals in rural districts. Still more ironic is the fact that only three years later both parties displayed exemplary cooperation and cohesion in the overthrow of their common enemy, General Rojas Pinilla. The patrician leadership of both parties feared, if Rojas Pinilla were ultimately successful in his political designs, it would be replaced by people unswervingly allied to the general rather than the upper class.

This factionalist tendency has its basis in nineteenth century personalism. The preoccupation with the self, the ego, the virtual deification of the individual has produced extreme personalist tendencies not only in politics but in society at large. When a leader did attain power, rather than seek cooperation and compromise for the common good of the nation a polarization instead took place between that leader's followers and his opponents. Negative criticism was the motif of Colombian politics during the late 1940's and early 1950's. The sense of compromise so essential to the American and British systems of government was at best in a crude stage of development.

The bi-party struggle has traditionally been masked by a patina of idealism. The politically naive masses were still led to believe the rights of man did exist for the people; but the true end of party politics was toward that of capturing, controlling, and using the public budget, customs receipts, and the administration through which favors

were disbursed to friends.⁵ Political responsibility was not necessarily synonymous with social justice for all Colombians but rather allegiance to the party hierarchy, which, in return, distributed the spoils of victory to deserving supporters with little or nothing left over for the vanquished. Particularly after the 1930's, control of an expanding economy became of paramount importance. At their best, the Conservative and Liberal parties have balanced their greedy appetites in a kind of armed truce. Notwithstanding this condition, politics still centers in warring camps with the welfare of the nation of secondary importance.

By the time Laureano Gómez captured the presidency in 1950, a civil war in the rural districts, commonly called The Violence (La Violencia) had reached a high point.⁶ The first wave of violence from 1949 to 1953 was thought to have been directed by top politicians in Bogotá and the departmental capitals and apparently had the tacit approval of President Gómez himself. At first Liberal peasants were singled out as the victims of extortion and other acts of violence, but within a few months attacks between Liberal and Conservative guerrilla bands became reciprocal. Late in 1954, however, and in the succeeding years of the military regime wealthy landholders became the targets of peasant violence irrespective of their party affiliations which, in turn, initiated a very real fear of class warfare among the patrician

5. Fluharty, op. cit., p. 220.

6. For the best account of The Violence during this period see Germán Guzmán Campos, La Violencia en Colombia, Vol. I (Bogotá: Ediciones Tercer Mundo, 1964).

politicians. In other words, the same people who in the late 1940's and early 1950's had condoned, or at least not opposed, inter-party violence became the very opponents of this mania when the specter of social upheaval became apparent.

By 1953, both parties were receptive to the idea of a neutral strongman to stop the internecine conflagration. Violence was spreading beyond control with every indication of increasing in geography and intensity. Most Liberal leaders, including Lleras Camargo, were in political exile. And, too, President Gómez was losing grip with his own Conservative party, and his press censorship and the proposed constitutional reforms pointed to a civilian dictatorship in the making. President Gómez no longer ruled with a unified party. Ospina Pérez commanded a large block of moderate Conservatives in the National Constituent Assembly that could challenge any attempt by Gómez to choose a presidential successor. To counteract the power of the ospinistas, Gómez imposed press censorship on pro-Ospina sympathizers some months prior to the military coup d'etat. Though a much smaller Conservative faction, Gilberto Alzate Avendaño headed a personal following whose political ideology coincided closely with the rightist policies of President Gómez. The danger of the alzatistas to the laureanistas was that they recognized Alzate Avendaño rather than Gómez as their teacher. Moreover, the highhanded rule of the President and his program of constitutional revision indicated a growing personalist rule with little sympathy for any semi-independent factions.

Thus, when Rojas Pinilla deposed the constitutional president on June 13, 1953, Colombia heralded him as a savior. Rojas Pinilla, in

fact, accomplished in a matter of hours what President Gómez was trying to do all along through the corruption of civilian government. Gómez failed to reconcile himself to ambitious elements in the military establishment. As his popularity waned and the dictatorial character of his administration became more apparent, there was a commensurate desire on the part of dissatisfied power groups to reverse this trend. It was only the military, however, which was capable of decisive action.

The Armed Forces were in the advantageous position of being able to enter the political scene as an arbitrator between the two parties. And, indeed, the military takeover was not ill received by the majority of Colombians, for the situation had become so chaotic by 1953 that any alleviation of the present state of affairs would have been a favorable alternative. In addition, the Colombian military had already earned itself a favorable popular image by its tradition of professionalism and aloofness from partisan politics. Furthermore, the officers' corps did not have the stain of upper-class prejudices and, therefore, could pose as a more truly national institution representing all Colombians. What most Colombians failed to realize when they gave their blessing to the new military government was that now the Armed Forces, as an institution with a decisive role on the political scene, would look after itself first just as the political establishment had done. In effect, Colombia found itself again with another sort of institutionalized "extended family" more interested in the perpetuation of itself in a position of power, and therefore economic advantage, rather than the good of the nation. To be sure, the officers' corps felt what was good for the Armed Forces was synonymous with what was good for the nation.

Rojas Pinilla as the head of the New Order soon found it necessary to foist upon the public a new ideology of militarism to justify the continuation of military government. And in order to integrate the military into the political panorama, Rojas Pinilla had to remove political obstacles. But as has been noted, Colombians are not inclined toward compromise, which ultimately created new alliances and conflicts. Now rather than conservative versus Liberals, the patrician politicians of both parties came to realize they were being eliminated from national leadership. Their only recourse was to organize all forms of pressure groups against their common enemy. In brief, their strategy was to pool civilian pressure groups while at the same time discrediting Rojas Pinilla as a national leader. The political ineptitude of the military dictator was advantageous. He was unable to form a favorable understanding with the Church and finally alienated that institution by a series of errors truly demonstrative of his military tactlessness. Moreover, the greater experience of his civilian adversaries, the dismal economic failure assisted by administrative and political ineptness, and the general discontent ultimately convinced his military coterie of the uselessness in sustaining his rule. At the same time, Rojas Pinilla had not groomed a military successor able to continue a personalist regime in the name of the military. With their leader discredited, the Colombian military again sought refuge in its traditional role of professionalism.

CHAPTER II. THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL OPPOSITION

There was general surprise when the official radio announced to the country that Lieutenant General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla had assumed the presidency. Earlier that evening of June 13, 1953, the general had entered the Palace of Nariño with a group of high-ranking officers. There the military usurpers were met by Colombia's prominent Conservative leaders, with the exception of any representation of the laureanistas. Deposed President Gómez was making preparation for immediate exile. Everyone at the palace pledged their support to the general. Meanwhile military chiefs were taking over the governorships of most of Colombia's provincial departments. Colombia's first military coup d'etat in the twentieth century was completed bloodlessly in a matter of a few hours.

Late in the evening of June 13, the new provisional president addressed the country over the official radio network. He stated that he overthrew President Gómez because of a "morally serious" situation created by his unconstitutional policies. He called for "no more bloodshed, no more violence in the name of the party, no more strife between Colombians." "Clean elections" were promised with a "genuinely democratic system, legislative rulers and judges which the Colombian people wish to choose in complete liberty."¹ Thus, Colombians were won over

1. Hispanic American Report, VI, No. 6 (June, 1953), pp. 25-26.

by the optimistic predictions of their new military chief executive that over six years of unmitigated violence would be resolved by the superior integrity and political morality of the Armed Forces. The country took on the aspect of exhilaration at the prospect of a brighter future. Rojas Pinilla had become a hero in a matter of hours. With overwhelming popular support and the backing of the military, his power was absolute.

The general's next step was to legitimize his de facto rule in constitutional terms. On the fifteenth of June he announced over the official network the convening of the National Constituent Assembly (ANAC) to seek "a national solution not strictly on party lines."² In a triumphal procession from his new headquarters in the Palace of Nariño to the Capitol, where the ANAC was to hold the presidential inauguration, the general did not hide his vanity. No less than fifty splendidly dressed military officers of high rank attended their chief in his procession. At the Capitol, the Constituent Assembly pledged its unanimous support; the followers of ousted President Gómez were either absent or silent. The president of the legislative body, ex-President Ospina Pérez, declared vacant the remainder of Gómez's term of office and appointed Rojas Pinilla as the constitutional chief executive until that term expired on August 7, 1954. Rojas Pinilla concluded his political triumph with an eight-minute speech to the Constituent Assembly in which he affirmed his intentions of improving the country's distressed political

2. New York Times, June 15, 1953, p. 1, col. 3.

situation and of shelving Gómez's plans for drastic constitutional reform.³

Soon after assuming the presidency, Rojas Pinilla appointed a cabinet acceptable to his military and political supporters. Six of the twelve cabinet appointees were affiliates of the moderate pro-Ospina faction within the Conservative party and the remaining six positions were divided evenly between the Armed Forces and ironically the laureanistas. Gómez politicians were given three positions in the cabinet to win over the Conservative faction they represented within the Conservative party and to alienate Gómez from any sympathizers. Most important, however, was the fact that the laureanistas were proposing before the coup d'etat an ultrarightist civilian government that was not unlike the spirit and methodology of the new military regime. It is therefore not so very ironic that Lucio Pabon Núñez, previously very pro-Gómez, became the minister of interior and later the chief political strategist under Rojas Pinilla. The Liberal party, on the other hand, though it had been earlier promised representatives in the cabinet, did not protest its exclusion in view of the fact that now they were free temporarily from persecution.⁴ In fact, both Liberal party leaders, Alberto Lleras Camargo and Enrique Santos Montejó, cabled their approval of the President's cabinet appointee's from exile.

Shortly thereafter, the Liberal Directorate reopened its headquarters in Bogotá, and both Santos and Lleras Camargo returned from

3. "Fast Out of the Gate," Newsweek, June 29, 1953, p. 52.

4. Hispanic American Report, VI, No. 6 (June, 1953), p. 26.

exile. It must be emphasized, however, that the Liberal party was considerably more restrained in its praise of the military government than Conservative leaders. Guillermo León Valencia, who later became the president of the National Conservative Directorate, precipitously went to the rhetorical excess of proclaiming Rojas Pinilla the successor to Alexander the Great, Caesar, Napoleon, and even Bolivar.⁵

One of the major factors which undermined faith in the Gómez administration was the crescendo of guerrilla activity and general insecurity in the provinces. Almost immediately, the new government took measures to stop this suicidal struggle of pointless violence. To continue unabated, La Violencia would have had the same negative effect on the military regime as it did on its predecessor government. On June 19, only six days after the coup, General Duarte Blum sent a circular to the new military chiefs of the respective departments. Complete amnesty and protection were offered to any guerrillas who rendered their arms to the departmental authorities and returned to their normal pursuits.⁶ The results were at first rather spectacular, and the violence did subside for a little less than a year. In the first five days of September, 6,500 men all over Colombia reportedly laid down their arms, and between the previous month of August and September, 3,540 more llaneros (herdsmen on the Llanos) returned to a peaceful existence.⁷ Not only did peace and continued prosperity now seem an

5. Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, Rojas Pinilla ante el Senado (Bogotá: Ediciones Excelsior, 1959), p. 603.

6. Guzmán Campos, op. cit., p. 99.

7. Ibid., p. 100.

attainable goal to most Colombians, but the nation began to feel it had at last a leader capable of solving all its problems within the context of democracy.

However, the President did not tarry long in disappointing sincere democrats. As will be noted in Chapter III, the regime was sensitive to any criticism, constructive or otherwise, and promptly instituted press censorship and coercion. But a more direct and unaccustomed insult to democratic ideals was the President's caustic denunciation of the judiciary. On November 11, 1953, in Cartagena, Rojas Pinilla stated publicly his feelings concerning the failure of the courts to convict the defendant in a highly publicized assassination plot against ten top military leaders. The chief executive then generalized his displeasure with a broad denunciation against the judicial system: "While Judicial Power cannot isolate itself from the partisan camp and rapid and effective processes do not exist to sanction the Judges and Magistrates who lack fulfillment of their duties, the administration of Justice potentially is a shameful deception, and will continue being the greatest obstacle to national convivencia."⁸

Two days later the thirteen members of the Supreme Court jointly submitted their resignations to the President. At the time, however, Rojas Pinilla was still on his vacation, so Justice Minister Antonio Escobar Camargo held the resignations in abeyance until the chief executive returned. Rojas Pinilla later accepted them with apparent reluctance, but while doing so, he also hinted that reorganization would be

8. "Colombia," Seis meses de gobierno, p. 196, as cited in Martz, op. cit., p. 181.

facilitated if other judicial bodies followed the same course of action.⁹ As a result, the six-member Supreme Court of labor and the four-member Council of State also tendered their resignations before the end of 1953. The new hand-picked appointees to these judicial bodies were personally sworn in by Rojas Pinilla early in 1954.

The next move in personalizing his dictatorship was to neutralize old guard politicians in the Constituent Assembly who were in principle opposed to the institutionalization of the military in their sacred realm of politics. The ANAC by law was not allowed to assume legislative functions directly affecting itself, although this fact was discretely overlooked. In July, 1954, just prior to the presidential election which was determined indirectly by the vote of the Constituent Assembly, the President succeeded in having this body increase the number of Liberal delegates from thirteen to thirty-three members and the Church and Armed Forces were each allowed to representatives.¹⁰ The membership of the ANAC therefore became fifty-nine Conservatives, who were with few exceptions rojistas; thirty-three Liberals, twenty of whom were selected directly by the government; and two representatives of the Armed Forces. The Church under the leadership of Archbishop Crisanto Cardinal Luque refused to allow any of the clergy to take either of the two seats offered by the government for Church representation. By this method of "packing" Rojas Pinilla was assured of his re-election. Conservative votes comprised the overwhelming rojista

9. Ibid.

10. New York Times, July 29, 1954, p. 7, col. 6.

support, although laureanista Conservatives either voted for their exiled leader or abstained. Furthermore, a number of Liberals abstained because they felt their representation was "neither adequate nor genuinely representative."¹¹ But aside from a growing number of Liberals and pro-Gómez Conservatives, Rojas Pinilla was still not unpopular nor had the worst aspects of his regime become fully apparent. The majority of pragmatic politicians still saw it expedient to side with the military government rather than prematurely incur the dictator's wrath. Ospina Pérez, presiding president of the Constituent Assembly, had months before seen his bid for the presidency be overwhelmed by the pressure tactics of the regime. Commensurate with Ospina Pérez's decline in presidential potential was the fading of his influence in the Constituent Assembly, though he still remained its president. Most of the ospinistas began truckling to Rojas Pinilla as their leader, while a very small minority began taking sides with Lleras Camargo's opposition movement. (Lleras Camargo was also in the ANAC). On August 7, 1954, General Rojas Pinilla once again took the oath of office for another four-year term.

Late in the month of August, the ANAC conceded still further power to the chief executive. It was decided that until July of 1955, the Constitutional Assembly would not assume full legislative functions but proceed under the provisions of the still-in-force state of siege. Under this condition, the President was empowered to rule by decree as he saw fit. Moreover, the Constituent Assembly was unlikely to offer

11. Ibid., August 8, 1954, p. 11, col. 1.

any serious contention anyway, because pro-Rojas Pinilla representatives held a large majority.

The departmental and municipal governments, on the other hand, still elected their representatives popularly. The military regime replaced this system with small administrative councils of ten to twelve members. The President would personally appoint two of the members while his loyal Constituent Assembly would name the remaining members.¹²

In the latter half of 1954, the Conservative party still gave its cool support to the dictatorship. This support came from the largest of the three Conservative factions. No longer correctly called ospinistas, this group still looked upon the dictator as their patron and upon the Liberal party as a very real enemy. Late in 1955, Guillermo León Valencia emerged as the spokesman for his majority faction. A small group of vociferous laureanistas still remained loyal to their exiled leader Gómez. These Gómez Conservatives remained from the beginning until the end of the dictatorship the intractable opponents of Rojas Pinilla within and without the Constituent Assembly. As a counterpoise to the laureanistas were the followers of Gilberto Alzate Avendaño who, often classified as ultra-rightists or fascists, offered their unfledging support of the military regime. Alzate Avendaño was a fiery politician and for reasons of precaution Rojas Pinilla felt more at ease with zealous ally serving an ambassadorship in Spain. In summation, it is not unusual that the majority, but disunited, Conservative

12. Martz, op. cit., p. 185.

party would take longer to organize against Rojas Pinilla, whom they only belatedly discovered was more dangerous to their interests than the Liberal party.

To be sure, the Liberal party was firmly united under the enlightened leadership of ex-President Lleras Camargo. Always cool to the military government, the party's most prestigious members had formed a real nucleus of opposition by the first half of 1955. It was Lleras Camargo who took the initiative in late 1955 for a reconciliation of differences with the Conservative party.

One reason why Rojas Pinilla had to continue building the machinery of dictatorship in the latter half of 1954 was because his overwhelming popularity was rapidly waning. His attack on the press became increasingly intolerable because, in effect, it was an attempt to undermine the propaganda machine of both political parties which would result only in the decreasing influence of the upper class. As will be noted in Chapter IV, the economic situation, always precarious for the great majority of Colombians, went from a period of prosperity in 1954 to a depression in the latter part of 1955. But probably just as distressing to vested interest groups was the dictator's failure to end La Violencia. In the second half of 1954, another fierce wave of brutal guerrilla warfare flared up, particularly in the departments of Valle del Cauca and Tolima.¹³ This second wave of hostilities reflected more generally the institutionalization of brutality and pillage in the countryside. The

13. See Guzmán Campos, op. cit., pp. 99-115.

fighting was no longer a simple matter of Conservatives attacking Liberals with reciprocal action on both sides but of professional bandits, products of previous years of turmoil and lawlessness. In certain isolated instances there was fierce fighting between anti-government peasants and the military. By 1957, nearly every Colombian family, not excluding the upper class, would mourn the assassination of at least one relative. In addition, landholders began sustaining considerable economic losses to the depredations of bandits, plus the deterioration of morale in devastated areas was very great.¹⁴

Rojas Pinilla and his political strategist, Interior Minister Pabón Núñez, were well aware that the military regime could not justify itself by the existence of predecessor military governments. There had not been any in the twentieth century. Moreover, the right of either the Liberal or Conservative parties to rule Colombia was supported by a tradition of republican government. The only way Rojas Pinilla would be able to justify military rule to political tradition would be to organize a civilian party to compete with and, indeed, to replace the Conservative and Liberal parties. It was the goal of the President and Pabón Núñez to form a "third party" with a popular base of workers, government employees, and anyone else who would follow along. The organizing of the workers and lower middle class was not unlike the policy followed by Juan Domingo Perón in Argentina. Though, to be sure, the urban workers were a much smaller percentage in Colombia with much less sense of political destiny than in Argentina.¹⁵ Such an attempt

14. Ibid., p. 294.

15. My own conclusion after talking with a number of urban workers in Bogotá.

on the part of the government would inevitably put forth the threat of class conflict between Rojas Pinilla's followers and the entrenched oligarchy of the upper classes. Just the prospect of a third party competing with the two established parties was frightening to the upper classes.

The first rumblings of a new political party began rather innocuously. In fact, there was collaboration on the part of several patriotic Liberals and Conservatives. In December, 1954, Liberals Abelardo Forero Benavides and José Umaña Bernal and Conservatives Felix Angel Vallejo and Carlos Londoño met with Rojas Pinilla to propose a third force against "sectionalism and the phenomena of political violence to which the country has been subject."¹⁶ In other words some members of the old guard of politicians were willing to collaborate with the dictator, if it would lead to an alleviation of dangerous social and political conflicts. Too, it is probable that these political activists wished to be a part of any new political movements that would maneuver them into a position of prominence.

Pabón Núñez, nevertheless, gained the initiative in attempting to build a new political machine. With the tacit approval of Rojas Pinilla, he began organizing the Movement of National Action (MAN). Late in December, 1954, the official radio network announced the creation of a new super-party. The object of this political organization was to unite Conservatives, Liberals, Socialists, and labor unions in

16. Tad Szulc, Twilight of the Tyrants (New York: Henry Holt Co., 1959), pp. 225-26. See also Martz, op.cit., p. 191.

support of the military regime.¹⁷

In spite of a concerted but awkwardly handled effort, MAN was a failure from the outset. The scheduled February 26 rally was partially jeopardized by the regime's own propaganizing. On February 27, there appeared in the magazine Semana descriptions of placards demanding support of the government and its "battle against oligarchies."¹⁸ As a result of this demagogic attack on the upper classes, both the Liberal and Conservative leadership refused the participation of their party members in the rally. The decisive blow came some days later when Archbishop Luque in a Lenten pastoral, cosigned by forty Church leaders, condemned the embryonic organization. MAN had made the mistake of seeking the support of the National Confederation of Workers (C.N.T.) which had been condemned only one month before by the Antioquian Catholic hierarchy as Peronist and anti-Catholic.¹⁹ Now, the archbishop brought the full influence of the Colombian Church against this anti-confessional labor union which reportedly rejected the social teachings of the Church on questions of unionism.²⁰ MAN, therefore, was under inferential Church condemnation for its coddling of the CNT. At first the February 26 rally was postponed for several days, and in the meantime the affair was quietly dropped.

The failure of MAN was a setback for Pabón Nuñez and the President but not a defeat. In mid-1956, Rojas Pinilla made his biggest and

17. New York Times, February 26, 1955, p. 5, col. 1.

18. Martz, op. cit., p. 192.

19. Fluharty, op. cit., p. 246.

20. Ibid.

most decisive bid for popular support. At a luncheon held in his honor at the Colegio Militar Cooperativo de Bogotá, he revealed to a group of retired military officers his projections for a Third Force. This new party, the chief executive maintained, was to be above the traditional parties on neutral ground without any discrimination whatsoever to an individual's previous affiliation. Furthermore, since the two traditional parties were still in a state of anarchy, a Third Force would naturally emerge supported and headed by the Armed Forces as means of bringing order out of chaos. With the military in social and educational functions, the thesis of Catholicism was to be paramount so "that we practice and defend the Bolivarian principle of union and liberty with order."²¹ This banquet speech concerning the proposed Third Force was not a new idea to Colombian political thinking, but, in fact, was little more than a paraphrasing of a 1942 manifesto by a group of young Conservatives, "The Doctrine of the National State."²² The only difference between this manifesto and that of the Third Force was that Rojas Pinilla made the Armed Forces the responsible organization for putting into effect its dictums. It is also interesting to note that the architects of the 1942 document were not sympathizers with the military regime, and Belisario Banturur was openly against Rojas Pinilla.

On June 12, the third anniversary of the military coup, army, navy, and air force men were marshalled into Bogotá's Plaza de Bolívar. There on a platform at the foot of the statue of Bolívar were arranged

21. Luis Agudelo Ramírez and Rafael Montoya y Montoya, Los guerrilleros intelectuales (Medellín: Publicaciones Augumont, 1957), pp. 76-77.

22. See Ibid., p. 77.

a cross and eight urns containing the ashes of soldiers who fought in the Korean War and rural guerrilla conflicts. Rojas Pinilla read a solemn oath to the Armed Forces in the name of Jesus Christ and in the memory of Bolivar to "fight for the domination of the Third Force until Colombians lay down their political hatreds before the national banner."²³ The following afternoon at Campín stadium, the north of Bogotá, the President likewise took the oath of allegiance from a throng of youth, labor, farm, and women's groups. Among the labor unions represented were the Catholic oriented Union of Colombian Workers (U.T.C.) and the anti-confessional Confederation of Colombian Workers (C.T.C.). Later the President discovered he committed a serious indiscretion by giving the oath of allegiance en masse to both confessional and anti-confessional labor unions. As a result, the Church hierarchy found it necessary to denounce the Third Force.²⁴

Meanwhile, the government opposition had not remained idle. In the previous month of March, the leadership of the ideologically united Liberal party had met in Medellín to formulate a manifesto calling for a reconciliation with the Conservative party.²⁵ It was the Liberal party under the progressive leadership of Alberto Lleras Camargo, who foresaw the only way to head off the Third Force was with a united Liberal and Conservative coalition against the dictator's program. The apparent success of the June 12 and 13 manifestation brought renewed doubts to

23. "Third Force," Time, June 25, 1956, p. 33.

24. See the letter of Archbishop Crisanto Cardinal Luque in Chapter V, pp.

25. Agudelo Ramírez and Montoya y Montoya (eds.), op. cit., pp. 153-60.

the leadership of both parties concerning the independence of their organizations within the growing government political machine. The aim of Rojas Pinilla was without question prejudicial to the by-party system, and to be sure the dictator would develop his own coterie of civilian politicians.

Thus, in mid-July, 1956, Lleras Camargo quietly left Colombia for Benidorm, Spain, where his old political foe, Laureano Gómez, was residing in exile. Though the military regime had done everything in its power to discredit the haughty Conservative, Gómez still commanded great prestige among Conservatives. His exile and the foundering of the regime's politics and the economy had made him, in fact, a martyr and more popular than ever. The two leaders discussed the problems of their country for several days, and on July 24, 1956, they signed an agreement popularly called the Pact of Benidorm. It called for a "return to the institutional forms of political life and the reconquest of liberty." There no longer existed a popular government nor any organ with moral or judicial validity. Moreover, the pact urged as a "primordial urgency" the union of the two parties in order to express their "immense general distress for the ruin of the civility of the country." A coalition government of the two parties was suggested along with a condemnation of previous belligerencies. The continuing banditry was making alarming advances, "an atrocious phenomenon of contempt of morality and the laws." Furthermore, the two leaders maintained that "cold objective consideration of the actual aspect of the country permits clear indication to the Colombians that a satisfactory solution for

their suffering does exist."²⁶

Although Lleras Camargo was the sole member of the Liberal Directorate, he was prudent in obtaining the approval of the pact from former Liberal Presidents Santos in Paris and López in New York.²⁷ Back in Colombia, he continued to rally the support of important Liberals who, in turn, helped him in the task of convincing the Conservatives. The Pact of Benidorm was at the outset little more than the writing down of a set of goals by two political strategists. Fortunately Lleras Camargo was a pragmatist as well as an intellectual and, therefore, was capable of bringing about an understanding between the two parties.

One of the first effects of the pact was to bring the disunited Conservative party under the leadership of Guillermo León Valencia, head of the Conservative Party Directorate and the spokesman of anti-government sentiment within the party. However, an important sector of the Conservative party lingered by preferring an autonomous solution to the military threat in order to establish institutional normality under Conservative hegemony.²⁸ This group was wary of a coalition with the Liberals, and some individuals to a lesser extent were wary of Gómez. On the other hand, other Conservatives began signing their adherence to the principle of a bi-party coalition against the dictatorship as early as August, 1956.²⁹ The whole question revolved around the attitude of

26. Ibid., pp. 145-47.

27. Ibid., pp. 147-48.

28. Ibid., p. 153.

29. Ibid., pp. 148-49.

the Conservative party toward gestures for cooperation by the Liberal party, and it was not unanimously resolved until the early months of 1947. León Valencia in fact did not publicly acknowledge the coalition prescribed by the Pact of Benidorm until February, 1957.

Though Lleras Camargo did concentrate his efforts on convincing Conservative party leaders, he did not confine himself to that area. He wrote in a Liberal party circular: "In all political groups and all social categories the desire to have a government subject to fixed norms has been growing." He flatly rejected the National Constituent Assembly as the "easiest road to normality" on the grounds that it was nothing more than a political arm of the regime: "Its independence is very fragile, its autonomy impossible." The Pact of Benidorm, the Liberal leader maintained, was merely a recommendation for joint action and that the leadership of both parties must decide on a strategy to make the opposition all encompassing.³⁰

The Armed Forces posed a delicate problem. They would necessarily be implicated in any attempt to overthrow General Rojas Pinilla, who was their commanding chief. The strategy of Lleras Camargo and others was therefore to break down the chain of command, to distinguish between those high ranking officers responsible for the dictatorship and those who only obediently followed the orders of their superiors. In effect, Rojas Pinilla was singled out as the sole individual of the military establishment responsible for the imposition of military rule,

30. Ibid., pp. 153-60.

"the superior that gave the order."³¹ Under this interpretation, the Liberal party in particular was promoting dissention within the ranks and possibly another coup d'etat to topple the general. The power of the military was the real keystone of Rojas Pinilla's power, and as will be noted in more detail in Chapter IV, it was the withdrawal of military support by the President's military subordinates which toppled his regime.

In the second half of 1956, there were other trouble spots for the dictatorship. Ironically, Rojas Pinilla's own hand-picked Supreme Court sent in a joint resignation of its twelve members on August 9. The disagreement arose over the presidential appointment of a special court, apart from the Supreme Court, to decide upon the constitutionality of his decrees under the provisions of the state of siege.³² In November, forty-five of Colombia's most eminent jurists sent a joint note of protest to Major General Alfredo Duarte Blum. They protested the sentencing of a civilian by a military tribunal to a six-month prison term for distributing anti-government propaganda, which was considered an "insult" to the Armed Forces and, therefore, was to be handled by a military court. The military, the jurists maintained, displayed a "disregard of clear and traditional judicial precepts."³³

Also in November, the President called into session the Constituent Assembly, and an amendment was proposed to enlarge the membership

31. Ibid., p. 158.

32. Ibid., pp. 168-69.

33. Ibid., p. 174.

of that body to make it more "representative." To be sure, the real reason was that Rojas Pinilla was anticipating his 1957 re-election, and he was now not convinced of future overwhelming majority in view of the recent economic and political consternation. To the surprise of many, Lleras Camargo initiated a hot debate against the amendment, and, as a result, further discussion on the proposal was temporarily dropped. The bill was passed some time later which prompted the resignation of the presiding president, Ospina Pérez.

On the last day of the same session of the ANAC, León Valencia again surprised the assembly with a scorching rebuke of its competence. The Conservative rather tritely accused the ANAC representatives of allowing the systematic violation of their rights and "the overwhelming corruption in other branches of public administration."³⁴ León Valencia in essence had declared his vote of no confidence against the regime. Now the question was open as to whether the Conservative party would join in a coalition with Lleras Camargo and his Liberal party and, if so, under what terms. To everyone concerned it was quite clear that the dictator was seeking a means to ensure his re-election which was an intolerable prospect to Liberals and most Conservative leaders alike. Almost daily, conditions in the country were deteriorating in every respect.

In spite of the crescendo of growing opposition, Rojas Pinilla continued to prepare the public for the announcement of his intention to run for re-election, although under the present laws a second full term of office was illegal in succession. On February 5, 1957, the

34. Ibid., p. 174.

minister of government released an article to the Diario Oficial written by the minister of war, Major General Gabriel Paris, to the effect that the Armed Forces wanted Rojas Pinilla to remain in the presidency for a "new constitutional period." General Paris stated that "the Armed Forces, conscious of their responsibility and obligation, have not wished to overlook . . . their well founded fears of a return to the chaotic situation that the country lived before June 13, 1953, if His Excellency Mr. President does not continue at the forefront . . . to carry forth the extinction of sectarian hatred."³⁵ Probably in anticipation of public demonstrations in response to Paris' article, the minister of government on the previous day had reminded the public through a newspaper article that Decree 3522 of 1949 prohibiting political gatherings was still in force.

This pledge of support by the Armed Forces, nevertheless, did provoke declarations of protest from the National Liberal Directorate and most significantly from the National Conservative Directorate. Fore-shadowing the eventual coalition of the two parties, the National Liberal Directorate signed a joint protest with the strongly anti-rojista faction of the Conservative party calling itself the Commission of Conservative Action. They denounced the "chain of transgressions against institutions of the Republic and of the constitution," and reiterated the point that it really was not the decision of the Armed Forces to support Rojas Pinilla for re-election but rather the order of the President himself. Moreover, institutional restoration, they maintained, as recommended in

35. Ibid., pp. 177-78.

the Benidorm Pact, was the objective to be pursued.³⁶

On the other hand, the Conservative National Directorate and the Conservative Directorate of Antioquia issued separate protests, without Liberal participation, against the continuation of the military in civilian politics for another presidential term. The Antioquian declaration, particularly strongly worded, stated that the imposition of Rojas Pinilla for another term of office would be tantamount to another military coup, and moreover, it denied the reported overwhelming popular support of the Armed Forces.³⁷

By February both parties had agreed in principle that the most urgent problem facing the nation was continuation of military dictatorship. Still left to be resolved was a functional coalition of the Liberal and Conservative parties to bring the full force of their machinery against re-election. This unification was accomplished in the Pact of March. On March 20, 1957, the National Conservative and National Liberal Directorates assembled with all other nationally prominent members of their respective parties. The ideas of Alberto Lleras Camargo and Laureano Gómez now became a working program for collective action.

The Pact of March begins with a summary of the grievances which make "inadmissible the prolongation of the government of General Rojas Pinilla." Moreover, the Armed Forces had exceeded their role as part of the government and as a repository of national confidence by deciding the political destinies of the country. Now, as a result, the chief

37. Ibid., pp. 183-85.

of the military was perverting the constitution and withholding freedom of vote in order to impose his re-election. In doing so, the President also profaned national rights on the pretext of preventing violence which, in fact, no longer corresponded to reality. It also refers to the economy "managed with turpitude and waste by the state, without any check whatsoever to expenditures nor control over the inversion of public money, destroying all equilibrium between salaries and the cost of merchandise of primary necessity" The political leaders also expressed their objections to press censorship, improvised statutes, "draconian decrees," and threats of fines and imprisonment.³⁸

However, the most significant statement in the Pact of March was the joint agreement that in the future there would be equality of representation in the government by both parties.³⁹ In conclusion, a compromise candidate was called for "that embodies this agreement of the two parties." And, neither party was to offer "any contribution to the irritating comedy of the presidential election (of Rojas Pinilla) . . . , placed at the service of a sole personal and illegitimate ambition."⁴⁰

Still remaining to be resolved was who would be the coalition candidate or the procedure for his nomination. In response to this problem, the Liberal and Conservative National Directorates plus the Liberal and Conservative Departmental Directorates of Antioquia met again on April 8 in Medellín. The party leaders decided upon Guillermo

38. Ibid., pp. 204-6.

39. Ibid., p. 204.

40. Ibid., pp. 206-7.

Leon Valencia that same day as the candidate to represent the Liberal and Conservative parties in the Civil Front.⁴¹ León Valencia immediately notified the convention in Medellín of his acceptance of the presidential candidacy.

To aid León Valencia in formulating a campaign platform in accordance with the precepts of the Pact of March, both parties chose six jurists respectively to comprise a commission to collaborate with him. Lleras Camargo and León Valencia had previously written this commission of twelve in joint letter outlining certain suggestions. First, the commission was "to study the constitutional and legal formulas that would realize a type of government with the interest and ideas of the (two) parties in all branches of power" A revision of the decree imposing a state of siege was also to be considered. And, emphatically, the commission was to direct its attention to the serious economic and social conditions including a better distribution of the national income, ways to curb inflation, and "the legitimate appropriation of the economic instruments of the state."⁴² Thus, the Civil Front was determined to rally popular support by associating all the ills of Colombia with the dictatorship and promising and improvement with the restoration of the constitutional system. Moreover, the political leaders dwelt upon their claim to legitimacy. The stage was set for a showdown.

41. Ibid., pp. 225-27.

42. Ibid., pp. 214-15.

CHAPTER III. THE PRESIDENT VERSUS THE PRESS

Without question the Colombian press was one of the most persistent and formidable opponents of the military regime. Rojas Pinilla did not succeed completely in subjugating the press and, therefore, failed to completely suppress criticism. The press did prove itself one of the strongest bulwarks against military totalitarianism. On the other hand, a closer examination of the larger and more influential papers will reveal that the press is conservative and only rarely will it question the system of limited democracy. Throughout the dictatorship, the anti-government press clamored for the restoration of political control to civilian rule, or, in other words, the restoration of leadership to the upper class. Indeed, this fact is understandable when one realizes that the Colombian press is controlled almost exclusively by the same upper-class families who also contribute powerful political leaders. The economic and family ties between the political camp and the newspapers is hidden and difficult to dissect, though they are nevertheless very real. It suffices to say, however, that nearly all Colombia's twentieth century presidents, including Rojas Pinilla, owned or controlled one or more newspapers. The press in effect has been a prop of upper-class hegemony in politics, and Rojas Pinilla's unscrupulous tactics against it were an intolerable subversion of the status quo. One should not fail to note that it was precisely at the time the military regime appeared to have press opposition in check that civilian politicians, and various owners of newspapers, made their

greatest advances in a coalition of the Liberal and Conservative parties.

Since the 1920's, Colombia's most popular and internationally recognized newspaper has been El Tiempo. The paper's owner, Eduardo Santos Montejó, was the Liberal president (1938-1942) and still was a very prominent leader of the party during the military regime. Moreover, Santos was a prestigious member of the comparatively small oligarchy of upper-class families. In spite of his social status, his newspaper was progressive for the generally conservative milieu and stressed evolutionary changes within the social and political system. El Tiempo carried on a courageous fight against Rojas Pinilla, but this paper, too, had no program for the more basic ills in Colombian society that made a military dictatorship possible. "Institutional normalcy" was the coinage harped upon by El Tiempo and the anti-government press in general.

Probably the second most famous Colombian newspaperman was Enrique Santos Montejó, the brother of Eduardo, the owner. Under the pseudonym "Caliban," Santos was the most widely read editorialist in the country. Enrique Santos' son, incidentally, became the managing editor of the Intermedio, an interim newspaper after Rojas Pinilla had forced El Tiempo to close. The Santos family, therefore, had a profound influence on public opinion and enjoyed great prestige. Rojas Pinilla gravely miscalculated the repercussions when he closed this family newspaper, the sacred cow of the national press.

The right wing of the Conservative party also had an influential newspaper to express its views. El Siglo, owned by the family of ex-President Laureano Gómez, was the mouthpiece of the haughty exiled

president. Understandably El Siglo was relentless in its attack on Rojas Pinilla just after the military coup, and it was this paper which was to suffer the first political martyrdom of the dictatorship. The Diario Gráfico was also owned by the Gómez family, but unlike their other newspaper, this one showed considerably more restraint and for that reason enjoyed a longer life under the regime.

There were a number of other influential newspapers owned by prominent Colombian families, and they all suffered some degree of persecution under the dictatorship: El Espectador of the Cano family in Bogotá, La Prensa of the Lloreda family also in Bogotá, Diario del Pacífico of the Borrero family in Cali, and the Diario de la Costa of the Escallón family in Cartagena.¹ These families are all wealthy and if only for economic interests, they would be strong supporters of the status quo.

As noted earlier in the case of former President Santos, the line separating newspapermen from politicians is not always clear. Nearly all prominent men of politics some time in their careers were affiliated with the press. For example, distinguished Conservative Senator Belisario Betancur was briefly the editor of La República (circulation 50,000) from 1955 to 1957, and previously had been the editor of Gómez's El Siglo. Under Betancur's direction, La República came to support the views of former President Ospina Pérez, now chairman of the National Constituent Assembly. In February, 1954, Rojas Pinilla's minister of education, Manuel Mosquera Garcés, resigned to assume

1. Ibid., p. 69.

management of this paper. Similarly former President Lleras Camargo briefly edited El Independiente for his friend Eduardo Santos, who had gone into voluntary exile.

In 1956 and 1957, the dictatorship also attempted to express official policy in a favorable light by creating the Diario Oficial. Rojas Pinilla's son-in-law was the editor of this paper. However, even with government patronage and financial subsidies, the Diario Oficial did not command the public attention in any manner comparable to that of El Tiempo or even El Espectador. While other papers, not approved of by the regime, were being charged usurious storage rates for their newsprint in the Aduana along with spurious back taxes, the Diario Oficial was able to sell at a penny less than other newspapers. Perón in Argentina had also used similar tactics to foist his propaganda on the public.

There were three other quazi-official newspapers. Minister of Interior Pabón Núñez organized El Día to promote government propaganda and probably had intentions of using this paper to further his own political career. La Hora was originally organized by the semi-official Popular Bank to represent the political aspirations of Banker Luis Morales Gómez; this newspaper was later taken over by the government-owned Granadina Company and its name was changed to La Paz. For all practical purposes, La Paz was under the thumb of the dictator.² And, thirdly, there was the Diario de Colombia managed by Rojas Pinilla's son-in-law.

2. Hispanic American Report, VIII, No. 11 (November, 1955), p. 519.

Censorship was not a new tactic with the takeover of General Rojas Pinilla. On the contrary, since 1949 and henceforth until the downfall of the military regime, Colombia was under a state of siege which means in effect that the President could institute press censorship as he saw fit. Under President Ospina Pérez, censorship was considerably more mild than that instituted by his successor President Gómez, and likewise, President Rojas Pinilla was the harshest of them all. Gómez, under his new program of Christian Democracy, permitted political parties to propagandize only if they conformed to the policies of his regime. On May 8, 1953, he forbade the press to use the name of his political rival Ospina Pérez in any political context connected with the intra-party struggle between more moderate Ospina Pérez and himself.³ In addition, all pro-ospinista political demonstrations were banned, and radio stations were forbidden to use his name. Gómez, just prior to his overthrow, had intended, in fact, to impose other state controls on radio and television and make the press a so-called "public utility."⁴ Nevertheless, it was impossible for Gómez to repress the intra-party struggle. About one month before the military coup, Ospina Pérez had emphasized in a speech given at a banquet that there was a clear conflict between the "democratic thesis" (his own) and the "authoritarian thesis" (Gómez's).⁵

When President Gómez was inaugurated in August, 1950, under

3. New York Times, May 12, 1953, p. 14, col. 3.

4. Hispanic American Report, VI, No. 5 (May, 1953), pp. 21-22.

5. New York Times, May 12, 1953, p. 14, col. 3.

circumstances which the Liberal party considered fraudulent, the Liberal El Tiempo suspended publication for three days in protest.⁶ Ironically, however, when General Rojas Pinilla deposed the unpopular Gómez in a patently unconstitutional act, El Tiempo, as nearly all newspapers not controlled by the Gómez family, joined the chorus of praise for their military hero. El Tiempo stated:

Individually, we as Liberals have received the political transformation, accomplished yesterday, with a satisfaction that we do not attempt to hide There was no other road . . . and the Army which has always been Colombia's maximum expression of democracy, Saturday fulfilled an essentially democratic function in suppressing an adventure designed to eliminate the last vestige of representative government.⁷

Political polarization and the genuine desire of some Colombians to return to a democratic system made people temporarily blind to the fact that Rojas Pinilla had profaned one of the dearest traditions--the non-intervention of the military in politics. It was not anticipated that this military general already in his fifties would be less an imaginative democrat and more a boorish authoritarian, nor was it taken into account that historically the military in South America rarely produces a chief executive capable of coping with civilian politics within constitutional limits. The mere retention of Ospina Pérez's and Gómez's dictatorial decrees in combination with a strong military backing would give him the opportunity to be more autocratic than Gómez. Inter-party belligerencies had led many to serious miscalculation. The Liberal party believed it would have more freedom of action under a

6. Rojas Pinilla, op. cit., p. 12.

7. El Tiempo (Bogotá), June 14, 1953, as cited in Fluharty, op. cit., p. 140.

neutral military president and saw an opportunity to end guerrilla attacks against Liberal villages in rural districts. Ospina Pérez was ideologically and temperamentally more moderate than Gómez, and under Rojas Pinilla, he no doubt saw a greater opportunity for his taking of the Conservative candidacy for the presidential elections of 1954. In any matter, he would be head of the Conservative party and, therefore, would have decisive influence in choosing another candidate, if not himself. The essential fact was, whether Liberal or Conservative, most politicians saw themselves benefiting from a neutral interim government by the Armed Forces. Nearly everyone was placing partisan interests above those of the nation as a whole.

Various newspapermen began to pressure the new President into making a reality of his June 13 promise to restore full civil rights, free play of the political parties, and freedom of the press. A few days after the coup, Minister of Interior Pabón Núñez had qualified Rojas Pinilla's promise to lift press censorship by adding that steps would be taken to ensure such freedom except for reports affecting public order.⁸ Still with high hopes, the Bogotá Newspapermen's Circle on June 23, 1953, sent its greeting to the President with the insertion that "Freedom of the press being one of the firmest pillars of democracy, the Bogotá Newspapermen's Circle is already anticipating happily the elimination of existing censorship."⁹ But probably as a warning to this professional organization and the Colombian press in general,

8. New York Times, June 17, 1953, p. 18, col. 4.

9. El Tiempo (Bogotá), June 24, 1953, p. 1, as cited in Martz, op. cit., p. 177.

the government closed El Siglo for seven days in July and also arrested the editor because he had published Peru's side of the Raya de la Torre affair.¹⁰ The newspaper reopened under new management, but it was again closed in August for five days because it did not give as much space to Pabón Núñez's rebuttal of an anti-government accusation written by the paper's owner, Laureano Gómez.¹¹ Gómez by this time was residing in exile in Spain.

The President defended his tough stand on censorship on the grounds that the country still had not been returned to order and peace. On August 19, Rojas Pinilla took the occasion to express these views to a group of visiting United States newsmen. He said censorship would henceforth be voluntary, or "self-censorship."¹² This diplomatic terminology really meant the regime would not tolerate criticism, constructive or negative. Both El Tiempo and El Espectador recognized the portent of the dictator's statement and thereby rejected this obvious contradiction of news ethics. In editorials, they pointedly declared themselves not in a position to be "directed."¹³ On the other hand, the pro-government Diario de Colombia actually approved of the

10. After the accession to the Peruvian presidency of Manuel Odría, leftist (but anti-Communist) Victor Haya de la Torre became a hunted man and took refuge in Colombia's Lima embassy. The World Court subsequently ruled confusingly that asylum was not justified but that Colombia is not obliged to deliver Haya to the Peruvian authorities.

11. Hispanic American Report, VI, No. 8 (August, 1953), p. 25.

12. New York Times, August 20, 1953, p. 13, col. 3.

13. Ibid.

government's stand by calling for a cessation of adolescent slights on the President and his government.

In the following month of September, the military regime took the hard line against the press. El Siglo was closed for a third time with a stiff thirty-day suspension for a critical article on the June coup d'etat which the government considered as "frankly subversive material."¹⁴ Moreover, El Liberal of Popayán was suspended for ten days, and El Colombiano of Medellín chose not to publish rather than obey a specific censorship order to carry on its first page a three-column statement by the local secretary of labor.¹⁵ Ironically, a group of Liberal newspapermen came to the support of El Siglo by appealing to the President to lift the thirty-day suspension.¹⁶ Newspapermen irrespective of their party affiliation were coming to realize that the fate of El Siglo just happened to be an incident of the dictator's policy of repression of all uncomplying newspapers. Self-censorship applied to everyone.

From the beginning of October until March of the following year, the government considerably relaxed its campaign against the free press. On October 1, 1953, the administration announced a decree lifting press restrictions but at the same time stipulating a high sounding "press statute" defining the responsibilities of newspapermen within the regime.¹⁷

14. Ibid., September 26, 1953, p. 3, col. 4.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid., September 27, 1953, p. 39, col. 3.

17. Ibid., October 2, 1953, p. 6, col. 1.

On the following day, it was announced that the First National Press Association was to meet at the end of the month to draw up recommendations concerning censorship regulations. Hopes were further buoyed when the Constituent Assembly was adjourned with a statement from the administration to the effect that censorship would remain in abeyance with "the hope that newspapers will continue to lend the Government their valuable influence toward fulfilling its task of restoring peaceful living among all Colombians."¹⁸ The regime seemingly did not want to antagonize the press when there was still a chance that some agreement might be reached on a code of a sort legitimatizing voluntary censorship.

During the subsequent period of relative tranquility, the administration set up the Office of Information and Propaganda under the direction of Jorge Luis Arango. In February, Director Arango sent a circular to Bogotá newspapers requesting that they show absolute respect for the President, Colombian institutions, representatives of friendly nations, and abstain from publishing notices that would upset internal order and peace.¹⁹ On March 6, Rojas Pinilla promulgated Decree 3000, which ordered all papers to pursue "factual reporting," and all those individuals who might transmit, write, edit, assist in editing, or distribute writings or clandestine publications in which the legitimately constituted authorities are insulted were liable to punishment.

18. El Tiempo (Bogotá), November 5, 1953, p. 1, as cited in Martz, op. cit., p. 179.

19. Hispanic American Report, VII, No. 2 (February, 1957), p. 25.

Infraction of this draconian decree could result in a prison sentence of six months to two years and fines from 100 pesos to 50,000 pesos. There was also a stipulation prohibiting certain wordings of current events: "it is said," "it is rumored," and "we have been informed."²⁰

Hence, the President had used the respite from press persecution to consolidate his "legal" position. Unlike a competent servant to the needs of his country, he chose to smother bonified criticism and rely on his autonomous judgment or that of his advisors, who often were little more than political opportunists and military sycophants. Decree 3000, nevertheless, became one of the most effective instruments of driving the opposition underground and ultimately of bringing about a reaction with the Pact of Benidorm.

On March 13, 1954, the respite terminated with the suspension from publication of La Unidad. The editor, Belisario Bentacur, an intellectual and important Conservative ideologist, had published a manifesto by former Interior Minister Luis Andrade assailing the administration as unconstitutional and naming Laureano Gómez as the only legal chief executive.²¹ In June, the Diario Gráfico failed to appear because its editor, Guillermo Gómez, who was also a relative of the ousted president, decided not to publish rather than to submit to censorship.²²

Moreover, in the following August, the political editor of the same newspaper, Pedro P. Camargo, was obliged to seek political asylum in the

20. New York Times, March 7, 1954, p. 43, col. 1.

21. Hispanic American Report, VII, No. 3 (March, 1954), p. 26.

22. New York Times, June 12, 1954, p. 3, col. 6.

Mexican embassy. The government had charged Camargo with distributing subversive material among the delegates of the National Constituent Assembly, an infraction of Decree 3000.²³

The dictator in September issued a supplement to Decree 3000. All radio stations were forbidden to broadcast any political comments, and any radio or public speaker who made any announcements deemed slanderous by the authorities was subject to the fines prescribed in previous legislation. But, if the libel was directed against a public official, the fine was to be doubled.²⁴

The National Press Committee, composed of two Liberal and two Conservative newspapermen, appealed to Rojas Pinilla for a modification of this new legislation. In addition, Jules Dubois of the Inter-American Press Association, sent a telegram to the President voicing a vigorous protest.²⁵ Rojas Pinilla apparently realized international public opinion was focused on him. He accordingly agreed to postpone the decree for two weeks pending an investigation by a special commission. Interestingly enough, this commission was composed of four prominent politicians of which only Gilberto Alzate Avendaño was unquestionably pro-rojista. The other three members were Alberto Llernas Camargo; Antonio Rocha, Supreme Court Justice; and Francisco Paula Pérez, a member of the National Conservative Directorate.²⁶ Of the several

23. Ibid., August 20, 1954, p. 3, col. 3.

24. Hispanic American Report, VII, No. 9 (September, 1954), p. 23.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid., No. 10 (October, 1954), p. 25.

amendments proposed by the commission, only one was actually instituted by the President: the creation of a "judge of social guarantees" to try cases. However, this was hardly a concession because the President could control the appointment of this judge.

Newsmen met in Cali for the Second National Press Conference from October 30 until the early part of November. A special commission for the defense and preservation of the press was set up temporarily. But government representatives disrupted the conference to such an extent that the independent journalists walked out, and as a result, the bare skeleton of organizational defense was removed.²⁷

Following the sharp decline of coffee prices on the world market and the subsequent fiscal confusion, the government ordered newspapers to submit for the censor's approval all articles on economic matters. An example of the failure to abide by this new regulation was the one-day suspension of El Espectador in February, 1955. This newspaper published an article indicating the spiral of inflation. Colombian bakers, it said, would discontinue making five-centavo loaves of bread and that the size of the ten-centavo loaves would be reduced.²⁸

Also in February, the government closed all direct sources of information within the government. All news reports about the administration henceforth were to come via the Directorate of Information and Propaganda. Various newsmen protested this new restriction by a petition

27. Martz, op. cit., p. 189.

28. Hispanic American Report, VIII, No. 2 (February, 1955), p. 76.

for a renewal of direct access.²⁹ This request was refused. Still more clamor was raised with another regulation in March requiring all radio stations to broadcast a government news program for fifteen minutes every evening. The first news broadcast created some consternation when the announcer stated: "It is not that the state (which), with its natural means of defense, to which it has at least as much right as the industrialist of the press have to theirs, is trying to create an artificial public opinion The National reality is not the reality of the newspapers."³⁰ Later in the month, Rojas Pinilla further clarified his administration's anti-press position in a speech before the villagers of Pacho in the department of Cundinamarca. He characterized reporters as salaried minions of their self-interested employers. He, the President, must assume the role of "the supreme fountain of public opinion."³¹

The dictator was not merely boasting about his administration's position. Alberto Galindo, one of the country's foremost radio commentators and newspaper columnists, was being sued by the Armed Forces at the same time of the Pacho speech. The Armed Forces maintained that Galindo had written an article "offensive" to their organization.³² Simultaneously a second charge was brought against Galindo by the minister of communications for having violated during the course of a radio

29. Ibid.

30. New York Times, March 3, 1955, p. 7, col. 3.

31. Hispanic American Report, VIII, No. 3 (March, 1955), pp. 122-123.

32. Ibid., p. 123.

news broadcast the regulation prohibiting political commentaries when he was supposedly limited only to economic material. Moreover, he was charged with having released news concerning the government that had not passed through the censorship of the Office of Information and Propaganda.³³ The administration wanted its own news broadcast to be the only source of political commentary. Ultimately in June, 1956, after an extended legal haggles and court hearing, Galindo was fined 2,900 pesos. The Armed Forces wanted to make certain that no other news commentators would emulate the audacity of Galindo. Thereby in April, 1955, the President pronounced his draconian decree that anyone who divulged information reflecting discredit on the military would be liable to a possible prison sentence of two to five years.³⁴ Newspapers, on the other hand, were required to post a bond twelve times the previous amount in the event they broke any censorship regulations in the future.

The Galindo case was only one of many incidents of oppression in the name of the Armed Forces. The respective departmental authorities, for the most part Army officers, arrested the editors of the Diario del Pacífico in Valle del Cauca and El Diario in Cundinamarca, and censorship was reimposed on the Diario del Quindío in Caldas and La República in Bogotá, for publishing a graphic account of a Tolima insurrection.³⁵ In June, both the Conservative Diario Gráfico of

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid., No. 4 (April, 1955), p. 172.

35. Ibid.

Bogotá and El Literal of Barranquilla were subjected to prior censorship for publishing an account of the June 9 and 10 clashes between students and troops of the previous year.³⁶ Henceforth, these two Conservative papers editorialized only on art, literature, and history. This editorial policy was taken up also by La República and La Unidad which both suffered renewed censorship in June.

On July 30, Rojas Pinilla decreed blanket censorship on all papers of the nation. Previously uncomplying newspapers were singled out on an individual basis and required to submit copy for official inspection. In rural areas where there was a central censorship office nearby, the newspapers were required to take their copy for inspection which was a time consuming and burdensome procedure, or censors stationed themselves in an office at the respective building of the newspaper.

Meanwhile, certain papers could not contain their antagonisms against the dictatorship. El Tiempo early in July began criticizing the government for its inaction following the assassinations of three important persons. Both the editor of El Diario de Pereira, Emilio Correa, and his son, Carlos, were shot on a rural road, and only a week later, Liberal lawyer Aristides Gómez, a friend of the Correas, met the same fate. While these assassinations were still a cause célèbre, Enrique Santos under the pseudonym "Caliban" took issue with a recent speech by the President on La Violencia which he delivered before the people of Cali. Santos countered Rojas Pinilla's allegation that the new outbreak of violence was a result only of "political sabotage" and

36. Ibid., No. 6 (June, 1955), p. 274.

suggested instead that the fighting was in fact a farce contrived by the government to maintain the state of siege and deny constitutional rights.³⁷

The dictator did not overlook this criticism. On the night of August 3, 1955, police forces entered the building of El Tiempo and stopped work. Hours before the closure, high military officials had presented Roberto Garcia Pena with a document containing an abject apology by the newspaper to be printed on the first page of every edition for thirty consecutive days. Pena's refusal to comply with these demands precipitated the crisis.³⁸

In closing El Tiempo, the government in fact dealt a devastating blow to its prestige and alienated no small number of influential Colombians. The reaction was immediate, widespread, and more serious than previous protests. Even Rojas Pinilla himself later conceded that the closure of El Tiempo alienated from his regime the remaining pro-government Liberals.³⁹ Former President Eleras Camargo resigned from his post as advisor to the ministry of foreign affairs and immediately assumed the leadership of the opposition. Labor Minister Castor Jaramillo Arrubla also handed in his resignation on the fifth of August. And more serious for the regime, the National Liberal Directorate submitted a written protest also on August 5 protesting the forced suspension in terms which amounted to a proclamation of opposition against the

37. Ibid., No. 7 (July, 1955), p. 321.

38. Agudelo Ramirez and Montoya y Montoya (eds.), op. cit., pp. 22-23.

39. Rojas Pinilla, op. cit., pp. 601-604.

regime.⁴⁰ El Tiempo in fact had been a major propaganda ally of the Liberal party. Letters of protest also came from two patrician residents of Medellín, former President Alfonso López and the renowned Liberal mentor Luis Eduardo Nieto Caballero, who pointed out in his letter to Rojas Pinilla that the "dictatorship of El Tiempo was prestige based on one half a century of eminent service."⁴¹

Ironically, the most sensational protest came from a group of upper-class women in the popularly called Manifestation of the Ladies of August 10. The roster of these female participants is equivalent to little more than a social register of Bogotá.⁴² They marched down Seventh Avenue in Bogotá to the Plaza de Bolívar where they were met by anti-riot squads. When they had voiced their protest, they began marching up Seventh Avenue, but this time they were attacked from behind with fire hoses and tear gas.⁴³ Among the placard carrying ladies was the mother of the recently resigned ambassador to the United States and the wives of the owners of El Tiempo and El Espectador, plus a number of other socially prominent women which, in fact, made this demonstration the first solidly upper-class protest against the dictatorship. Eduardo Santos, who was the most perfect example of patrician elitism, became in one day a martyr for the cause of Colombian democracy.

From abroad more protests came in the form of letters from John

40. New York Times, August 7, 1955, p. 5, col. 6.

41. Agudelo Ramírez and Montoya y Montoya (eds.), op. cit., pp. 41-43.

42. See Ibid., p. 42.

43. Ibid., pp. 40-41.

Reitemeyer, President of the Executive Committee of the Inter-American Press Association; Ricardo Vivado, President of the Inter-American Association of Radio Stations; Latin American Labor unions; newspapers from the majority of the republics, and other sundry organizations both in Europe and the Western Hemisphere.⁴⁴ El Tiempo was a newspaper of international fame and Eduardo Santos a man of far-reaching influence. The military regime, in fact, became so incensed by these protests that it placed a formal protest against Panama because it was felt that the Panamanian National Assembly had intervened in Colombia's internal affairs by adopting a resolution condemning the closing of El Tiempo. Moreover, Time magazine and its Latin American equivalent Visión were banned because of their unfavorable coverage. Later in the following November, the Time correspondent, Harvey Rosenhouse, was expelled from the country.

This intensified resurgence of bad publicity did not deter the blunderingly confident dictator. In the same month of August, Interior Minister Pabon Núñez refused to allow the National Press Commission to convene for "obvious reasons of public order."⁴⁵ More significant, however, was the creation of the National Publications Enterprise (Empresa Nacional de Publicaciones) which was to grant import permits to companies purchasing imported newsprint. Private newspapers acceptable to the government were allowed to import newsprint at the official exchange rate of 2.50 pesos to the United States dollar; but, those papers

44. Ibid., pp. 34-38.

45. Hispanic American Report, VIII, No. 8 (August, 1955), p. 371.

blacklisted by the regime had to pay for their newsprint with dollars purchased at the free rate of exchange or about four pesos to the dollar. This preferential treatment financially jeopardized the anti-rojista press. El Dominical, the Sunday edition of El Espectador, was financially incapable of continuing, and the Conservative leaning El Diario was in serious financial difficulties as a result of nearly doubled prices for newsprint.⁴⁶

Just as Liberals had come to the support of Gómez's now defunct El Siglo one year earlier, so some Conservatives called for the reopening of El Tiempo. On October 19, the Conservative Directorate of Antioquia, which was the most powerful departmental party, met in Medellín and specified new conditions for the reunification of the widely split nation Conservative party: an early return to constitutional normalcy, permission to allow ousted President Gómez to return from exile, and the reopening of El Tiempo.⁴⁷ Pabón Nuñez gave the official reply to this Conservative manifesto in a speech. He stated the provisions of the document were "absurd" and were intended to unite the party "against the government."⁴⁸

In spite of Pabón Nuñez's allusion to the possible union of the Conservative party's factions against the dictatorship, Rojas Pinilla was apparently blindly confident that his regime could crush any political reaction. Thus, he continued to employ the same repressive tactics

46. Ibid., pp. 370-1.

47. Ibid., No. 10 (October, 1955), p. 474; New York Times, October 20, 1955, p. 6., col. 5.

48. New York Times, October 20, 1955, p. 6, col. 5.

with no let up. On December 21, 1955, El Correo of Medellín and El Espectador of Bogotá were each fined 10,000 pesos (about \$4,000 at official rates) for what Pabón Núñez referred to as "calumnies and insults to members of the government and Armed Forces."⁴⁹ In a nation-wide broadcast two days later, he added that the government was "determined not to tolerate any longer that some Colombian newspapers persist in serving the dissolving forces of nationalism."⁵⁰ This indeed was a severe rebuke, for the two papers had only insisted the number of political prisoners was greater than the official figure of three hundred and twenty. Many Colombians were unsympathetic with this exemplary punishment because a public subscription was begun to help the papers pay the fines. But both newspapers insisted on covering the fines themselves. A similar situation arose when the Diario Gráfico editorialized on the correctness of advance and longevity pay for the President before as well as after coup d'etat.⁵¹ The authorities fined the Diario Gráfico 10,000 pesos for insulting the integrity of the chief executive. Various sympathizers also initiated a public subscription for this victimized newspaper, but it, too, chose rather to pay the fine itself. El Colombiano of Medellín was the only newspaper to give coverage to the February, 1956, Bull-Ring Massacre by withholding copy from the censors.⁵² For this breach of the censorship laws, the government had

49. Hispanic American Report, VIII, No. 12 (December, 1955), p. 566.

50. New York Times, December 24, 1955, p. 5, col. 4.

51. Hispanic American Report, IX, No. 1 (January, 1956), p. 24.

52. See Chapter V for a more detailed account of the Bull-Ring Massacre.

the local censorship office in charge of the newspaper quietly moved to an out-of-town military post and ordered all copy henceforth to be submitted to this office. As a result, El Colombiano and several other Medellín newspapers were forced to shut down.

Not unlike the tactics Perón used in Argentina, Rojas Pinilla's government charged the major opposition newspapers with income tax evasion. The unpaid "taxes" of El Espectador amounted to 397,000 pesos, of the El Colombiano 600,000 pesos, and of the defunct El Tiempo over one million pesos.⁵³ When El Espectador submitted an editorial in its defense, the censorship office refused to approve it. So the paper closed as did El Colombiano. El Tiempo, as has been noted, had been closed already and it remained silent. At last Rojas Pinilla had broken his most steadfast opponents.

Late in the following month of February, 1956, El Tiempo and El Espectador reappeared under the names Intermedio and El Independiente respectively. Eduardo Santos, before leaving for Europe, had formed a corporation to handle the Intermedio and thereby legally, at least, disassociated himself from this new paper. His brother Enrique, however, took over the editorship. Alberto Lleras Camargo became the editor of the El Independiente. El Colombiano also reappeared under the title Información.

These three "new" newspapers were, nevertheless, not pro-government and continued to have difficulties with the censorship authorities. On March 21, 1956, Información eluded the censors and

53. Hispanic American Report, IX, No. 1 (January, 1956) p. 24.

published a letter by former President Gómez to an unidentified Colombian priest. According to the exiled president, the Church had lost its moral authority over the people because of its support of the "usurper" and his "tyrannical" regime, and that the nation would never honor priests "who are the supporters and partners of this bloody dictatorship."⁵⁴ This letter reflected the anxiety of a man who had once been excommunicated. But as it turned out, Rojas Pinilla was able to use this letter to strengthen Church-state relations.⁵⁵

El Independiente and the Intermedio failed to appear for a day. The reason was because government officials had approached Lleras Camargo and requested that he print in El Independiente an official version of a raid on the Liberal party headquarters where documents were found allegedly linking the party with La Violencia. Lleras Camargo refused to yield his assistance in framing the Liberal party. The Intermedio, in order to show its support of the El Independiente, also suspended publication on the same day.

The censorship authorities began using more refined techniques to distort fact. They started adding words and entire sentences to change the meanings of articles. Later in 1956, nothing could be published concerning the material necessities of the country, economics, national or international politics, or problems of education. Headlines were at times on sporting events or exhortations from the Pope. Reportable news was so restricted that advertisements on lotteries,

54. New York Times, March 22, 1956, p. 14, col. 5.

55. See Chapter V for more detail.

official and semi-official, were prohibited. Condemned to "civil death" were Alberto Lleras Camargo, Guillermo León Valencia, Alvaro Gómez Hurtado, Luis Eduardo Nieto Caballero, Alirio Gómez Picón, Germán Arciniegas, Alberto Galindo, and Luis Enrique Osorio among other less famous names in Colombia. "Civil death" meant that no mention or allusion of these men was permitted even in the social columns.⁵⁶

In the first half of 1956, even the Bogotá city library did not escape the damnation of free speech. All objectionable works labeled arbitrarily as dialectical materialism underwent a thorough purge. These writings included famous socio-political works by such authors as José Carlos Mariátegui, Antonio García Molina, and Jorge Eliécer Gaitán (Rojas Pinilla often referred to himself as Gaitán's political successor).⁵⁷ Gerardo Molina was conducting the purge. He had gained national recognition by winning from the government Cultural Index the honor of having produced the best book of 1954, Proceso y destino de la libertad.

Under the resolute management of the new Director of Censorship Sanclemente Cabal, the refitted Office of Information and Propaganda became able to handle censorship on a more uniform basis. Previously, the departmental authorities shouldered a large part of the responsibility of watching provincial publications. There was now a much greater amount of centralized direction from Bogotá and less reliance on military governors.

56. Agudelo Ramírez and Montoya y Montoya (eds.), op. cit., pp. 49-50.

57. Hispanic American Report, IX, No. 2 (February, 1956), p. 78.

Rojas Pinilla always tried to make political capital by trying to show himself in the public eye as compromising with the stubborn opponents of press censorship. He always tried publicly to demonstrate his farcial flexibility before events of national importance as, in this instance, the inauguration of the Third Force in June and the upcoming National Press Conference. In a nationally publicized letter to Enrique Santos, Rojas Pinilla revealed that the ban on the publication of El Tiempo was lifted as of May 5, 1956. Moreover, on May 15, the government published its version of a letter of rejection received from Eduardo Santos, who was now residing in Europe. Santos wrote that the memory of high responsibilities and honors conferred upon him by the Colombian nation prevented his becoming "a king of clowns" submissive to the daily whims of an imperious, irresponsible censor who would tell him "what should not be said."⁵⁸

Santos' refusal to accept any peace gestures from the dictator set the tone of non-compliance for other private newspapers, that were still above truckling to the administration's censorship policy. This was a blow to the dictatorship which wanted to mend bridges in order to obtain favorable publicity on the upcoming inauguration of the Third Force. The National Press Conference met in Cali on the eighth and ninth of June. If Rojas Pinilla had had any hopes of token support from opposition newspapers, he was sadly mistaken. Thirteen newspapers (eleven Liberal and two Conservative) boycotted the conference in spite

58. Ibid., No. 5 (May, 1956), p. 241.

of generous offers of free lodging and accommodations.⁵⁹

To be sure, President Rojas Pinilla set the tone of the National Press Conference. In the opening speech, he clarified again his view of the "faithful obligation" of his regime to apply censorship "because certain newspapers instigate incentives for hatred."⁶⁰ And, Interior Minister Pabón Núñez corroborated this note in the closing speech: "The liberty of expression cannot be absolute and undefined."⁶¹

However, the most serious outcome of the press conference was the creation of a National Press Federation which was to license all working newspapermen. Dictator Perón in Argentina, too, had once created a similar federation to regulate the press. But the reaction in Colombia to Rojas Pinilla's scheme was widespread. No less than about forty newspapers refused to recognize the National Press Federation and in fact created their own Association of Independent Newsmen headed by Lleras Camargo, the editor of El Independiente.

As has been noted, Rojas Pinilla succeeded in bankrupting several newspapers by demanding additional back taxes. He now added a new twist to this fraud by alleging the Intermedio was guilty of not paying \$240,000 (at the free rate of exchange) for storage costs on 500 tons of newsprint in the Aduana.⁶² It will be remembered that the defunct El Tiempo still had an outstanding tax debt of over one million pesos.

59. Agudelo Ramirez and Montoya y Montoya, op. cit., pp. 134-35.

60. New York Times, June 9, 1956, p. 40, col. 2.

61. Ibid., June 10, 1956, p. 32, col. 2.

62. Ibid., August 24, 1956, p. 4, col. 4.

The administration's tactics, as it was later euphemistically explained by Rojas Pinilla himself before a Senate investigation committee, was to place a charge of contrabandism against the owners of the newsprint.⁶³ A time consuming judicial "investigation" was therefore necessary to prove the legitimacy of the imported newsprint. However, the authorities purposely failed to notify the staff of the Intermedio of the court's waver on the newsprint, and as a result, no one took custody of the paper. This gave the Aduana in Barranquilla, which was in collusion with the dictator, the opportunity to claim extortionate storage charges against the purchasers of the newsprint.

Again, as in the fall of 1954, Rojas Pinilla suddenly relaxed censorship in anticipation of gathering of the National Constituent Assembly. In November of 1956, only the Liberal Intermedio and the Conservative La Republica remained under mild censorship. The authorities even informed these two papers that all censorship would be lifted, if they would only agree to report certain types of information. Colonel Juan B. Cordoba, the new national director of the press, had presented a twelve-point document providing for voluntary censorship upon which he wanted these two papers to agree. To be sure, this document was only a rewording of the dictator's longstanding policy against freedom of expression.⁶⁴

By the beginning of 1957, the press with few exceptions had been beaten into an armed truce. But other sectors of opposition were

63. Rojas Pinilla, op. cit., p. 703.

64. New York Times, November 3, 1956, p. 23, col. 1.

emerging to the forefront. As shall be noted in more detail in Chapter VI, La Republica and the Intermedio made a last ditch show of resistance with other pressure groups in April by practicing a reverse type of censorship. All news concerning Rojas Pinilla's proposed "re-election" was refused coverage, although other papers gave the government very adequate publicity. By the time political, financial, and student groups and the Church had organized against the regime, the contribution of the press was completed. It was the press' steadfast and vanguard resistance throughout the military regime which eroded the dictatorship. Rojas Pinilla was denied a valuable monopoly on propaganda and, indeed, his persecution of the press rallied other groups sympathetic to civilian rule.

CHAPTER IV. ECONOMIC DETERIORATION UNDER ROJAS PINILLA

The coffee boom of the early 1950's tended to obscure basic weaknesses in the Colombian economy, and it was not until a serious drop in the price of coffee on the world market in 1954 occurred that these fissures widened and became politically dangerous. The severe drop in foreign exchange earned from coffee exports only magnified certain socio-political conditions that were eroding the domestic economy: first, the rural violence seriously disrupted the production of food-stuffs other than coffee in various departments and also caused severe demographic displacements; second, neither food nor industrial output had been keeping pace with the exploding population since World War II; and third, the irresponsible fiscal policy of the military regime squandered money in areas that did not improve the productive capacity of the economy. The overall effect of these negative trends was a general worsening of the relative living standards of most Colombians which, in turn, was reflected in the country's increasingly negative political response to the dictatorship. The riots, especially in Cali, during the last days of the regime without doubt had economic roots commensurate to political dissatisfaction. Though all Colombians were affected by the depression that hit the country in late 1955, no economic class suffered more than the urban proletariat.

Even during the years of greatest evident prosperity (1950-1953), the working class did not fare well. The real wages of the working force during these years actually decreased 1.7 per cent annually

in relation to the overall increase in production.¹ Probably one of the best determinants of the overall standard of living is the diet of the people which, in turn, has a direct effect on their health. In fact, the malnutrition of Colombians in the 1950-1953 period was little improved over that of the years prior to World War II, and undoubtedly their substandard diet was worse in 1956 and 1957 when the whole economy was in doldrums. Since World War II, the per capita consumption of such essential foods as milk, eggs, fruits, and meat was decreasing.² Annual per capita meat consumption in the 1950-1953 period was scarcely larger than that in Peru during 1947 and about one-fourth and one-fifth that consumed respectively in Argentina and Uruguay.³ The Colombian population as a whole consumed only 57 per cent of the recommended amount of fats for a healthy diet, 77 per cent of calories, and 58 per cent of proteins.⁴ Out of a random group of 342 workers in Bogotá examined by a United Nations investigation team, 71 per cent suffered from avitaminosis, 52 per cent from ariboflavinosis, and 43 per cent from underweight.⁵

To be sure, in 1953 the country was at one of its highest levels of financial stability. In May, gold and dollar reserves amounted to \$180,000,000. Foreign credit was very good and large sums of private

1. Anaylyses and Projections of Economic Development, Vol. III (Geneva: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 1957), p. 25.

2. Ibid., p. 144.

3. Ibid., p. 205.

4. Ibid., p. 148.

5. Ibid.

foreign capital were entering the country. In 1953 coffee exports amounted to an increase of \$75,000,000 over the figure for 1952 at an average price of 66½ cents per pound.⁶ Prospects for 1954 were indeed very good.

One of the first major innovations of the Rojas Pinilla administration was the 1953 tax reform. The reform was generally unpopular with upper income groups precisely because it made them pay a fairer share of the tax burden. A minimum of a one-peso tax was placed on all incomes above 1,000 pesos and all patrimonies over 5,000 pesos. This stipulation made a tax payer out of the lower salaried and propertied people but also hit the habitual low declarant. At the same time, however, rates went up on all incomes over 12,000 pesos to make the bite sharper on preferred groups and ease that on the lowest level of income earners. Business, on the other hand, was not oppressed by this provision because even though exemptions were grouped, they were in many cases doubled and corporations were given larger deductions for the salaries of high officials. The most controversial provision was the new tax on the income from stocks and bonds which heretofore had been tax free. As a result, there was strong opposition by organized big business, the National Association of Industrialists (ANDI) to save their investment havens from tax responsibilities. From 1953 to 1954, capital in corporations was reduced by one-half.⁷

Strong opposition was also voiced against Decree 058 of January,

6. Hispanic American Report, VI, No. 5 (May, 1953), p. 22.

7. Fluharty, op. cit., p. 237.

1955. Local governments were authorized to tax branches of banks and insurance companies which previously had been subject only to direct national taxes in the purest environment of laissez faire.⁸

Beginning in January, 1954, the administration feared the record high coffee prices would bring unprecedented inflation, and, therefore, it began a series of anti-inflationary measures. In February, banks were required to increase cash holdings by three per cent, and the official rate of exchange for the peso was pegged at 2.3845 to the United States dollar.⁹ In April, the finance ministry declared an export tax of \$10.00 on each sack of coffee. But for each sack sold above the base price of \$105, there was levied a fifty per cent tax. In the following May, the export tax was revised so that only on sacks of coffee selling above the base price of \$115 would there be a levy of fifty per cent. The proceeds from this tax were to be diverted to agricultural development and the purchase of 200,000 head of cattle to improve native breeds.¹⁰ At this time, the price of coffee on the world market was 98.5 cents per pound. In order that the country would not be flooded by American dollars, coffee exporters were also required under the "recovery rule" to sell a specified amount of their dollars to the Central Bank at official rates, which were always lower than the free rates of exchange. However, in spite of these precautions, domestic prices were rising. An executive order in May lifted completely or

8. Ibid., p. 238.

9. Hispanic American Report, VII, No. 2 (February, 1954), p. 25.

10. Ibid., No. 5 (May, 1954), p. 25.

reduced restrictions on imported food stuffs and staple commodities and also eliminated the necessity of obtaining permits to import these commodities in an attempt to head off rising food prices.¹¹

In August, Brazil took a sharp deflationary action by releasing her large quantities of unsold coffee on the world market. Prices for Colombian coffee rapidly went down so that by the end of the month the price per pound was 74 cents.¹² By October, it was necessary to curb the outflow of dollars with new restrictive measures, for Colombia was already \$50,000,000 in arrears in her balance of payments.¹³ The tariffs on 300 non-essential articles were raised from forty to eighty per cent. Moreover, the importation of certain foods including potatoes, wheat, corn, and rice were prohibited, and refundable deposits required when applying for an import license were increased from ten to twenty per cent to twenty to sixty per cent.

By early 1955, the situation had gotten worse. Coffee prices had continued to decline to a low of sixty cents per pound and sales were comparatively light.¹⁴ To counteract the drop in foreign exchange earnings, the finance ministry temporarily suspended on February 15 all import permits until a new list of prohibited items could be decreed by the President on February 24. This new list contained 235 items of which most could be produced locally. A sliding scale of stamp taxes

11. New York Times, May 14, 1954, p. 7, col. 5.

12. Hispanic American Report, VII, No. 9 (August, 1954), p. 23.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid., VIII, No. 2 (February, 1955), p. 76.

from three to one hundred per cent was also provided, and all importers were obliged to place non-interest bearing deposits of twenty to sixty per cent on all perspective imports. Finance Minister Carlos Villaveces in turn ordered the Bank of the Republic to increase its gold reserves from twenty-five to thirty per cent, while all other banks were required to increase their reserves on deposit from eighteen to twenty-three per cent. This amount was increased to forty per cent after April 13, 1955.¹⁵ In spite of these harsh measures, the gold and dollar reserves for the following May were only about \$120,000,000 compared to \$257,000,000 for the previous January; also, an outstanding debt of \$68,000,000 had accrued between January and March, 1955.¹⁶ Throughout the rest of 1955, except for a brief rally of coffee prices to seventy-two cents per pound in September, the economy was in the doldrums.

The beginning of 1956 saw continued deterioration. In May, 1956, Finance Minister Villaveces took expedient anti-inflationary measures by fixing the rents on the dwellings of over 50,000 inhabitants, by announcing new measures to limit corporate profits, and by intimating new government price controls.¹⁷ But these measures also had strong political overtones and were interpreted by many as anti-business. The flight of domestic capital increased, and foreign investors began to look elsewhere. By September, the peso had fallen to a new low of 5.25 on the free exchange, and by October the foreign

15. Ibid., No. 4 (April, 1955), p. 172.

16. Ibid., No. 5 (May, 1955), p. 222.

17. Ibid., IX, No. 10 (October, 1956), p. 487.

commercial debt had risen to an astronomical \$345,000,000.

On October 4, 1956, Luis Morales Gómez, the general manager of the Popular Bank, succeeded Carlos Villaveces as the minister of finance. In November, Gómez, in an effort to reduce the country's commercial debt, released a new expanded list of 430 items which could not be imported. Drastic action had to be taken because Colombia was losing her capacity to import even the essential materials for her industry. Had Colombia been less dependent on coffee imports for her foreign exchange, this situation would have been much less severe. However, considering that in 1953, 19.7 per cent of her consumer goods came from abroad, 38.2 per cent of her machinery, and 42.1 per cent of that year's raw materials, the ability to pay for these items in dollars had a profound effect on the overall economy.¹⁸ The growth of industrialization was being held back just when it was most needed to prevent the debt backlog from rising. The stoppage of certain raw materials made the local manufacture of various goods impossible, and they, therefore, had to be imported.¹⁹

In November, the minister of finance also froze prices on imported and locally produced articles at the level of the previous October 31. Merchants violating this decree were liable to return to the buyer the greater part of the price of the merchandise involved and to face a fine of approximately \$1,650.²⁰

18. Analyses and Projections of Economic Development, p. 37.

19. "The Horrible Mess in Bogotá," Time, October 22, 1956, pp. 43-44.

20. Hispanic American Report, IX, No. 11 (November, 1956), p. 583.

Finance Minister Gómez made two trips to New York City in February, 1957. The first trip was to inspire public confidence. On the second trip, Gómez gave Colombia's New York creditors \$62,000,000 in bonds to cover sixty per cent of the debt. The remaining \$50,000,000, or forty per cent of the debt, was covered by issuing 2.5 per cent bonds to German and American banks to be paid off in thirty monthly installments. According to the finance minister, Colombia still had a reserve of \$90,000,000 in dollars and gold, a result of his austerity plan which reduced the country's imports to a disastrously low \$12,000,000 in the final quarter of 1956.²¹ In the same expedient manner, Gómez exchanged Colombia's six per cent bonds due October 1, 1970, with the First National City Bank of New York as the exchange agent.²² The finance ministry had temporarily removed the threat of bankruptcy, but the domestic economy was still suffering a severe inflationary spiral. The fiscal stability inherited from President Laureano Gómez had been completely destroyed.

While both finance ministers, Villaveces and Morales Gómez, had been trying to institute some sort of fiscal stability to offset the effects of the reverse of terms of trade, Rojas Pinilla and his military cadre were intent on doing the very opposite. The Armed Forces witnessed a tremendous expansion from 14,000 men in 1948 to 32,000 by 1956.²³ The military budget, which in 1951 was 2.2 times

21. Ibid., X, No. 2 (February, 1957), p. 82.

22. New York Times, December 31, 1956, p. 21, col. 1.

23. Edwin Lieuwen, Arms and Politics in Latin America (New York: Frederic A. Praeger, Inc., 1960), p. 89.

that allotted to education, rose to 3.8 times that to education in 1955.²⁴ The dictator was intent on placating the demands of his subordinates. He used scarce foreign exchange to buy Swedish destroyers, Canadian and American jet fighters, and various other types of military hardware. One Colombian businessman said, "The only thing you can make with a warship is an admiral," which the President, in fact, did do.²⁵ Two new admirals were commissioned by Rojas Pinilla. The President also built a lavish Military Club in Bogotá and permitted military officials to buy imported luxuries, otherwise prohibited, at official exchange rates. Worst of all, the administration did a lot of unreported spending on luxury items and military hardware using valuable foreign exchange that could have been diverted into the deteriorating economy.²⁶

Throughout the regime, Rojas Pinilla increasingly styled himself as a social benefactor and disciple of modernization. In 1956 highway construction was being pushed in seventy-seven different locations, and the ministry of public works estimated that fifty-three miles of new road and twenty-three miles of pavement were being completed each month.²⁷ Other projects were also under way. In May, 1955, the government made an appropriation of \$20,000,000 for the international airport in Bogotá and an additional loan of \$50,000,000 for a low-rent housing

24. William Sylvane Stokes, Latin American Politics (New York: Thomas Y. Cromwell Co., 1959), p. 112.

25. "The Horrible Mess in Bogotá," Time, October 22, 1956, pp. 43-44.

26. Ibid.

27. "Colombia: Riches on a New Frontier," U.S. News and World Report, September 21, 1956, pp. 63-66.

community in Bogotá.²⁸ However, no project was more detrimental to the economy or a better example of wasteful economic nationalism than Colombia's first steel mill, the Acerías de Paz del Río, which represented a total investment of \$200,000,000. It could not produce the 20,000 tons of bulk steel required monthly by industry, and consequently industry had to buy steel abroad with a stiff thirty per cent tariff added to the cost.²⁹

One of the ways Rojas Pinilla financed his grandiose construction projects and still kept the government solvent was to offset the financial burden through foreign loans. From the World Bank, the government contracted a loan of \$14,230,000 for highway repair and construction, a second loan of \$16,700,000 for highways, and a third loan of \$5,000,000 directed to the Caja de Crédito Agrario, Industrial y Minero for agricultural development.³⁰ To help finance the Acerías de Paz del Río steel mill, an additional loan of \$25,000,000 was secured from the French Banque de Paris e Pays Bas.³¹

Not unlike the Eva Perón Charity Fund in Argentina, Rojas Pinilla created the National Secretariat of Social Assistance (SENDAS) in September, 1954. The dictator appointed none other than his twenty-one year old daughter, María Eugenia, to head this agency. Apparently the

28. Hispanic American Report, VIII, No. 5 (May, 1955), pp. 223-24.

29. Ibid., No. 7 (July, 1955), p. 322.

30. The World Bank Group in the Americas, A Report Prepared by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (Washington, D.C., 1963), p. 29.

31. Hispanic American Report, VII, No. 4 (April, 1954), p. 26.

President did not realize that his daughter lacked the good looks, the public appeal, intelligence, and public funds of Eva Perón. SENDAS was an attempt to extend aid to farmers, workers, and displaced persons, but it turned out that the aid extended through this agency was very limited. Like the Third Force, SENDAS was created primarily to bring popular backing behind the regime, and the Office of Propaganda and Information made sure that vast amounts of publicity accompanied any social work SENDAS did do.

Some sort of economic alleviation was indeed necessary after 1954. The wholesale price index had risen from a minus 2.0 in 1951 to a plus 23 points in 1956, with most of this increase in prices after 1953. From 1955 to the end of the regime private loans increased by fifty-five per cent, and this greatly increased amount of circulating currency was over and above that pumped into the economy from expanded national budgets.³² As a result, in the short time between 1955 and 1957, the cost of living went up fifty-one per cent.³³ The Colombian worker particularly suffered. Always on a subsistence income, his wages had not kept pace with the spiral of inflation. According to the purchasing power of the peso in 1960, the average per capita annual income of 1954, 1,814 pesos, declined to a per capita income of 1,305 pesos in 1957, or a twenty-eight per cent loss in purchasing power.³⁴ Therefore,

32. Felipe Echavarría, Una economía en crisis (Rome, 1963), p. 30.

33. Ibid., p. 31.

34. Inventory of Information Basic to the Planning of Agricultural Development in Latin America, A Report Prepared by the Pan American Union (Washington, D.C., 1963), p. 72.

it is not surprising that the urban workers sided with upper-class groups in the overthrow of the dictator.

While rampant inflation was undermining the buying power of the peso, the finance ministry continued to peg its official exchange rate at 2.50. While on the free exchange, the rate was 7.00 pesos for the dollar. Exporters, on the other hand, were required to hand over to the government a large number of their dollars earned abroad and were given pesos in return at the low official rate of exchange. In fact, the proceeds on about eighty-five per cent of the country's exports were covered by this exchange stipulation. In effect, the government was levying an export tax of nearly fifty per cent on most of Colombia's exports.

In response to this great disparity between official and free rates of exchange, the contraband movement became a lucrative clandestine business. Although it is difficult to ascertain as to the exact proportions of this illegal activity, reliable sources estimate that about 500,000 sacks of coffee were smuggled out of Colombia in 1956 alone.³⁵ Compared to a legal traffic of 4,500,000 sacks of coffee for that year, contrabandism indeed did reach grave proportions. Ironically, the dollars entering Colombia via the contraband trade had an uneconomic effect, even though there was a desperate need of foreign exchange. These dollars were not used to build up the government's foreign exchange reserves for the purchase of capital goods, but instead competed for already scarce consumer and luxury goods. Contrabandism, therefore,

35. Echavarría, op. cit., p. 98.

only contributed to the runaway inflationary spiral.

Public clamor against the contraband movement became so loud that Rojas Pinilla appointed a Supreme Court of the Aduana to investigate alleged collaboration of government officials with contrabanders in the port of Barranquilla. However, this investigative commission resigned shortly after their appointment in January, 1957. The members of the commission claimed in a letter to the President that the Dirección General de Aduana refused to cooperate in the investigation and that the inspector general was especially abusive.³⁶ According to their letter, members of the Aduana were in consort against any investigation of their activities, to the point of physical threats against the members of the commission. The President, in his reply to the letter of resignation, said he would name "other investigators to uphold severe and rapid justice."³⁷ Nevertheless, the new investigation was equally as ineffective. To be sure, it was only supposed to be just a gesture, for Rojas Pinilla himself was apparently involved in the contraband traffic of cattle for his ranches.³⁸

No less an economic as well as a political setback for the regime was the so called Tragedy of Cali. About 12:00 a.m. on August 7, 1956, an army convoy of seven trucks parked in the city plaza of Cali near the police station. The trucks were transporting an estimated

36. Ibid., p. 176.

37. Ibid.

38. See Interrogatory by Senator Murrillo to ex-President Gustavo Rojas Pinilla in the Senate Investigation Committee of 1958-1959, in Rojas Pinilla, op. cit., pp. 267-68.

92,000 pounds of high explosives from the port of Buenaventura to Bogota. At 1:07 a.m., the trucks mysteriously exploded, completely destroying the industrial center of the city between First and Eighth Avenues and Twentieth and Fortieth Streets. Industrial losses represented approximately \$120,000,000 at official exchange rates in raw materials and capital equipment. Moreover, their immediate replacement was nearly impossible with the scarcity of foreign exchange and the prohibitive cost of dollars on the free market.³⁹

The government suppressed any unofficial coverage of the explosion. Official news releases attempted to exonerate the administration from negligence and attribute the explosion to saboteurs in the employ of the government opposition. The death toll was later found to be well over one thousand, which made the whole affair a political bombshell.⁴⁰ In a radio message to the nation, the President attributed the explosion to "a treacherous and criminal conspiracy" and promised "before God and man, the Armed Forces will not rest until the authors of this treacherous and criminal attempt receive exemplary punishment."⁴¹ Extending his personal condolences to the governor of the department of Valle del Cauca, he decreed three days of mourning and mobilized government assistance for the city.

Alberto Lleras Camargo protested the inferential blame placed

39. Agudelo Ramirez and Montoya y Montoya (eds.), op. cit., pp. 78-81.

40. New York Times, August 8, 1956, p. 1, col. 5.

41. Ibid., August 9, 1956, p. 1, col. 4.

upon the Liberal party as an example of "monstrous opportunism."⁴² But the President sensed popular repercussions of his precipitate accusations. Therefore, in his usual bullish, untactful manner, he denied that he had singled out individuals by stating, "I do not believe that any fellow countryman would fall so low in political corruption."⁴³ However, he did not altogether exclude the possibility of a conspiracy nor did he even allude to the possibility of negligence on the part of the Armed Forces.

There was still another phenomenon creating a profoundly deteriorating effect on the economy as well as the national morale. This was the peasant guerrilla movement labeled La Violencia. From 1949 to 1955, the destruction of property, the loss of land, and robberies had amounted to about 970,200,015 pesos, or equivalent approximately to the national budget of 1955.⁴⁴ In another sense, La Violencia was very costly because it necessitated increased military expenditures to support the policing action in troubled areas, although in some cases the indiscriminate use of military force cause a reaction and actually increased violence.

Especially during the 1954-1958 period, wanton destruction of property rendered large sectors of agricultural areas non-operational and/or caused rapid demographic changes which, in turn, increased social pressure with urban areas. Localized surveys began revealing a

42. Ibid., p. 6, col. 7.

43. Ibid., August 10, 1956, p. 4, col. 3.

44. Guzman Campos, op. cit., p. 294.

considerable reduction in the production of foodstuffs other than coffee. In the department of Cundinamarca, where La Violencia had flared up, statistics show that some 470,180 tons of foodstuffs were imported in 1954, but in the following year, after fighting and terrorist activities had intensified, 506,185 tons of foodstuffs were imported.⁴⁵ Since there was no other factor not attributable to La Violencia, insecurity, pillage, and depopulation were the causes.

Chaos in rural districts aggravated already existing social problems in urban centers. Hordes of penniless peasants migrated from their strife-torn villages to the cities at a phenomenal rate. Too, many of the migrant refugees also had hopes for better paying urban jobs which were in short supply. For example, between 1951 and 1958, the national capital of Bogotá increased in population by 105 per cent while that of the nation as a whole grew only twenty-nine per cent, and the rural area around Bogotá (the "region") actually decreased four per cent.⁴⁶ Moreover, the population increases for the departmental cities showed a still more rapid growth, particularly Ibagué and Cali. With the economic depression that became especially acute in 1956 and 1957, there was indeed festering discontent among the residents of the crowded cities.

45. Refael Stevenson, Jorge Villegas, Hernando Mutis, and Justo Castellanos, La Planificación agraria (Bogotá: Fundación Universidad de América, 1960), p. 43.

46. Ibid., p. 53.

CHAPTER V. THE POLITICAL POSITION OF THE CHURCH

Seven days after Lieutenant General Rojas Pinilla executed his military coup d'etat, the Roman Catholic Church endorsed the new President. Archbishop Crisanto Cardinal Luque told Colombian Catholics that President Rojas Pinilla's authority "must be recognized and obeyed."¹ This endorsement, in view of prior events, was in no way a precipitate action. By now the general had been "elected" to fill the remainder of Gómez's term of office, and also the new administration had been recognized by a number of countries, including the United States.

Rojas Pinilla did his utmost to court the good will of this very influential institution, although the Church hierarchy accepted only a minimal involvement in the politics of the military regime. Exceptions to this policy were few for the first year and a half. It was reported that two bishops and a parish priest had preached in their sermons that the new President had descended from heaven for the benefit of Colombia, but this excessive adulation was limited.² The government's gift of a new cardinal's palace costing \$2,500,000 was accepted with quiet gratitude but not with any formal commitments on the part of the hierarchy. Nor, as a matter of fact, did Rojas Pinilla's frequent public manifestations of orthodoxy create more than silent approval by the Church. The peculiarly perverted manner in which Rojas Pinilla wanted to prove his

1. New York Times, June 21, 1953, p. 23, col. 6.

2. Agudelo Ramírez and Montoya y Montoya (eds.), op. cit., p. 263.

Catholicism would make the most ardent Catholic hesitant about patently endorsing his religious policies.

Probably the most unadmirable gesture for Church backing was the President's intensification of the physical persecution of a very small minority of Colombian Protestants (about three per cent); but the Church did not specifically protest this persecution. However, there was an inference to Protestants in the Church's blanket condemnations of any form of violence, particularly the pathologically criminal activity of bandits in rural areas. The government, on the other hand, promoted violence against Protestants by trying to identify them as subversive to Colombian institutions. In reality, the dictatorship was looking for a scapegoat to shoulder the blame for the blunders of the President. Moreover, Protestants were indeed a very convenient group in this prejudice-ridden country. As early as 1954, Minister of Interior Pabon Núñez had instructed departmental governors to curb the activities of Protestant ministers. In October, 1955, Pabon Núñez sent another circular to the governors and heads of districts confirming his instructions of the previous year. The circular added that many Protestants had been engaged in distributing leaflets that were offensive to the Pope and Catholicism, and such action "is equivalent to a serious attack against the best qualities of the national soul and a clear perturbation of public order."³ Hence, anti-Protestantism and nationalism clearly were becoming synonymous. Rojas Pinilla in his New Year's message for 1956 alluded to the capture of Communist and Protestant propaganda in

3. New York Times, October 23, 1955, p. 9, col. 3.

guerrilla posts.⁴ Then on August 18, 1956, the President stated in a radio-television message that the Diario Oficial would publish a special report to prove two things: "a Protestant propaganda and a Communist propaganda. . . . That is to say it seems Communists have understood that, to carry out a campaign in Colombia, they first have to vanquish the religious beliefs of the people."⁵

There was, in fact, a great deal of violence against Protestants extending to the extremes of arson, assault, and murder. But excluding the closing of Protestant schools and church burnings, the circumstances of many crimes against individuals pointed to political vendettas rather than solely religious persecution. The majority of Protestants were also Liberals, and particularly in the rural areas, Liberals were the objects of violence. Moreover, the departmental and municipal authorities, after being warned about the subversive activities of Protestants, were not as inclined to offer them the necessary protection from felonious assaults. Other Protestants were simply casual victims of La Violencia.

The Church, nevertheless, did not fail to take this opportunity to assert itself against Protestant education. In December, 1956, Archbishop Luque read a pastoral letter to Colombian Catholics in which he threatened possible excommunication to parents who continued to send their children to Protestant schools. The ministry of education supported the archbishop's stand by ordering all non-Catholic schools to

4. Martz, op. cit., p. 216.

5. New York Times, August 19, 1956, p. 27, col. 1.

provide their Catholic students with religious instructors jointly chosen by the government and the Church. These instructors also had the right to scrutinize textbooks and teaching methods. Trying to avoid any complications, the four American Protestant schools decided to accept only non-Catholics, whereas for the previous year their enrollment had been half Catholic. Instead of a decrease in enrollment, there was an actual increase, with some students waggishly calling themselves "Independents" and "Buddists."⁶

For about a year and a half, Rojas Pinilla was able to follow domestic policies which maintained good relations with the Catholic Church. However, it became more apparent to Church leaders that the dictator was attempting to impliment Peronist tactics in the labor movement. In February, 1955, this favorable state of affairs began to sour when the archbishop and forty lesser heads of the Church signed a collective Lenten pastoral denouncing the National Confederation of Workers as Peronist and, therefore, anti-Catholic.⁷ The National Confederation of Workers did in fact have the moral and financial backing of the Peronist Agrupación de Trabajadores Latino Americanos Sindicalizados (ATLAS), which was an inter-American confederation of labor unions. Another slap came in the following October when El Catolisismo, the official organ of the Church, stated editorially that the attitude and actions of the Catholic Church did not imply complete solidarity with the acts of the government. The editorial specifically alluded to

6. "Colombian Church versus Schools," Time, December 20, 1956, p. 24.

7. New York Times, October 23, 1955, p. 9, col. 3.

a statement by Rojas Pinilla as presumptuous: "Church blesses the government which in turn protects Church interests and is convinced that the greatest service which can be done for the country is that of aiding the Church in its campaign of Christian solidarity."⁸

The real schism came, however, as a result of the brutal debacle at the Santamaria Bull Ring in Bogotá on February 5, 1956. On the Sunday of the week previous to February 5, Alberto Lleras Camargo, by now the well-known leader of the opposition movement, made his appearance before the crowd at the bull ring and was greeted by an enthusiastic applause for ten minutes. A few minutes later, the President's daughter, Maria Eugenia, made her appearance in the company of several military officials and her husband, Samuel Moreno Díaz. Instead of receiving the overwhelming ovation given to Lleras Camargo, the crowd jeered and booed the group and, in addition, objected to the dedication of the first bull to Maria Eugenia. Unable to tolerate these numerous insults, the group hurried away from the amphitheater.

This affront could scarcely be forgotten by the most forgiving of Colombians, let alone the very sensitive President. Even El Catolicismo denounced the incident as "such a demonstration of a minimal level of culture A woman is always worthy of respect, much more when her title or position is such as to give her special considerations."⁹ The President made no comment until the following Saturday in a speech

8. Hispanic American Report, VIII, No. 10 (October, 1955), p. 474.

9. El Catolicismo, February 10, 1956, as cited in Martz, op. cit., p. 218

delivered to the citizens of Barranquilla. He cautioned that the government would use force if necessary to insure "public tranquility and fraternal viability." Moreover, on the same day, an official government announcement warned that "fitting measures" would be taken.¹⁰

The government had bought \$15,000 worth of bull fight tickets, and so on Sunday, February 5, free seats were supplied to several thousand detectives and government employees. After everyone had been seated, these rojistas began cheering the President in order to identify the either silent or jeering anti-rojistas. Then the government men attacked with knives, clubs, and pistols bringing a toll of eight dead and approximately fifty wounded.¹¹

News coverage of this affair was quickly suppressed, but two newspapers, El Colombiano in Medellín and El Catolicismo, eluded the censors and published an account. El Catolicismo characterized the bull-ring brutality as openly anti-Christian and indicated that responsible parties in the government should receive exemplary punishment regardless of their positions. Silence, it said, "would only serve to intensify the climate of fear and discontent that with each passing day becomes more menacing." On the other hand, the semi-official Diario de Colombia described the episode as "trivial and unimportant."¹²

10. "Lucha sin cuartel contra politicos resentidos, anuncia," La Prensa (New York), February 20, 1956, as cited in Fluharty, op. cit., pp. 295-96.

11. "Bull-Ring Massacre," Time, February 20, 1956, p. 34.

12. Hispanic American Report, IX, No. 2 (February, 1956), p.

In his Lenten pastoral, which appeared in El Catolicismo but was not permitted for reprint in other sources, Archbishop Luque alluded to "those unspeakable happenings that merit all our reprobation because of their seriousness and the notably criminal circumstances surrounding them, and because they symbolize an alarming social disintegration." He continued that "thousands of witnesses denounce the vengeful spirit in which the riots avenged discourtesy with inhuman cruelty, cowardice, and a reign of brute force."¹³

Ironically, there appeared shortly after in the laureanista newspaper La Información a 2,000-word letter by ex-President Gómez to an unidentified priest. Gómez attacked the Church hierarchy, "who are supporters and partners in this bloody dictatorship." He compared the Colombian Church to that of Mexico prior to 1910 and emphatically denounced members of the Constituent Assembly as a "lamentable group of hirelings" at the employ of the "usurper."¹⁴

The object of Gómez's letter was to widen the already irreconcilable breach between the Church and the dictatorship. But the government in one of its few shrewd diplomatic maneuvers outdistanced the wily exile. La Información was permitted to distribute enough copies to circulate the letter, and then the government suspended publication. The next day other papers were permitted to publish the letter but without any editorial comment. On that evening, the government issued a communique underlying its loyalty to the Church and "rejecting the

13. "Rebuke from the Church," Time, March 5, 1956, p. 39.

14. New York Times, March 22, 1956, p. 14, col. 5.

unchristian bitterness and unleashed wrath of Gómez." Rojas Pinilla then sent his cabinet to pay their official respects to the archbishop. El Catolicismo in turn criticized Gómez and reiterated that its authority came directly from God and that no man had the right to question it. Gómez's insults, the paper asserted, were "unique in Colombian history." However, more important for the dictatorship, there was no reaffirmation of confidence in the military regime by the Church hierarchy.¹⁵

Questions centering around the labor movement posed the most insurmountable obstacles for good relations. Dictator Rojas Pinilla's Peronist tinged policy of gaining control of the labor movement in order to build a popular backing came into direct conflict with the Catholic labor movement. On July 16, 1956, Archbishop Luque directed a letter to the President airing his disagreements. He particularly condemned the Third Force. "An oath" (for the Third Force), the archbishop maintained, "is an act of religion." Furthermore, "it is not licit to the Armed Forces and a heterogeneous multitude an oath of fidelity to one person, that orders will be fulfilled without any reservation and the supremacy of a political movement will be fought for (in the present case the Third Force)" The archbishop went on to compare the oath of the Third Force to that demanded by Italian fascists and condemned by Pious XI in his encyclical Non Abbiamo Biscogno. Nevertheless, the still more offensive aspect of the Third Force was that it included groups previously denounced by the Colombian Church hierarchy: the National Confederation of Workers, the Confederation of Colombian

15. New York Times, March 25, 1956, p. 34, col. 1

Workers, socialists, Communists, and others that did not have the confidence of the Church.¹⁶

The archbishop stated that "the Third Force constitutes a serious threat to the labor movement that is inspired in the directives of the Supreme Pontiffs and that coordinate their activities to Catholic social doctrine." The Confederation of Colombian Workers had been denounced previously by the hierarchy "as profoundly hostile to the Church," and now the leaders of this union were appearing in the official labor magazine Colombia Obrera. Moreover, the archbishop objected to a female labor organization known as CONALFE which "is formed by women of the socialist school or a markedly leftist tendency" and was making headway "with a dangerous demagogic campaign among the popular masses."¹⁷

In regard to the confessional Union of Colombian Workers, he also informed Rojas Pinilla of his views:

The Church does not assume activities of a character properly called a labor union movement; but it inspires and encourages the movement represented by the U.T.C. (Union of Colombian Workers). The Church wishes that the U.T.C. not be entangled in political influences, and that it be permitted to follow its professional and technical orientation in accordance with Catholic morality and the pontifical directives that guide it, that influences and undeserved pressures not be exercised over its leaders, that it not be made the object of unmerited lack of confidence, and that (the government) in regard to the U.T.C. not disrupt or attempt to impose determined burdens on its leaders.¹⁸

16. Agudelo Ramirez and Montoya y Montoya (eds.), op. cit., pp. 138-43.

17. Ibid., pp. 140-41.

18. Ibid., p. 142.

The archbishop ended his formidable letter with a request that the government refrain from disrupting the planned labor meeting of the U.T.C. in Cali with "underhanded methods or political influence."¹⁹

It was not until April of the following year that the Church voiced again its strong opposition to the dictatorship. But, to be sure, the strong stand of the Church in July of the year before profoundly retarded the development of Rojas Pinilla's Third Force, and, therefore, it can be accredited to the Church that the dictator could not muster a large enough popular backing to legitimize his regime in the eyes of the nation. As Monsenior Joaquin Garcia Benitez, Archbishop of Medellin, described it, the Church undermined the dictatorship on moral issues: "We did not do anything more than defend the life and rights of Man."²⁰

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid., p. 262.

CHAPTER VI. THE FALL OF THE DICTATORSHIP

On May 1, 1957, President Rojas Pinilla committed a bungle of disastrous proportions. Guillermo León Valencia had gone to Cali to speak on behalf of his candidacy for the Civil Front. Both the Liberal and Conservative parties had united in their efforts to overthrow the dictatorship and had chosen León Valencia as the coalition candidate for the upcoming presidential elections. However, the President was unable to contain his suspicions of León Valencia's rising popularity, and, therefore, he gave orders to the governor of Valle del Cauca, Brigadier General Jaime Polanía Puyo, to detain the Conservative leader in Cali. Accordingly a Secret Service agent was sent to the home of Jorge Vernaza where León Valencia was staying. León Valencia was told that he was under house arrest, and to prevent his escape, the Vernaza residence was surrounded by a cordon of troops.¹

Sometime after midnight, May 2, León Valencia left the house and persuaded the young officer in charge of the troops to allow him a visit with the auxiliary bishop in Cali, Miguel Antonio Medina. Both the auxiliary bishop and the bishop of Cali, Julio Caicedo Téllez, extended the persecuted politician asylum within the confines of the episcopal palace, and two days later, they extended the same asylum to his wife and daughter also with him on his tour. Nevertheless, the determined Conservative refused the offer for himself and returned to the

1. Ibid., pp. 235-36.

Vernaza residence. This visit was very significant, although, because it clearly demonstrated that the Civil Front and León Valencia had the support of the Church.

At about 3:00 a.m. the same morning, León Valencia learned that the troops outside were about to seize him by force. Brandishing a .32 caliber Smith and Wesson pistol from the second story window, he reportedly shouted to the troops below: "You will have to take me out either dead or tied up. You know the kind of fight I can put up."² At this show of resistance, an ominous, heckling crowd began to gather about the house, and in the streets of the city, other protest groups began to form. Auxiliary Bishop Medina, fearful of possible violence, called Archbishop Luque in Bogotá who, in turn, contacted Rojas Pinilla in the presidential palace. Through the archbishop's influence, the President rescinded the order to detain León Valencia.

The result of this incident was to fan into a flame of smoldering Liberal and Conservative opposition and to bring student groups into more active participation. While still in the Vernaza residence, May 2, León Valencia released a message which was distributed at large to university students by means of a very effective clandestine press. León Valencia called for a united student protest so that "all legal activity should be employed in the defense of our essential rights."³ The students responded. The leadership of all the major universities had pledged their support of the Conservative-Liberal coalition in the

2. "The Strongman Falters," Time, May 13, 1957, p. 38.

3. Agudelo Ramírez and Montoya y Montoya, op. cit., pp. 237-38.

latter half of March. Student leaders in all private and state supported universities, excluding the Military College, announced a nation-wide student strike. Students on the campus of the National University in Bogotá^o smashed pictures of the President, while police attempted to disperse demonstrating students at the Catholic Javeriana University.

Anticipating further protest and possible violence in Cali, Governor Polonia^o Puyo requested the social clubs in that city to secure permission from the authorities before any gathering of their members.⁴ This order had a reverse effect, for on May 2, not only did the clubs of Cali suspend their activities, but the professional and social organizations of Medellín^o, Barranquilla, Manizales, Popayán^o, and Bogotá^o also voluntarily suspended activities. In a joint resolution, the clubs of Bogotá^o stated that "If they accepted the precedent that the governor of Valle pretends to impose, it would be collaborating with a flagrant violation of the constitutional and longstanding norms that protect the right of association and reunion."⁵ This protest was indeed serious for the regime. When the economic, political, and social status of the many members of these clubs is taken into account, Rojas Pinilla, in fact, had a general declaration of non-support from the middle and upper classes. Brute military force was now the only counterpoise to this opposition.

The President was shaken by this turn of events, but he refused to retreat short of his goal of re-election. An unconvincing excuse was given for the detention of León^o Valencia. Rojas Pinilla dismissed

4. Ibid., p. 235.

5. Ibid., pp. 278-79.

his blunder on the grounds that the government had received word that there was an assassination plot against León Valencia which would bring discredit to the regime.⁶ It was for this reason that officials in Cali insisted that he go to Popayan instead of Bogotá. But on the day after his release, May 3, León Valencia did arrive in the national capital with a show of great popular enthusiasm.

To counter the erosion of his popular backing, Rojas Pinilla made a desperate appeal to the working classes by launching a propaganda campaign against the "unpatriotic oligarchies."⁷ However, this attack on the economic and social elite failed to rouse the desired popular response. But the dictator continued to foist upon the country the prospect of another presidential term, though in a radio message to the nation he stated that he might voluntarily step down after his re-election.

On May 2, the President promoted six colonels to the rank of brigadier general and had these faithful adherents placed in strategic positions.⁸ To remind the public that the military still was under his command, on May 4 the President had Brigadier General Navas Pardo conduct a "routine exercise" with 35,000 troops in downtown Bogotá. The troops started moving in the city at 5:30 p.m., and all had taken up their stations by 8:45 p.m. As an additional reminder, radios began blaring at about 8:30 p.m. that a one and one-half hour curfew was to

6. La Paz (Bogotá), May 4, 1957, p. 2.

7. Diario Oficial (Bogotá), May 3, 1957, p. 1

8. Ibid. p. 1.

begin at 9:30 p.m. and that anyone caught on the streets after that time would be taken to the nearest jail. When the curfew was over, the troops began marching out of the city in an orderly fashion. Brigadier General Navas Pardo called the occupation a great "success."⁹

In spite of the government's ovations "to Love one another," the agitation continued in Bogotá. Clandestine printing presses turned out anti-government leaflets which, in turn, were circulated throughout the city by students. They continued to hand out signs to cars with "Death to Rojas," and a fund-raising campaign was started to finance the revolution.¹⁰ The Central University Committee, which conducted the agitation, came under the personal direction of Guillermo León Valencia after May 4. Hence, the student leaders, many of whom were critical of previous upper-class rule, now were the allies of those very politicians who were trying to reassert their control over the nation.

The opposition was coalescing into a movement larger than Rojas Pinilla could control without military force. Yet, if he did use overt force, the constitutional legitimacy of his regime would be lost. But still the alternative of not seeking a re-election was inconceivable to the dictator. Moreover, the Church already had tacitly reprobated dictatorial repression in Cardinal Luque's informal agreement with the President to release León Valencia from detention. Any type of violence arising from political disturbances was unacceptable to the Church

9. Agudelo Ramírez and Montoya y Montoya (eds.), op. cit., p. 280.

10. New York Times, May 5, 1957, p. 1, col. 8.

hierarchy. The military government responded rather ineffectually to student agitation by closing the universities on Monday, May 6, for reasons of "absence and improper conduct by the students and professors."¹¹ But the students in fact had been on strike since May 2. The Central University Committee, in turn, availed itself of this decree to reject the authority of the education minister "of a barbarous government that has pursued and pursues all the values of culture."¹² At the same time, students began calling for a general strike of all Colombians.¹³

On Sunday, May 5, Rojas Pinilla made two more blunders of major proportions. The first occurred at La Porciúncula, a Catholic church situated in the fashionable Chapinero district in the north of Bogotá where the highly respected Fray Severo Velásquez delivered a fiery sermon at the noontime high mass. Severo made several allusions to government corruption which were enthusiastically applauded by the congregation and also carefully recorded on tape by police detectives in the crowd.¹⁴ These detectives meanwhile alerted anti-riot squads, which appeared outside the church as the parishioners were leaving. Still inspired by the sermon, some people began shouting epithets against the government including "Long live the strike."¹⁵ At this moment, the police attempted

11. Agudelo Ramírez and Montoya 7 Montoya (eds.), op. cit., p. 297.

12. Ibid., p. 279.

13. Ibid., p. 280.

14. Ibid., pp. 271-74.

15. Ibid., p. 281.

to disperse the crowd with water jets of red dye and tear gas. Indiscriminately, they threw tear gas into the precincts of the building where about half the parishioners still remained. The police also gave Fray Severo an ample spattering of red dye while he shouted "a curse upon the tyrant, a curse upon the man who had led the nation to this situation."¹⁶

Later in the day, anti-riot squads accidentally killed an upper-class youth only sixteen years old. The boy, Ernesto Aparicio Concha (whose mother incidentally participated in the Manifestation of the Ladies in August, 1955) was among a group of some forty students who began singing the national anthem in the streets of Bogotá. The police arrived and fired tear gas shells into the group, and one of the shells perforated the neck of Aparicio Concha. He was pronounced dead on arrival at the hospital.¹⁷ News of the killing spread rapidly by word of mouth, and the President was immediately dubbed a new name, "the assassin."

By the end of the following day, May 6, commercial activity in the capital had come to a virtual stop. Professional men, industrialists, bankers, and small businessmen all joined the nation-wide strike, which by Tuesday, May 7, had spread throughout the nation. The major private banks in the capital, excluding the semi-official Bank of the Republic, wrote a joint letter to the President informing him of the

16. "The Strongman Falters," Time, May 13, 1957, p. 38.

17. Interview with Santiago Aparicio Martínez, the first cousin of Ernesto Aparicio Concha.

closing of the banks. The presidents and members of the boards of trustees called for "the reestablishment of institutional and judicial order, the union of political parties, economic stability and the general return to normality, which constitutes the greatest desire of all Colombians to end the insecurity that exists in different sectors of enterprise and private interest."¹⁸ In addition, the leading businessmen of Antioquia also aired their ill feeling toward the military government by pronouncing themselves absolutely against re-election.¹⁹ In summation, the financial community had withdrawn its support of Rojas Pinilla.

Factories on Tuesday failed to open, along with all other commercial establishments. The national capital fell into a state of semi-paralysis and calm. León Valencia and Lleras Camargo that day asked the people in a joint statement to abstain from demonstrations other than the continuation of the strike.²⁰ Meanwhile, patrol cars with loud speakers drove through the streets calling for the reopening of business establishments. By 12:00 p.m. there was assembled in the Plaza de Bolívar a small group listening to these loud speakers blare "We warn the shopkeepers that, if they do not open their stores, the people will make them function." Other cheers were "Long live Rojas Pinilla," "Down with the oligarchy," and "Death to the anti-patriotic."

18. Agudelo Ramírez and Montoya y Montoya (eds.), op. cit., pp. 255-56.

19. Letter from Antioquian Businessmen to General Rojas Pinilla, May 6, 1957, in El Independiente (Bogotá), May 10, 1957, p. 3.

20. Agudelo Ramírez and Montoya y Montoya (eds.), op. cit., p. 282.

Nearly 800 individuals had collected by 3:00 p.m. and some were carrying posters to remind bankers, industrialists, and storekeepers that "If the oligarchy closes, we will open."²¹

On Thursday, May 9, the government bank superintendency actually did take over the business and belongings of the Bank of Bogotá and furthermore threatened to do the same with the other banks which had suspended operations. Moreover, by presidential decree, the striking banks were not allowed to collect interest on debts while not functioning but, on the other hand, they were required to continue paying the prescribed six per cent interest on deposits.²² Nevertheless, the government did not succeed in forcing the banks to open. In fact, the Bank of Bogotá and six other private banks had warned the bank superintendent two days earlier that they would not open under any threats of reprisal. They further acceded that their employees would continue receiving their normal salaries, because the clerks and management stood together in their "desire to obtain liberty and peace for Colombia."²³

Labor, also, sided with anti-government camps, though the Union of Colombian Workers (U.T.C.) was the only labor organization which manifestly declared against the regime. The declaration of May 6 aired grievances with the dictatorship. Aside from the very real economic problems afflicting the workers, the declaration reveals a community of

21. Ibid., p. 283.

22. La Paz (Bogotá), May 9, 1957, p. 1.

23. Letter to the Bank Superintendent from the Banks of the Andes, Bogotá, Colombia, Commercial Antioqueño, Industrial Colombiano, del Comercio in El Independiente (Bogotá), May 10, 1957, p. 3.

spirit and cooperation with other sectors of society: "It is indispensable to make the necessary rectifications and with the collective action of the industrialists, the government, the workers and all peoples of good will, to look for formulas that will guarantee the return to normalcy"24

Meanwhile, the dictator continued to prepare for his re-election. On Tuesday evening, his hand-picked Constituent Assembly met under the heaviest security precautions. That night the ANAC revised the constitutional provision forbidding the President to succeed himself in office. On Wednesday the Constituent Assembly reconvened and at 4:50 p.m. elected Rojas Pinilla to a second four-year term of office.

Some hours after his re-election, President Rojas Pinilla gave a nation-wide radio message, which had ominous overtones of class conflict. The dictator declared that the "working classes are above the oligarchy," and again he denounced the banks for joining the strike. Moreover, he added that the economic oligarchy had initiated class warfare as a tool of the political oligarchy. The President seemingly was trying to promote violence or somehow hoped to undermine the opposition movement by discrediting its upper-class leadership as an unscrupulous "oligarchy" manipulating the workers to their own interests.²⁵

Though Bogotá^o was the geographic center of the opposition movement, in Cali there was also taking place serious violence against the government. By May 8, six persons had already lost their lives and

24. El Independiente (Bogotá^o), May 10, 1957, p. 4. Italics are mine.

25. Agudelo Ramírez and Montoya y Montoya (eds.), op. cit., pp. 284-86.

ultimately forty were killed.²⁶ Most of the people killed in Cali were from the working class, whereas, in Bogotá, the upper and middle classes seemed to have played a more significant part in the demonstrations.

In Bogotá, Archbishop Crisanto Cardinal Luque had planned to hold a cleansing ceremony on Wednesday at La Porcuíncula. According to the practice of the Colombian Church, when a religious building is profaned, as did happen at La Porcuíncula when anti-riot squads threw tear gas inside the building, the Church authorities must bless the building before it can be reopened. To be sure, the government was not going to risk another mob demonstration and, therefore, forbade the cleansing ceremony. The following day, May 9, El Catolicismo published an exhortation by the archbishop to the faithful of the city and archdioceses. The archbishop denounced the government for sacreligiously profaning various churches and their parishioners. He also alluded to the death of young Aparicio Concha and continued that "No reason whether it be just or reasonable, can condone and justify outrages of violence, that only can bear bitter fruits of greater evils for individuals and societies, which will be accounted for before God and the country."²⁷ Cardinal Luque's exhortation coincided with the position taken by Bishop Caicedo Téllez of Cali on the previous day. Bishop Caicedo Téllez pronounced excommunication to those "who gave the order (military and police officials) to commit the assassinations during the tragic events between

26. Ibid., pp. 300-1.

27. Exhortation to the Faithful by Archbishop Crisanto Cardinal Luque in El Independiente (Bogotá), May 10, 1957. p. 4.

last Monday and Wednesday."²⁸ Moreover, when this exhortation was made public outside the bishop's residence, it was received with enthusiasm and applause by the crowds.

On the evening of May 9, Lleras Camargo and León Valencia released a joint manifesto to the Armed Forces. Representing the will of both the Conservative and Liberal parties, the two leaders explained their opposition to the mock re-election and the personalist cult of Rojas Pinilla. They reminded the military that it was their solemn duty to uphold the "conditions which conserve public respect and confidence." In addition, it was made explicit that the political parties were opposed to General Rojas Pinilla but not against the continuation of the Armed Forces as an institution in Colombia. And lastly, they called upon the military to help them together resolve the national crisis.²⁹

In the early afternoon, May 9, President Rojas Pinilla called to the palace of San Carlos the president of the Coffee Bank, Antonio Álvarez Restrepo, who, until three days previously, was the minister of finance. Rojas Pinilla and Álvarez Restrepo conferred at length about the principle aspects of the national crisis. Later, Álvarez Restrepo was asked to review the points of their discussion before the cabinet. After this was accomplished, the dictator asked him to consult with some of Colombia's other leading business magnates to find possible solutions to the country's economic problems and make suggestions for a cabinet for his new government. This group met in the home of Álvarez

28. Agudelo Ramírez and Montoya y Montoya (eds.), op. cit., p. 287.

29. Ibid.

Restrepo and officially at the outset of the talks had among its members the president of Avianca Airlines, Juan Guillermo Restrepo Jaramillo; the president of the Bank of the Republic, Carlos Mario Londoño; and the president of Paz del Rio steel mill, Umaña de Brigard.³⁰

It soon became apparent that this core group was inadequate to find any political solutions to the problems of the country. So, Llerenas Camargo and León Valencia, among other opponents of the regime, were also invited to attend the conference at the Alvarez Restrepo residence. Of course, the dictator did not know that this meeting would develop into a conspiracy of the financial, political, and military power groups.

It then occurred to some of the members attending that the group could not find adequate solutions without representation of the Armed Forces. Accordingly, Brigadier General Navas Pardo, commander of the military forces in Bogotá, was summoned to the home of Alvarez Restrepo in order to hear his views. Navas Pardo threw his support in with the opposition. It was thereby resolved that Rojas Pinilla was to renounce the presidency and that a military junta should take over, a new cabinet would be formed, practical solutions were to be found to stop acts of sabotage, and the ANAC was to be disbanded and popular elections called as soon as possible. Navas Pardo was asked to deliver this decision to Rojas Pinilla.³¹

Meanwhile, the President was in the palace of Narino surrounded by a coterie of sycophants. Through Navas Pardo, other military

30. Rojas Pinilla, op. cit., p. 738.

31. Intermedio (Bogotá), May 11, 1957, p. 2.

commanders had been contacted, and they agreed to support the agreements made at the Álvarez Restrepo residence. But by the time everyone had decided on an agreement for joint action it was early morning, May 10. Between 1:00 and 2:00 a.m., General Navas Pardo appeared before the President in company with representatives of the three branches of the military and in addition a spokesman for the police. Also attending were Carlos Mario Londoño and Umaña de Brigard. Jointly the military and police commanders declared their non-support of Rojas Pinilla as the chief of state.³² Abandoned by virtually every power group and with no real bargaining position whatsoever, the general was permitted the favor of naming a military junta. The ex-dictator still had hopes of retaining influence among his appointees to the junta, but these five military men turned out to be loyal to the provisions of the meeting at the Álvarez Restrepo residence.

As for the ex-President, he remained in the presidential palace until 7:00 p.m. At that time, with a \$15,000 loan from the Bank of the Republic for traveling expenses, Rojas Pinilla and his family went to the airport.³³ They took a special plane and flew to Bermuda. A few days later the ex-dictator flew to Spain where he took up residence in exile. But he would return to his native land and stand trial for his deeds, a trial that amounted to little more than a strong reprimand. Today, 1967, he resides in Colombia surrounded by politically ambitious friends. Though disbarred forever from the exercise of his political

32. Rojas Pinilla, op. cit., p. 740.

33. Ibid., p. 742.

rights, Rojas Pinilla through his daughter María Eugenia controls the third strongest political party in Colombia.

REFERENCES

Primary Sources

- Agudelo Ramírez, Luis E., and Montoya y Montoya, Rafael. Los guerrilleros intelectuales. Medellín: Publicaciones Augumont, 1957.
- Echavarría, Felipe. Una monstruosa farsa. Rome, 1964.
- Rojas Pinilla, Gustavo. Rojas Pinilla ante el Senado. Bogotá: Editorial Excelsior, 1959.

Books

- Alexander, Robert J. Communism in Latin America. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1957.
- Azula Barrera, Rafael. De la revolución al orden nuevo. Bogotá: Editorial Kelly, 1956.
- Belmonte, Pedro Luis. Antecedentes históricos de los sucesos del 8 y 9 de junio de 1954. Imprenta Nacional, 1954.
- Considine, John J. New Horizons in Latin America. New York: Dodd, Mead, & Co., 1958.
- Camacho, Alberto Aguiler. Derecho agrario colombiano. Bogotá: Ediciones Tercer Mundo, 1962.
- Dangond Uribe, Alberto. Laureano su vida es su victoria. Bogotá: Librería Colombiana Camacho Roldan, 1962.
- Echavarría, Felipe. Una economía en crisis. Rome, 1963.
- Fluharty, Veron Lee. Dance of the Millions. Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 1957.
- Franco Isaza, Eduardo. Las guerrillas del llano. Bogotá: Librería Mundial, 1959.
- Gutiérrez, José. La rebeldía colombiana. Bogotá: Ediciones Tercer Mundo, 1962.
- _____. La revolución contra el miedo. Bogotá: Ediciones Tercer Mundo, 1962.

- Guzmán Campos, German. La violencia en Colombia. Vol. I. Bogotá: Ediciones Tercer Mundo, 1964.
- Hamill, Hugh M., Jr. (ed.). Dictatorship in Spanish America. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965.
- Hanke, Lewis. Mexico and the Caribbean. Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Co., Inc., 1959.
- Johnson, John J. The Military and Society in Latin America. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965.
- _____. Political Change in Latin America. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965.
- Laserna, Mario. Estado fuerte o caudillo. Bogotá: Ediciones Mito, 1961.
- Lieuwen, Edwin. Arms and Politics in Latin America. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1965.
- _____. Generals vs. Presidents. New York. Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1965.
- Lleras Camargo, Alberto. Sus mejores páginas. Bogotá: Compañía Grancolombiana de Ediciones, 1961.
- Lleras Restrepo, Carlos. El pensamiento de Carlos Lleras Restrepo. Bogotá: Librería Mundial, 1963.
- López, Francisco. Los factores de la revolución. Bogotá: Editorial Iquema, 1964.
- López Michelson, Alfonso. Colombia en la hora cero. Vol. I. Bogotá: Ediciones Tercer Mundo, 1963.
- _____. Los últimos días de López. Bogotá: Ediciones Mito, 1961.
- Martz, John D. Colombia: A Contemporary Political Survey. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962.
- Moncado, Alonso. Un aspecto de la violencia. Bogotá: Italgraf Ltd., 1963.
- Puentes, Milton. Historia del partido liberal colombiano. Bogotá: Prag, 1964.
- Ruiz Novoa, Alberto. El gran desafío. Bogotá: Ediciones Tercer Mundo, 1965.

- Saldarriaga Betancur, Juan Manuel. De la dictadura al comunismo. Medellín, 1962.
- Santa, Eduardo. Nos duele Colombia. Bogotá: Antares, Ltd., 1962.
- Stokes, William Sylvane. Latin American Politics. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1959.
- Szulc, Tad. Twilight of Tyrants. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1959.
- Villaveces, Jorge. La derrota. Bogotá: Editorial Jorvi, 1963.
- Unidad popular contra la reacción y el golpe de estado.
A report Prepared by the Ninth Congress of the Colombian Communist Party. Bogotá, 1961.

Economic Reports

- Currie, Lauchlin. The Basis of a Development Program for Colombia. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1960.
- Prebisch, Raul. Toward a Dynamic Development Policy for Latin America. A United Nations Publication for the Inter-American Economic and Social Council of the Organization of American States. New York, 1963.
- Stevenson, Rafael; Villegas, Jorge; Mutis, Hernando; and Castellanos, Justo. La planificación agraria. Bogotá: Fundación Universidad de America, 1960.
- Analyses and Projections of Economic Development. Vol. III. Geneva: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 1957.
- Coffee in Latin America: Productivity Problems and Future Prospects. New York: United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization, 1958.
- Colombia: Highlights of a Developing Economy. Bogotá: Bank of the Republic Press, 1955.
- External Financing in Latin America. New York: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 1965.
- Inventory of Information Basic to the Planning of Agricultural Development in Latin America. Washington, D.C.: Pan American Union, 1963.
- Livestock in Latin America: Status Problems and Prospects. New York: United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization, 1962.

The World Bank Group in the Americas. A Report Prepared by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Washington, D.C., 1962.

Periodicals and Articles

- Herrera, M. L. "Colombia: The Policy of the Communist Party and the Crisis of the Oligarchy," World Marxist Review, IV, No. 9 (September, 1961), 48-50.
- Hilton, Ronald (ed.). Hispanic American Report, Vols. VI-X. A Report Prepared by Stanford University. Stanford, 1953-1957.
- "Bull-Ring Massacre," Time, LXVII, No. 34 (February 20, 1956), 34.
- "Chairman of the Board," Time, LXIX, No. 4 (January 28, 1957), 41.
- "Colombian Church versus Schools," Time, LXVI, No. 26 (December, 1956), 24.
- "Colombia Now Feels Coffee Price Backlash," Business Week, No. 1313 (October 30, 1954), 138.
- "Fast Out of the Gate," Newsweek, XLI (June 29, 1956), 52.
- "The Horrible Night is Over," Time, LXI, No. 25 (June 22, 1953), 38.
- "The Mess in Bogota," Time, LXVIII, No. 17 (October 22, 1956), 43-44.
- "Neo-Nazism in Colombia," The Nation, CLXXXII (February 4, 1956), 81.
- "Riches on the New Frontier," U.S. News & World Report, XLI (September 21, 1956), 63-66.
- "Rebuke from the Church," Time, LXVII, No. 10 (March 5, 1956), 39.
- "The Strongman Falsters," Time, LXIX, No. 19 (May 13, 1957), 38.
- "Surplus & Shortage," Time, LXVIII, No. 11 (September 10, 1956), 51.
- "Third Force," Time, LXVII, No. 26 (June 25, 1956), 33.

Newspapers

Diario Oficial. May 3, and May 5, 1957.

El Independiente. May 10, 1957.

Intermedio. May 10, May 11, May 12, and May 13, 1957.

New York Times. 1953-1957.