

There is no doubt that President Tolbert attempted to broaden the political base to include the rural population and to involve them in the running of the nation. But he could not escape what his settler ancestry symbolized for the majority of Liberians. Now both groups—and the cleavage is not as sharp as it may appear—will need each other. For the immediate future it would not be surprising if the political situation continues to be unstable. Still, the major importance of the coup lies in the fact that indigenous peoples of Liberia are now, and are likely to remain, the arbiters of modernity for all the peoples of Liberia.

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EXCURSUS 3

Alexander Wilde on IS COLOMBIA ON THE BRINK OF ANYTHING?

In the 1940s, Colombia's great populist politician, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, used to explain in crowded plazas that Colombia was not one country but two. The first of these was the country of the people, the *país nacional*, the other was the country of politics, the *país político*. Colombia's problem, Gaitán thought, was the gulf between the two. The "country of politics" did not deal with the nation's real problems. It was a game with its own rules, self-contained and self-serving, dedicated to its own ends of patronage and power. Gaitán was cut down by an assassin's bullet in 1948, but as recent events in Bogotá have confirmed, his analysis is more valid than ever.

From February 27 to April 27 urban guerrillas held diplomats from some fourteen countries hostage in the embassy of the Dominican Republic. The tight drama played out there—the parleys between the government and guerrillas, the troops drawn up around the scene—vividly suggested the hermetic quality of the whole "country of politics." For the actors the immediate stakes were and are tangible, but Colombian society has looked on with detachment. The only difference from Gaitán's time (and it is an important one) is that the drama now includes more than politicians from the traditional Liberal and Conservative parties. Both the army and the guerrillas have become part of the *país político*.

None of the principals in the embassy standoff has been able to rally any substantial proportion of the population. The government of Liberal party President Julio César Turbay has claimed to be defending Colombia's democratic institutions. It has received ritual expressions of support from politicians, organized business, and the army (in a declaration headed "no to subversion, yes to democracy"). But mid-term elections held in March, in a calm and relaxed atmosphere, did not give it a public vote of confidence. Although the government lists gained a slim majority, the low turnout—less than a quarter of eligible voters—indicated widespread indifference.

The M-19 revolutionaries have seemed equally irrelevant. While claiming to fight for social justice and the people, they have acted in isolation from other organized forces of change. The democratic Left opposition—such as the renovationist Liberals and the independent broad-front Firmes movement—have condemned the guerrillas' methods as quixotic and counterproductive. In fact, guer-

rilla revolutionaries are nothing new in Colombia. They have attacked the government—first in the countryside, now in the city—for twenty years. They have been able to capture headlines and hostages, but never significant popular support. Including the urban M-19 and the rural FARC, ELN, and smaller groups, they number at most 2,000 against an army of 60,000 and police forces of 30,000.

The social transformation they seek is no closer than it was in 1960, but gradually they have become a regular part of the "country of politics." Their continuing attacks over several decades have underwritten a rationale for increasing repression. Their official counterpart, the army, has played an ever more important role in political life. Confronting each other at the Dominican embassy, the two armed camps symbolized a larger process of political decay: Together they maintained the value of violence—a traditional political currency in Colombia—and devalued that of participation.

Colombia has experienced a generation of dynamic economic development and rapid social change. Economic growth has averaged nearly 6 per cent annually over the last twenty years. Inflation, that substitute for civil war (as Albert Hirschman called it), has recently reached 30 and 40 per cent annually, after years at single-digit figures. Non-traditional exports have boomed, led by that "other" category in the accounts—drugs—that may now equal coffee. The result has been a pervasive sense of moral crisis. The country is awash in dollars. The black market rate is lower than the official one, charging, in effect, a laundry fee. Easy money and financial sleight-of-hand have produced an "emerging class," unprecedented political corruption, and a feeling of "insecurity" everywhere in daily life. The country feels itself, in the phrase of former President Carlos Lleras Restrepo, "coming unbound."

Politics should clarify a society's options, but to this point Colombia's democracy has not been up to the task. The still relatively free play of political forces has produced a sense not of conjuncture but confusion. The traditional parties have fragmented. New movements have struggled, unsuccessfully, against government harassment and the prevailing climate of disaffection. For more than a decade the one clear and consistent response to change has been militarization.

In a country that has had only five years of military rule in more than a century, the army has steadily extended its influence and authority. A state of siege, invoked to deal with the guerrilla threat and sense of political paralysis, has been in force almost continuously for the last thirty years. Now, with the Security Statute of 1978, the army has de facto control of large areas of the countryside and much authority de jure over administration of justice.

The *país político* has not yet been capable of debating what is at stake in this trend. A classic coup d'état does not seem in the cards, at least for now. The minister of defense, General Luis Carlos Camacho Leyva, is a formidable and ambitious man, with a law degree in addition to twenty years in government. But he already has considerable—some say the determining—influence over a wide range of policies concerned with internal subversion and public order.

The real danger is a kind of coup by easy stages that may one day find Colombia's battered democracy an empty shell. Both Camacho Leyva and President Turbay tend to equate the preservation of democracy with the control of subversion. An incident like the Dominican embassy takeover confirms for them the need for a harsh

crackdown. Last year they responded to an M-19 arms raid by arresting some two thousand people and condoning the use of torture, which has not been practiced in Colombia as it has in some military dictatorships. The public outcry then forced the government to pull back, but it may cross the line again after the hostage situation is resolved.

If anything can finally shatter the politics of indifference and anesthesia, it will be torture. It would deeply divide the *pais politico*, which has not yet confronted the ultimate implications of militarization. The remarkably independent judiciary, while undercut by the constitutional reform of 1979, is still able to react. A National Commission for Human Rights includes leaders of significance from all sectors of society, and the press remains largely free of censorship. The trade union movement, which organized the country's first national strike in 1977, is still capable of mobilizing to protect workers' interests.

The relative openness and pluralism of Colombia's politics give special influence to international institutions such as Amnesty International and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, both of which have sent missions in 1980. Amnesty's findings of torture and repression by the army, for example, will become issues in Colombia's own political process (and not just a problem in foreign relations, as they tend to in harsher military regimes to the south). Indeed, they may finally focus political debate on the power of the army, which has clearly been responsible—in its courts, prisons, and militarized zones—for the worst human rights violations that have occurred.

The power of the army, however, is not just the result of military ambitions (or, certainly, of the guerrilla threat), but of the weakness and illegitimacy of the country's political institutions. Those institutions have been saved many times in the past by the ability of Colombia's party politicians to strike workable arrangements for sharing power. They have demonstrated a willingness to accept responsibility for resolving national crises, rather than going to knock at the barracks door. It is a laudable tradition, but one severely bent by the drift of recent years. Those institutions stand today at the point of being destroyed, like the infamous village in Vietnam, in the name of being saved. If politicians truly want to save them, they must have faith enough to use them.

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EXCURSUS 4

Richard John Neuhaus on NEW OCCASIONS, NEW DUTIES FOR RELIGION

Is there still a peace movement? Was there one ten years ago? Certainly there was an antiwar movement. Not antiwar-in-general, but very specifically anti-America's war in Indochina. Where today are the hundreds of thousands who massed in protest in the '60s?

The vast majority have gone on to the other things, fondly recalling their protest as a burst of youthful idealism and disguising as maturity their abandoned efforts for peace. For many, protest was mixed with the temporary

self-interest of avoiding the draft or with sundry counter-cultural fixations which were viewed as the wave of a new American revolution. The more conformist have simply switched sides, from "Peace Now" to "Nuke the Ayatollah," in obedience to the temper of the times.

Some from the '60s have sustained their interest in international affairs and alternatives to war: in government or various institutes or, like the indomitable Robert Pickus, in organizations such as the World Without War Council. Then there are those who come closest to a real peace movement, those for whom the Vietnam agitation was a momentary upsurge of interest in a continuing commitment. They are the pacifist groups, including the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the Mennonites, and the Quakers. Finally, there is the small but not unimportant group "radicalized" by the '60s, arriving at the firm conviction that American power is the chief cause of global oppression and injustice.

The antiwar movement was a much more variegated phenomenon than most of its apologists and opponents would like to believe. A fundamental difference existed between those who wanted to extricate America from a militarily disastrous and probably unjust course and those who backed Hanoi in the hope, as it was said, of getting America "on the right side" of the world revolution. The basic disagreement was whether U.S. policy in Vietnam represented a *distortion* or *revelation* of the true nature of American world power. Was Vietnam a disastrous mistake or a manifestation of systemic evil? Those of us who believed that—on balance, and considering the alternative—American global power is benign and essential, protested the squandering of that power.

Others opposed the war for fear of damage to the democratic process at home. From Lyndon Johnson's lies as the "peace candidate" in 1964 through the last days of the Kissinger-Nixon manipulation, the war was an exercise in official mendacity. In reaction to this, these people frequently, and perhaps naively, backed the "third force" in Vietnam—politicians and Buddhist leaders opposed to both communism and the Saigon regime. Most of this third force were imprisoned under Thieu and have since been killed, driven out, or imprisoned under Hanoi. Their American friends are embittered, feeling that the U.S. pulled out of Vietnam in the same way it had entered—with callous indifference toward a country's people and their own search for an alternative to tyranny.

In the shadow of the boat people, mass imprisonments, and the genocide in Cambodia, no thoughtful person today can confidently assert that whatever position he took then was self-evidently right. Despite the I-told-you-so crowing of some, supporters of the war have not been vindicated. No one can say what would have happened had the war been fought by different means and to different ends. If a national decision on America's world responsibilities depends upon a clear-cut determination of who was right and who wrong about Vietnam, America will remain divided and indecisive in the years ahead.

Although it may not be as revelatory an event as President Carter seems to think, the Russian invasion of Afghanistan marks the beginning of a new period of popular consciousness concerning the threats and obligations facing America. In shaping a new consensus, and avoiding a regression to old belligerencies, the churches of America have an important part to play. Most of them are not well equipped for the part. In the last decade many of the churches established peace programs—or, lest peace tend to inhibit support for favored revolutions, "peace and justice" programs. Such programs are fre-