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Colombia: The Preprogrammed War Has Started

by Liz Atherton (Colombia Peace Association)

On the night of Wednesday 20 February 2002, President Andres Pastrana announced for the second time in less than two months the end of the peace process with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). However, his latest declaration to the people of Colom-

bia had a ring of deadly finality as he authorised General Fernando Tapias, head of the Colombian Armed Forces, to retake the demilitarized zone with immediate effect. By the morning after the dreaded proclamation, military planes had dropped more than 200 bombs on military targets around the whole demilitarized zone.

The reasons given by President Pastrana for the rupture of the peace talks were the FARC's attacks on utility companies and their alleged detention on 19 February of Senator Jorge Eduardo Gechem Turbay.

More than 13 000 troops have been mobilised from different parts of the country to make their way to the zone. According to reports by the French Press Agency AFP "the Colombian army did not permit the entrance of journalists into the former demilitarized zone in the south of the country on Thursday [21 February]."

And when the army enters the zone, so too will their paramilitary soulmates. Already hit lists are circulating among the civilian populations of the zone warning certain people to leave if they want to stay alive. One such list has the names of around 30 people, all accused of collaborating with the guerrillas.

There is no doubt that we are about to be witnesses to a civilian bloodbath with government authorisation.

Under the new Law on Defence and National Security, the demilitarized zone is a major designated "theatre of operation" in which the army will have total judicial autonomy, unaccountable to any civil judicial authority. In the name of "public order" they will have complete freedom to detain, torture, kidnap, rape and murder with total impunity and without being answerable to any authority but their own.

National security forces have been continuing their rampage



of death and devastation in different regions of the country, most recently in Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Valle del Rio Cimitarra, Choco and Arauca, where assassinations and massacres have been accompanied by the forced displacement of thousands of campesinos. The army and police have been using the new national security statute to harass and arbitrarily detain those who do

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Italy Indymedia under attack

by IMC Italy

Wednesday morning February 20th, the Italian police knocked at the doors of a few Italian social centers: Gabrio in Torino, Cecco Rivolta in Firenze, TPO in Bologna, and the Cobas offices in Taranto. The huge police turnout (lots of cars, vans, and riot cops) was specifically called for by Genova's district attorney.

The DAs Andrea Canciani and Anna Canepa ordered the cops to seize audio and video material concerning the demonstrations during the G8 summit in Genova last year. In the search warrant it was explained that such material would have been collected through the Italy Indymedia website, and would then be stored at the aforementioned social centers as well as in other places (using loose specifications to allow the police to operate at their own convenience).

Searches went on for several hours. The police seized computers, archives and other material used by hundreds of Italian activists for their daily activities.

The focus of the search was on material about the infamous police raid on the Media Center and the Diaz-Pertini school: in the night after the large anti-G8 demonstration, police had stormed the building from where Indymedia operated for the duration of the G8 summit and also

the school in front of it, which was a sleeping place for demonstrators. 61 people had to be taken to a hospital, a lot with severe injuries, and 32 people got arrested.

The search warrant designated the four raided places as "Indymedia offices". Italy Indymedia states however that Indymedia has no offices but works through the thousands of people who commit themselves to produce free and independent information by contributing via the website.

All Italy Indymedia decision making and project coordinating takes place over the internet, using open and publicly accessible mailing lists and chat-rooms.

The material seized on Wednesday therefore is freely available on the Indymedia website. And so are the archives of the various mailing lists, chat transcripts and any other Indymedia information. "Indymedia has nothing to hide."

Italy Indymedia speaks of a "severe attack on free information" and invites everyone to join them at the demonstration in Rome on March 16th, called for by Radio Onda Rossa.

About FARC

The FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia) emerged from the campesinos struggle in the '50s (campesinos were peasants fighting to resist government violence). The FARC, which has a strong communist and marxist political background, focused its expansion on the rural provinces, as cities were ruled by the middle class and by the politicians. The FARC grew stronger during '60s and '70s, due to the revolutionary wave that shook Latin America in those years, and has now become one of the most powerful guerrilla organizations in the world, counting 20 000 armed combatants.

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not profess to believe in the current neo-liberal, US-manipulated regime, in particular members of the Patriotic Union/Colombian Communist Party. And while the FARC attacks utility companies because of their corrupt owners and multinational involvement in usurping Colombia's natural resources and impoverishing further the Colombian people, trade unionists protesting the privatisation of public utilities and their sale to foreign multinationals are being threatened, kidnapped and assassinated.

The FARC have been kidnapping and detaining high-ranking politicians, in order to compel the government to keep its commitment on the issue of prisoner exchange. When the last big exchange was being discussed by the FARC and the government last year, the latter promised to release at least 50 FARC guerrillas from prison. In the event, the FARC released more than 250 political prisoners, the government a meagre 11. Where was the government's commitment to the peace process then?

Some of the main issues on the peace agenda presented by the FARC, after the dismantling of paramilitary groups, have been political and social changes to achieve a truly democratic society with social justice for all the people. However, instead of putting more ideas and resources into helping the millions of unemployed and underemployed people in the country, instead of putting more money into education so that even the poorest can benefit from at least a basic education, instead of making health care accessible to all the Colombian people, money and resources have been taken away from

these projects. Financial constraints and IMF structural reforms, it has been repeated and repeated, have made it necessary to limit public expenditure, reduce workers' rights and environmental controls and open up the market to more multinational ownership. And yet, money for fumigations rather than alternative development, money to fund a far-reaching "national security" statute, money to fund further impoverishment and enslavement to the neoliberal agenda, money to kill people and freedom, money for war is always available.

What is strange is that this latest and most final rupture in the process has coincided with the United States government agreeing to provide yet more military aid to the Colombian army and to allow this aid to be used directly against the insurgency as part of their "war on terrorism".

This was a planned war, conceived in Washington. Its blueprint was Plan Colombia. The peace process was never going to work, because there were powers in the White House beyond our influence and deaf to our pleas making sure it wouldn't.

The only hope now lies within the international community, but when we talk about the international community we are talking about governments. Governments protect each other. The only way they are going to be able to have any influence is by finally opening their eyes to the major role that has been and is being played by the United States and the Colombian state in the terror and violence that is killing and displacing thousands of Colombians every year.

Denying the cumbersome responsibilities of US and Colombian governments is getting more difficult every day.

The Independent Media Center (IMC) is a collective of independent media organizations and hundreds of journalists offering grassroots, non-corporate coverage of events and issues around the world. The IMC started in the fall of 1999, during the anti-WTO protests in Seattle, and has since grown into a global network of fifty regional centers. Anyone can post text,

Communities charged for 'land invasion'

by South Africa IMC

Cape Town, South Africa – After several years of struggle, landless residents of Valhalla Park in Cape Town, South Africa have been accused of "land invasion" by the city council.

The landless residents, represented by the United Civic Front (UCF), had previously negotiated a deal with the city council securing a space for housing and other public services. A year later, the city had not held up its end of the bargain, and the community decided to take the initiative and build their own houses.

The community also established a communal refuse removal system, a source of water and a basic medical system. These independent actions then precipitated the accusations of "land invasion" by the City of Cape Town. The council threatened the community with evictions and the destruction of their homes, as well as possible jail time. In turn, the community went to court and succeeded in postponing the city's actions: for the past year they have been in and out of the Cape Town Supreme Court more than five times waiting for their future to be decided.

The court's previous decisions have all stated that the forced removal of the residents of Valhalla Park is

illegal, because of a lack of evidence and documents presented by council for their case. Another court decision is expected in the near future.

Despite the community's legal successes, they have been forced to spend many years mobilizing for their basic rights. The UCF maintains that if the council had put half as much effort into providing services as they have into fighting in court, the community would not suffer so greatly from its lack of housing and basic services like lavatories.

The perseverance of the UCF and the Valhalla Park community has strengthened the group's ties with other landless movements throughout the province, like the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign. Other communities have already begun plans to emulate the Valhalla Park UCF and start their own small towns.



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