

The Colombian Government sows terror

The cases of Cajamarca and Castilla (Tolima)

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The day of protest on 29 August, organised in Colombia in the context of the popular agricultural strike that has spread along the length and breadth of the country since the 19th of the same month, was a social explosion that demonstrated the deep malaise rotting Colombian society at its core. This is not about, as Santos claims, a mere passing “disturbance”, but a social crisis that is cracking the very basis of a regime imposed by violence and deceit. While the official media stridently rails against “hoodies” and “vandals”, seeking to appeal to deep-seated prejudices among the Colombian middle classes against “culchies”, “indians”, “blacks”, and other “undesirables”, that (horror of horrors) make a living through manual labour, it ignores the real outrages caused by the “vandals” in military uniforms or the ESMAD anti-riot squad. It is the latter that have killed and abused the population, who are violating the privacy of campesino households, infiltrating demonstrations, stealing from the poor and destroying their belongings.

As examples of the unprecedented criminal violence with which the social protest has been repressed here are the cases of two localities in the department of Tolima: the municipality of Cajamarca and the community of Castilla in the municipality of Coyaima. It must be stressed that these are not exceptional cases, rather two more cases of the state-endorsed violence against the people that has assailed the whole country. This violence, incidentally, has been exacerbated by the laws of impunity that have driven this government: the military fueros [immunity from prosecution] and the legal framework for peace, as well as by legislation, also driven by the Santos administration, to criminalise social protest, in the form of the so-called “Law of Public Safety”. They have brute force, and now they no longer have any legal brake to apply when repressing popular discontent.

Cajamarca

Cajamarca, which has been the epicentre of the struggle against the multinational mining company AngloGold Ashanti¹, also mobilised in the protests on August 29. Since the previous day, the campesinos, the leaders of the community action groups and other social organisations came to meet and discuss their participation in the agricultural and popular strike. On the 28 August, the campesino small-scale farmers were concentrated in the village of Anaime and the district of Recreo Bajo (El Chuzo). From these two places they left for the urban centre of Cajamarca, where 5000 people congregated. As night came, many of the campesinos who came from the villages remained in the area, some spending the night in the school. At two in the morning, the ESMAD anti-riot squad burst into Cajamarca, throwing gas and stun grenades, shooting and beating people that they found in the rest areas laid on by the campesinos. They detained about 30 campesinos who were staying in the school. A campesino leader, whose identity we cannot reveal to protect his physical integrity, told us that this situation hardened the resolve of the community:

“Although they put logs and boulders across the main road [to block it], everything was completely calm until the arrival of ESMAD ... then they arrived, barging into the campesinos ... the campesinos that were detained while they were sleeping were taken to the police station ... they went with their hands up and receiving tear gas from ESMAD. They had these campesinos in a truck, and it wasn’t possible to breathe in the street

¹ anarkismo.net

because of the tear gas. Many of us confronted the police, demanding respect, furious that many children and elderly ended up affected by the tear gas. The house adjacent to the station was filled with gas and many children ended up in hospital.”

In the morning, the same campesino told us, the repression continued, with the ESMAD invading private homes and several people left injured by rubber bullets, and one with a stun grenade that was thrown at his face. A video was also filmed and circulated on social media in which ESMAD forces are seen kicking and using batons and the butts of guns against a boy while the community intervenes to rescue him². During the course of the morning the campesinos of Anaime were joined by others coming from the districts of El Cedral and El Brasil. The campesinos now fear in particular for the life of community leader **Julio Vargas**, president of the Community Action Committee of the district of El Cedral, who has been threatened and who, according to witness accounts, police fired at, missing their target.

A statement signed by the *Environmental Committees of Small-scale Farmers of Tolima for the Defence of Life, Water and Food Sovereignty*, on 29 August, reports that death threats are being circulated against the leaders of the movement. They also denounced the arbitrary arrest of 10 campesinos in Cajamarca, who are still detained:

1. Carlos Mario Fierro
2. Edison Julián Bermúdez
3. Rubén Darío Varón
4. Pedro Pablo Cárdenas
5. José Wilson Fierro
6. Luis Crisanto Rodríguez
7. Edwin Jairson Ferrato
8. Julio Cesar Velandía
9. Adalver Ospitia
10. José Alveiro Peralta

Another statement from the same committees reported that the protests were infiltrated by people, some of them minors, who appeared among the demonstrators in order to carry out abuses, and then appeared alongside the police throwing stones at campesinos. Police dressed as civilians were seen carrying firearms and tear gas. So-called “students” were also seen, who, when asked by other participants from which university they came, vanished, only to be seen later among the security forces, photographing protesters. We denounce this infiltration, which aims to stigmatise, justify repression, sow confusion and demoralise. We condemn the use of “dirty war” methods against protesters. We condemn infiltration by government agents into a protest that comes from the people and is made up only of the people. It is strange that the

² www.youtube.com

government denounced the “insurgent” infiltration into the protest when they are the only ones that we know of that are infiltrating these demonstrations, using their repressive forces. These facts, reported by the Tolima Environmental and Campesino Committees, have one name: state terrorism.

The population is terrified by the savage treatment of the community and the terror that was sown in the heart of the community. This sentiment is reflected in the last correspondence that we had with this campesino leader, who confessed his fear to us:

“At this time of night the town of Cajamarca is incommunicado ... friend, the truth I have fear of what might happen to me, what might happen to my community, we are good people, poor people and rural people ... our sin is to be campesinos, and we are not to blame for the policies that this government employs.”

Castilla (Coyaima)

In Castilla, the mobilisation has been gathering increasing force since 19 August, made up of agricultural workers, small dairy farmers, ranchers, coffee growers and rice farmers. From the day before the start of the strike, some 1800 farmers from several municipalities, mainly from Chaparral, Roncesvalles, Ataco, Planadas, Ríoblanco, Prado, Natagaima, Coyaima and Dolores came to Castilla³. This mass of people had grown to around 3000 people by yesterday, with almost all of them coming from the south and east of the department of Tolima.

From that first moment, the mobilised campesinos have suffered repression. The police have destroyed and looted the campesinos’ food stores, invaded homes, knocked down doors in order to drag campesinos out of their homes, and have obstructed the movement of people on public roads. On the 20th August the community was bombarded with tear gas from helicopters, choking the elderly and infants and damaging homes. 46 people had been wounded by police repression in Castilla up until 28 August: three by bullets⁴, others by stones thrown by riot police and others intoxicated by gases. Three people have also been arbitrarily arrested: **Anderson Pinto** (27 August), and **Edison Chaguala** and **Humberto Montaña** (28 August). The police also have infiltrated the protests. Students discovered ten civilian infiltrators with tear gas hidden around their waist who were inciting minors to do damage in order to justify a violent response by state forces. These infiltrators were seen meeting with the police at another point.

An agreement was eventually reached with the mayor and the regional government of Tolima, in which, during the national day of protest on the 29th, the roads would be closed and then opened up intermittently. The agreement, however, was breached by the authorities: the mobilised demonstrators were attacked by riot police and plainclothes officers, who fired at campesinos indiscriminately. A statement by the *Environmental Committees of Small-scale Farmers of Tolima*, reported that as a result of these attacks five people were seriously wounded (of a total of 24 wounded) and that two campesino (small-scale farmers) died. We have been able to confirm that there was at least one death, as reported by the correspondent weekly Voz, Nelson Lombana. This was a campesino from the municipality of Ataco called **Jeiner Mosquera**, whom police murdered with a shot to the head⁵. However, it appears that another of those

³ prensarural.org

⁴ prensarural.org

⁵ www.youtube.com

wounded by bullets was at that moment struggling between life and death. It was also reported that the ESMAD blocked the way of an ambulance carrying two wounded people, a testament to the severity of the onslaught of repressive force that is crushing all the community's rights in order to instil paralysing fear.

This is just a sample of the terror used against the campesinos and the population in just two municipalities where there have been protests in the department of Tolima. This situation is not unique: we have received news of brutal repression in many other departments like Cauca, Nariño, Valle del Cauca, Boyacá, Cundinamarca, Antioquia, Meta, etc. where the State is responding to the demonstrators through militaristic and openly terrorist means. Despite the terror, protests are continuing across the country, fuelled by outrage at what is happening and by the just demands of a population fed up and tired of Santos's disrespect, and of the abuse of its repressive force and its policies of starvation and extermination.

Something new is growing in Colombia — both a promise of new life and indignation over the life that the people have had until now... something they cannot control. That is the fear of the tyrant who, from the presidential palace, lies, issues threats, issues provocations, orders bombing and murder, and then returns to lying and issuing threats all over again. Now he has ordered the militarisation of Bogota and deployed 50,000 troops to clear roads across the country⁶. He knows no other way. His violence is the violence of a weak, lone, isolated, autistic, fearful tyrant. He knows, and we know, that despite his violence, his is impotent. Something new is growing in Colombia, even if it hurts to the lineage of those who, by hereditary right, have been the owners of Colombia during two hundred years of solitude.

⁶ www.semana.com

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