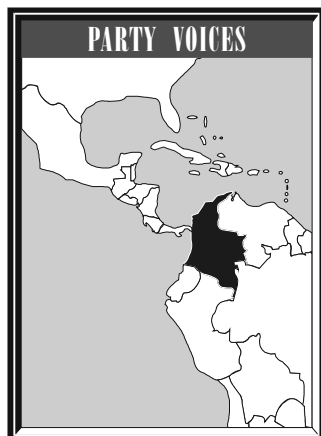


COLOMBIA: THE FARC SPEAKS OUT



interview with Olga Lucía Marín
and Marco León Calarcá

Possibly the largest guerilla army in the world, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (*FARC*—*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*) has grown in recent years in both number and influence, to some 20,000 soldiers active in over half of the country.

Olga Lucía Marín and Marco León Calarcá, international representatives for the FARC, were interviewed in May this year for *Links* by Allen Jennings.



Colombia's defence minister stated, after the recent massacre of 22 peasants in Puerto Alvira, that he accepts the fact that Colombia is at war. What is your response to this?

Calarcá: We've been pointing out for some time that Colombia is at war. And the effects of this war are spreading daily, particularly over the past few years, to such an extent that unless we sit down and work on a peace process, the conflict is bound to intensify, with all the disastrous consequences that implies.

But there are two issues here because the massacre at Puerto Alvira and other such massacres are not part of this war. They are part of the government's terrorist policy, part of the government's effort to destroy our social base by killing unarmed civilians. It's a military strategy in which the so-called paramilitary forces form an integral part. However, these paramilitaries are nothing more than a clandestine arm of the military, which aims to clear the Colombian government of human rights violations. It must be emphasised that these groups are an extension of the army and those who are not direct members are

certainly controlled by the army. These are the groups involved in the Puerto Alvira massacre.

Colombia is at war, but you shouldn't confuse the war with these massacres.

It appears that in recent years the FARC is gaining support and strength. Can you tell us of the extent of and reasons for this change?

Marín: It's not only in the past few years that the FARC has been gaining support. We've been growing ever since the movement began in the 1960s.

What happens is that growth comes in stages. The obvious first step was the formation and establishment of the FARC, followed by building a financial base so that we could continue the struggle and become known throughout the country. While we've been fighting now for 33 years, in these last few years, because of our political, military and organisational strength, our actions have received a positive response from the population.

It is clearly false that the people oppose our military action. On the contrary, they have shown enormous support because they see a real likelihood that the guerilla war will change their situation. Now that they see through the famous "stalemate"—the idea that the guerilla wasn't capable of defeating the army and vice versa—confidence in the FARC is growing.

Our actions have not only proved this "stalemate" false, but it has also shown that well-organised forces can win. We are convinced of this. We have a strong, untiring leadership who will continue to fight for revolutionary changes. Our leadership is not looking to resolve the problems of 20,000 guerillas (we don't have an exact figure). It is looking to resolve the problems of the country. And the guerilla rank and file believe in and respond to this leadership. Because of this, our impact is greater and we are earning respect.

Because we are well-organised and can show something tangible to inform international opinion, we have a rising international profile. We don't have to invent all this. The more we show who we are, what we can do and what we hope to achieve, the more Colombians realise that the FARC is a real option.

This is briefly why we are receiving such support and growing faster. And it is clear that the more we fight the more we grow.

From which sectors of the population would your social or political base come?

Marín: Primarily from the rural population and among those living in the outskirts of the cities. Currently, though, we have increasing support in the cities, especially in the poorer suburbs, among youth and within the unions. And this diversifying social base is changing the nature of the guerilla fighter. While we began with a primarily peasant-based guerilla force, this is now changing. Students, urban workers and peasants are now involved.

Do you have much support in the urban unions?

Marín: We do have support there. However, this work is clandestine and quite dangerous. In Colombia, to be a member of the FARC is to be branded a criminal. Grassroots leaders in mass struggles, even those who have no links with the guerillas, are often accused by the army of being members of the FARC, as terrorists. So this work is somewhat more dangerous and, because we have to protect these people, it demands greater caution in public discussion. Yes, there are many people who support us within the union movement.

Do you believe that in your struggle to take power you will have to combine the armed struggle with mass uprisings in the city?

Marín: Yes, of course. And that's why we must work with and organise the entire population. We are encouraging people to get involved with a new movement, which we call the Bolivarian Movement for a New Colombia. This is an underground movement because we saw the disastrous results when the Patriotic Union (*UP—Unión Patriótica*)¹, also a project of the FARC, attempted to open political space and form an alternative to the traditional parties. They murdered most of the leaders. It was the complete decimation of revolutionaries, of grassroots leaders, of communists. Consequently, we propose that this movement remains clandestine to protect the activists involved, but at the same time gives the Colombian people an alternative organisation, with concrete tasks.

This movement is headed by a member of our national executive. Thus, our organisational experience is used within this movement to ensure that the people can organise and struggle, but will not be wiped out. This same movement will provide the vital beginnings for the mass uprisings. We know that the armed struggle cannot stand alone. Armed struggle is one element of a strategy which must also include mass insurrection in the cities and towns. The essential issue is to link the two and ensure that they fit together.

The revolution will be a combination of military victories in strategic locations supported by mass action. Mass organisations will play an essential role in this conflict. So our work must be in both areas. And our tasks are therefore both military and political.

There are other guerilla movements in Colombia, like the National Liberation Army (*ELN—Ejército de Liberación Nacional*) and People's Liberation Army (*EPL—Ejército Popular de Liberación*).³ Can you comment on these movements and specifically the FARC's relations with them?

Calarcá: I'm not sure if they are growing like us, but they are certainly holding their own. Either way, there are efforts to increase unity between these move-

ments. For the FARC, unity on the left is strategically important. This process reached its peak in 1987 when we formed the Simon Bolivar Guerilla Coordinating Committee (*CGSB—Coordinadora Guerrillera Simón Bolívar*), which is currently at one of its lowest points. This is not due to the lack of will on behalf any of the groups. There are various issues to be resolved internally before we know the future of this coordinating body. We think that with ongoing effort and a Marxist–Leninist analysis of the current situation in Colombia, we will see the growth of each of these socialist organisations.

Could you expand on the *Coordinadora*? What is its purpose and why is it currently at a low point?

Calarcá: As its name implies, its purpose is to coordinate the different guerilla forces. It never aimed to combine these forces. We understand the value of unity and it's something that you can't take lightly. However, there are many internal problems within the organisations and between them which must be resolved by the leaders of the three organisations active in the armed struggle: the FARC, the ELN and a sector of the EPL, which has a significant impact.

Even though we are well aware of the importance of unity between the left, it is a process which cannot be forced nor resolved subjectively. We are talking about organisations which have been around for more than 30 years and these links cannot be forged by whims. Yes, there are real differences, and we are attempting to sort them out. But what we don't do is discuss these differences in public. Depending on the progress we make, we may be able to breathe new life into the *Coordinadora*.

Can you see the FARC negotiating a peace accord as we have seen with the URNG⁴ or FMLN⁵ in Central America?

Marín: No. For different reasons. First, because they are very different situations. Colombia is a much larger and richer country. For the US and global capitalist interests, it is strategically located. The roots of the Colombian guerilla differ from those in Central America. Colombian people are different and what we want is completely different. We aim to take power. We believe in socialism. We believe that the ideals of Marx, Engels, Lenin and others who gave workers the ideological basis for their struggle are still relevant.

We believe that we should negotiate. War cannot be Colombia's destiny. We only use arms because we've been forced to do so. We are willing to talk and shorten the road to save Colombian blood. Because it is not only the blood of the guerilla, but also the blood of the soldiers, unionists and priests, all those who die in this conflict.

Nonetheless, we have agreed to dialogue without laying down our weapons or demobilising our forces. And we won't lay down our arms because, as revolu-

tionaries, it is the only guarantee we have. We cannot betray the people and all those who died in this conflict.

But we believe that we must aim to win political, economic and social gains for the Colombian people. And this is what we've attempted to achieve through such discussions. We will talk. We will talk in order to find solutions to the economic crisis. And we even will look for ways of resolving problems brought about by the armed struggle. But we are not considering laying down our weapons.

What is the current role of the US government in your country and what do you expect their role to be when the FARC approaches its goal?

Marín: Americans also learn from war, don't they? We know that there is disagreement within the US government about Colombia. One sector believes in a political solution. They understand the need for economic change before a solution to the conflict can be found. This sector understands the political nature of the FARC and disregards the tag of "narco-guerillas".

On the other hand, the militarist view is that you can't allow the guerilla to make any gains, because it would be a disaster if we took power and that we would violate human rights, etc. This sector supports US intervention on Colombian soil and they add that financial support to the Colombian military is essential because, they argue, that the military is under-skilled and unable to defeat the guerilla with their current resources.

US intervention would be a tragedy for the world, Latin America and, of course, Colombia, because we are ready to fight. There are people here with hope and belief in what they are doing. It wouldn't be an easy fight.

The US government can't rely on all the support that they always believe they have. Americans clearly remember Vietnam.

In spite of all this, however, if they want to, they are arrogant and powerful enough to attack Colombia. So it is important for the international community to support Colombia by condemning any possible US military intervention in our country.

Drugs are closely linked to Colombian politics. What is your opinion of the drug trade and what links do the FARC have with this industry?

The FARC, as a revolutionary organisation, because of our principles and ethics, has no links whatsoever with drug trafficking. It's important that the world understands this issue.

First, drug trafficking is not the fundamental problem in Colombia. It is a serious problem, but is not the fundamental issue.

Second, you must consider how the drug industry works. Some farmers grow coca because it's not viable for them to grow other crops, because they receive no loans or technical assistance and have no access to markets or communica-

tion. In many cases, it's not possible to survive growing crops other than coca. These peasant farmers sell the coca leaves to intermediaries who transport the product to the cities to sell.

For us, these peasants and intermediaries are not really drug traffickers. They are simply working to make ends meet. These peasants are the same as those who grow other crops and thus have the right to earn a dignified living from their work.

We are active in the regions where coca is grown because we have a presence throughout the whole country. The government accuses us of being responsible for the production of coca. However, they have never claimed that we are responsible for the production of bananas or coffee, or said that we control cotton policies, even though we are also active in all of these areas. While we are not involved with trafficking, we are certainly unwilling to play the role of state police, our enemy, by attacking peasant farmers, who are our support base.

Everyone knows that the drug traffickers have ties with the mainstream political parties, the parties of the Colombian elite. This is where (President) Samper and presidents before him get their campaign funds. Everyone knows that the bulk of drug profits ends up in the major cities where the drugs are sold. Most of these profits are distributed and laundered in these developed countries. This money is linked to finance capital and is used to back the neo-liberal economic model.

It's a very complex story in which those in developed countries play the main role. Not only are they responsible for consuming the drugs and keeping and recycling most of the profits, they are also responsible for producing the necessary chemicals used in the processing of coca. While they speak of the fight against drugs, they really do nothing to combat this problem. In fact, what they are doing is fighting against the most marginalised peasants, who they blame.

A further point is that, for the US administration, this supposed war against drugs replaces the war against "international communism". As international communism supposedly collapsed along with the Berlin Wall, there is now no enemy to justify US intervention. So they use the issue of drugs. Drug traffickers are now world enemy number one. We have even seen an invasion in the name of protection from drug traffickers. Without judging Noriega or the people of Panama, the US justified an invasion of this country on such grounds. And it is clear that this invasion had nothing to do with resolving the drug problem while it did have a profound effect on the country's political situation, which was its objective.

What do you see as the necessary steps in order to take power?

Marín: While the FARC has a strategic plan with both military and political aspects, our fundamental role in the revolutionary process is as an army which can take key military targets and defend our gains.

In addition to this, we understand the need for mass movements, which will become the other integral part of the mass insurrection. The FARC won't take power alone. However, while we are simply part of this historic movement, at the moment, unfortunately, you could say that the FARC bears the weight of this responsibility.

Because this "above-ground", organisational, component of the struggle is somewhat weak, we, as a guerilla movement, are putting resources into organising the mass movements. While this was not our fundamental task, it has become necessary to take on this work. These developments are essential steps in reaching our goal, and slowly but surely we are approaching our objectives on this front.

In many cases, including in Latin America, movements with an anti-imperialist platform have won power and, due to both internal and external forces, have been unable to implement their programme. How can the left in Colombia take this political and economic path in a world so antagonistic to such a path?

Calarcá: What are the left forces in Latin America that have taken power?

I am talking about countries like Nicaragua under the Sandinistas and Chile under Allende, for example, where progressive movements took power and were unable to implement their platform, primarily because of US intervention. Cuba, as well, is struggling to survive and is forced to make compromising economic decisions. All countries wanting international finance must accept the conditions imposed by the World Bank, for example. In this hostile environment, what can a lone revolutionary government do after winning power?

Calarcá: We believe that it's possible to build a socialist society, without exploiter or exploited. But we are talking of a socialism which has nothing to do with, or at least, is not a copy of the socialism we saw in the Soviet Union or China, Vietnam, Korea, Cuba, none of them. Nevertheless, it is not an invention of the FARC. Marxism–Leninism is very clear on this issue: that these processes cannot be duplicated, that you must take specific local conditions into account. We would have to build a Colombian socialism, which would consider the possibilities and realities of Colombia and the interests and needs of the Colombian people.

And we believe that there is a good foundation for such a society. Colombia is a country which can easily be self-sufficient in food. It has great agricultural potential. Colombia is a country which is rich in energy sources, like petroleum, coal, natural gas and hydro-electricity. So there are many possibilities. And we believe that this will help us resist imperialist aggression.

At the same time, we would seek political and diplomatic relations with other governments. We are not opposed to international trade. We are opposed, though, to international exploitation, which is called “trade”. We are not against development. We are, however, opposed to development at the expense of the majority, development for a few based on the misery of the rest. We believe that these relations can be levelled out.

And we believe—and perhaps this is one of the main fears of imperialism—that after the Colombian revolution, instead of becoming isolated, Colombia would become an example, another beacon of freedom in Latin America.

What have you learnt from the fall of the USSR and the “socialist bloc”?

Marín: Plenty. First, we have learnt that the ideal has not failed. What has failed is the leadership that was responsible for building socialism. And this means we must work to ensure that our leadership maintains its principles and avoids dogma. One of the greatest problems faced by socialism in the USSR was that the theory became dogma. Lenin’s writings on the organisation of the party were misinterpreted, leading many communist parties to become dictatorial, bureaucratic or corrupt. These leaders misinterpreted support for the people as state paternalism, which meant that in the end no-one valued what they had. This generated numerous problems, like poor production and distribution of domestic goods and ignoring the wishes of the population. And it didn’t work.

But moreover, it didn’t work because the state controlled every breath they took. While the state should be overseeing the fundamental issues, it doesn’t need to be involved with the production of coffee or repairing shoes, for example. That is, we believe that the main tasks, resources and ideas of a revolutionary leadership must focus on the central issues, like the political, economic and organisational strategies of the state, and not get involved in bureaucratic detail. Because this ends up with control over everything and then nothing works.

Now, there are many positive lessons to learn from socialism. It is the most humane form of society. Who can say that Cuba is not a just society, when everyone has guaranteed education and health? In Cuba there are beautiful things, like the respect for human beings. It is these positive things from Cuba, the Soviet Union and other countries that we must learn to apply.

So we say that you have to take the positive from the socialism we have seen and analyse the mistakes. We also think that you must adopt certain aspects of capitalism, like increased competition to ensure good quality in all areas, including both the material and intellectual spheres.

Does the FARC have specific policies to promote women?

Marín: As a policy, no. The FARC is a military–political organisation for women and men and there are no different rules based on gender. There is a clause in

