

## The Consequential Effects of Canadian Immigration Policy and Anti-Terror Legislation on Colombian Refugees

by James J. Brittain\*, University of New Brunswick

Many years ago, Tim Buck (the well known political antagonist and author of numerous anti-imperialist texts) foresaw that if Canadians do not come together and consciously organize to alter the inequitable conditions formulating at their and other international borders, the specific economic institutions and political leaders, pursuing their own class-interests, would increasingly allow Canada to “lose its independence and become dependent upon and, in essentials, subservient to another” (1970:79). Today, many see that this warning is becoming chillingly true, through Canada’s alteration of civil rights in Bill C-36 and the institutionalization of a new United States (US) formulated system of immigration, Canadian institutions have increasingly allowed their “essentials” to be circumvented in subservience to the US. In recent years, Canada has partially turned away from presenting itself as the socially responsible nation and is exceedingly becoming “an active partner in the

exploiting, oppressive, bellicose, imperialist world system, seeking to preserve that reactionary system by wars of conquest” (79; See also Brittain, 2006). A discussion of what these changes will mean not only for Canadian society but for persons in other countries follows. Using the example of Colombia, the new so-called cohesive policies between the Canadian and US governments do not support increased understanding of the Colombian socioeconomic and political situation nor does it benefit the peoples therein. On the contrary, this bi-national alignment helps maintain the exploitive structures presently existing within Colombia’s territory. Illustrating three specific implications resulting from Canada’s decisions to increase its alignment with the Bush administration provides a greater understanding of the need for Canadians to heed Buck’s call, and to organize and eliminate this imperialist alliance for those in Canada and the people of Colombia fleeing social injustice and degradation.

\* James J. Brittain is a Ph.D. candidate and lecturer within the department of sociology at the University of New Brunswick. His research interests centre on social movements throughout Latin America, international development and social change. Mr. Brittain has delivered presentations relating to the socioeconomic and political dynamics of contemporary Colombia at conferences throughout North and South America and has had several papers and book chapters relating to the topic published both domestically and internationally (Recent (and forthcoming) refereed and non-refereed publications have been published in *Zed Books*, *Fernwood Publishing*, *Capital and Class*, *The Journal for Peasant Studies*, *Critical Times*, *Green Left Weekly*, *People’s Voice*, *Counter Punch*, *Z Net*, *ANNCOL*). Recently he was a principal expert on a three-part documentary series airing on Radio Canada International (RCI) and Radio Cadena Nacional (RCN, Colombia) concerning the civil-war within Colombia and the effects of Canada’s modified foreign policy toward the rising influx of Colombian refugees. Currently, he has been interviewing peasants and workers throughout southern Colombia and examining how people, at a grassroots level, are responding to neoliberal dislocations and imperialist expansion.



## Canada's Political Subservience and Its Implications for Colombia(ns)

Some may argue that Canada is not, nor will it ever be, a political subservient to the US. One could even dispute the preceding introduction by stating that it is a misinterpretation of Canada within contemporary geopolitics. These individuals could assert that Canadians share a unique and different cultural milieu compared to that of its closest southern neighbor. Does Canada, like the US, have an extensive military that can tangibly induce the specific political and economic interests of a specific minority? It has been said that Canada certainly does not. Another point that could dispute the above claim is that Canada is not directly involved in the active fiscal and armed counter-insurgency campaigns within Colombia, nor does Canada debase the Venezuelan government for its socio-economic reforms through the Bolivarian Revolution. The political administration of Canada also refused to provide military support against the illegal US-led assault on the country and people of Iraq. In response to these statements one must reply, yes, the Canadian government has demonstrated an image of sovereignty, independence, and a reserved desire for peace by refusing to directly unite with the US in the armed counterrevolution throughout rural Colombia, the defamation of Hugo Chavez, and the illegitimate destruction of Iraq; however, does this mean that Canada is not aligned with imperialism?

While Canada has not been directly involved in these and other conflicts, the contemporary Canadian government has maneuvered itself in a bilateral political relation with the US that objectively appears to not support imperialist efforts but subjectively aligns itself with expansionist practices through its subservience. When one examines Canada's foreign policy, they come to recognize that, in actuality, Canada has done nothing as a sovereign and democratic nation to stop US imperialist aggression.

Canada, while refusing to go to war in Iraq, has been a nonentity in condemning the US government invasion of an independent nation. Nor has Canada condemned the US for the torturous activities its soldiers have imposed onto "terrorists" within several prisons used to retain prisoners suspected of terrorist activity. It cannot be said that Canada's inactivity or silence is due to lack of evidence or information, either. On 6 December 2004, US Sergeant Jimmy Massey testified in Toronto, Ontario in front of the Immigration and Refugee Board that "his unit had gunned down 30 unarmed civilians in Iraq in 2003 and that the US Marines had routinely shot wounded Iraqis and killed them" (People's Voice, 2005:9). Apart from its idleness, the administration within Canada has attended meetings with the US government, shaken hands with an administration which has allowed such atrocities, and presented non-confrontational statements of how both countries must work together to help re-build a better Iraq, thus economically benefiting from the imposed destruction of the country's infrastructure (See Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, 2004). While the above demonstrates the Canadian government's links to US imperialism, to fully examine the total implications of a continued Canadian political passivity to the US would be unending. Therefore, to effectively present these implications, this paper presents an analysis of Canada's present relations toward Colombia and what effects the Canada-US alliance will have for the growing Colombian population seeking to enter into Canada trying to escape one of the most dangerous countries in the world.

### Implication I: Canada's Negation of the Colombian Peace Process

Colombia poses a very important contemporary and growing example of Canada's subservience to US

political and economic interests. Canada was once an active supporter of a peace process within Colombia that sought an end to the half-century old civil war ravaging throughout the resource rich nation. The form of this support was the Canadian government's vigorous encouragement of negotiations between the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army (FARC-EP) and the Colombian government.

Canada's support for resolving the Colombian conflict was consistent until 2002, when the FARC-EP/State negotiations were cancelled upon the Colombian government re-militarization of the demilitarized zone needed for the peace talks to take place. During the period to follow, an increased paramilitarization of specific regions within rural Colombia took place, thus escalating tremendous acts of violence, torture, rape, and intimidation against civilians in support of the ideologically led insurgency and movement for peace (Brittain, 2005 (forthcoming); Goff, 2004; Murillo and Avirama, 2003). Nonetheless, the Canadian government vigilantly remained in contact with persons in Colombia seeking to make a peaceful progression out of the internal conflict. This support continued until the Canadian government entered into an alliance with US foreign policy concerning issues relating to Colombia; conveniently, this came after the Chrétien administration refused to unite with the Bush administration's attack against Iraq. The unspoken union drastically changed Canada's historic role towards the Andean country and peace efforts therein.

## **Implication II: Canada's Unsubstantiated Labeling of the FARC-EP as a Terrorist Entity**

On 3 April 2003, promptly following the Canadian government's official renunciation of involvement with the US war against Iraq, the Chrétien administration surprisingly altered a well-entrenched piece of national policy toward the country of Colombia. Disturbingly, the policy presented by the Canadian government did not agree with James LeMoyné (Acting Special Advisor on Colombia) and the United Nations, nor with the Organization of American States (OAS), academics and experts on the civil war within Colombia, or numerous non-governmental organizations. Strangely, the Liberal government – with strong support from the Canadian right – agreed with the US political perspective toward the FARC-EP; a peasant-incepted revolutionary social movement seeking peace with social justice for Colombia. The newly formed position taken by the Canadian government was that the FARC-EP was not a legitimate movement struggling for an end to the Colombian civil war through peace negotiations, a position that Canada had agreed with and defended for many years. On 3 April, Canada formally announced that the FARC-EP was a terrorist entity and placed it on the government's list of foreign terrorist organizations alongside such groups as Al-Qaeda.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Garry M. Leech (2002:86) wrote that "while there is little doubt regarding the global reach of terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda, there is no evidence that the FARC is anything but one of the armed actors in Colombia's long and tragic domestic conflict". Such a statement presents that to see the insurgency as anything other than a social movement struggling for equitable change within Colombia is not only incorrect but a blatant misunderstanding of the Colombian conflict and the contemporary political situation of the Latin American country. Other academics, such as James Petras and Henry Veltmeyer (2003:32-33) argue that calling the FARC-EP terrorists "puts them on the list of targets to be assaulted by the US military machine" and that "under the Bush-Rumsfeld doctrine, half of Colombia is a haven for terrorists and thus subject to total war" enabling the US and the Colombian government to conduct counterinsurgency military actions against the peasant populace. Petras and Veltmeyer continue to issue that employing the terminology of 'terrorism' is perfect for imperial ideology for its open-endedness "allows maximum intervention in all regions against any opposition because it targets not only identifiable terrorist groups with whom they have interacted. Even more ominously, the term "terrorist" is used in so loosely that any group engaged in opposing militarism, imperialism (so-called "globalization") or local authoritarian regimes could be labeled "terrorist" and targeted" (55). It could be probable that the labeling was a "give and take" position enacted and agreed upon by the Bush and Chrétien administrations. Bob Woodward (2004) published that prior to the official announcement of the Canadian government's nonalignment with the United States both leaders were in formal negotiations and secret discussions. One of the negotiations could have been heavily weighed in favour of the United States, being Canada's primary economic trade subsidiary. The author suspects that Bush requested Chrétien to place the FARC-EP on Canada's list of foreign terrorist entities, thus enabling a great win for the US due to Canada's defense of the FARC-EP in years past.

## *Canada has become an important country for Colombians to apply for immigration and refugee status.*

Under the guidance of the then Solicitor General Wayne Easter, the FARC-EP was labeled as an entity involved in “terrorist activity” (Parliament of Canada, 2003:5072-5074). The implications of this were, and continue to be, immense. Persons now involved in the peace process, academics, journalists, NGOs, human rights advocates, students studying the organization, and the sociopolitical environment of the war-torn country, are being harassed, intimidated, and threatened by the Canadian government, Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP).<sup>2</sup> All this has taken place after repeated pleas by Canadian political parties, civil society organizations, citizens, scholars, and concerned groups who are asking the government to review this labeling of the FARC-EP.

At the time of the announcement several political parties openly denounced the position of the government and asked for proof or evidence of the FARC-EP’s “terrorist activities”. Minutes after Easter’s statement to members of Parliament, parties began questioning the motives and reasoning for such an abrupt change in Canada’s position toward Colombia. Robert Lanctôt, a member of the BQ, issued that there was one substantial “problem” in labeling the FARC-EP as a foreign terrorist organization. The predicament was that Mr. Easter and the government acted “without reasons or

explanations”, and failed to provide “any proof” as to why the guerrillas were labeled a terrorist group, and “why they are on the list”. He pointed the ironic positioning of the government toward the insurgency movement in the fact that “in 2002, Parliament debated a motion demanding and forcing the Colombian government to negotiate with this guerrilla movement” (Parliament of Canada, 2003: 5072-5074).<sup>3</sup> In closing, Mr. Lanctôt asserted to Parliament that “to add such a group to the terrorist list endangers the lives” of numerous Colombians.<sup>4</sup>

The implication for Canadians is that after 3 April 2003, those involved in any way with the movement, be they academics, human rights workers, unionists, or others, could be deemed to be violating the Criminal Code of Canada under Bill C-36 (Anti-Terrorism Act) (See House of Commons of Canada, 2001). Being found guilty of such allegations can result in the assets of the individual(s) being frozen (section 83.08) or being “liable to imprisonment for a term of not more than 10 years” (section 83.02). This has quashed any opportunity for the Canadian state to support the peace process or for Canadian citizens to increase their understanding of the Colombian conflict. Ending the injustices and blood-shed committed by the Colombian government forces and the State-supported paramilitaries can only take place

<sup>2</sup> This information has been based on interviews between the author and several persons in the above professions who have been physically and emotionally threatened, detained, or intimidated – without criminal charges being applied or stated – by State institutions following April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2003. It should also be noted that now in the US academics who are critical of the ‘war on terrorism’ are considered to be traitors and have been dismissed from tenured academic posts (Wood, 2003: 175n.5), thus if Canada maintains this unification with the US the effects on the post-secondary education system could be hampered.

<sup>3</sup> At one time the Canadian government utilized its politico-economic power to persuade the Colombian government to conduct negotiations with the FARC-EP. Now the Liberal government has ended this use of using the country’s political and monetary capital to encourage peace.

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that the Communist Party of Canada (CPC) has been active and vigilantly lobbying government to have the unsubstantiated labeling of the FARC-EP as a “terrorist entity” reexamined by the Canadian government in consultation with academics on the issues and activities taking place within Colombia (information based on an interview between the author and Miguel Figueroa, leader of the CPC, on November 5, 2004).

through conflict resolution and peace negotiations between the government and the FARC-EP in a safe demilitarized zone. It is in this reality that Canada must review the labeling of the FARC-EP as a terrorist organization.<sup>5</sup>

Stated over a century ago, “The unification and fraternization of nations is a phrase used today by all parties, particularly the bourgeois free-trade men . . . It is the fraternization of the oppressors against the oppressed, the exploiters against the exploited” (Padover, 1971:35). Is this what Canada is becoming, an oppressive exploiting nation which seeks to only maintain the fiscal and political interests of a select few? Has the Canadian government come to a point when it supports the rule of power over the rule of law and social justice? Has Canada arrived at a place where it denies material evidence and scholarly research in order to promote unsubstantiated rhetoric due to its relations with an imperialist power? To respond to these questions Canadians must demand an independent examination and contextual analysis of the FARC-EP followed by an official statement of the reasons as to why the FARC-EP have been labeled a terrorist organization. This will then allow all informed Canadians to determine whether their government has acted in the interests of its constituents and toward international peace or whether it has bowed to the politico-economic power of its closest neighbor to the south.

### Implication III: The Myth of the Third Safe Country Agreement and Its Effect on Colombian Refugees

The new bi-lateral immigration agreement between the US and Canada, entitled the *Third Safe Country Agreement*, boasts that both nations are to “provide protection for refugees” and must uphold “their mutual obligations to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms” (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2004). Is this possible? When it comes to Colombia, the US is doing anything but seeking the promotion of human rights within the Andean country<sup>6</sup>, whereas Canada, historically, has assisted the peace process and those seeking refuge from the war-torn nation.

Canada has become an important country for Colombians to apply for immigration and refugee status. Oakland Ross (2004) wrote that Colombia, more so than any other country, “recently became Canada’s leading source for refugee claimants”. Jorge Visbal Martelo, Colombia’s ambassador to Canada, has also expressed that many of those applying are highly educated individuals and trade-persons, including professors, teachers, engineers, and doctors, and if allowed to enter the country, applicants will not only benefit their personal and familial situations but will enhance Canada’s multicultural and economic fabric (See Leadley, 2004). However, if Canada maintains its *Third Safe*

<sup>5</sup> Canadian Maher Arar was falsely accused of terrorist activity and held in a Syrian prison for over ten months, where he was beaten, tortured and forced to make a false confession. The disturbing consequence of all this was the fact that Arar was neither a terrorist nor involved with any organizations or movements associated with such activities. This demonstrates that the Canadian (and United States) government has already proven its failure in labelling “terrorist” activities, could the FARC-EP have been falsely labelled a terrorist organization as well? The longer that this label is entrenched the longer the peace process in Colombia will not be supported by the Canadian government. What other human rights violations could or are presently occurring in the name of protecting North American security? In negating peaceful solutions and indirectly promoting an imperialist war against “terrorism” the Canadian political body is not relinquishing destitution but advancing anti-western positioning.

<sup>6</sup> The United States has been found guilty of training paramilitaries at the SOA/WHINSEC in Fort Benning, Georgia (LaFaber, 1972:220). The AUC, (the largest paramilitary organization in Colombia) and its leadership were “supported and coordinated by the official security forces and U.S. Department of Defense contracted-mercenaries” and “was directly networked for intelligence and operations with the security forces. The network was organized and trained in 1991, under the tutelage of the U.S. Defense Department and the CIA. This was accomplished under a Colombian military intelligence integration plan called Order 200-05/91” (Goff, 2004:34). The AUC is responsible for 70% to 90% of the homicides, torture, violence, and displacement that takes place throughout the country (Brittain, 2005 (forthcoming); Murillo, 2004:89; Leech, 2002:27). Now Colombia is ranked the third largest recipient of United States military funding. With this almost unlimited funding (“the government spends almost \$7.3 million a day . . . and from the United States a little more than \$1.6 million arrives each day, within the framework of Plan Colombia” (Latin American Press, 2004)), the Colombian administration has devised a method of destroying the regions resource materials; therefore, it could be generalized that the activities the United States and the Colombian government are employing are being carried out against the poor. The destruction of peasant crops—their means of subsistence—destroys communities and forces the peasantry to move further into the forested regions of the countryside (Petras and Veltmeyer, 2003:179).

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*Country Agreement* with the US, the number of Colombians able to enter Canada legally will be greatly hampered.

The two countries have stated that they will implement generous systems of refugee protection, recalling both countries' traditions of assistance to refugees and displaced persons abroad, consistent with the principles of international solidarity that underpin the international refugee protection system, and that they are committed to the notion that cooperation and burden-sharing with respect to refugee status claimants can be enhanced (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2004).

However, when one examines even the simplest of statistics relating to both countries "traditions of assistance" they are anything but similar. In late December, KAIROS<sup>7</sup> (2004) indicated that the US's "asylum laws and procedures fall short of international law and do not provide the procedural safeguards to ensure adequate protection". The agreement between the Canadian and US administrations will not provide a fair basis on which Colombians can apply for refugee status or immigration. This can be recognized by assessing past averages of Colombian immigrants and refugees allowed entrance into the two participating countries.

Molly Short, legal director for the US-based VIVE refugee centre in New York, was recently quoted saying that statistics put the lie to arguments that claimants get as fair a shot at asylum in the US as they do in Canada: "For those apply-

ing from Colombia, where thousands have fled civil war and human rights abuses, the disparity is shocking . . . Canada accepted 81 per cent of claimants compared to 36 per cent who were successful south of the border" (Bailey, 2004).

There have also been recent sightings of anti-immigration media reports (more characteristically published in the US) starting to arise within Canada. One recent article from 8 September 2004, entitled "Canada Conned into taking in Colombian Rebels" presented a story of how "at least 50 Colombians have fraudulently obtained residence in Canada" (Pringle, 2004). While the information is important, the title presented a false pretence of fear. Now uninformed Canadians may be skeptical of Colombian immigrants, thus providing an unconscious threat to the Canadian multicultural mosaic. By tagging them as "rebels" the reader is led to interpret that these "fraudulent refugees" are in fact murderous terrorists who have manipulated Canada, the Canadian tax payer, and the safety of the country by illegally prying themselves into the country. However, journalists like Oakland Ross refuted the bigoted undertones within the piece and wrote that articles such as that listed above do nothing but harm honest Colombians who have a legitimate right to free themselves from the armed revolutionary context within their country of origin and provide a safe environment for their families in Canada (Ross, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> KAIROS is a mobilization of several religious denominations that have done a great deal of research and work pertaining to Colombia. They are made up of numerous national committees and invite academics to work with them in understanding and expanding public consciousness of issues relating to social justice.

## Conclusions

While Colombia is in a state of revolution, sociopolitical influx, and change, Canada is a country that can offer those seeking refuge an environment of peace. Canada can and has assisted Colombians in the past by supporting the peace process between the insurgents and the State and by allowing Colombians a protected atmosphere in which to better themselves (be it a demilitarized zone or refugee status). There are several ways in which the Canadian government has recently denied these past processes. Nonetheless, the above pages also provide the constituents of this country a blueprint as to how they can support Colombia in three distinct areas;

1) Encouraging the Canadian government to once again support the peace process within Colombia by promoting a demilitarized zone so the FARC-EP and the Uribe government can employ negotiations.

2) To have the Canadian government implement an independent review of the FARC-EP's political ideology and their methods of social change (from a culturally-based perspective). After such an endeavor, they must unrestrictedly publish the findings and allow the people of Canada, not an unannounced minority, to decide if this social movement should be deemed a terrorist entity.

3) To have Canada reexamine its immigration policies and alignment with the US and to absolve itself from the *Third Safe Country Agreement*. Through this activity Canada can once again obtain its sovereignty and its position as a country that supports equal opportunity and the ability for all persons to achieve what they desire.

This Briefing Note establishes how the Canadian government has abandoned many of its "essentials" in subservience to the US. It is hoped that examining Canada's change in policy toward Colombia provides all Canadians a brief synopsis of the US's influence and manipulation over Canada's political institu-

tions. Now is the time for the Canadian people to organize against this imperialist dominance and to impose a democratic model of social justice at home and abroad.

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# The Saskatchewan Institute of Public Policy

Saskatchewan Institute of Public Policy  
University of Regina, College Avenue Campus  
Gallery Building, 2nd Floor  
Regina, Saskatchewan • S4S 0A2



General Inquiries: 306.585.5777  
Fax: 306.585.5780  
sipp@uregina.ca  
www.uregina.ca/sipp

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