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November 9, 1948

SECRET

COMMUNIST INVOLVEMENT IN THE COLOMBIAN RIOTS  
OF APRIL 9, 1948

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To

American Diplomatic Officers in the Other American  
Republics.

The Acting Secretary of State encloses, for purposes of background information, a study of "Communist Involvement in the Colombian riots of April 9, 1948" (OIR report no. 4686, October 14, 1948), which the Department has recently completed. A single copy of this report is being sent to each of the missions of the other American republics, with the exception of the missions in Bogota and Lima which already have received copies. This report is considered an excellent summarization of information available to the Department concerning the Colombian riots which took place after the assassination of Eliecer Gaitan, Colombian Liberal leader, at the time of the Inter-American Conference held in Bogota in April of this year.

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Enclosure:

OIR Report no. 4686 of  
October 14, 1948.  
(No enclosure for Bogota  
and Lima.)

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SECRET

November 9, 1948

COMMUNIST INVOLVEMENT IN THE COLOMBIAN RIOTS  
OF APRIL 9, 1948

To

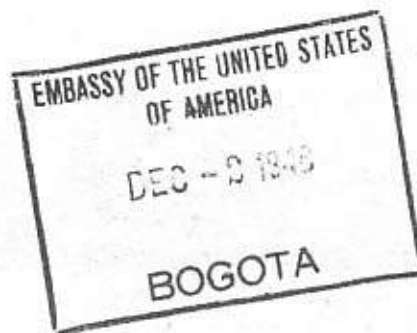
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Enclosure:

OIR Report no. 4686 of  
October 14, 1948.  
(No enclosure for Bogota  
and Lima.)

*No enclosure transmitted with this instruction*



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DEPARTMENT OF STATE ONLY

COMMUNIST INVOLVEMENT IN THE COLOMBIAN RIOTS

OF APRIL 9, 1948

OIR Report No. 4686

October 14, 1948

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Division of Research for American Republics  
OFFICE OF INTELLIGENCE RESEARCH

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When this study outlives its usefulness to you, please return it to:

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I. BACKGROUND OF RIOTSA. General Political Conditions

Chronic conditions of economic and social insecurity provide the background for the Colombian riots of April 9, 1948. Liberal regimes attempted to cope with these conditions from 1930 until 1946, when a schism within Liberal ranks culminated in the election of the present minority Conservative administration. In an effort to achieve a formula for close cooperation between Liberals and Conservatives, President Mariano Ospina Pérez instituted in August 1946 a Government of National Union and gave both groups equal representation in the various cabinet reorganizations. Key posts, such as that of Minister of Government, however, were reserved for Conservatives. From its inception, the Government of National Union was beset with serious difficulties. Although "responsible elements" within both major political groups recognized the necessity for collaboration, party leaders were unable to control the passions of rank-and-file members nor could they silence the opposition of extremist elements. The bitter political struggle was carried to the halls of Congress where, despite repeated appeals by the President, Conservative hostility toward all Liberal-sponsored legislation, together with a division in Liberal opinion, resulted in a virtual impasse. The President's position became even more precarious when, in February 1948, the Liberal Party decided to break with the Government of National Union. This decision precipitated the formation on March 22, 1948 of an all-Conservative cabinet.

President Ospina had also to contend with serious political disorders especially during the spring and fall of 1947, when Congressional, departmental, and municipal elections were held. Clashes between Liberal and Conservative partisans became so acute in Norte de Santander that in January 1948 a state of siege was declared and remained in force until the assassination of Gaitán. Disturbances continued elsewhere until the eve of the Ninth International Conference of American States, and rioting was reported in some areas during the opening sessions. It is difficult to establish responsibility for these disorders. Action by Liberals was frequently precipitated by the allegedly arbitrary measures of Conservative officials and of police units, nearly all of both being regarded by the Liberals as political agents of the administration. Conservative excesses were often perpetrated in retaliation for or as protests against the actions of Liberal officials. Despite public condemnation of violence by leaders of both parties, Liberal and Conservative newspapers aggravated the situation by accusing each other of breaking faith with the Government of National Union, by publishing detailed accounts of persons "murdered" by the opposition, and by preparing periodic tabulations of outrages perpetrated against persons and property.<sup>1</sup>

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1. DRA Information Note No. 109, Political Parties in Colombia, March 25, 1948, Confidential; OIR, Intelligence Memorandum No. 56, Political Consequences of the Conservative-Liberal Impasse in Colombia, March 23, 1948, Confidential; El Siglo, passim; El Liberal, passim.

The seriousness of these clashes can be attributed in large measure to basic economic and social maladjustment. Not only had industry been permitted to attain exorbitant profits at the workers' expense, but in recent years the migration of agricultural labor to urban centers, as the result of increasing industrialization, had created serious food shortages. Economic dislocation during World War II and a serious postwar inflationary spiral accentuated social unrest. In March 1948 the cost of living index for the laboring class in Bogotá was the highest in Colombian history: 245.1 (1939=100). Although salaries increased by as much as 100 percent, real wages for the average worker were from 40 to 50 percent lower than in 1939.<sup>1</sup>

B. The Communists' Role in Colombia

1. Organization and Political Effectiveness. Although the first manifestations of Communism appeared in Colombia during the late 1920's, the Communists were not permitted to organize legally until 1930. They have carried on normal political activity since that date. In July 1947, however, ideological differences and personal rivalries culminated in the creation of two parties, the majority Partido Comunista Colombiano (PCC, the Colombian Communist Party), and the Partido Comunista Obrero (PCO, the Communist Labor Party).<sup>2</sup> The Communists' electoral strength rose from 5,000 in 1935 to 27,696 in the Congressional and departmental

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1. R-75, Bogotá, April 16, 1948, Unclassified; R-96, Bogotá, May 13, 1948, Unclassified; Compilation in DRA Files.

2. OIR Intelligence Memorandum No. 31, The Communist Schism in Colombia, August 25, 1947, Secret.

elections of 1945. In that year their Congressional delegations consisted of one Senator, elected in 1943, and five Deputies. They are believed to have elected at least nine Deputies to departmental assemblies. Since 1945 the Communists have lost considerable ground. Their candidates polled only 16,000 votes in the March 1947 elections, and as a result they lost their entire Congressional representation and all but one seat in departmental assemblies. Later, in October 1947, Communist candidates received only 7,742 votes cast in the municipal elections. Prior to the schism the Communists had supported some Liberal (Gaitanista) candidates in areas where their own chance of success was slim. The PCC has favored a more militant, revolutionary policy, while the PCO has cooperated to a limited extent with the Liberal majority in Congress. Because of their relatively small electoral strength, the Communists have not been an important political factor. Membership in both parties is believed to lie between 5,400 and 8,500.<sup>1</sup> Since April 1948, the PCO has been seeking to reunite with the PCC.<sup>2</sup>

2. Position in the Labor Movement. The Communists have played an important role in the Colombian labor movement since 1935, when the first national labor convention was held. In that year nine of the 32 members of the Executive Committee of the Confederación Sindical de Colombia, predecessor of the Confederación de

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1. D-470, Bogotá, July 27, 1948, Secret.

2. Idem.

Trabajadores de Colombia (CTC, the Colombian Labor Confederation), were Communists. In 1943 thirteen of the 31 members of this Committee were Communists.<sup>1</sup> The Communists consolidated their position in the CTC in December 1947 when they elected 14 party members to the 37-man Executive Committee. Because of the strategic posts which these individuals hold and because of the extremist views held by some Liberal officers in the confederation, the Communists have been able to influence many of the activities of this organization, which embraces about 109,000 of the 165,000 organized workers in Colombia.<sup>2</sup> They are strongest among petroleum workers and in various transportation and construction syndicates. Acting through the CTC, the Communists have organized or participated in several strikes, notably among Magdalena River workers (1945), in petroleum unions (1946, 1947, and 1948), and in at least one abortive general strike (1947).

C. Communist Plans to Sabotage the Bogotá Conference

1. Plans and Objectives. There is abundant evidence that the Colombian Communists, working primarily through the Colombian Confederation of Labor, made extensive plans to sabotage the Ninth International Conference of American States. In these plans the Communists apparently were motivated by two broad objectives: to embarrass the work of the Conference and thereby to

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1. Enclosure to D-869, Bogotá, August 14, 1945, Restricted.  
2. D-174, Bogotá, December 8, 1947, Unclassified; D-82, Bogotá, January 30, 1948, Restricted.

undermine the prestige of the United States in hemispheric and world affairs; and to create added difficulties for the Ospina administration by emphasizing before an international audience its allegedly anti-democratic aspects and its inability to cope with serious economic and political problems.

Plans discussed at meetings of the Colombian Communist Party to discredit the Conference and the United States included a "denunciation of the forthcoming Pan American Conference", the launching of an "anti-imperialist propaganda campaign", the circulation of 3,000 posters "especially during the Pan American conference", approval of an "open campaign against all proposals of the United States delegation" and an "extensive written and oral attack against the 'Truman Doctrine' and the 'Clayton Plan'".<sup>1</sup> On March 29, 1948 a controlled American source reported that the Communist and Communist Labor parties had reached an agreement on a program of "agitation and molestation" against several delegations including that of the United States. According to this report the Communists had been instructed to save their efforts for personal attacks at the conclusion of the Conference to give the delegates an impression of failure and loss of prestige.<sup>2</sup>

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1. CIA: SO-8688, Colombia, 20 October 1947, Secret; SO-10159, Colombia, 19 December 1947, Secret; SO-11442, Colombia, 6 February 1948, Secret; SO-12790, Colombia, 8 April 1948, Confidential.
  2. CIA, SO-13019, Colombia, 12 April 1948, Secret.

Earlier the Communists had been advised, with particular reference to the forthcoming Bogotá conference, to refrain from committing acts which might endanger their legal existence, to enlist the support of Gaitanista elements wherever possible, and to work publicly through the CTC.<sup>1</sup> In this connection it is of interest that the Communist-influenced Ninth National Labor Congress (CTC Convention) favored "...manifestations against and disturbances of the Pan American Conference, with public rallies against Yankee imperialism, the Truman, Marshall and Clayton Plans...."<sup>2</sup>

There is evidence that these "manifestations" were also calculated by the Communists to serve domestic purposes. For instance, a document prepared by the Secretariat of the CTC to be used during the Ninth National Labor Congress in December 1947 reportedly said that one reason for staging a demonstration during the Conference was to "convince Colombian reactionaries that the labor movement in Colombia is prepared to defend itself".<sup>3</sup> Later, in March 1948, the Embassy reported that the CTC intended to hold a meeting of affiliated union and federation officers during the conference to present a "nation-wide bill of grievances", demanding, among other things, strong measures against scarcities and high prices, stability of unionized

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1. Ibid.; SO-11219, Colombia, 29 January 1948, Secret; SO-9629, Colombia, 1 December 1947, Confidential.

2. D-82, op. cit.

3. CIA, SO-10899, Colombia, 15 January 1948, Secret.

workers, especially those in government employ, civic guarantees, and "respect for lives of citizens". CTC affiliates throughout Colombia were expected to present similar petitions. The Embassy believed that the Ospina administration would be attacked on additional grounds and that a series of strikes was a possibility, although it did not feel that a new general strike attempt would succeed.<sup>1</sup> Proposals were reportedly made prior to February 7, 1948 by certain Communist elements in Barranquilla to blow up oil tankers in the Magdalena River with the expectation that this might assist in some way to sabotage the Conference.<sup>2</sup>

Various allegations were made by the Conservative press linking the plans of local Communists with the "designs of international Communism". El Siglo and Eco Nacional, Conservative dailies of Bogotá, charged in January and February 1948 that the Communists planned subversive activities under direction of the Soviet Legation, that the Marxist CTAL planned a general strike throughout the other American republics, and that Salvador Ocampo, a Chilean Communist, had come to Colombia to coordinate activities. It may be noted that El Tiempo, leading Liberal daily, joined the attack, asserting that Ocampo brought money from Venezuelan oil workers to CTC leaders presumably to

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1. A-196, Bogotá, March 16, 1948, Restricted; T-137, Bogotá, March 22, 1948, Confidential.
  2. CIA, SO-12030, Colombia, 2 March 1948, Secret; T-326, Bogotá, April 23, 1948, Secret.

support strikers in Colombia.<sup>1</sup> On March 20, 1948 El Colombiano, leading Conservative daily of Medellín, accused Gaitán of consorting with the Communists to instigate riots and disturbances throughout the country and to create an "atmosphere of alarm and agitation". El Siglo then charged that native Communism was "under direct inspiration of Moscow and of the faction commanded by Jorge Eliécer Gaitán".<sup>2</sup> This allegation was denied by Gaitán on March 23; he said that he had learned of plans for hostile acts against the delegates and called upon the "strong disciplined masses of the Liberal Party" to resist such outbreaks.<sup>3</sup> On March 21, 1948 El Colombiano alleged that CTC leaders were working with the Communists in certain areas to plan disturbances and that they had distributed circulars urging intensification of strikes, especially in the transportation industry, to "annul the labors" of the Pan American Conference.<sup>4</sup>

2. Implementation of Plans. Little evidence is available to suggest that the Communists, working either independently through party organizations or in conjunction with the CTC, succeeded in implementing any appreciable number of these plans before the assassination of Gaitán on April 9, 1948. One of the

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1. FBIB, February 2, 1948, P.N 1, Unclassified; A-85, Bogotá, February 2, 1948, Unclassified; D-111, Bogotá, February 5, 1948, Restricted.
  2. A-209, Bogotá, March 22, 1948, Restricted.
  3. A-197, Bogotá, March 24, 1948, Restricted; A-214, Bogotá, March 25, 1948, Restricted.
  4. A-209, op. cit.

principal vehicles of "sabotage", the presentation of "bills of grievance", which was to have been followed by strikes and demonstrations, was not scheduled until April 15. On or before April 8 this event was postponed by Communist leaders until May 1, reportedly because they feared a poor turnout because of the bad publicity and because such a demonstration might inspire the Conference to recommend enactment of measures to restrict Communist activities.<sup>1</sup>

Communist efforts to impede the work of the Conference, to harrass the administration, and to undermine the prestige of the United States consisted primarily of attacks in the press and the use of posters. For instance, one Communist manifesto, distributed after the Conference opened, proclaimed the party's determination to "redouble its revolutionary activity" and to effect the "overthrow of the Conservative oligarchy ... and installation of a popular revolutionary government...."<sup>2</sup> Another was distributed in Bogotá on the morning of Gaitán's death, which denounced the Conference as "an ostentatious act of Pan American oligarchy to show off their power and riches to the world and to the poor hungry people of Colombia".<sup>3</sup> In addition, an editorial appeared in Vanguardia del Pueblo, official organ of the Colombian Communist Party, in its issue of April 5-11, 1948, which assailed the Conference as a camouflage for

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1. D-287, Bogotá, May 7, 1948, Confidential; NA, Colombia, R-2-S-48, 18 May 1948, Secret; NA, Colombia, R-3-S-48, 24 May 1948, Secret.
  2. T-326, op. cit.
  3. MA, Colombia, R-33-48, 16 April 1948, Confidential.

imperialist efforts by the United States to enslave the peoples of Colombia and the other Latin American nations. It concluded: "A farce has begun in Bogotá which tomorrow may have the bloodiest consequences. Let the peoples open their eyes."<sup>1</sup> On March 30 police removed from the headquarters of the Communist Party a poster depicting a Colombian soldier about to be devoured by a Yankee imperialist crocodile.<sup>2</sup> Crudely lettered signs (such as "Heil Marshall") were also seen on buildings; these epithets were probably inspired by articles and cartoons appearing in both the Communist and leftwing Liberal press, which attacked the administration and the Colombian delegation, including its chief, Laureano Gómez, Foreign Minister and Conservative leader, partially because of his pro-Nazi sympathies during World War II.

A poorly attended public meeting of the Communist Party (PCC) was held on the night of April 8, 1948, where party leaders and CTC officials criticized the government for its excessive spending in preparation for the Conference and for the high cost of living, and assailed Yankee imperialism and the proposed anti-Communist resolution then before the Conference.<sup>3</sup> In view of earlier reported plans to loot food stores during the CTC demonstrations, it is of interest to note that Gilberto Vieira White, Secretary General of

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1. T-326, op. cit.

2. A-222, Bogotá, March 31, 1948, Restricted.

3. R-2-S-48, op. cit.

the PCC, remarked that it would be "strange" if the masses did not seize food by force because of high prices.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to the activity by the Colombian Communists with respect to the Conference, informal preliminary meetings were held at Bogotá early in April by youth groups from several countries. They apparently discussed the formation of a Latin American student federation and sought to affect the Bogotá conference adversely by agitating such questions as European colonialism in America and Puerto Rican independence. These meetings were reportedly attended by delegates from Argentina, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, and Venezuela.<sup>2</sup> It is not known whether this student activity was a part of the Communist strategy to embarrass the Conference, or even that all the student delegates were affiliated with Communist movements in their respective countries. Three of the Cuban student leaders, Fidel Alejandro Castro, Alfredo Guevara, and Rafael Lázaro del Pino, however, are believed to be members of the Partido Socialista Popular, the Cuban Communist Party.<sup>3</sup> Del Pino and Castro are reported to have been in contact with leftist elements at the National University in Bogotá, where they fomented

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1. T-326, op. cit.

2. OIR-4507.2, The World Federation of Democratic Youth: Part Two. Affiliated Youth Organizations in Latin America, June 1, 1948, Secret.

3. CIA, SO-13304, Argentina and Cuba, 23 April 1948, Secret; D-293, Habana, April 9, 1948, Confidential; A-366, Bogotá, June 9, 1948, Confidential; G-2, USARCARI, R-22-48, 5 May 1948, Secret.

student action and distributed handbills.<sup>1</sup> Guevara and Enrique Ovares, another Cuban student leader who, although not a Communist, is classed as a fellow traveler, are reported to have been in contact with the CTC and with Colombian Communist leaders and to have collaborated with the latter in the preparation of an anti-imperialist manifesto.<sup>2</sup>

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1. MA, Colombia, R-31-48, 9 April 1948, Secret.  
2. A-507, Habana, April 28, 1948, Confidential;  
T-326, op. cit.

II. RESPONSIBILITY FOR RIOTSA. Evidence Concerning Communists' Connection with the Murder of Gaitán

The Colombian Government is not known to have released any documentary evidence elaborating upon or substantiating charges made on April 9, 1948 and echoed afterward by President Ospina that implicated the Colombian Communists, the Soviet Legation in Bogotá, or "the forces of international Communism" in the murder of Gaitán. It may be significant that no reference to such allegations was made in the note handed the Soviet Chargé d'Affaires on May 3, 1948 by means of which Colombia broke off diplomatic and consular relations with the USSR.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, no data yet reported by the Embassy and other government intelligence agencies indicate that any of the forces named above were involved in the assassination. Dr. Jordán Jiménez, magistrate of the Supreme Court of Colombia and friend of Gaitán, who was appointed by President Ospina to investigate the murder, was quoted by the United Press on July 14 as having said at the conclusion of the "criminal phase" of the investigation that the sole author of the crime was one Juan Roa Sierra and that there did not appear to be any "intellectual authors".<sup>2</sup> This finding was concurred in by the Scotland Yard official who was brought in by the Colombian Government to take part in the investigation of Gaitán's murder.<sup>3</sup>

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1. T-361, Bogotá, May 3, 1948, Restricted; T-369, Bogotá, May 3, 1948, Restricted.

2. La Prensa, New York, July 15, 1948.

3. Ibid.; Secret Enc., D-404, Bogotá, June 30, 1948, Secret.

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Conservatives and Liberals, however, are seeking to discover some political motivation for the murder. The Liberals, particularly the ardent Gaitanistas, are hoping to prove that the Conservatives were responsible, and the latter are attempting either to fix the blame on the Communists or to involve Gaitán and the Communists in a plot to overthrow the government.

At least two theories have been advanced for the assassination: (1) that Roa Sierra was motivated by a spirit of personal revenge; and (2) that he, a demented and fanatically Catholic Conservative, acted as the tool of a small group of ultra-Conservatives which desired to remove Gaitán from the political scene. The personal-revenge theory is based upon one or the other of two hypotheses: (1) that Gaitán had obtained on April 8, 1948 the acquittal of a member of the Colombian armed forces accused of murdering one of Roa's relatives some years before and that Roa had acted in retaliation; or (2) that Roa was a bastard son of Gaitán's father, that there had been recent trouble between the two families, and that Gaitán's father had made a settlement upon Roa's mother only a month before the assassination.

The "Conservative conspiracy" theory is based upon the contention that Gaitán himself was involved in a plot to create disturbances and possibly a coup, believed to be planned for May 1, 1948. Details of the proposed revolt allegedly planned by Gaitán are not clear, but there is some evidence indicating a connection with the alleged efforts of Dr. Antonio García, Director of the Institute of Economic Sciences at the National University,

to bring about a social revolution in Colombia. García, also a member of the Board of Directors of the Colombo-Soviet Cultural Institute and formerly professor of political economy at the Escuela Superior de Guerra (War College), not only acted as an adviser to Gaitán and his closest associates on political matters but also reportedly exercised considerable influence over officers of the Colombian Army, some of whom had studied under him. A CIA informant asserted that García's plans called for a spectacular break in friendship between himself and Gaitán and for García to obtain through Army influence the portfolio of Minister of War. Once this had been accomplished, an armed revolt was to be launched within a few days, which, in the words of García, would destroy "the bland reactionary and oligarchic government which has been restored in Colombia". It was also alleged that the group had stores of arms, explosives, and uniforms, that planes and artillery could be obtained from the Venezuelan Government through García's influence, and that García was acting as an intermediary between Gaitán, on the one hand, and members of the Soviet Legation in Bogotá and Colombia Communist party leaders, on the other. According to this informant a small band of extremist Conservatives, possibly Laureano Gómez, then director of the Conservative Party, Colonel Virgilio Barco, then Chief of Police of Bogotá, and José Antonio Montalvo, then Minister of Justice and former Minister of Government, learned of this evidence and, in an effort to forestall this revolutionary threat, prevailed upon Roa Sierra to

carry out the assassination of Gaitán. This information has not been confirmed by other sources and therefore its credibility is still questionable.<sup>1</sup>

The theory that the Communists were involved in the assassination is based on the fact that they had made, far in advance, plans to sabotage and discredit the activities of the International Conference of American States, to molest several of the delegations, principally that of the US, and to embarrass the administration of President Ospina while the Conference was in progress. It was also believed by many that the swiftness and vehemence with which the Communists participated in the riots which followed the assassination betrayed their involvement in the murder. No evidence has yet been presented, however, which links the Colombian Communists to the actual assassination. In fact it has been reported that at the time of the murder the Communists were undecided upon what course of action to pursue. That the assassination took the Communists by surprise may be indicated by the fact that essential services such as transportation, communications, power installations, ports, hospitals, and schools were not seized nor did they suffer extensive damage.<sup>2</sup>

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1. T-326, op. cit.; D-287, op. cit.; NA R-2-S-48, R-3-S-48, op. cit., CIA: SO-11200, Colombia, January 26, 1948, Secret; SO-11360, Colombia, February 3, 1948, Secret; SO-13040, Colombia, April 12, 1948, Secret; SO-13736, Colombia, May 7, 1948, Secret; D-311, Bogotá, May 20, 1948, Confidential.
  2. R-110, Bogotá, June 1, 1948, Unclassified.

B. Extent and Nature of Communist Involvement in Subsequent Rioting

The Colombian Communists were heavily involved in and at least partially responsible for the intensity of the looting which followed Gaitán's murder. Utilizing the radio, printed matter, and individual contacts, they joined other revolutionary elements in urging all "liberal and democratic" and laboring forces to riot and to overthrow the Ospina administration.

1. Radio. Broadcasting over established radio outlets in revolutionary hands as well as over clandestine stations, the Communists took advantage of the confusion caused by Gaitán's death. In general, Communist spokesmen urged the populace to continue the violence and to support the nationwide work stoppage decreed by the CTC, and gave detailed instruction for the quick manufacture and use of incendiary bombs. Some of these broadcasts charged the United States with the responsibility for Gaitán's assassination.<sup>1</sup> A number of Communists who participated in these broadcasts have been positively identified. For instance, Gilberto Vieira White, Secretary General of the PCC, addressed the people on April 9 and, although he spoke in relatively moderate terms, instructed the Communists to support the "liberal revolution". It may be noted in this connection that when announcers proclaimed the "liberal revolution" there were frequent cries within

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1. T-326, op. cit.; MA R-33-48, op. cit.; NA R-2-S-48, op. cit.; T-192, Bogotá, April 9, 1948, Confidential; T - Unnumbered, Bogotá, April 10, 1948, Plain; (For CNO CNI DIO 15) T-Unnumbered (IPM) Bogotá, April 10, 1948, Confidential; T-346, Bogotá, April 27, 1948, Secret.

the studio, audible over the network, that "the Communists participate too".<sup>1</sup> Another Communist, Joaquín Moreno Díaz, head of the PCC's Cundinamarca (departmental) Committee, spoke over one of the stations held by the revolutionaries from a microphone installed in the party's headquarters on Plaza Bolívar.<sup>2</sup> Other Communist broadcasters whose names have been reported include José Miguel de Paz, brewery-union worker and member of the Executive Committee of the CTC; Marco A. Acero, another brewery worker; Carlos Canal, former Secretary of Education of the Cundinamarca Committee of the PCC; and Jorge Gaitán Duran, Communist poet.<sup>3</sup> It appears that the three Cuban Communist student leaders, whose activities during the Conference have been described above, also participated in the rioting.<sup>4</sup>

Although no names have been reported, it is possible that some Communists were included in a group of students from the National University which seized the national radio station on April 9 and urged all "Liberals, all Leftist forces, the Communist Party", and the forces of labor, particularly the CTC, to revolt, to join in a general strike, and to attack and destroy the national Ministries. The people were also instructed to arm themselves "by any means" and to kill leading Conservatives in reprisal for Gaitán's death. Despite its predominantly

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1. T-Unnumbered, Bogotá, April 10, 1948, Confidential; T-326, op. cit.; D-287, op. cit.
  2. T-326, op. cit.; NA R-2-S-48, op. cit.
  3. T-326, op. cit.; A-337, Bogotá, May 21, 1948, Confidential.
  4. T-326, op. cit.

Liberal orientation, the student body is reported to have been greatly influenced by the Marxist sympathies of its former rector, Gerardo Molina.<sup>1</sup>

In an effort to combat the effect of this type of broadcast and to restore some semblance of order, several less important Liberals organized the "Executive Committee of the Liberal Revolutionary Junta", which urged labor leaders to form a "popular civic police" to prevent looting, called upon all Liberals to join forces in the revolution, and proclaimed falsely that the country was being governed by a Liberal revolutionary junta. This group apparently regarded the group of leading Liberals which had called upon President Ospina on the night of April 9 in a futile attempt to obtain his resignation as constituting the "Liberal Revolutionary Junta". Although all the members of the "Executive Committee" are regarded as extreme leftists, no member of either body is known to be a member of a Communist Party in Colombia.<sup>2</sup>

2. Printed Material. The Communists were quick to make use of printed matter in their appeals to the masses to revolt and avenge Gaitán's death. One such handbill, distributed in Bogotá on April 9 and afterwards by the dissident Communist Labor Party, asserted that Gaitán had been "executed by an official agent, armed by the most reactionary forces of the Conservative Party, who serve as the instrument of Yankee Imperialism...."

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1. T-326, op. cit.

2. NA, R-3-S-48, op. cit.; A-337, op. cit.; D-287, op. cit.

It sought to draw a parallel between Ospina's efforts to place the blame on the Communists and the burning of the German Reichstag in 1933 and it called upon the "democrats and sincere patriots ... [to] forget rancors, resentments and grudges and unite ... to dedicate ourselves ... to organized, disciplined ... struggle to save the democracy and independence of our country". The handbill asserted also that a democratic front must be formed which would unite "Liberals, Communists and other democratic elements to demand and obtain by constitutional means the immediate resignation of Ospina Pérez...."<sup>1</sup> A handbill similar in content was circulated by the PCO in Barranquilla.<sup>2</sup> An unsigned placard, distributed in Bogotá on April 9 probably by the PCC, accused the Ospina administration of causing Gaitán's murder and asserted that "united Liberals and Communists ... will save democracy [by] destroying the assassin government and [by] creating a revolutionary junta of government which may assume power".<sup>3</sup> The PCC also circulated an anti-administration and anti-US handbill in Buenaventura on or about April 11, although its contents indicate that it was prepared for use in connection with the Bogotá conference and before the assassination of Gaitán.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Enclosure No. 3 to D-287, *op. cit.*; MA, Colombia, R-36-48, 30 April 1948, Unclassified.
  2. Enclosure to D-14, Barranquilla, April 17, 1948, Confidential.
  3. CIA, 00-B-3508, Colombia, 6 May 1948, Confidential.
  4. Enclosure No. 1B to D-5, Buenaventura, April 14, 1948, Confidential.

3. Direct Action. In addition to appealing to the masses by means of radio and printed matter the Communists are known also to have resorted to other methods to incite and control the outbreaks. Such appeals may be described generally as exhortations to direct action and may be divided into the following categories: incitations on the spot; special instructions regarding participation in looting and pillaging; and the commission of other overt acts. For instance, Jorge Regueros Peralta, member of the PCC Central Committee and editor of its official organ, Vanguardia del Pueblo, is reported by the Embassy to have harangued the revolutionary mobs on the Plaza Bolívar in an unsuccessful effort to divert them from looting and organize a disciplined march on the government.<sup>1</sup> According to a controlled American source, Gilberto Vieira White said that the PCC was not involved in the murder of Gaitán but that it instructed Party members to make the most of the situation and to engage in the pillage of the largest stores and commit acts that would disrupt the Bogotá conference.<sup>2</sup> Hector Hernández Ron, a Venezuelan leftist who had been studying in Bogotá, said that immediately after learning of Gaitán's murder he had gone to Communist Party headquarters where he met one Andrés Villegas, who, after concluding a telephone conversation with Vieira, ordered one group present to go to the Plaza Victorino and incite the mob to attack hardware shops

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1. T-326, op. cit.

2. CIA, SO-13102, Colombia, 14 April 1948, Secret.

and stores selling iron and steel materials. Another group was ordered to go to the National Capitol, where the Conference was being held, and demolish furniture and destroy documents.<sup>1</sup>

In Barranquilla a flag bearing the hammer and sickle was raised on the balcony of the departmental government building on the afternoon of April 9.<sup>2</sup> From Medellín the American Consul reported that "Leftists and Communists" held the city hall for a brief period on April 9 and that a number of Communists, including one Luis Martel, had been arrested. Martel had been seen leading a "portion of the unsuccessful attack on the State House".<sup>3</sup>

The Communists apparently sought also to sabotage the oil industry, and at El Centro seventeen party members were placed under preventive arrest by a Liberal revolutionary junta. Quantities of explosives were reportedly found in their possession. One Communist, secretary of a local oil workers' union, was shot while resisting arrest.<sup>4</sup> A number of other Communist leaders were arrested in Bogotá for their alleged participation in the disturbances, although it must be pointed out that mere detention by the Colombian Government, which had previously indicated its intention to fix the blame upon the Communists, cannot be accepted as prima facie evidence of guilt. These included Gilberto Vieira,

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1. CIA, SO-13949, Venezuela, 21 May 1948, Secret.

2. T-346, op. cit.

3. T-13, Medellín, April 13, 1948, Confidential.

4. T-346, op. cit.

Victor J. Merchán, Secretary of Rural Affairs for both the PCC and CTC, Filberto Barrero, treasurer of the PCC, and Alvaro Sanclemente, PCC Executive Committee member. Many of these persons were released within a week or so, pending further action by the Colombian authorities.<sup>1</sup>

4. Labor. Through the CTC the Communists also appealed to labor to rise up and overthrow the Ospina regime, though it must be emphasized that the majority of Colombia's organized labor force is Liberal and consequently needed little urging from the Communists to avenge Gaitán's murder. Within an hour after the Liberal chieftain's death the CTC called a nationwide strike which continued until approximately April 15. Many workers, however, did not return to their jobs and normal conditions were not restored until some days later.<sup>2</sup> The National Petroleum Workers' Federation, strongest unit within the CTC and dominated by the Communists, was ordered to strike by its legal adviser, Diego Montaña Cuéllar, an "independent" Communist.<sup>3</sup>

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1. T-326, op. cit.; T-355, Bogotá, April 29, 1948, Restricted.  
2. D-287, op. cit.  
3. T-326, op. cit.

III. CONCLUSION AS TO RESPONSIBILITY OF COMMUNISTS  
FOR MURDER AND SUBSEQUENT RIOTING

Long-standing political tension, chronic economic distress, and the consequent social unrest provided the stage for the violent riots which followed the assassination on April 9, 1948 of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán. Although allegations were made soon after the murder that the Communists were responsible, no conclusive evidence has been brought forth to substantiate these allegations. They were apparently based upon the fact that the Communists participated extensively in the rioting which followed the murder and upon the assumption that since the Colombian Communists had prepared plans to disrupt the work of the Ninth International Conference of American States, to discredit several delegations, especially that of the US, and to do their utmost to embarrass President Ospina's administration, they would be willing to take even the most extreme measures to achieve their purpose. Despite attempts to discover some political motivation for the murder there is, to date, no clear proof that the Communists, either Colombian or foreign, were involved in the assassination itself.

Circumstantially, the murder can be explained at least equally well in ways that do not involve any deliberate planning by the Communists. It has been reported, moreover, that the Communists were caught by surprise at the time of the murder; it does not appear now that the action of the Communists with respect to strategic installations was of the nature to be expected had there been careful planning.

Although the Communists may not have had any responsibility in the murder itself, they nevertheless took advantage of the ensuing confusion to promote and to participate actively in the rioting touched off by the event. By utilizing the radio, printed matter, and their position in organized labor, the Communists urged Party members and fellow travelers to execute plans which had been formulated to sabotage the Conference. They also appealed to the people to overthrow the minority Conservative administration of President Ospina Pérez -- one of the objectives which motivated the masses of the rioters, who were predominantly Liberal in political affiliation.

It is impossible to determine to what extent the Communists instigated and participated in the mob violence and vandalism. The leaders of the rioting included fellow travelers, Gaitanistas, and other leftist elements who joined in inciting the people to avenge Gaitán's murder and to establish a revolutionary government. All of these groups, as well as the Conservative administration, share the blame for the political tension, developed over a long period of time, which made possible the angry sequence of events that followed Gaitán's death.