



VENEZUELA

## "LOS INDOCUMENTADOS COLOMBIANOS"

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On the night of January 15, 1971 in Maracaibo, Venezuela, another tempest in the already-tense relations between Venezuela and Colombia was provoked when a detachment of the Venezuelan National Guard (the border and prison police) descended upon a settlement of squatter shacks, "Barrio 24 de Julio," and arrested some 73 illegal Colombian residents (*"indocumentados"*) who could not produce identification papers; the *indocumentados* were placed aboard a bus and driven across the desert Guajira region to the Colombian border town of Maicao. The Colombian press reported that the merchants of Maicao, who specialize in a lively and fast-growing contraband trade with Venezuela, took up a public collection to care for the 15 men, 13 women, and 45 children who had been temporarily lodged in a schoolhouse while trying to arrange their return to Venezuela.

In the recriminations that followed, the Venezuelan official who ordered this police operation was never identified. Indeed, it seemed contrary to present Venezuelan policy, which was to studiously avoid all sources of conflict with Colombia while secret negotiations proceeded in a thus far unsuccessful effort to settle an increasingly acrimonious territorial dispute between the two nations over the oil-rich continental shelf under the Gulf of Venezuela. The expulsion of the Colombian *indocumentados*, itself an unusual procedure for the customarily tolerant Venezuelan police, was never reported in the Venezuelan press until it became the object of bitter comment in Colombian newspapers. In an editorial printed three days later, *El Espectador* of Bogotá observed: "The press reports of the attack of the Venezuelan National Guard, with bayonets and rifle butts, are much more impressive than the constant discussion of the problem of the thousands of our compatriots in the neighboring country." In an effort to show that the Colombian *indocumentados* had not been mistreated, the Venezuelan Foreign Ministry hastily invited a large group of Colombian journalists to Maracaibo to investigate the matter for themselves.

At a press conference, Governor Elio Suarez Romero of the Venezuelan state of Zulia estimated that 200,000 Colombian *indocumentados* were living in Maracaibo, roughly one-third of the city's population, and another 100,000 were living in the rest of the state. "The question of this great population from the neighboring country has presented us with a major medical-welfare problem, to the degree that the growing number of Colombians receiving maternity and medical services in the hospitals of Maracaibo has diminished the possibility of helping Venezuelans," Governor Suarez said, adding that the Colombians were the principal organizers of urban land invasions and composed the major portion of the inhabitants of the new squatter settlements surrounding Maracaibo. In reply, the Colombian Consul in Maracaibo, Oscar Echeverria Mejias, told reporters the next day that "the mere fact that 200,000 Colombians live in Maracaibo indicates that such human conglomeration, an enormous majority of it linked to the Zulian economy, would require a heroic effort [*'obra de romanos'*] to expel and would cause incalculable traumas of many kinds. The expulsion of Colombians from the Barrio 24 de Julio was so violent that many persons were taken to the frontier in their underclothes. Many of them were forced to leave their children behind. The most 'fortunate' were able to take their children, but not their clothes and belongings. None of them wish to remain in Colombia, because it is in Maracaibo where

they have their interests which the authorities have not enabled them to recuperate.” However, the problem was explained in a much broader scope by Venezuelan President Rafael Caldera in a press conference a week later:

. . . the hundreds of thousands of Colombians who dwell and work in Venezuela—most of them without having filled the legal requirements for entry into our country—are the best testimony before the world of the cordiality and fraternity which we Venezuelans have always displayed toward them. Nobody has ever thought of expelling these hundreds of thousands of Colombians although juridically it would be unobjectionable . . . . But the flow of those entering illegally has been until now uncontrollable. If from 1960 to 1970 the number of illegal immigrants, known as *indocumentados*, is calculated at several hundred thousands, this means that tens of thousands have come each year; and when one speaks of expelling 70 or 100 or 200 of them that continue penetrating, there are those who pretend that Venezuela is committing inhuman deeds. [These immigrants] come from very far, from Colombia’s Pacific Coast, from the frontier with Ecuador, people who have made long journeys and who create problems for Colombia, such as in Maicao, such as when a group of illegal immigrants are returned there to Colombian soil and public opinion is unduly stirred.... We are aware that this is an economic question, that many Colombians contribute with their labor and effort to our development process, but this also means the sending of large quantities of money to Colombia that... contributes to Colombia’s balance of payments.

The research for this essay began as a study of the impact of migrations on the urban growth of Maracaibo, but widened in scope with the discovery that the flow of Colombian *indocumentados* into Venezuela appears to have become the largest human migration in South America’s history. Essentially the present urban growth problems of Maracaibo are those generated by the arrival of large numbers of Colombians. The impoverished Northeast region of Colombia has revived its past role as an economic hinterland to Maracaibo and western Venezuela, eagerly fulfilling a heavily-urbanized, and ever-increasing Venezuelan demand for cheap food stuffs and cheap labor. During a month of travel in western Venezuela and in the coastal region of Colombia, I was able to interview a wide variety of public officials, as well as many Colombian *indocumentados* in the squatter slums of Maracaibo, in city jails in the rich banana region south of Lake Maracaibo, on cattle ranches in the Perijá district that lies between the lake and the mountain frontier with Colombia, and in the Ticoporo rain forest on the plains of Barinas. Because of the clandestine nature of these migrations, official statistics are largely meaningless and estimates are subject to wide margins of error. Nevertheless, it seems abundantly clear that these migrations, together with other factors, are presently generating major political and economic problems between the two countries.

The relations between the two countries have always been intimate and somewhat ambiguous. The colonial province of Maracaibo, containing one of the world’s richest reserves of petroleum, embraced large portions of what is now Colombian territory and during most of the eighteenth century was governed by a Viceroy in Bogotá. While Maracaibo and part of its Andean hinterland supported the royalist cause during the Wars of Independence, they subsequently became part of the short-lived Republic of Gran Colombia, which incorporated the present territories of Venezuela, Colombia, and Ecuador before disintegrating in 1830, after less than a decade of tenuous republican life, under the pressures of regional and leadership rivalries. (According to the Pombo-Michelena Treaty signed in 1833, large portions of what is now Colombian territory, including Colombia’s access to the Gulf of Venezuela, would have been ceded to Venezuela. However, while the Colombian Congress ratified the Treaty, the Venezuelan Congress did not, thus leaving the way open for the present territorial dispute over the oil-rich continental shelf under the Gulf of Venezuela.) During the civil wars of the nineteenth century, the frontier areas of Venezuela and Colombia served as refuges for incipient and defeated factions in these frequent conflicts. Because of the extremely difficult communications between Maracaibo and the Venezuelan Andes on one hand and the rest of the republic on the other—because of the primitive highway system, the most feasible way of traveling between Maracaibo and

Caracas until around 1950 was by coastal steamer—several generations of youth from the Venezuelan Andes traveled to the Colombian cities of Pamplona and Bogotá to be educated. In his Venezuelan classic, *Los Andinos en el Poder*, Domingo Alberto Rangel vividly describes this symbiosis as it flourished during the coffee prosperity around the turn of the century:

The state of Táchira in the Venezuelan Andes was the navel uniting three zones of undeniable importance. Along its western slope issue forth the valleys of Cúcuta [Colombia], a kind of geographic staircase giving breath to the Colombian Andes. Cúcuta is the only passage that can link the great Colombian highlands—and their cities of Bogotá and Tunja—with the coast of Lake Maracaibo.... Arriving in Táchira is a continuing immigration of Colombians from the North of Santander Department. The Colombian is a born colonizer. Few farmers are as adept as he in the rudest tasks of the earth. Patient and ingenious, the Colombian knows how to extract from the soil the best fruits and to elude the worst difficulties. But the Colombian brought to Táchira, when he migrated *en masse* in the middle of the nineteenth century, that commercial spirit that inevitably shaped the character of Cúcuta. A frontier city, in the midst of a tangle of valleys with openings that face Colombia's Magdalena River to the south and Lake Maracaibo to the north, Cúcuta has been a kind of Polish corridor in the history of the relations between Venezuela and Colombia. Its streets are the necessary crossroads of people looking for something, the meeting place of merchants and adventurers. In Cúcuta there developed a class of merchants very similar to those of Maracaibo in their quick wits and deep greed.

Today the commerce between Venezuela and Colombia, most of it in contraband, superficially resembles the economic relations between a developed and an underdeveloped country. Colombia exports to Venezuela cheap labor, cattle (roughly 300,000 head per year), coffee, potatoes, textiles, and finished clothing. Venezuelan contraband flowing into Colombia is mainly in consumer durables: refrigerators, television sets, washing machines, radios, canned foods, medicines, and even canisters for compressed natural gas. However, nearly all of these manufactured goods are either imported into Venezuela or merely assembled there. While the legal trade between the two countries is officially registered by their central banks at about \$15 million, the contraband traffic and remittances home of Colombian *indocumentados* working in Venezuela probably total at least ten times that figure. The smuggling of cattle, at roughly \$110 per head, is estimated to be worth around \$35 million per year. If one adds income from other kinds of smuggling and the money sent home by *indocumentados*, a sum could be conservatively produced amounting to between 10 and 20 per cent of Colombia's official 1970 export total of \$750 million. Not surprisingly, little of this cash ever flows through the Colombian banking system. Venezuelan *bolivars* (US\$1 = Bs.4.50) paid to Colombian merchants and cattlemen for contraband goods are promptly converted into dollars at bank windows in Venezuelan frontier towns, thus avoiding Colombia's strict foreign exchange controls. The two private banks in San Antonio, Venezuela, which is just across the border from the Colombian commercial center of Cúcuta, are reported to sell roughly \$100 million each year in this fashion. Likewise, most of the postal money orders sent to Colombia by *indocumentados* working in Venezuela as farm hands and house-maids are sold on the Colombian black market and later negotiated in Venezuela in the same way. Indeed, the most common reason given for both the contraband trade and the migration of *indocumentados* into Venezuela is the ever-widening difference in value between the Colombian *peso* and the Venezuelan *bolivar*. With such a differential between the two currencies and between the levels of consumption in the two countries, an illiterate Colombian girl working illegally as a housemaid in Caracas can earn as much as a lawyer in her home town and support her family in Colombia with her savings.

Together with the widely discussed disparity between the two currencies, a deeper motive for the large-scale migrations of Colombians into Venezuela may be seen in the different demographic extravaganzas in the two countries. Venezuela's population has grown at an annual average rate of 2.9 per cent in the half-century since 1920, with the death rate declining since 1936 from 16.1 to 6.6 per thousand today. Since the 1936 census, Venezuela

has been transformed by its oil prosperity from a nation 65.3 per cent rural to one officially estimated today at 77 per cent urban (persons living in places of more than 1,000 inhabitants), one of the highest urbanization rates in the world. The proportion of Venezuelans living in cities of more than 20,000 inhabitants has risen, meanwhile, from 13 per cent in 1936 to 58.2 per cent today, to the degree that 42.7 per cent of its people are concentrated now in its 12 cities of more than 100,000. Colombia began the present century with around four million inhabitants, slightly less than twice the Venezuelan population at the time, and this proportion has remained roughly constant until today, when Colombia is officially estimated to have about 21 million people and Venezuela about 11 million. However, although it has an older and much more developed system of medium-sized and large cities, Colombia has urbanized in recent decades at a far slower rate than Venezuela. The urban population (communities of more than 1,500 persons) grew from 29.1 to 52.8 per cent of the total between the 1938 and 1964 censuses, while in 1967 only 34.4 per cent of the population lived in Colombia's 17 cities of more than 100,000 inhabitants. Other indices of Colombia's relative poverty have been its death and infant mortality rates, which in recent decades have been nearly twice Venezuela's, while Venezuelan per capita income in 1968 (\$908) was more than triple Colombia's (\$280) in the same year.

The greatest burden of this poverty has been borne by Colombia's growing rural population. Many observers have noted that Latin America, excepting Venezuela, has never recovered from the Great Depression in terms of real per capita income from exports. This has been especially true in the case of Colombia's coffee economy, which grew in exports by 5.6 per cent annually between 1880 and 1930. The most eloquent index of the divergent fortunes of the Venezuelan and Colombian economies in the four decades since the Depression is the fact that, while in 1930 the Colombian peso was worth five Venezuelan *bolivars*, today the *bolivar* is worth five *pesos*. The *peso* was roughly at par with the United States dollar in 1930; today it is worth about four cents. In his essay on "Land Use and Land Reform in Colombia," Albert O. Hirschman wrote: "The Depression of 1929 had immediate and pervasive effects. With the budget difficulties and, even more important, foreign loans no longer obtainable, public works were severely retrenched and the unemployed drifted back to their families in the country; but with coffee prices declining precipitously, farm income shrank at the same time. Given this double squeeze on per capita farm income, intensification of internal migration and settlement was to be expected. However, most of the public lands with an acceptable and familiar climate in the central portions of the national territory had been taken up by this time; worse, some of these lands had lost their fertility through erosion. As a result, settlers increasingly occupied lands which they knew to be privately owned." Thus began a series of bitter conflicts over land that continue until this day. Colombia's Supreme Court in 1926 and 1934 ruled that landlords must show proof of ownership to expel squatters from their *haciendas*, a kind of impossible, "diabolical" proof in a society that had functioned on the basis of *de facto* possessions for centuries. Meanwhile, these conflicts over squatters' rights were aggravated by continuing disputes between landlords and their *peons* over whether the unpaid farm hands could plant coffee on their subsistence plots ceded by the landlord in exchange for free labor on the *hacienda*; planting of coffee on these plots would not only give the *peons* an independent cash income, but would make them more difficult to evict because they would have to be compensated for these improvements. These conflicts have led to successive waves of rural violence over the past four decades, most recently the series of invasions of *haciendas* during the past few months by landless peasants exasperated with the slow pace of the Colombian agrarian reform. By far the most destructive of these conflicts was the decade of *violencia* (1948-1958), a kind of undeclared war between rural bands of the liberal and conservative parties that cost an estimated 300,000 lives and has left Colombia's traditional political system a husk of its former self.

Both the internal violence in Colombia and the Colombian migrations into Venezuela seem to be motored, at least in part, by increasing demographic pressures on available land.<sup>1</sup> According to the 1966 CIDA (Comité Interamericano de Desarrollo Agrícola) study of Colombian land tenure, 64 per cent of Colombia's farm families are either landless or

occupy subsistence plots averaging 1.7 hectares (four acres); moreover, about 40 per cent of those occupying these tiny subsistence plots are either squatters or renters. Berry notes that “between 1938 and 1951 the increase in the agricultural population seemed to have been mainly in the form of nonowners [according to the two population censuses].” Strikingly enough, the greatest rural population increase between 1951 and 1964 was in the four Departments of Colombia’s Atlantic Coast (Magdalena, Córdoba, Atlántico, and Bolívar), precisely the region from which the heaviest Colombian migration into the Maracaibo area has proceeded in recent years. The average annual rural population increase in the 1951-1964 period for these four Atlantic Coast departments was 3 per cent—an extraordinary rural growth rate for any country in this rapidly urbanizing world—while all of Colombia’s other departments had rural population increases of less than 2 per cent. Given this demographic setting, the contrast in man/land ratios between the two countries is especially dramatic. While Venezuela’s population has tripled since 1941 and its land in crops has increased by roughly 85 per cent since then, its rural population has actually declined in both relative and absolute terms over the past three decades from 2.64 million in 1941 to an officially estimated 2.53 million today. While Colombia’s agricultural work force increased substantially from 1.76 million in 1938 to 2.65 million in 1960, Venezuela’s farm labor force declined slightly from 724,000 in 1951 to about 700,000 today; it has declined even more so if one considers that the present Venezuelan rural labor force contains a large number of Colombian *indocumentados*. According to CIDA, Colombia has roughly 1.3 hectares of land in crops for each member of its farm labor force, Venezuela has proportionately twice that amount. With Venezuela so heavily urbanized, with much vacant land in Venezuela, with a desperate shortage of salaried labor on Venezuelan *haciendas*, and with 60 per cent of the Venezuelan agricultural labor force over 40 years of age, one can scarcely wonder at the large-scale and sustained clandestine migrations of young Colombian peasants across the unguarded 1,500-mile frontier into Venezuela, along what are known as the *caminos verdes* (the green trails).

The *caminos verdes* are routes to many places in Venezuela. They lead to banana plantations at the southern shore of Lake Maracaibo, to cattle ranches in the Perijá District between the lake and the Sierra de los Motilones, to whorehouses in the oil towns and roadside establishments throughout western Venezuela, to the *rancho* squatter slums of Maracaibo and Caracas, to the coffee farms of Táchira, to agrarian reform settlements and to burning timber and clearing land in Venezuela’s great national forest reserves, to work as gardeners and chauffeurs and housemaids in the homes of leading politicians and businessmen in most of Venezuela’s great cities. In an extraordinary series of 1969 reports on these migrations, Gérman Carías of the Caracas newspaper *El Nacional* wrote that along the *caminos verdes* “these pilgrims wear straw hats, shirts and pants caked with dust, dung-stained rubber sandals that were worn and frayed. On the dry grass is spread out their miserable luggage: a cardboard suitcase, a smaller bag bearing a Bucaramanga label, four cloth jackets, two paper bags and six hammocks.” When Carías interviewed seven *indocumentados* in the process of entering Venezuela by the *caminos verdes*, one of them told him: “In the *municipio* of Momil, my home, there is much hunger. There a *peon* is paid only ten *pesos* [US\$.50] daily, without meals. In Venezuela there’s a chance to earn seven *bolivars* a day [US\$1.50], with the *tres golpes* [three meals] thrown in.” On a cattle *hacienda* in the rich dairy district of Perijá, a young *indocumentado* told me a few weeks ago: “I entered this time via Cúcuta. I took the long bus ride from Ríoacha on the coast south into the mountains to Cúcuta because I went with some *paisanos* who had entered that way before, who knew the trails, so there were no problems. You have to cross a river and pay the man who takes you in his canoe ten *pesos* [US\$.50]. Then you take another trail to avoid the National Guard post, because if the National Guard catches you they will take you prisoner or charge you 20 or 30 *bolivars* to let you pass, whatever you have. I don’t dare to leave this *hacienda* at night to go into town for a few drinks, because if they catch me they’ll throw me into jail without my having done anything. In the month of January, there was a roundup in Maracaibo and they were deporting Colombians. I heard this on the radio.”

The most common estimate given by Venezuelan officials is that around 500,000 Colombians have entered Venezuela illegally during the 1960s, and that Colombians and their children might amount to nearly 10 per cent of Venezuela's total population. When one considers that roughly 300,000 Europeans entered Venezuela legally between 1950 and 1961, it may be that immigrants and their offspring may now constitute close to 20 per cent of Venezuela's population. Until the conflict over the Gulf of Venezuela disturbed relations between the two countries in 1970, Colombians had been entering Venezuela in large numbers on tourist cards and frontier passes to stay illegally as residents. The same kind of tourism was practiced by Colombians entering the United States after Congress in 1965 sharply reduced Western Hemisphere immigration to America. In the two years between 1965 and 1967, the number of Colombians entering the United States on tourist cards rose from 25,489 to 69,943, most of them staying on illegally. *The New York Times* reported with considerable alarm recently that some two million aliens were residing illegally in the United States after entering on tourist and student visas. If the United States were to have proportionately the same problem that Venezuela has with its Colombian *indocumentados*, there would be 20 million instead of two million illegal aliens residing in America.

Over the past two years a new resentment and suspicion has suffused the relations between Venezuela and Colombia because of the proportions reached by the illegal migrations and the territorial dispute over the Gulf of Venezuela. Some Venezuelan newspapers, most notably the chain owned by Senator Miguel Angel Capriles, have charged that Colombian peasants forming communities on Venezuelan soil are reservists of the Colombian army and have been financed by INCORA, the Colombian agrarian reform agency. During 1970 and early 1971 there have been troop mobilizations on both sides of the frontier, and the armed forces of both countries have been hastily purchasing new equipment abroad. In his message to the state legislature earlier this year, Governor Suarez Romero of Zulia spoke of "the negative action of Colombian immigration" because of "the anarchic and disorderly exploitation by Colombians of Venezuelan natural resources." He gave three examples:

In the zone of the Guasare River, in the Mara District, bordering the Valledupar region of Colombia, there is a program of timber exploitation on Venezuelan territory that is stimulated by the Colombian government which finances the colonists and builds penetration roads to remove the production. The Directorate of Hydrolic Works of the Public Works Ministry and the National Agrarian Institute possess information of this.

On Lake Maracaibo, an estimated 5,000 Colombians are engaged in fishing. Some of these fishermen enter the lake through the Gulf of Venezuela and others through the rivers south of the lake, progressively displacing native fishermen.

In the Perijá District, along the new Machiques-Colón highway, a movement of Colombians has appeared to settle in the new lands opened to agricultural exploitation by the new highway.

The most widely publicized of these penetrations occurred in the rich Guasare Valley, which is divided from the Colombian territory by a high mountain range. On March 9, 1970, the newspaper *Panorama* of Maracaibo reported that "the most fertile zones of Colón District along the Colombian border are occupied in large areas by Colombian *indocumentados*. From these invasions have emerged towns with lively commerce like Tres Bocas, on the banks of the Tara River, in Venezuelan territory, and other small settlements [*caseríos*] ruled by Colombian authorities." Much deeper into Venezuelan territory, an estimated 50,000 Colombian *conuqueros* (nomadic practitioners of slash-and-burn agriculture) have denuded a large portion of the forest reserves in the states of Barinas and Apure. In the Alto Guasare, a *caserío* of 108 Colombian families and a school with a Colombian teacher was discovered on Venezuelan soil. A detachment of the Venezuelan National Guard was sent there, and a Venezuelan teacher substituted for the Colombian teacher. But the Colombian peasants were allowed to remain, since the Venezuelan countryside has been so depopulated that no Venezuelan peasants are available to send in their place. The Venezuelan government has begun a crash program to build an economic infrastructure along its frontiers, but it faces an

apparently impossible task in finding Venezuelans to occupy these remote areas. Meanwhile, most of the coffee, cattle, and banana *haciendas* of western Venezuela have become utterly dependent on Colombian *indocumentados* as the basic source of manpower for their fanning operations. This is especially true of the cattle and banana plantations to the south and west of Lake Maracaibo; most of this land was cleared by Colombian *indocumentados* in the late 1950s after the opening of the Pan-American Highway in the area. A Venezuelan lawyer who took me to interview *indocumentados* on the dairy farms of the Perijá Valley explained the migratory process in this fashion:

Before in Perijá many people came from the [heavily-Negro] Atlantic Coast of Colombia. But now many come from the southern departments of Colombia, from Tolima and even as far south as Pasto [with heavily Indian racial stock]. Many are 17 or 18 year-olds who had no opportunities in the south of Colombia, often accompanied by young girls of 15 and 16 years old, sometimes pregnant, sometimes even with two small children, and they are not married. There are also petty merchants called *maleteros* [baggage men] who live off the Colombian *peons* fellow-Colombians who sell the *peons* rum and cheap merchandise smuggled from Colombia; the *maleteros* come to the *haciendas* in groups of five or six and are fed by the *peons* and trade with them in stuff that's expensive here in Venezuela. Also there are the women who arrive at the *haciendas* with the men; the men go to the fields and the women stay in the kitchens and cook for the *peons*. Things have changed greatly here from around 1956, when this was an area of new exploration and exploitation. Now there is electricity in Perijá and other improvements, so life is better here, but there is much more immigration now into the banana region to the south of Lake Maracaibo. While they are on the *haciendas* the National Guard leaves them alone, and on Saturdays and Sundays you can see lots of Colombians on the streets of small towns like Guayabo and Encontrados and Santa Barbara. But if the National Guard finds Colombians in the towns during the week they are arrested. The *hacendados* [planters] make friends with the National Guardsmen, and often money changes hands. Often there are small detachments of the National Guard where a sergeant of bad character commits abuses. Incidents have occurred in which the *hacendado* owing several months' pay to a *peon* would denounce him to the National Guard as an *indocumentado* and have him expelled from the country. This occasionally has led to a number of bloody incidents of revenge by the *indocumentados*, but mainly the Colombians stay among themselves and when they fight they fight among themselves.

In 1959, when a frontier agreement was signed between Venezuela and Colombia to permit free movement of people in the frontier areas [the Treaty of Tonchalá], it was said that Venezuela supplied the hospitals and Colombia supplied the patients, and this is the truth. Medical services in Colombia are very poor, because all they have are religious and charity institutions without Government help. People who urgently need surgery get their operations done free in the University Hospital in Maracaibo, which at times has 60 per cent of its beds occupied by Colombians. When they are sick, nobody asks their nationality. Colombians who are critically sick or injured pass unchallenged through the Venezuelan checkpoints along the border.

In Perijá and other zones there are Colombians who have had good luck and have gotten rich and have *haciendas* but their *haciendas* have been invaded by other Colombians. There are Venezuelan *haciendas* where both the foreman and the squatters are Colombians and there have been bloody clashes between them. What are denounced in the press as Colombian towns in Venezuela are really *caseríos* [dispersed rural settlements]. Take the case of Calle Larga, which is 60 or 70 per cent Colombian in population. On Saturdays and Sundays all you see in the streets are Colombians because they come there on weekends to drink. They don't live in the village of Calle Larga, but the surrounding *haciendas* each have 20 or 30 or 40 Colombian *peons*. So on Sundays they look like Colombian towns, but most of the businesses are owned by Venezuelans, although there are Colombian proprietors too. There are also many Colombians who occupy plots of land in the Venezuelan agrarian reform, but they live with very little credit. They were given these parcels by the Venezuelan National Agrarian Institute [IAN]. Their credit is insufficient and the crop fails, and they wind up owing money to the Agricultural Bank. What then happens is that they give their plot of land

to someone else, or just abandon it. Often their agrarian reform plot is taken over by an Italian farmer who makes a success of it, collecting a plot here and a plot there until they have what amounts to a *hacienda*. The Italian has an agricultural tradition, while the Colombian and Venezuelan peasants do not; all they can grow is plantains and yucca and potatoes, while the Italian grows grapes on the same land and tomatoes for the off-season market in Caracas.

Thanks to the oil prosperity of the past half-century and also to the agricultural expansion near the lake over the last 15 years, the state of Zulia has been increasing in population at the very high and sustained rate of 5 per cent annually ever since 1920. In the 50-year period between 1920 and 1970, the population density of Zulia has increased more than tenfold from 1.9 to an estimated 22.5 persons per square kilometer while its share of Venezuela's total population increased from 5.1 to 12.2 per cent at the same time. This implies a population growth rate roughly twice the national average for the past half-century. Only about three-fifths of the increase of the past two decades was reproductive; the great inflator of population growth was migration. Over the recent half-century the Zulian birthrate was always above 4 per cent, reaching a high of 4.85 per cent in the early 1950s, during the Korean War, when the oil companies in the Maracaibo Basin embarked on an intensive program of exploratory drilling that attracted large numbers of new migrants into the area and a new surge of prosperity. At the same time, Zulia's mortality rate has declined even more dramatically than the national average since the 1920s: Zulia's death rate in 1926 (2.5 per cent) was roughly 30 per cent higher than the national average (1.89 per cent) for that year; after the oil companies wiped out dysentery and malaria in the Maracaibo Basin during the 1920s, Zulia's death rate dropped to well below the national average. By 1946 it was 1.21 per cent (compared with 1.5 per cent for all Venezuela), and by 1967 Zulia's recorded death rate was down to .56 per cent, with the national average at .66 per cent. Comparing the census figures of 1920 and 1961, which may not fully measure the impact of migrations, one finds the number of persons born outside the state increasing from 3,160 in 1920 (less than 3 per cent of Zulia's population) to 242,792 in 1961 (26.4 per cent). According to Professor Dionisio Carruyo, the leading analyst of Zulian demography, 42 per cent of the migrants to the state who arrived in the 1961 census year were between 15 and 30 years old, the optimum breeding age bracket.

Although the population of Zulia grew by only 35 per cent (from 88,498 to 119,458) between the censuses of 1873 and 1920, it has taken impressive quantum jumps ever since then, doubling every 15 years over the past half-century to reach the present estimated population of 1.4 million, 88 per cent of which is urban. This enormous surge in population began almost overnight, in the brief period between 1922 and 1928, when Venezuela grew from an insignificant producer of oil to the world's leading exporter, second in production only to the United States. Frightened by social revolution in Mexico and the appearance of salt water in their Mexican wells, the big oil companies moved their personnel and baggage south to drill in Venezuela. On the great day of December 14, 1922, perforations made below an abandoned well near Lake Maracaibo brought in a prodigious gusher, Barroso Number 2, which "began at 2,000 barrels per day and increased rapidly until it flowed wild at 100,000, destroyed the derrick, and blew a column 200 feet into the air. It was a huge gusher, 'the most productive in the world,' reported *The New York Times*." During most of the 1920s, Venezuelan oil production doubled every year, increasing from one million barrels in 1921 to 137 million in 1929. All the big oil companies began drilling frantically at the fringes of their concessions to tap each others' deposits; Standard of New Jersey, which later was to control the lion's share of Venezuelan production, spent over \$20 million in drilling in western Venezuela alone, yet had failed to produce oil commercially by 1929. During the same period, migrations in the Lake Maracaibo region reached avalanche proportions. In the six years between the censuses of 1920 and 1926, Zulia's population grew from 119,000 to 204,000. According to Edward Lieuwen:

The industry gathered a docile, unorganized labor force. Since sparsely populated western Venezuela had no surplus of workers, it was at first difficult to obtain labor. Early attempts to bring men down from Caracas and the Andean states failed, because they quickly



contacted malaria in the low, humid, hot Maracaibo Basin and returned home. The companies hired what Zulian agricultural laborers they could and some local Guajira Indians, but the shortage had to be made up by bringing in Negroes from the West Indies.... Meanwhile, a long-range program to make the entire lake region more sanitary got under way. Mosquito-infested swamps were sprayed with crude oil, water supplies were purified, and sewage systems were installed. Troublesome malaria was all but eliminated and dysentery brought under control.... As news of the improved working and living conditions spread, Venezuelans from all parts of the nation began migrating to the oil fields.... Companies preferred the already acclimated *Margueritenos* [from the island of Margarita, with a strong maritime tradition, whose natives included many good swimmers suited for drilling work in Lake Maracaibo] and handy *Andinos*... Petroleum's economic stimulus thus gave rise to a migration of far greater numbers than were actually employed by the companies. *Campesinos* heard of the attractive wages and social benefits, and when they failed to get employment in the industry, they found work in the towns that sprang up around the camps. Migrants from all parts of Venezuela came to swell the population of the little parasite towns that lived off petroleum workers' wages and company purchases. The municipality of Cabimas, in which the La Rosa field was situated, increased its population more than tenfold [from 1,940 in 1920 to 21,753 in 1936 (to roughly 150,000 in 1971)], and alike growth took place in the municipality of Lagunillas.

The city of Maracaibo had prospered but did not grow much during the nineteenth century. A French visitor in 1800 wrote: "Maracaibo is situated on the western shore of the lake of the same name and six leagues from the sea. Its earth base is sandy and without vegetation; its temperature is all the more hot because the breezes are weak and irregular, the land has no running streams and rains are rare;... the air one breathes in summer feels like it is emerging from an oven." After some very difficult beginnings—the early settlements were destroyed three times by Indians in the sixteenth century before a permanent colony could be established, and the city was sacked several times in the seventeenth century by Henry Morgan, L'Olonnais, and other pirate chieftains—Maracaibo became the main shipping outlet for the wheat and cacao grown in western Venezuela and part of the Colombian Andes. Of the commercial flourishing of Maracaibo late in the nineteenth century, Domingo Alberto Rangel writes:

The *Maracucho* merchants financed the coffee expansion of the Andean state of Táchira during all of the nineteenth century. Maracaibo was already, at midcentury, a most active port. A Bremen of the tropics, there converged the products of a vast zone in search of an outlet to the sea. Separated from the rest of Venezuela, the Venezuela of perpetual civil wars, the port of Maracaibo suffered no interruption in its accumulation of money. A commerce that was audacious and familiar with the techniques of mercantile capitalism—the letter of credit, the joint stock company, etc.—made Maracaibo the strongest financial market in nineteenth-century Venezuela. For a long time, this city outranked Caracas in mercantile influence and creative dynamism. The *Maracuchos*' money flowed toward Táchira, with short-term loans that mobilized plantations. The Maracaibo merchant offered advances to small coffee-growers in the foothills of the Andes.... Maracaibo dictated, with its credits, the rate of expansion of the agricultural economy of western Venezuela. The cycle began when the merchant houses of the Zulian capital established the volume of loans and concluded when the canoes filled with coffee arrived in the port of Maracaibo.... The rate of interest prevailing in Maracaibo, the volume of currency issued by its banks, the price of gold in its market were for the farmers and merchants of the Andes the Star of Bethlehem for all their economic activities.

The expanding coffee economy exercised a progressive influence throughout the Venezuelan Andes. "During the nineteenth century, the traditional cultivation of wheat symbolized in politics the Conservative tendency, while the recently expanding coffee agriculture expressed the Liberal trend." In 1891 the merchants of Maracaibo tried to formalize their economic sway over the Venezuelan Andes by pressing for the joining of Zulia and the three Andean states (now Táchira, Mérida, and Trujillo) into a single administrative unit roughly corresponding to the old province of Maracaibo. By this time the highly successful enclave

of European mercantile capitalism—its leading merchant houses were Breuer Möller, Boulton, Van Dissel, Andressen, Logomaggiore, and Hard & Rand—had installed in Maracaibo Venezuela's first commercial banks, its first electric plant (1889), its first public tramway (1883). The pre-World War I coffee prosperity increased Maracaibo's share of Venezuela's exports from 21.3 per cent in 1884 to 49 per cent in 1912.

The old Andean coffee economy declined rapidly with the Great Depression and World War II, with much of its labor supply migrating into the oilfields. The old Maracaibo merchant houses either went out of business or shifted into other lines. Prior to the oil boom of the 1920s, despite its extraordinary commercial success, Maracaibo grew very slowly in population. Its population was 22,000, according to the census of 1801, and only 28,165 in 1873; over the next four decades it increased at an annual rate of roughly 1.6 per cent to the 1920 census total of 46,099. But with the oil boom it doubled in the next decade, reaching 110,010, the bulk of this increase coming in the years between 1923, after the Barroso gusher was brought in, and 1930, when production began to decline under the impact of the economic crash. During those boom years of the 1920s Maracaibo's population growth must have been more than 10 per cent annually; following the Great Depression, in the 1940s and 1950s the increase was 7.63 and 6.03 per cent respectively. By 1971 the population was estimated at around 700,000.

The Colombian *indocumentados* have played a major role in the continued rapid expansion of Maracaibo, despite the economic recession of the early 1960s that followed the fall of the Perez Jimenez dictatorship in 1958 and the cutback in exploratory drilling in response to the "no new concessions" policy announced in the same year. According to municipal officials, 148 new squatter settlements have been founded in the city since 1958, an average of more than 10 per year, while the number of linear meters of streets quadrupled from roughly 30,000 meters in 1961 to about 120,000 today. The horizontal expansion of Maracaibo has fanned outward from the old port and market at lakeside, with the proliferating residential developments and shopping centers and squatter *barrios* all connected by a system of parallel peripheral highways and elaborate cloverleaves. Nearly all of the few tall buildings are of recent construction and most are located along Avenida 5 de Julio, the new commercial boulevard with its new stores and neon signs and gas stations and hamburger stands resembling an American strip city in the tropical heat. This voracious expansion over the past decade has left most of the city's streets unpaved, while 60 per cent of the city's population lives in the squatter colonies that cover most of this new ground. "The Municipal Government is bankrupt," a high official told me. It stopped paving streets 10 years ago. It only has money to pay its employees."

According to a survey carried out in 1968 by the Economics Research Center of the University of Zulia, nearly one-fourth of all urban salaried workers in the state were on the public payroll. Indeed, in 1970, 88 per cent of Zulia's population was officially estimated to be urban, leaving a hired agricultural work force of only 29,536 to serve a rapidly expanding agricultural economy. Despite a rate of unemployment and underemployment (working less than 30 hours per week) together reaching above 25 per cent, there seemed to be a lively demand for labor in both the city and the countryside. Colombian *indocumentados* seem to be the only supply of labor for such jobs as farm hands, housemaids, masons, carpenters, etc. A leading Congressman who also owns a banana plantation on the southern shore of Lake Maracaibo, a region which supplies half the country's plantains (a staple of the Venezuelan diet) and is developing production of sweet bananas (*cambures*) for export, told me that local growers are left desperately short of labor when their Colombian *indocumentado* farm hands leave after a month or two on the *hacienda*; the growers regularly send recruiters across the border to find more cheap labor. This labor shortage has created a tolerant attitude toward the *indocumentados* on the part of the Venezuelan authorities, some of whom seem to be involved in different kinds of illegal traffic between the two countries. Meanwhile, the enormous differences in income levels between the two countries is drawing more and more immigrants into Venezuela. It is most instructive, in this connection, to compare earnings of slum residents in Maracaibo and Barranquilla, Colombia's main Caribbean port which functions economically much as Maracaibo did

before the beginning of oil production. According to the recent *MERCAVI' 70* survey of the Maracaibo housing market, 31.9 per cent of the families living in squatter *barrios* earn less than Bs. 500 (US\$110) monthly, and are ineligible for public housing, while another 39.2 per cent of the families living in *ranchos* earn between 500 and 1,000 *bolivars* monthly. In Barranquilla, according to an unpublished study of the squatter slum of Carrizal (pop. 63,580) made in 1970 by the Departmental Planning Commission, the average family income was 676 *pesos* (US\$32) or roughly 136 *bolivars* monthly at the current five-to-one exchange rate. This means that the average family income in the Maracaibo slums is four or five times greater than in comparable areas of Barranquilla. In the recently invaded Maracaibo squatter *barrio* of Los Robles, adjacent to the city's new Industrial Park, I interviewed Julio Santos Melendez, who came to Venezuela nearly two decades ago as an *indocumentado* from the Barranquilla area, and who worked for many years in the banana fields south of the lake and today as an electrician's helper in Maracaibo earns three times what he would earn in a similar job in Barranquilla. "The Venezuelan doesn't like to work with his hands," Julio told me. "He always prefers to work for the government. We Colombians come here because we are needed. Every day more Colombians arrive. If the Government expels 30, then 100 more will come in."

Across the street from the new campus of the University of Zulia, in a squatter settlement called Ziruma that originally was built on land allotted by the municipal government to the Guajiro Indians but which now is inhabited largely by Colombians, I taped an interview with a 37-year-old black migrant who came to Venezuela many years ago from Colombia's Atlantic Coast. I reproduce a translation of his statement here because it appears so representative of the land-clearing role of many Colombian migrants in western Venezuela:

I was the type of guy who was full of aspirations. I went out exploring and walking even in my own country. My two brothers are still working their *conuco* [subsistence patch] in the Municipio of Maria la Baja, where we all were born. As for myself, I wandered about the Departments of Magdalena and Cesar and the Guajira about 15 years ago until I heard there was money to be made in Venezuela. I entered through the wilderness trails, the *caminos verdes* as they say, but I had no problems with the authorities as an *indocumentado* because I always stayed in the countryside and they don't bother you there, if you like the countryside. The passports they were selling were very expensive, 170 *bolivars* each, so I came in through the *caminos verdes*. I founded eight *haciendas* in the Indian region of the Motilones, in Perijá. I cut down trees and cleared the land and left it in production, for someone else to cultivate, then I went to clear land elsewhere. I had a good boss who took me to Maracaibo for the first time in 1958. He trusted me with money for the payroll and for buying provisions; I was almost a capitalist partner of his. But then I asked him to pay me off because I wanted to make a *hacienda* for myself, near the Santa Ana River, in Perijá. I planted rice, plantains, corn, and yucca, and lived on this. Then I worked on contract for others to clear land, to make farms out of wilderness, and with the money they paid me I was able to improve my farm bit by bit. I was able to clear for myself 1,050 hectares [2,625 acres] in unused public lands, a *latifundio* with two rivers running through it. Of this I had some 150 acres in crops. I spent five years there, until I was expropriated by the Venezuelan agrarian reform. It went bad for me because I was an *indocumentado* who worked on his own with a certain aspiration, to rise from *campesino* to *hacendado*, but this wasn't possible. So then I got bored with the countryside and came to Maracaibo. That was in 1963 or so. As I said, I got bored with the countryside and came to Maracaibo because here at least there are schools and electricity and other things. I began working for construction companies for 18 *bolivars* (US\$4) daily. Now it is no longer possible for me to go to the countryside to work, because my kids would be abandoned here and they would be stupid, uneducated. Nor could I go back to Colombia after all this time, because I would be a foreigner in my own country.

The pattern of Colombian *indocumentados* invading and clearing land, often illegally, for the subsequent use of Venezuelans has become an established custom both in the countryside and the city. Venezuelan conservation officials complain that two of the country's most important forest reserves, San Camilo (1.1 million acres) and Ticoporo

(530,000 acres) have been invaded over the past decade and destroyed in roughly 40 per cent of their total area by nomadic Colombian *conuqueros* practicing slash-and-burn agriculture. "Both of these forest reserves are near the Colombian frontier," one official told me. "What often happens is that the Colombian *conuqueros* enter into agreements with unscrupulous Venezuelans who want this land, who take it over from the Colombians after it's been cleared, paying the Colombians for their 'improvements' (*bien-hechurías*). In other cases, the Colombians find Venezuelan women, beget Venezuelan children, become members and even leaders of the Venezuelan peasant *sindicatos*, which makes it impossible for us to get them out of there without paying them off. But if we pay them off, more Colombians will come over from the other side to try for the same deal. Unfortunately, nobody cared about what has been happening to the national forest reserves until the dispute with Colombia over the Gulf of Venezuela became a public issue." By that time, the Colombian *conuqueros* in the Ticoporo rain forest had acquired real political power in the plains state of Barinas. They dominated the peasant leagues in the area, and both major Venezuelan political parties actively wooed their support and facilitated their fraudulent enfranchisement as voters.

In the city of Maracaibo a similar pattern of land invasion has created many of the new squatter *barrios*. "There's a desperate shortage of public lands in Maracaibo because most of the *ejidal* [communal] lands were parceled out during the Gómez dictatorship [1908-1935] to the director's friends," one city official said. "The municipal housing agency has to purchase land now because most of the city's land was stolen in this way. What happens now is that invading land in Maracaibo has become a business, in which Colombians seem to play a major role. The *indocumentados* have no legal status here, so they cannot keep the land they invade. The organizers of a new invasion charge each family 50 *bolívars* for 'settlement rights' and 50 *bolívars* for 'streets.' But a few months later each parcel of invaded land can be sold for Bs. 1,000 and for Bs. 2,000 after public utilities arrive." Visiting the squatter settlements of Maracaibo, one is impressed by the luxurious size of these house lots, and by the sight of large houses with two or three air conditioners next to miserable shacks that seem to date from the original invasion. This phenomenon was explained to me recently by a community development worker in Barrio *Simón Bolívar*:

This *barrio* was founded five years ago. The first invaders of most *barrios* in Maracaibo are Colombians. When they see that they have a chance to sell their house lots at a profit, they sell them and either go back to Colombia or move on to found new *barrios*. It turns out to be a good business. In my case, for example, I was living in the center-city. When I got married I needed a new house, so I found a man here in *Simón Bolívar* who sold me the house I'm living in now for Bs. 1,000. He moved out and is now living in another *barrio*, '24 de Julio,' where the National Guard came and expelled those Colombians last January. Here in *Simón Bolívar* we have roughly 1,350 families, one-third of them Colombian. But there were many more before the Colombians sold their lots to Venezuelans. They are selling them now for Bs. 2,000 each for the 'improvements,' not the land, which they cannot sell. All they did was put up four walls and a roof and clear the land of vegetation, which could not have cost more than Bs. 300. Venezuelans buy up the lots, and there are Venezuelans who now own three or four or five parcels in our *barrio*. There is one building contractor who now owns six parcels, and is buying up a whole city block. We have *hacendados* living here also. But there are also garbagemen, mailmen, policemen, and National Guardsmen. An aqueduct was installed here last year, and we already have electricity and a school, and the streets are being paved right now. It's very peaceful here. *Barrio Simón Bolívar* has become a nice place to live.

Because it is impossible to obtain reliable statistics on the number of Colombians in Maracaibo, one cannot know exactly to what degree they have inflated the demand for public services in the city. However, it does seem fairly clear that the Colombian *indocumentados* have kept up the city's rapid rate of expansion over the past dozen years when, with the decline in the oil companies' investments in labor-intensive exploratory drilling, the rate of migration to the area should have subsided somewhat. In his study of the costs of urbanization in Venezuela, Professor Alberto Urdaneta of CENDES reported that 44

per cent of Maracaibo's population lacked piped aqueduct water in 1965 and 81 per cent (400,000 people) lacked sewage facilities. Urdaneta estimated that it would require an investment of US\$75 million to supply these two public services by 1975. Officials of INOS (Venezuela's sewer and aqueduct authority) estimated that an investment of US\$7 million annually is necessary to keep Maracaibo's deficit from growing; this year INOS is spending \$47 million in Maracaibo in an accelerated construction program that has reduced the sewer deficit to 30 per cent and the aqueduct deficit to about 20 per cent.

In education the escalation of expenditures is even more dramatic. In the state of Zulia the population under 15 years of age has increased from 39 to 47 per cent of the total since 1936, which has meant a sixfold increase from 110,895 to nearly 660,000 in this same 35-year period. In the years following the fall of the Pérez Jimenez dictatorship, an enormous effort was made to bring a greater number of children into the classroom. Between the 1957-58 and 1961-62 school years primary enrollment alone increased by 62 per cent. In the decade following 1958 primary school enrollments more than doubled, while secondary attendance has more than tripled. An indicator of how much the demand for public services has increased in Maracaibo is the fact that the municipal budget has more than quadrupled between 1958 and 1971, increasing from Bs. 19.87 million to Bs. 85.02 million, while Venezuela's national budget merely has doubled in the same period. According to city officials, the amount of garbage collected daily in Maracaibo has tripled in the decade since 1961, yet one-fourth of the 148 new *barrios* are still without regular garbage collection service.

There seems to be a community of interest between the increasing demand for public services in Maracaibo, which is marginally augmented by the influx of illegal Colombian migrants, and the political convenience of placing more and more Venezuelans on the public payroll. The favorite sport of radio announcers on news programs in most cities of the republic is to denounce that this *barrio* is *abandonado* by the authorities, and that *barrio* lacks police protection and another *barrio* is without water and garbage collection. Indeed, one is impressed by how promptly and cheerfully these services are supplied. Venezuela's national government revenues have doubled since 1963, increasing by more than 20 per cent in each of the past two years, thanks to rapidly rising oil prices. Venezuela's population has slightly more than doubled since 1950, but public employment has increased about fivefold, absorbing today between 20 and 25 per cent of all salaried urban employment. In Caracas, for example, public employment has almost tripled between 1950 and 1966. While comparable data are not available for Maracaibo, 38,000 of the 164,000 salaries urban jobs in Zulia in 1968 were reported on the public payroll. There seems to be some logic, then, to the economic formula of my friend, the Maracaibo lawyer, that "we supply the hospitals and the Colombians supply the patients," but only as long as per capita oil revenues remain high enough to permit expansion of the public payroll at the present rate.

As is common in most migrations of people from poorer to richer regions, the role of the Colombian *indocumentado* has been to perform the kind of jobs that no longer attract native Venezuelans, and for half or one-third the pay that Venezuelans would earn in the same jobs. Venezuelan employers in both the cities and the countryside thus have a double purpose: to maintain the supply of Colombian laborers in Venezuela at a high level, and to maintain unchanged their illegal status as *indocumentados* so as to limit both the Colombians' mobility inside Venezuela and the level of salaries they can command. Both Venezuelan *hacendados* and housewives have learned that, once their Colombian *indocumentado* farm hands and housemaids legalize their status by obtaining a Venezuelan identity card, they either demand higher pay or leave to find better employment. With so many Colombians desperate to enter Venezuela and then to legalize their status, and with so many Venezuelan employers equally desperate to hire Colombian *indocumentados*, the lucrative business of granting real or false legal documents has become a temptation for minor Venezuelan officials. One Venezuelan immigration official told me that 5,000 Colombians had received frontier permits and tourist cards at the Venezuelan Consul in Maicao in the first nine months of 1971, and that many times that number had probably entered the country illegally. He said that before the international conflict over the Gulf of Venezuela focused public

attention on the problem of the *indocumentados*, the Venezuelan consulates had issued many more permits to Colombians. "Since the Venezuelan army began to intensively patrol the frontier in 1970 during the diplomatic crisis with Colombia," he said, "the prices charged by white slavers for delivering Colombian prostitutes to Venezuelan bordellos rose sharply." Carias reported in *El Nacional* in 1969 that "Colombian women, many of them minors, are brought from Puerto Santander and Vilamizar to Encontrados and Santa Barbara, charging commission up to US\$100 per head to the owners of whorehouses who had placed advance orders for them."

Early in the 1960s, the Venezuelan government tried to legalize the status of the many Colombian *indocumentados* living in the country by issuing identity cards (*cédulas*) to any Colombian who could prove that he had Venezuelan children or had lived a certain number of years in the country. The only proof required was a letter received at a Venezuelan address, which could easily be predated by a friendly postal employee, or a bank statement or health certificate that they had resided in the country prior to 1961. Because of the many abuses committed under this permissive policy, Venezuelan immigration officials began to restrict the number of *cédulas* granted, creating heightened pressure by *indocumentados* to regularize their status by hook or crook. A number of small factories were organized in Colombia to produce forged Venezuelan passports and identity cards, using the names and *cédula* numbers of dead Venezuelans. A reporter for the Capriles chain wrote that one of these forgers in Cúcuta had told him: "Our agents get the names and *cédula* numbers of dead people from funeral homes and civil registers, and once they are used we cross them off our list. Our *cédulas* are good for five years, the life of a normal Venezuelan identity card, and we renew them upon application." More recently, the Venezuelan Consul in Maicao, Manuel Atilio Meléan, charged publicly that Venezuelan immigration officials had been selling frontier passes to Colombians at 500 *bolivars* (US\$110) each. He made this accusation a few days after immigration agents broke into a public relations agency called "Andrea," located in a Maracaibo shopping center and run by the sister of a high-ranking military officer. Two weeks later a Colombian woman walked into the office of the Maracaibo newspaper *Panorama* and announced that she had paid 700 *bolivars* to the agency's go-between with the Immigration Department, a former immigration official named Juan Segundo Caraballo Padrón, after she had been jailed for 19 days as an illegal alien. She said the money got her an interview with the Maracaibo immigration chief, who said he would issue her a *cédula*, but she feared that the *cédula* was false. Meanwhile, the confiscated office records of the public relations firm mysteriously disappeared from the court files, and all detainees in the case were released.

While many minor functionaries have found immigration matters to be a gold mine, senior Venezuelan officials have become greatly concerned that the large influx of Colombian *indocumentados* may have greatly impaired the Venezuelan government's capacity to exercise sovereignty over its own territory. While these officials discredit sensational press reports that many *indocumentados* are in fact Colombian army reservists, they are worried that to expel the hundreds of thousands of *indocumentados* would provoke serious internal convulsions inside Venezuela as well as another confrontation with Colombia. In internal discussions of this problem, analogies have been drawn between the Colombian *indocumentados* and the demographic pressures that have motivated the Salvadorean migrations into neighboring Guatemala and Honduras, which provoked the brief war between Salvador and Honduras in 1969 and thus wrecked the Central American Common Market. The Venezuelan countryside, however, is so depopulated that the Colombian migrations could have continued for some time without causing any disturbance if it were not for the nagging dispute over the Gulf of Venezuela.

The Colombian territorial access to the Gulf of Venezuela through the semidesert and sparsely populated Guajira region was first established in a somewhat ambiguous arbitration decree in 1891 by the Princess Regent Maria Cristina of Spain, and then confirmed in a 1941 treaty between the two countries that more specifically defined their land frontier. During most of the 1960s the relations between the two countries were excellent, since many leaders of the ruling Acción Democrática party had lived in Colombia as exiles in the 1920s and

1930s from the long dictatorship (1908-1935) of Juan Vicente Gómez. When Carlos Lleras Restrepo visited Caracas in 1966 as Colombia's President-elect (1966-1970), he was greeted by Venezuelan President Raul Leoni (1964-1969), who as a young political exile had earned his living by running a fruit stand in Barranquilla, with these words: "My friendship with the man who today is President-elect of Colombia began many years ago, when I arrived in Bogotá in flight from the persecutions of Gómez, and on the platform of the railroad station of La Sabana was a group of student leaders, among them Carlos Lleras." However, the trouble over the Gulf began during Lleras's presidential term as Colombia began negotiating contracts with foreign oil companies for exploratory offshore drilling along the Guajira coast, which prompted the Venezuelan Minister of Mines and Petroleum, Manuel Pérez Guerrero, to make a hasty trip to Bogotá to protest that Colombia may be issuing concessions on a continental shelf that it does not own. Although the Venezuelan Foreign Ministry insisted that the Gulf consists of "waters that are traditionally and historically Venezuelan contained within Venezuelan coasts," it has never denied Colombian claims to a share of the continental shelf. The two governments exchanged visits of Cabinet Ministers to quietly explore ways of reaching an agreement until 1970, when Lleras, in his last presidential message to the Colombian Congress, touched off renewed controversy in the press and parliaments of both countries when he declared that Venezuela could not claim complete possession of the Gulf. In the flurry that followed, both nations ostentatiously negotiated for arms purchases in Europe, while formal negotiations between themselves proceeded in Caracas last year, in Rome this year. Meanwhile, both nations have tacitly agreed to suspend exploratory drilling in the Gulf until an agreement is reached.

The present impasse over the Gulf of Venezuela, if it continues over the next few years, is likely to place Venezuela in an increasingly difficult position. While Colombia also badly needs new oil reserves, continued high production is indispensable to Venezuela's prosperity and political stability, and the probable—though still unexplored—deposits in the basin of the Gulf seem to be the most likely and easily accessible source of new petroleum. The present Venezuelan government of President Rafael Caldera (1969-1974), in the pre-election years of 1972 and 1973, is most unlikely to expose itself to the political risks of making any concessions to Colombian claims in the Gulf to reach a negotiated agreement. Nor is it likely to depart over the next two years from Venezuela's long-standing policy of no more concessions and the reversion to the state of most of the existing private concessions when they expire in 1983-1985. By then, according to some projections by a number of petroleum economists and geologists, oil production from areas now being exploited is expected to decline by about 20 per cent. Moreover, by 1983 the Venezuelan population is expected to grow by 60 per cent, according to official projections, which would reduce per capita oil production from existing fields by about 80 per cent. While it is widely believed that Venezuela has vast, untapped oil reserves waiting to be explored, a political as well as economic formula must be found to identify and exploit them. Meanwhile, existing proven reserves have been declining steadily over the past decade.

Until important new Venezuelan reserves are actually brought into production, the recent Colombian migrations into Venezuela must be viewed in the context of this uncertainty. It is largely because of Venezuela's easy and unearned oil prosperity that the Colombian *indocumentados* have found their uneasy, illegal, but desperately sought place in the hemisphere's richest underdeveloped society, in a society that has become hyperurbanized and an economy excessively dependent on government employment and on continued high per capita oil income to keep the public payroll expanding (in persons employed) at the present rate of about 6 per cent annually. Economically speaking, the Colombian *indocumentado* is just one more cheap imported commodity sucked in by the Venezuelan economy's extraordinary capacity to buy foreign goods. Politically, he gains more influence as he strikes roots in Venezuela, obtains a fictional or quasilegality, marries a Venezuelan or begets Venezuelan children, and plays an increasingly important part in the Venezuelan economy. Ideally, the two neighboring economies should be transformed from a *concubinato* to a *matrimonio*, a formal economic integration that would embrace the problems of both the Gulf and the *indocumentado*, and that would provide more rational and dynamic

employment for Venezuela's immense capital resources in a market that could be enlarged overnight from 11 to 33 million persons. But such a rational and oft-discussed development policy has been blocked thus far by political obstacles.

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