

'Right There with You'

Coca-Cola, Labor Restructuring and Political Violence in Colombia

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Abstract ■ The article examines how state terrorism operates alongside neoliberal capitalism and has reconfigured labor relations and generated new forms of oppositional politics. Focusing on the struggles of Colombian Coca-Cola workers, the article first considers how neoliberal restructuring and political violence have fragmented social relationships and aggravated inequalities among workers and between them and the Coca-Cola Company. This is a process that is based on widespread impunity. The article then examines how trade unionists have struggled against the degradation of work and the violation of their human rights by internationalizing their struggle against Coca-Cola and building broad alliances that extend beyond the workplace. Finally, it considers the problems, possibilities and new tensions that emerge from the union's internationalism.

Keywords ■ human rights ■ impunity ■ neoliberalism

As the tentacles of the Coca-Cola Company stretched around the world in the 20th century, the corporation's fizzy, dark brown soda became synonymous with a sugar-coated version of US-led globalization. Yet behind the glitz and the bubbles, the world of Coca-Cola was fraught with tension. The company, which arose out of the Jim Crow South, adhered to traditions and business practices that sprouted from its southern roots. The multinational's mostly Georgia-born executives agreed, in 2000, to pay nearly \$200 million to settle a class-action lawsuit brought by 2000 African-American employees who charged the company with discrimination (Hayes, 2004: 256–62). Elsewhere, farmers in India – the fastest-growing market for Coca-Cola – accused the company of draining public groundwater and ruining agriculture in their villages. In Mexico, the corporation aggravated class divisions among indigenous peoples in the state of Chiapas by granting concessions to religious elders, who distributed Coca-Cola during festivities that once used cane alcohol in ceremonies dedicated to the gods (Nash, 2006). And in Colombia, workers at several bottling plants alleged that management colluded with illegal paramilitary organizations to threaten and murder trade unionists.¹ Their charges echoed those of Guatemalan workers, who challenged the multinational's ferocious anti-union policies in the 1970s and 1980s, and who

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coined the slogan 'Coca-Cola has the flavor of blood' to urge consumers not to drink it (Levenson-Estrada, 1994: 202).

These claims and accusations are deeply ironic in light of the company's assertion that 'Whatever is true in your life, Coca-Cola is right there with you'. They raise questions about how neoliberal capitalism reconfigures the social relations of work and the organization of production, and how political violence and personal insecurity give rise to new forms of labor regulation. They also encourage us to think about what kinds of oppositional politics are possible at the dawn of the 21st century. Several scholars have explored how the reorganization of production and the emergence of new understandings of class, gender and ethnicity are reshaping the terrain of political struggle (see, for example, Collins, 2003; Kasmir, 2005; Nash, 1989). Yet researchers have devoted less attention to how state terrorism operates in some settings as the handmaiden of neoliberal capitalism, fragmenting social relationships, abetting the formation of new 'democracies' in which working people have fewer rights and protections, and generating new forms of resistance.²

Harvey employs the concept of 'accumulation by dispossession' to describe the ways that states and powerful international institutions dismantle, co-opt or appropriate pre-existing social achievements in order to make productive assets available to corporations at low cost. It encompasses a range of phenomena, including the suppression of labor unions; the privatization of state, common and collective property rights; the commodification of culture and heritage; biopiracy; and the management of credit and debt (Harvey, 2003: 137–82). Harvey argues that accumulation by dispossession is a continuous process of 'enclosing the commons' that has accelerated under neoliberalism (Harvey, 2003, 2005; see also DeAngelis, 1999). Drawing on Harvey's formulation, this article examines how neoliberal state policies, corporate restructuring, and intense repression have reshaped the nature of work, unionism and collective action among Colombian Coca-Cola workers.³ Colombia is an important place to examine these issues. As many Latin American nations, led by Venezuela, have modified or moved away from neoliberalism, Colombia remains an important neoliberal outpost in South America, with its unaccountable security forces that are backed by US military aid and available to repress opposition from a growing number of dispossessed people. Colombia is also emerging as a key battleground where labor activists from many countries are fighting for the future of working people everywhere.⁴

The article first considers how, since the 1990s, the struggle between the Coca-Cola Company and SINALTRAINAL – the National Food and Beverage Workers' union that organizes Coca Cola workers⁵ – over accumulation by dispossession has intensified. The struggle turns on the definition of rights and entitlements, how they are distributed and who decides. Three separate but interrelated processes have shaped the dispossession of Coca-Cola workers. They are (a) the enactment of a series of neoliberal

state policies that mandated economic deregulation, lower tariff barriers and a new labor code that permitted the 'flexibilization' of labor; (b) a corporate strategy that draws on these policies and includes the use of subcontractors, an increase in the number of part-time employees with no benefits and the elimination of unionized jobs through plant closures; and (c) the intensification of right-wing paramilitary violence against workers from which the Coca-Cola Company benefits, and in which, unionists say, it is complicit.

These processes are based on widespread impunity, an aspect of power that allows state officials and corporate executives to enact policies and invoke definitions of legality that benefit multinational corporations and drive working people into poverty without suffering negative consequences themselves. Impunity also permits them to enforce these policies and laws by calling on armed groups to repress workers whose daily struggles to better living and working conditions threaten the neoliberal order that sectors of the state and the Coca-Cola Company desire. It has eroded the economic and social securities that workers won as the result of previous class struggles, and that once formed the basis of a relatively stable labor force in which male workers received a 'family wage', yearly bonuses, job security and benefits. The ties that bind workers to each other and to the Coca-Cola Company have weakened, and new divisions have emerged. Not surprisingly, union membership has dropped and workers' ability to make claims on the company has diminished.

Impunity therefore forces Coca-Cola workers to contend with both the chaos and the order that political violence and neoliberal restructuring create in their lives. They must constantly replace devastated social networks, build new relations of solidarity and recreate the institutional forms that represent these ties to ensure their daily survival.⁶ They must also heal the fractures that the violence creates within their own families. The marginalization of women from SINALTRAINAL and the Coca-Cola labor force hampers unionists' efforts to find solutions to the chaos that disrupts working people's lives. Wives and female companions are less well situated to appreciate how they can influence the political and economic agendas that facilitate assaults on SINALTRAINAL and their families. Women tend to experience unionism and the militancy of their husbands in family-centered ways, and they may blame husbands for violent attacks on relatives. Not surprisingly, new tensions and anxieties have arisen within union households that working people have difficulty handling or discussing. These pressures and worries point to the impending ruptures that people must face in situations where effective alternatives do not exist, and where people cannot change what is happening to them.⁷ They describe the profound turmoil that impunity creates among working people.

The article then explores how SINALTRAINAL, debilitated by economic restructuring and terrorized by political violence, wages a battle

against accumulation by dispossession and impunity by internationalizing its struggle and forging what Moody (1997) describes as 'social movement unionism'. Social movement unionism is a concept that extends union activism beyond the workplace to include other organizations of working people, such as public sector workers, neighborhood associations and social movements, in a fight against social and economic inequality. Such broad-based activism has long characterized certain sectors of the Colombian labor movement (for example, Delgado, 2006), as well as unions elsewhere at particular historical junctures (for example, Eley, 2002; Seidman, 1994), but it has not figured in the activities of broad sectors of the Colombian and US labor movements, which have tended to focus on narrow, bread-and-butter issues. Although this strategy appeared to work – at least for a limited number of workers in certain industries – economic restructuring and new, government-supported trade agreements have given corporations more power over their workforces. Social movement unionism arises from the recognition that increasingly powerless industrial unions constitute a dwindling minority of the working class, and that extensive political alliances beyond the shop floor are necessary for working people to overcome the decline in working and living conditions (Fantasia and Voss, 2004; Moody, 1997).

SINALTRAINAL's leadership has internationalized its conflict with the Coca-Cola Company as a human rights issue through the development of new relationships with trade unions, student organizations, lawyers, solidarity groups and intellectuals in various countries, and it has also forged alliances with various beleaguered groups in Colombia. Through these alliances, SINALTRAINAL seeks to overcome the social fragmentation and chaos generated by years of violence and economic turmoil. The union advances a human rights agenda that blends a demand for the individual right to life with a class-based concern for economic justice. SINALTRAINAL thus sidesteps the elitism of some mainstream human rights activism, which says little about the inequalities and forms of dispossession generated by neoliberalism,⁸ and it avoids the disillusionment with human rights expressed by many poor and working-class Latin Americans for whom 'human rights' constitute little more than unfair state protections for thieves (see, for example, Snodgrass Godoy, 2005; Goldstein, forthcoming). Yet it has little to say about the particular vulnerabilities of working-class women. The article examines the problems, possibilities and new tensions that emerged from the union's internationalism.

Neoliberalism, political violence and Coca-Cola in Colombia

Neoliberalism arrived relatively late in Colombia. This was because, unlike many debt-ridden Latin American countries that experienced severe economic decline in the 1980s, Colombia had not borrowed large sums of money, and its economy remained relatively healthy during a regional

economic crisis that marked the 1980s as the 'lost decade of development'. In addition, powerful industrialists, especially in Medellín, continued to back protectionist trade policies and opposed the enactment of a neoliberal trade regime. By the end of the 1980s, however, splits appeared in the protectionist ranks and a consensus on the liberalization of the economy began to emerge. Powerful new conglomerates within the financial, agro-export and telecommunications sectors came to dominate the economy and advocate a free-trade agenda. They were joined by a small but influential group of neoliberal, Colombian-trained economists who constituted a pool of experts that advised successive Colombian governments on economic issues.⁹

US pressure and the Colombian government's desire to receive US military aid to combat newly powerful drug cartels and a growing guerrilla insurgency also prompted the turn to neoliberalism. Drug lords had launched an urban bombing campaign to deter the government from extraditing suspected cocaine traffickers to the United States, and the country's oldest guerrilla group – the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) – had grown into a well-armed force with thousands of fighters by taxing the lucrative profits flowing from Colombia's burgeoning coca fields. The administration of César Gaviria (1990–94) agreed to 'open' the Colombian economy to foreign investment in exchange for a substantial cut of the \$2.2 billion Andean Initiative that was proffered by President George Bush, Sr. (Leech, 2004).

The advent of neoliberalism and the end of the Cold War presented the Coca-Cola Company with new possibilities for global expansion. The collapse of Soviet and Eastern European communism opened vast new swaths of territory for the expansion of Coca-Cola, while falling trade barriers and government deregulation in Latin American, Asia and Africa permitted higher prices, reduced taxes on the imported brown syrup that forms the basis of the soft drink, and larger package sizes. The Coca-Cola Company launched an aggressive campaign to buy out local bottlers whose limited autonomy had long frustrated the desire of Atlanta-based corporate executives for uniform policies and strategies to guide the corporation's global operations. It purchased family-operated franchises – or drove them out of business – and then dismantled their operations and incorporated them into a few large 'anchor bottlers', which would theoretically produce soft drinks more efficiently and at lower cost for the company's burgeoning empire. By 1999, there were 11 anchor bottlers, including Coca-Cola Enterprises in the United States, South Africa's SABCO and Mexico's FEMSA. As local franchises came under the control of the anchor bottlers, jobs disappeared and unproductive plants closed (see Hayes, 2004: 140–59; Pendergast, 2000: 333).

The company initially granted the Miami-based bottler PANAMCO control over the Colombian market. PANAMCO acquired 17 of the 20 Colombian franchises by the mid-1990s, and it then merged with a large Mexican bottler, FEMSA, in 2002. The new FEMSA-PANAMCO hybrid

became the Coca-Cola Company's anchor bottler for Latin America, where it controlled 40 percent of sales. In 2003, FEMSA executives shut down production lines in 11 of their 16 bottling facilities and concentrated the manufacture of soft drinks for the domestic market in five 'megaplants' in the cities of Bogotá, Barranquilla, Bucaramanga, Calí and Medellín. This decision led to the firing or the forced retirement of nearly 3000 workers, and it was facilitated by new labor legislation that granted employers the right to hire workers for limited periods, terminate their services briefly and then rehire them for another short period, depriving them of job security and benefits.

The transformations at Coca-Cola reflected the broader reconfiguration of the Colombian economy. Cuts in tariffs and investment laws that promised to treat foreign capital the same as national capital opened the country to world competition and threw the economy into a nose-dive. Deregulation and the reduction of tariff barriers exposed domestic industries to unbridled competition from highly capitalized multinational corporations, and the flood of cheap imports wiped out many small and medium-sized Colombian businesses. The proportion of salaried workers dropped from 37.1 percent of the workforce in 1992 to 30.7 percent in 2000. At the same time, the privatization of state-owned enterprises eliminated public-sector unions, and, together with the elimination of state subsidies and cuts in public services, aggravated unemployment. The agricultural sector, which once exported a surplus, contracted, and the country became an importer of basic grains. Only the 'informal economy' expanded. Drug trafficking or the unlawful cultivation of coca leaves became the only viable economic alternative for many people (ENS, 2002).

Not surprisingly, considerable resistance accompanied these transformations. The opposition of unions and peasant organizations intertwined with an enormous increase in common crime and an intensifying civil war. In the last five years of the 20th century, thousands of Colombians died and over 2 million people were displaced from their homes (Rossiasco, 2003). Most of the 28,000 annual murders in recent years arose from rampant urban violence and the economic injustice that fed it (Leech, 2004), but political violence claimed the lives of thousands of unionists, peasants, human rights advocates, left-wing political party members, lawyers and journalists. Right-wing paramilitaries targeted labor leaders with particular ferocity.

Some 4000 trade unionists of the Central Unitaria de Trabajadores (CUT) – the country's largest trade union confederation – died between the CUT's formation in 1986 and 2003, and human rights organizations blamed paramilitaries for the vast majority of the assassinations.¹⁰ Paramilitaries murdered nearly all of the confederation's founders. Hundreds of other unionists were threatened, forced into exile, displaced from their jobs, attacked, detained, tortured and kidnapped. Most of the rights violations were connected to specific labor conflicts, such as strikes, protests

and contract negotiations, in which selective assassinations, arbitrary arrests, detentions, unlawful raids and anonymous threats were tools of labor management. Targeted and discriminate violence led not only to the death, exile and displacement of hundreds of Colombian workers. It also contributed to a climate of anti-unionism in which trade unions were associated with guerrilla insurgencies and unable to exercise their right to free association. Union membership nationwide fell from 12 percent of the workforce in the mid-1990s to 3.2 percent in 2004 (ENS, 2002), and Colombia earned a reputation as the most dangerous country in the world to be a trade unionist.

Paramilitarism has a long history in Colombia,¹¹ and contemporary groups have diverse origins: some emerged as the private armies of well-known drug traffickers for whom they resolved disputes; others organized to protect ranchers from left-wing guerrillas in the conflicted Magdalena Medio region; still others grew out of legal self-defense groups established by President Alvaro Uribe when he was governor of Antioquia province (Palacios, 1990; R. Vargas, 2004). A series of political transformations in the 1980s spurred the growth and national-level coordination of these disparate entities. The emergence of the left-wing Patriotic Union political party, and the unification, in 1986, of the trade union movement under the umbrella of the CUT symbolized the resurgent power of social movements. At the same time, the decentralization of political power, including the first mayoral elections in 1988, opened political space at the local level for previously excluded social groups, and peace talks with the FARC initiated by President Belisario Bentancur (1982–8) raised expectations about the incorporation of the insurgents and their demands within the political system. These developments threatened traditional elites and newly rich drug traffickers-turned-landlords, who feared that the balance of power would shift to favor the insurgents and their sympathizers. They also worried the armed forces, who strongly opposed peace talks with the guerrillas, and prompted closer collaboration between regional elites, sectors of the armed forces and disparate paramilitary groups in an intensifying 'dirty war' against the guerrillas and social movements seeking to reform Colombian society (Romero, 2003). The primary victims of this dirty war were civilian non-combatants, including trade unionists, teachers, peasants and human rights advocates.

The paramilitaries became a loosely knit, national force in 1997, when former drug cartel enforcer Carlos Castaño united various regional entities under the umbrella of the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC), and the paramilitary–military relationship emerged from what Human Rights Watch (HRW) calls a 'strategy of impunity' in which:

... supposedly phantom paramilitaries that the military claims it can neither identify, locate, nor control take the blame for massacres and forced disappearances, allowing the military to evade responsibility ... for tactics taught, employed, and supported by the armed forces, but which they do not openly endorse. (HRW, 1996: 61)

Although the government began to negotiate the demobilization of some groups in 2002, it demonstrated little interest in holding commanders accountable for serious human rights crimes, dismantling their operations or providing reparations to victims.¹² Because paramilitaries targeted the supposed support base of guerrilla groups and only rarely attacked the state and its security forces, critics argued that what the government means by 'ending hostilities' is not clear (Garcia-Peña, 2005); indeed, paramilitaries have continued to kill and 'disappear' civilians, even after the enactment, in 2005, of the controversial 'Justice and Peace Law' and the highly public 'demobilizations' of various groups.

Unlike the insurgents of the FARC and the National Liberation Army (ELN), the paramilitaries do not oppose the activities of multinational corporations. As Richani observes, 'This allows for an affinity between the AUC and foreign companies, particularly those invested in areas of conflict' (2005: 130). What this 'affinity' means is not always clear, but journalist Steven Dudley (2004: 201) notes that paramilitary commanders repeatedly told him that they protected the business interests of international corporations and had built bases near Coca-Cola bottling plants. It is therefore not surprising that paramilitaries have taken aim at SINALTRAINAL – an affiliate of the CUT known for its socialist orientation – for over a decade and continue to pose a threat to its members. They have murdered eight Coca-Cola workers and threatened, kidnapped and harassed dozens of others. When union leaders refuse to give in to the intimidation, the paramilitaries may go after their relatives. SINALTRAINAL understands the attacks as an effort to exterminate the union. The Coca-Cola Company acknowledges the human rights violations, but officials explain away the violence as a product of Colombia's intractable civil war.¹³ Unionists, however, argue that murdered workers are not the product of random violence. The deaths, they say, are the result of a calculated and selective strategy carried out by sectors of the state, allied paramilitaries and the Coca-Cola Company to weaken and eliminate trade unions.¹⁴

Coca-Cola and labor restructuring in Colombia

When the Coca-Cola Company set out to reorganize its bottling operations in Colombia and elsewhere in the 1990s, it did not enjoy the luxury of some global firms – especially those in the garment industry – that could scour the world for the cheapest labor to manufacture goods primarily for North American and European consumers. The company sold soft drinks to millions of people in some 200 countries. To do so efficiently and to avoid high transportation costs, it had always engaged the practices, traditions and organizations of the workforces in countries where Coca-Cola was bottled, distributed and consumed. In Colombia, this meant inserting itself within the complex dynamics of local politics and the patterns of violence

that affected the regions where bottling plants operated. In cities such as Bucaramanga and Barrancabermeja, company officials had to contend with militant SINALTRAINAL locals, whose leaders emerged from rich traditions of leftist politics and activism, and who fought company policies despite repeated threats to their lives. In the northeast Colombian town of Carepa, however, labor unions were overwhelmed by a paramilitary offensive in the 1990s. The paramilitaries seized control of the Urabá region, where Carepa is located, and they decimated the SINALTRAINAL affiliate in 1996. They did so, according to SINALTRAINAL, with the complicity of company officials. Union leaders say that average wages in the plant then dropped from \$380 a month to \$130.

As the Coca-Cola Company consolidated and reconfigured a vast bottling network around fewer 'anchor bottlers' with broad geographical reach, it took a hard-line approach to Colombian workers that ruptured previous understandings about what constituted proper labor-management relations. Several long-time workers characterized the company in the 1970s and early 1980s as 'like a family', but the new management tactics were reminiscent of the company's take-no-prisoners strategy in Guatemala a decade earlier (see Levenson-Estrada, 1994). The company refused to recognize collective bargaining rights, as it closed plants and consolidated production. It stopped contracting laborers directly to avoid paying the 'family' wages and benefits that had enabled workers to lead relatively comfortable lives for many years. It pushed long-time workers into retirement by offering them increased severance payments in exchange for their agreement to quit, and it outsourced hiring to over 50 so-called cooperatives, or third parties, that dispensed short-term contracts to workers, who, in some cases, had been downsized from the firm. New and rehired workers received low wages and few, if any, benefits.

By 2005, unionized employees accounted for scarcely 7 percent of the Coca-Cola workforce in Colombia, and they found themselves divided among a handful of unions with different strategies for dealing with the company. The Coca-Cola Company took advantage of Colombian law, which permitted the formation of multiple unions within a single enterprise, to aggravate divisions between union activists and company loyalists. It did so by encouraging a company union alternative to independent worker organizations. The unions representing Coca-Cola workers ranged from independent SINALTRAINAL – the largest and most militant, with a membership that included 314 (45 percent) of the roughly 700 unionized laborers¹⁵ – to SINALTRAINBEC – a company union with only 38 members in two plants – and SICO – a paramilitary-sponsored union that arose on the ashes of SINALTRAINAL in the town of Carepa. The company took every opportunity to promote SINALTRAINBEC and SICO as the legitimate voice of Coca-Cola workers, and it even brought the president of SINALTRAINBEC to its 2005 shareholders meeting in Wilmington, Delaware. Not surprisingly, tension developed between these unions, and

new divisions also emerged between the dwindling number of older, unionized workers with stable employment contracts and a new majority of 'flexible' workers with no representation and no benefits.

As the company closed production lines in several cities, its human resource department organized week-long meetings in local hotels where company personnel coerced workers with direct contracts to sign buy-out deals and offered them seminars on micro-enterprise creation. One employee from Girardot likened the experience to being in a 'concentration camp with food'. He explained that after a worker signed a severance agreement, company officials removed the individual from the hotel to isolate those who remained and increase the pressure on them to negotiate with the firm.¹⁶ Most workers understood that their re-employment prospects were dim in a contracting economy, and few wanted to sacrifice the benefits and the security that they once enjoyed at Coca-Cola for the risks of managing a micro-enterprise. Yet the vast majority succumbed to company pressure and accepted the agreements to leave their jobs because they saw no alternative. There were exceptions, however.

When the Coca-Cola Company ceased producing soft drinks in Villavicencio in 2002, eight union workers refused a financial settlement from the company and demanded that it find new jobs for them. The conflict wound up in court. As the Colombian judiciary deliberated on the matter, these men continued to report for work and receive a paycheck, but they spent the eight-hour shift sitting in a kiosk outside the company cafeteria with nothing to do. They pointed to former workmates who had lost everything in bad investments or who struggled long hours to keep small businesses afloat. Their observations reflected the comments of a worker in Bucaramanga who commented that:

Today, Coca-Cola tries to fire people anyway that it can. But why would anyone who is 50 or 55 years old quit? The company knows that there is no place in Colombia that would hire such an individual today. So what is the person supposed to do – sell raffle tickets?¹⁷

Another noted that, with a history of union involvement, an individual's re-employment options decreased even further. Yet the Villavicencio Eight managed to prevail and, after three years of biding their time in the corporate kiosk, they retained their jobs when a Colombian court ruled in their favor in 2006. Their case was not typical, however.

With the departure of unionized workers and those directly employed by the company, a new group of subcontracted employees entered the bottling plants in the 1990s. Hired through various 'cooperatives', or subcontracting firms, these workers represented a younger generation of new laborers, as well as downsized workers obliged by economic circumstances to return to the Coca-Cola workforce under new working conditions. They quickly discovered that the living and working conditions once characteristic of the Coca-Cola workforce had grown ever more precarious.

Subcontracted laborers earned a quarter of the wages received by their unionized counterparts. They worked up to 16 hours a day and had little control over tasks and assignments. They also bought their uniforms, paid for transportation to work, and made their own contributions to a social security fund, all of which were benefits that the company once provided to everyone. According to one person in the town of Bucaramanga:

Today, at the company, you enter the plant at five in the morning, and at five-thirty, there are 40 or 50 people at the door hoping to get an hour or two of work. And, if they get work, they then have to support their family with what they make in a couple of hours.¹⁸

As SINALTRAINAL challenged the company's policies with street demonstrations, hunger strikes and legal maneuvers, local leaders were subjected to arbitrary arrests and imprisonment, and they confronted an onslaught of threats, assassination attempts and harassment directed against them by paramilitary groups. For example, after repeated threats to his life, a worker in Barranquilla was forced to leave town in 1997, after an intruder broke into his house and attempted to murder him. And, in 2000, in the city of Cúcuta, paramilitaries kidnapped another Coca-Cola worker who had participated in a demonstration against the company. In Cartagena, in 2002, an individual who identified himself as a paramilitary called the home of a SINALTRAINAL leader and spoke to the worker's 10-year-old daughter who answered the telephone. He told the little girl that if her father did not leave town, the paramilitaries would murder him. The worker estimated that the union local denounced at least 11 additional threats over the next two years. The complaints that SINALTRAINAL filed with authorities for these and other violations accumulated in a file that grew fatter by the month, but perpetrators were rarely arrested for the crimes and there were never any convictions. The violence, and the widespread impunity that facilitated it, hastened the reorganization of labor relations in Coca-Cola bottling plants.

The departure of long-time unionists through buy-outs and forced retirement, and the increase in the number of temporary workers, eroded the ties of familiarity that once bound workers to each other, and fed the fears of unionized workers that paramilitaries operated in their midst. These fears were well founded. Despite tight security and an extensive surveillance system in the bottling plants, paramilitary graffiti frequently appeared on plant walls and signed death threats materialized in workers' lockers, but verifying fears about suspicious workmates could be extremely difficult. Unionists had no way of resolving the gnawing doubts and anxieties that limited their ability to organize opposition to company policies. Even when they observed managers conversing with known paramilitaries, they could do very little (see Gill, 2005).

SINALTRAINAL leaders increasingly found themselves caught in a social 'order' that had come unhinged. Unable to protect their families or safeguard union members, they struggled with threats to their own lives

that left them hemmed in by bodyguards and transformed into what Steven Dudley (2004) vividly describes as 'walking ghosts'. One man recounted the unbearable lack of privacy when 'one bodyguard is sleeping in the bed next to you and another one accompanies you to pee'.¹⁹ All desired to live normal lives – playing soccer, going out with their wives and children without fear of attack, and walking down the streets of their neighborhoods without the constant presence of bodyguards – but such a life had long ceased to be possible for them. Dedication to the union and the memory of murdered friends kept labor leaders going, but their union activism left them exposed to continuous threats and plagued by ulcers, insomnia, and anxiety. Caught between life and death, union leaders could do little more than denounce the threats and labor code violations and then watch as the state and the Coca-Cola Company did nothing.

The violence directed against Coca-Cola workers extends beyond the workplace into the homes of unionists. Paramilitaries pressure union leaders, who often benefit from the protection of bodyguards and armored cars, into renouncing their positions by targeting vulnerable family members. The psychological consequences of these attacks are devastating to both individuals and families. Threatened families become isolated from neighbors and friends, who fear for their own safety if they are seen associating too closely with targeted individuals. This social isolation comes at a time when vulnerable individuals most need the support and understanding of others. The violence also provokes feelings of guilt and impotence among male unionists, who feel responsible for family members whom they are unable to protect, and it stokes anger among relatives, who may blame unionists and SINALTRAINAL for their difficulties. It is not unusual for wives to fault their husbands and the union for the harassment, murder or kidnapping of relatives, the inability of children to enjoy normal childhoods, and the severe restrictions that the threat of violence places on their social activities. In 2004, for example, as Coca-Cola workers in seven cities participated in a hunger strike to protest the closure of several bottling operations, paramilitaries in Bucaramanga sent a message to local SINALTRAINAL president Efraín Guerrero by killing his brother- and sister-in-law and their son. The murders were an enormous tragedy for Guerrero and his wife, who adopted a nephew orphaned by the attack, and they generated intense familial pressure on Guerrero and recriminations about his union activities.

Because wives and female companions do not have access to the institutional and collective spaces available to men, they have greater difficulty comprehending the attacks on their families as the result of specific agendas that they can change. Women do not work in the production and distribution of Coca-Cola. They participate minimally in SINALTRAINAL, and they are not part of the daily negotiation of labor politics and opposition to the Coca-Cola Company. Not surprisingly, women understand union politics and the labor militancy of their husbands in individual and

family-centered ways. They worry that men will lose their jobs, and they are constantly afraid that their husbands will be injured or killed, leaving a wife alone to fend for the children. These anxieties are heightened by the fact that labor leaders spend a lot of time away from home, attending meetings, traveling around the country, and speaking abroad, sometimes for months at a time. Although women's angst points to their vulnerability within the process of political struggle, women understand that withdrawing from SINALTRAINAL will neither remove their husbands from paramilitary hit lists nor make their families any safer, and they appreciate that a husband's resignation from Coca-Cola does not present a viable economic option for their families, given the degraded nature of Colombia's neoliberal economy. Union families must therefore deal with constant fear and uncertainty in the absence of alternatives, and they must cope with feelings of desperation, hopelessness and anger that are difficult to manage alone.²⁰

The security forces understand their dilemmas and are quick to exploit them. For example, in August 2006, a SINALTRAINAL member was murdered in Barrancabermeja, an oil town in the conflicted Magdalena Medio region. The police chief immediately suggested that the murder arose from a domestic dispute, because the assailant was related to the dead man's spouse, and he did not hesitate to share his speculations with the local newspaper, which placed the police theory on the front page, implying that the murdered unionist had abused his wife. What the police and the newspaper failed to mention, however, was that the victim had received numerous death threats because of his union activities, and that the assassin was a soldier attached to an army base in the neighboring town.

Internationalizing the struggle

The violence directed against SINALTRAINAL members and their families undercut men's abilities to protect and provide for their relatives, and the deterioration of working conditions at Coca-Cola convinced union leaders that SINALTRAINAL's very existence was at stake. Pervasive impunity precluded any hope of justice for the deaths and harassment of union members, and it left paramilitary organizations intact and empowered to continue terrorizing union activists and sympathizers. Widespread fear undermined SINALTRAINAL's ability to organize workers, who worried about what could happen if they associated too closely with the combative union, and the rise of subcontracting aggravated economic insecurity, eroded union membership and limited the utility of the strike as a weapon of resistance.

The irony of neoliberal restructuring, and the impunity-driven violence that accompanied it, was that these processes limited the usefulness of plant-level labor struggles and compelled workers to join forces with others to tackle larger objectives, which many SINALTRAINAL leaders had long

advocated. Faced with an increasingly desperate situation, SINALTRAINAL decided to internationalize its struggle against Coca-Cola by seeking the support of trade unions, student organizations, lawyers, solidarity groups and intellectuals abroad. Through these connections, it circumvented the Colombian state, its corrupt judiciary, and local Coca-Cola managers and built an international movement that framed the labor conflict as a human rights issue and a battle against impunity.

SINALTRAINAL's internationalism overcame the dichotomy present in much mainstream human rights discourse in which individual rights take precedence over concerns for equality. Despite ongoing political activism around the right to water, housing, HIV/AIDS drugs and so forth, some human rights organizations, especially in the United States, condemn only the most abhorrent acts of cruelty, such as murder, torture and rape, while leaving routine economic exploitation unacknowledged. Denouncing heinous human rights violations is certainly crucial and important work. Yet limiting the discussion of human rights to only extreme forms of violence sets up a distinction between unacceptable violence and quotidian, normalized acts of oppression, and it restricts efforts to understand their relationship.²¹ As Harvey notes, 'the limited objectives of many rights discourses . . . makes it all too easy to absorb them into the neoliberal frame' (2005: 178) and neoliberalism's exclusive concern with the individual. The internationalism of SINALTRAINAL sets forth an expanded conceptualization of human rights that combines a demand for security and the individual right to life with the class-based goal of economic equality.

In the United States, the union's international struggle had various interlocking dimensions, including a lawsuit filed in 2001 against the Coca-Cola Company in US federal court, a 'corporate campaign' initiated in 2003 to pressure the Coca-Cola Company in multiple ways, and student activism to remove Coca-Cola beverages from university campuses. The lawsuit represented the opening gambit in the United States. The centerpiece of the legal case that SINALTRAINAL and its allies – the Pittsburgh-based US Steel Workers and the Washington-based International Labor Rights Fund – built against the corporation was the 1996 assassination of union local president Isidro Gil. On the morning of 5 December 1996, two paramilitaries riding a high-powered motorcycle shot Gil as he stood in the doorway of a bottling plant in the town of Carepa. Another member of the union's directorate, Luis Adolfo Cardona, barely evaded an attempt on his life the same day when paramilitaries tried to kidnap him. The paramilitaries then broke into the union's offices, looted files and set fire to the premises, prompting fearful workers to flee town. As the mayhem unfolded, a company supervisor approached a member of the union directorate and informed him of a meeting proposed by the paramilitaries in which unionists would be given 'another chance to keep working in the factory'. Those who attended were shown a hit list of presumed subversives and issued with a warning: to keep their jobs, they would have to abide by

the paramilitaries' rules, which made no allowance for SINALTRAINAL. The paramilitaries subsequently occupied the plant, where they wrote letters of resignation on the company's computers, forced workers to sign them, and then faxed the letters to SINALTRAINAL's national headquarters in Bogotá. SINALTRAINAL thus ceased to exist in Carepa, and the entire directorate was displaced from town.

Shaken union leaders regrouped in Bogotá and lodged a complaint with the Ministry of Labor, where they eventually met with a company representative. According to one of those present, the men were told that 'the paramilitaries have control of the plant . . . and [workers] would not get anything from them . . . [she told us that] if we wished, we could go to Carepa and talk to them personally'. The company then refused to reassign union leaders to safer plants, and the workers were subsequently fired for 'abandoning their place of work'.²²

The lawsuit filed against Coca-Cola in US federal court charges that the corporation and its Colombian bottler collaborated with paramilitaries to murder and terrorize workers in several cities, and it draws on the Alien Tort Claims Statute, an obscure 18th-century law that allows foreigners to bring suit against US citizens for the most heinous human rights violations, such as genocide, torture and extrajudicial killings.²³ The Coca-Cola Company denies any responsibility for wrongdoing because, it claims, the corporation neither owns nor controls the Colombian bottlers and is therefore not liable for actions that occurred in the bottling plants. Hiding behind layers of subcontracting is a common defense used by global corporations. It allows them to claim that they do not employ workers and that subcontractors are the sole employers, and thus enables them to avoid any responsibility for providing minimum wages, health care, safe working environments or negotiating in good faith with labor unions. The SINALTRAINAL lawsuit challenges this strategy. Unionists and their lawyers note that the parent company regulates all aspects of production and distribution of the soft drink in Colombia and cannot be distinguished from the local bottlers.²⁴

By targeting the labor practices of the Coca-Cola Company, the lawsuit casts a shadow on the sparkling image of Coca-Cola, an image that Coke executives, like their counterparts in Nike, McDonalds and other global corporations, have invested millions of dollars to create. Known as 'branding', this corporate image-making technique equates particular commodities with positive cultural experiences and entangles them with consumers' identities. The practice took off in the 1990s, and, according to Klein, 'what makes nineties-style branding different is that it takes . . . associations out of the representational realm and makes them lived reality. So the goal is not merely to have child actors drinking Coke in a TV commercial, but for students to brainstorm Coke's next ad campaign in an English class' (2002: 29). Yet because the reputations of 'branded' commodities are closely tied to the companies that sell them, corporations

become vulnerable when evidence emerges that a product's carefully crafted image has little in common with the working conditions in which it is manufactured.

As the initial publicity surrounding the lawsuit died down, New York City-based Corporate Campaign Inc. assumed the task of keeping allegations about Coca-Cola's labor practices in the public eye and placing the Colombian events within the broader context of Coca-Cola's treatment of its workforce around the world. Its director, veteran labor activist Ray Rogers, believed that 'withholding your labor is only one way to fight back'.²⁵ He developed a 'corporate campaign' to diminish the soft drink's cachet among US consumers and to support the demands of SINALTRAINAL. The corporate campaign concept emerged from Rogers' successful, 1970s organizing drive to unionize the J.P. Stevens Company in the US South. It combined a variety of tactics, such as targeted consumer boycotts, pressure on interlocking business and financial sectors to isolate the corporation, and broadening the issues beyond labor relations to moral and social matters. For example, Rogers targeted Sun Trust Bank, the Coca-Cola Company's main creditor. He exposed the interwoven directorates of the corporation and the bank, and then used the allegations of human rights violations to encourage large investors – especially labor unions – to close their accounts with Sun Trust. Together with United Students Against Sweatshops, Rogers also supported an initiative to remove Coca-Cola products from colleges, universities and the halls of organized labor, and he developed a series of anti-Coca-Cola leaflets and glossy posters. One poster featured dead unionists floating in a glass of Coke with a slogan that read 'Undrinkable, Unthinkable'. Another displayed the feet of a corpse with a tag hung on one toe that said 'union leader' and came with the slogan: 'Ice Cold: Killer Coke Can't Hide Its Crimes in Colombia'.

The United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) represented a third – and increasingly important – ally of SINALTRAINAL. Born out of campus struggles in the 1990s to hold giant apparel manufacturers accountable for their labor practices abroad, USAS initiated a campaign to pressure universities to cut, or refuse to renew, contracts with the Coca-Cola Company as a way to pressure the corporation to change its labor practices. One of its national coordinators, Camilo Romero, played a key part in organizing student opposition to Coca-Cola and in promoting the concerns of SINALTRAINAL in the United States. A sociology major from the University of California–Berkeley, Romero could not only speak to US students in their own terms, but his Colombian roots and appropriately accented Spanish, complete with a range of slang expressions, enabled him to develop close relationships with many SINALTRAINAL leaders, whom he accompanied on speaking tours of the United States.

SINALTRAINAL and its various international supporters thus set out to turn the Coca-Cola brand into a sign of barbarity. The union and its supporters held 'public meetings' in Atlanta – site of the Coca-Cola Company's corporate headquarters – Brussels and Bogota, where noisy

demonstrators condemned the multinational's policies, and the idea of a boycott against Coca-Cola emerged. SINALTRAINAL leaders campaigned at World Social Forums in Brazil, India and Venezuela. They also participated in frequent international speaking tours in the United States and Europe, where they addressed audiences in high schools, labor unions and universities. These tours removed them temporarily from the violence in Colombia and allowed them to recount their harrowing stories to sympathetic groups.

By 2005, their efforts started to pay off. Although the lawsuit continued its slow journey through the legal system, student activism and the corporate campaign had gained traction. Some 16 US colleges and universities, and five in Ireland, Canada and Italy, had responded to the call to boycott by canceling contracts with the Coca-Cola Company. And, in the United States alone, there were active student campaigns in many institutions (Blandings, 2005). The student activism did not go unnoticed by company officials, who began to send representatives from corporate headquarters in Atlanta to college campuses to defend the company's battered reputation and to reassure nervous administrators. Under pressure from all sides, several university officials floated the idea of establishing a commission to conduct an independent investigation of the company's labor practices in Colombia. Although many in the anti-Coke movement interpreted the administrators' move as an attempt to stall the boycott momentum, they agreed to go along with the proposal.

At a meeting in Chicago in July 2005, USAS students, several university administrators, spokespersons from Coca-Cola and representatives from the labor movement met to discuss the formation of a commission. Reaching an agreement proved extremely difficult. Over the next several months, the company dragged its feet by failing to meet deadlines, and blocked efforts to promote a genuinely independent investigation, insisting that the commission not investigate the murders of trade unionists in its Colombian bottling plants and demanding that anything uncovered by an investigation be inadmissible in the ongoing court case. The process, according to students, also enabled company officials to make deceptive, unchallenged claims to university administrators about the Coca-Cola Company's efforts to address human rights abuses, even as new evidence of abusive practices was emerging in Turkey. USAS accused company representatives of negotiating in bad faith and withdrew from the discussions. The momentum for a commission then began to dissipate and, by the end of the year, New York University and the University of Michigan had cut contracts with the soft drink producer and handed the anti-Coke movement its biggest victory. Yet by April 2006 the University of Michigan had allowed Coke back on campus, pending the outcome of a workplace evaluation that the International Labor Organization agreed to undertake at the request of Coca-Cola.

From the students' perspective, the anti-Coca-Cola campaign aimed to do more than break consumer addiction to Coca-Cola. The boycott

constituted part of a broader agenda to promote 'ethical contracting' by college and universities. SINALTRAINAL, for its part, hoped to educate citizens in the United States and Europe about labor conditions in Colombia, to incorporate people from various walks of life into a transnational movement against neoliberalism and to end impunity in Colombia. As part of this program, SINALTRAINAL organized, in 2004, a 'Caravan for Life', in which international activists from the anti-Coke campaign in the United States, Europe and Latin America visited Colombia, traveled to different regions of the country, and reported critically on the social, political and economic conditions that they found. Activists then returned home to continue the task of organization and education. Such events served a number of purposes: they focused Colombian media attention on issues it preferred to ignore; they strengthened ties between SINALTRAINAL and its international supporters; and they gave SINALTRAINAL's foreign backers the social, cultural and political knowledge to carry out solidarity work in their home countries. By constructing transnational solidarity networks, leaders hoped that international pressure would strengthen their bargaining position locally, limit the violence directed against workers and focus attention on the unwillingness of the Colombian state to hold paramilitaries accountable and provide reparations to victims. As SINALTRAINAL's president Javier Correa explained, 'International solidarity is fundamental for us right now. We are unable to exist as a union or organize independently without it.'²⁶ Although SINALTRAINAL's internationalism was promoted by the lack of justice and accountability in Colombia, it flowed easily from the union's vision of itself and its fight for justice.

SINALTRAINAL leaders describe their orientation as 'classist', and some of its leaders characterize the organization less as a union than a social movement. Since its emergence in the 1980s from a more docile, company union, SINALTRAINAL has concerned itself with a broad array of social, political and economic issues that affect poor people throughout Colombia. For example, the union proposes a national food security plan that includes an agrarian reform, the nationalization of monopolies, free access to agricultural credit and self-sufficiency in basic food crops.²⁷ It offers concrete solidarity to neighborhood organizations and displaced peasants who have taken up residence in the cities, and it backs the struggles of public sector unions against the drive to privatize. SINALTRAINAL also accommodates representatives from an array of peasant, worker and international organizations in its Bogotá headquarters when they have business in the capital. Over evening beers and early morning breakfasts, activists exchange experiences, offer assistance and report on events in different parts of Colombia and the world. In these ways, SINALTRAINAL commits itself to a wider social and political struggle against accumulation by dispossession that affects an array of people.

The union's international activism forces unionists to confront new tensions, however. As SINALTRAINAL marshaled evidence in 2000 for a

lawsuit against Coca-Cola, labor leaders had to decide which cases of rights violations to privilege. Coca-Cola workers had experienced anti-union violence for many years. Although Isidro Gil's assassination was not the first time paramilitaries or state security forces attacked SINALTRAINAL members, US labor lawyers were reluctant to contextualize the human rights violations in reference to long-term class struggles with the Coca-Cola Company or the violent history of 20th-century Colombian capitalism for fear of diluting the case. The lawsuit, despite its potential benefits to the plaintiffs, focused on individual cases of rights violations and could not by itself provide more than a partial solution to widespread exploitation. Moreover, based on legal advice from US attorneys, unionists concluded that the assassination of Gil and several other violations that occurred the same year were more likely to attract international attention and galvanize popular support for the union than older instances of rights violations, and they tailored their presentations abroad and to visiting labor delegations to reflect SINALTRAINAL's 'recent history'. Yet, despite the merits of this approach, the exclusion of pre-1996 history, especially the quotidian economic battles that workers constantly fought with the corporation, misrepresented SINALTRAINAL's stormy relationship with the Coca-Cola Company, and it downplayed or silenced the suffering of some of the union's oldest members.

Building an international movement brought other risks and pitfalls. On the one hand, developing transnational alliances highlights the human rights violations suffered by workers and increases pressure on the Coca-Cola Company to account for abuses and better protect its workforce. The warm reception given to leaders abroad and the enthusiastic delegations of human rights activists that the union receives in Colombia fill workers with optimism and boost union morale. Perhaps most importantly, however, SINALTRAINAL leaders maintain that some of them are still alive because of the letters, faxes and emails sent to corporate and government officials by international activists who denounced the deplorable violence targeted against unionists. On the other hand, promoting international solidarity raises the stakes for the union and its leaders. The Coca-Cola Company has responded to the union's lawsuit by filing slander charges against SINALTRAINAL leaders in a Colombian court, obliging them to waste precious time and money defending themselves, and by forcing workers to listen to managers read statements that characterize the union's charges as 'reckless'. In carefully coded language, company officials also imply that SINALTRAINAL is little more than a guerrilla organization. 'SINALTRAINAL', according to one Colombian spokesperson, 'only wants conflict. It is anti-[government], anti-globalization, anti-[government] security plan, and anti-Plan Colombia.'²⁸

Forging transnational alliances also obliges union leaders and their international allies to deal with new challenges that, as Edelman (2005) notes, include different histories, problems, languages, political orientations

and leadership styles. The networks that activists create within and between countries are often very ephemeral and do not always work. For example, ongoing communication via the Internet and email is difficult when individuals are unable to speak the other's language. Moreover, the US-based alliance of students, labor unions, lawyers and corporate campaigners is fraught with tension between white, old-Left labor activists and a younger generation of Latino campus organizers. In Colombia, the time-consuming work of international organizing pulls SINALTRAINAL leaders away from their biggest and most basic struggles that continue to take place in Colombia. Unionists know that SINALTRAINAL must reverse the loss of members and grow if it is to wield any power with the Coca-Cola Company. Indeed, organizing temporary workers, addressing the pressing needs of rank-and-file members and responding to the latest company outrages are immediate concerns that require the constant attention of labor leaders.

Some in the rank-and-file question SINALTRAINAL's commitment to transnational activism and the boycott of Coca-Cola products. They believe that if the boycott strikes a blow against the company's share of the soft drink market, working people like themselves, who bottle and distribute the beverage, are most likely to suffer. Colombia's main trade union confederation, the Central Unitaria de Trabajadores (CUT), holds the same position and has not supported SINALTRAINAL. In the United States, some members of the US Steel Workers' Union and the Teamsters Union, whose members distribute Coca-Cola products, share similar views, and, until recently, they have been less enthusiastic about the boycott than condemning the human rights violations addressed in the court case. To a certain degree, such sentiments explain why North American and European college students are the most vigorous backers of the boycott, and they are used by the company to exploit divisions among its critics. As one Colombian spokesperson insisted, 'Several affiliates [of SINALTRAINAL] are not happy with how the national leadership is handling the anti-Coca Cola campaign. [This is because] SINALTRAINAL is putting at risk the jobs of the people ... while the national leaders tour the world.'²⁹

Even under the best circumstances, organizing non-union workers is a daunting task that requires great discretion and the creation of clandestine networks. It demands person-to-person contact inside and outside the workplace, and the painstaking toil of cultivating rank-and-file leaders in each bottling plant. SINALTRAINAL has adopted a policy that permits any worker, regardless of their contract, to join the organization, and SINALTRAINAL leaders have pressured the company to pay subcontracted workers the same wages as direct hires. In this way, the leadership tries to demonstrate to subcontracted, non-unionized employees that a union can bring advantages to them. SINALTRAINAL leaders also understand that the rank-and-file must play a part in setting the union's agenda if workers are going to invest their time and energy into the organization. Nevertheless,

organizing the unorganized, developing union democracy and promoting leadership accountability is extremely complicated in the world of Colombian Coca-Cola workers, where violence is the solvent of trust and peaceful efforts to improve workers' lives are repressed with extreme brutality. Violence and fear undermine internal debate and corrode the democratic potential of elections.

Conclusion

The case of SINALTRAINAL demonstrates all too clearly how political violence and the intensification of accumulation by dispossession have generated new ruptures and vulnerabilities in the lives of Coca-Cola workers and their families. Many Coca-Cola workers experience daily life less as a cohesive, relatively predictable unfolding of events than as an untenable, anxiety-ridden existence that episodically descends into social psychosis. As neoliberalism has aggravated economic insecurity, political violence has isolated people from each other and opened up new possibilities for capital accumulation by creating chaos in workers' lives and exposing them to new forms of exploitations. Workers' living conditions illustrate how men and women must construct an array of social relationships to contend with both the havoc of daily life and the particular order sought by the Coca-Cola Company and the Colombian state. They also demonstrate the complexities of rebuilding social life and viable unions in situations where people have little control over what is happening and enjoy few alternatives.

As union leaders contend with the transformations wrought by the violent restructuring of labor relations in Colombia and simultaneously try to build international alliances, they are pulled in many directions. Unionists endure the impossible dilemmas that fear and violence generate within their families, but they are particularly alarmed by the erosion of male bonds of solidarity and sociality brought on by the turbulent restructuring of the Coca-Cola labor force. The degradation of work at Coca-Cola diminishes the strength of SINALTRAINAL, and its ability to make demands on the company and the Colombian state. It corrodes men's ability to protect and provide for their families, but potentially opens up new possibilities for rethinking traditional notions of masculinity.

As SINALTRAINAL leaders have internationalized their struggle against the Coca-Cola Company, they have forged alliances that present new opportunities and new challenges. Male unionists evaluate the struggle in terms of their ability to build new transnational ties, institutional alliances and social collectivities, but women assess the price of union activism more in terms of increasing isolation and family dysfunction. How to confront the profound changes wrought by the political and economic violence of neoliberalism is a question that working people will continue

to develop and refine. At stake are the kinds of relationships, institutions and forms of solidarity that they are able to build. Also at stake are the ways that working people can use these relationships and institutional forms to overcome the social fragmentation and the forms of accumulation by dispossession associated with neoliberalism, and to advance a conceptualization of rights that unites social justice and economic equality for both men and women.

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Notes

- 1 For more discussion of these cases, see: www.killercoke.org, www.cokewatch.org and www.indiaresource.org (consulted October 2006).
- 2 See Friedman (2003), Grandin (2004), Hollander (1997), Narotzky and Smith (2006) and Winn (2004) for more discussion of the interconnections between political violence and capitalism.
- 3 The analysis is based on fieldwork conducted in Colombia during the summers of 2004, 2005 and 2006. I interviewed Coca-Cola workers in seven Colombian cities: Bogotá, Barrancabermeja, Cartagena, Bucaramanga, Barranquilla, Girardot and Villavicencio. These interviews included union leaders, unionized and non-unionized members of the rank and file, and former Coca-Cola workers who currently work in the informal sector. The analysis also draws on interviews with anti-Coca-Cola activists in the United States conducted during 2005.
- 4 See Chomsky (forthcoming) for an interesting discussion of new international labor activism between left-wing sectors of the US and Colombian labor movements.
- 5 SINALTRAINAL also organizes workers in Nestlé and several other firms in the food and beverage industry.
- 6 The discussion of impunity draws on Gill (2004: 163–97). See also Sider and Smith (1997) for an interesting discussion of power and processes of differentiation.
- 7 See Sider (2003: 44–58, 320–4) for an interesting discussion about how silences define the loss of coherency in working people's lives. According to Sider, a series of actual and impending ruptures increasingly shape working people's lives in situations where there are no viable alternatives or answers to what is happening to them. In such situations, people have great difficulty talking about the impossible dilemmas that they face, and, he suggests, silence 'names the sense of an unavoidable, impending, potential rupture' between today and tomorrow (2003: 322).
- 8 See, for example, Ross (2004). For a critique of mainstream human rights organizations and their conceptualization of rights, see Chandler (2002).

- 9 For discussion on the internal debates surrounding neoliberalism, see, for example, M. Vargas (1993) and Suárez (1994).
- 10 Although left-wing guerrilla groups are also charged with human rights violations, these violations are not as numerous as those committed by the paramilitaries, nor have guerrilla groups systematically targeted labor unions. Colombia's union leaders figure prominently on paramilitary hit lists because of their left-leaning politics and their criticism of neoliberalism and the policies of multinational firms.
- 11 The roots of contemporary Colombia violence emerge from the period known as 'La Violencia' (1946–53); see Roldan (2002).
- 12 The controversial 'Justice and Peace Law' passed in 2005 grants demobilized paramilitaries reduced sentences of five to eight years, even if they have committed serious human rights violations. It also provides no mechanism to compel combatants to provide information about the offences that they have perpetrated, the assets that they have acquired illegally and the decades-long support that they have received from the Colombian security forces.
- 13 See the Coca-Cola Company's web page, www.cokefacts.org, for its defense against charges of conspiring with paramilitaries to violate the rights of its workers.
- 14 The Coca-Cola Company is not the only multinational corporation that allegedly maintains ties to paramilitaries. According to Richani (2005: 130), the Drummond Corporation, British Petroleum, Occidental Oil, Silver Shadow and Defense Systems Ltd. also have links to illegal paramilitary organizations.
- 15 Data on union membership was provided by SINALTRAINAL.
- 16 Interview with Coca-Cola worker, Girardot, Colombia, July 2005.
- 17 Interview with Coca-Cola worker, Bucaramanga, Colombia, 28 May 2004.
- 18 Interview with Coca-Cola worker, Bucaramanga, Colombia, 28 May 2004.
- 19 Interview with Coca-Cola worker, Barrancabermeja, Colombia, 26 May 2004.
- 20 Tinsman (2002) discusses similar gender conflicts between men and women in Chilean rural labor politics during mid-20th-century struggles against the *latifundia* system.
- 21 For more on the limitations of human rights practice and discourse, see Harvey (2005: 175–82) and Binford (2004).
- 22 The description in the previous two paragraphs comes from Gill (2005).
- 23 The charges laid out in the lawsuit are available at the International Labor Rights Fund in Washington, DC.
- 24 In a recent study on the Coca-Cola Company, *New York Times* reporter Constance L. Hayes (2004) describes how the Coca-Cola Company wrested control away from the bottlers in the 1990s and made any distinction between the Atlanta-based giant and its local bottlers a fiction.
- 25 Interview with Ray Rogers, New York City, 22 August 2005.
- 26 Interview with Javier Correa, Bogotá, Colombia, 7 July 2005.
- 27 For a description of this plan, see: www.SINALTRAINAL.org
- 28 Interview with Pablo Largacha, Coca-Cola public relations manager, 12 July 2005, Bogotá, Colombia. Plan Colombia was a \$1.3 billion mostly military aid program begun under the Clinton administration. Although the military aid has continued under different names during the Bush administration, the US-backed anti-drug and anti-guerrilla program is still widely referred to as Plan Colombia.
- 29 Interview with Pablo Largacha, Coca-Cola public relations manager, 12 July 2005, Bogotá, Colombia.

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