

Sardi's arrest all his gang, except himself and two others, were out again. With four of the nine police commissariats in Vienna in the hands of Communist commissars, who take no orders from their Austrian superiors, such releases are not difficult to fix. Within forty-eight

hours you will find the released crooks dispensing champagne in some exotic night haunt, not ten per cent of whose clients are Viennese and not two per cent of whom have acquired honestly the hundred and thousand schilling notes they hand out with posed extravagance.

The Creeping Horror

FREDERICO HERNANDEZ

Bogota

THE CREEPING HORROR which has been stalking the world for most of the life of this generation has, as yet, no name. It has many names but not *one*. It has been called fascism, nazism, falangism, totalitarianism, nihilism, satanism, police terrorism, and tyranny. It is the most terrible of the sicknesses of our era — an era most accurately characterized, perhaps, by André Malraux when he called it “the time of contempt.”

No land is safe from the fascist sickness and it is not alien to the nature of any people; to believe otherwise is a criminal self-deception. Persons who are given to generalizing about the races and nationalities of man are hard put to pin down political terror as being peculiar to any one kind of people. If men *do* differ, to any serious degree, cer-

tainly the Slavic peoples of the plain of Great Russia and the Latin peoples of the Iberian Peninsula are different; yet both know the horror as a native growth. The Germans and the Japanese would appear to be unlike, but each nation produced an almost identical state of siege within its own boundaries by which the civil population was stripped of its human dignity and free thought was erased from the minds of men.

Now, in Colombia, a Latin American republic with a long tradition of political democracy and with more economic democracy than many other countries on that continent, this political evil has assumed almost full command. The sad fact would appear to be that the potential for this evil — which is an expression of a latent hatred that some men have for themselves — resides in all

nations and among all men; that bell which tolls for thee also sounds this ominous note.

If one examines, and searches for the motives of, the acts of violence that have become daily and nightly occurrences in Colombia in the last three years, it becomes apparent that there is a style to the terror down there that closely resembles the style of Hitler's men and Mussolini's and Franco's and Stalin's. There is the *seeking out* of victims for outrages and reprisals as though there existed a *demand* for blood and the breaking of bones and the smashing of faces which had to be satisfied, and as though there was a quota of pain and grief which must be filled; there are the seemingly senseless beatings on provocations so thin as to be immaterial; there is the swagger and chic of the executioners of violence who exult in brutality for brutality's sake — the aesthetes, one might say, of terror. There is the familiar nighttime pouncing on innocent households by armed men and, most of all, there is the contempt.

Colombians have a slang term for the armed men — “pressers,” they call them. These men, acting independently as civilians, or as police or soldiers, on behalf of the government and the Conservative Party which supports it, beat their victims with machetes, using only the flat of the blades. This suggests to the Colombians a gloomily humor-

ous equivalent of being pressed, as with a flat-iron; persons so beaten are called the “pressed.” Even this use, or misuse, of the machete — an instrument designed to hack and cut canebrake — is suggestive of contempt. In other lands that have known political terror in the style of the Twentieth century, there has been this same perversion of the use of weapons. The Nazi bravos of the S.S. pistol-whipped their victims and clubbed them with rifle butts. In New York City, the Yorkville Nazis of the Ordnungsdienst, who wore ornamental daggers in their belts, preferred to maintain “order” at their meetings with long, heavy flashlights used as truncheons. It may be part of the nihilism of the whole phenomenon that a weapon must be wrongly employed — it somehow seems to express scorn for the individual and his dignity that he should have his kidneys smashed with a rifle butt or his cheekbones fractured with the flat of a sword. There is also something a little ridiculous in being badly beaten with, say, a flashlight, or a machete, and this macabre absurdity, it may be, is felt by the beater-up, the “presser,” to remove some of the onus of guilt from his crime.

Frederico Hernandez is the pseudonym of a prominent Colombian writer who feels it would be a good idea to keep his identity secret, in case of government reprisals.

Who are the victims of the violence in Colombia? Technically, they are members or adherents, or suspected members or adherents, of the Liberal Party, but this is a very loose category; in reality, all sorts of people, including those of no political affiliation — peasants, small landholders, shopkeepers, housewives, and children — have been suddenly jumped upon, mauled, beaten, and killed for no apparent reason whatever. The Liberal Party has gradually dissolved and gone to earth since the notorious “Bogotazo” — the abortive rebellion of the masses in April, 1948, which was enkindled by the assassination of the leader of the extreme wing of the Liberal Party, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán. In the three years since that uprising, a continuous hunt has been in progress for leading members of the Liberal Party, and savage reprisals have been carried out against those suspected of giving them aid.

THE CONSERVATIVES’ excuse for these repressive measures is that the men of the old opposition are now leaders of an underground resistance movement, but it is doubtful if any very seriously concerted movement of the kind exists. No matter. Colombians in the cities, in the towns and villages of the provinces and upon the farms and coffee plantations have witnessed scenes of terrible, berserker frightfulness. Whole villages have been razed and

put to the torch and the inhabitants wiped out or dispersed on mere suspicion of harboring a fugitive from authority. The soldiers and constabulary, sometimes with, sometimes without, civilian volunteers, move in on a village without warning, usually at night. With the aid of the mayor or the local military chief, they seize the town and there starts an immediate blood-bath; summary arrests and imprisonments are instituted; women are stripped, hung up by the feet and whipped; very often they are raped. Children are tortured and the men beaten and killed. If the locality is too big, such as a large town, and the practical difficulties of razing the place are insurmountable — and if the pacifying forces fear they might create too big a scandal — different methods are employed to impress upon the population the idea of who is boss and the futility of protest. Non-conformists are rooted out (or those persons who are *accused* of non-conformist attitudes) and murdered; their mutilated bodies, tied to the backs of mules, are then exhibited along the local promenade. Naturally the national press, cowed into silence and acquiescence by the ruling clique, carries no intelligence of these proceedings, or, if it does, the stories are written in such a way that suggest that “criminal elements” have been dealt with for the good of the country. It would be hard to find a Colombian, however, who does not

know all about the outrages; fascist terror is an idea that people get very quickly and fear of it spreads like brushfire.

In many instances those who have in some way incurred the displeasure of the Conservatives and their bullies are warned of their danger and run for their lives — sometimes an entire village, secretly apprised of an impending raid, will flee to the hills or the valleys or to a different region of the country. Thus a new class of dispossessed has been created; these exiles within their own homeland, especially those who have migrated from the region of Boyaca, the eastern Llanos, the Sanatanders, the Cauca Valley and Nariño, where persecution has been severest, have caused serious problems of unemployment, poverty, and distress. In all corners of the Republic you can find men, fathers of families they will not see for a long time to come and which they are powerless to aid, furtively eking out an existence in daily fear of their lives. And the majority of them can only ask, "Why — what have I *done*?"

Unbridled wrath and violence is, of course, an early manifestation of the authoritarian horror — like the infamous "nights of the long knives" in the early days of the Nazis in Germany. Like the Nazis of those years, the men in power are, so far, not sure of either themselves or their power and the extreme bloodiness of their political means reflects that

insecurity and a nightmare fear of what a sudden reversal of fortunes would mean to them. Later, if and when they do manage to consolidate their rule and obliterate every trace of dissent, real or imagined, there will be time and leisure for the refinements of the fascist state — the *organizing* of terror and the creation of an elite to carry it out in an orderly and businesslike fashion. Up until now, however, the presser roams the country at will, beating political foes and personal ones alike with impunity.

AN EXAMPLE OF the political naïveté of the Conservative proto-fascists can be seen in what happened in the state of the Valley of the Cauca — one of the most beautiful of all the regions of the Republic. There Conservative hot-heads, eager to put the fear of God into the hearts of the people in the shortest possible time, hired a notoriously ferocious bandit named "Lamparilla" — a Latin-American imitation of an old-style Chicago gangster — and loosed him on the population. Operating out of the city of Cali, Lamparilla and his gang of armed thugs rapidly sowed terror throughout the Valley, killing, robbing, and pillaging on order, to silence all opposition to the government and the status quo. What happened, of course, is that Lamparilla turned into a Frankenstein monster, got completely out of hand

and began operating for himself and for his own ends; his sanguinary activities branched out far beyond the limits set him by his masters and his crimes, which were of a spectacular and odious nature, brought the worst kind of publicity home to roost on the government's doorstep. The problem was finally, and fittingly, solved in Chicago fashion; at a festival given by the bandits to celebrate some unusual exploit or other of their leader, Lamparilla was rubbed out by his fellow outlaws.

SO THE NEW terror — the twentieth century's Fifth Horseman — has now struck down another country, a once bright land that enjoyed

international prestige because of its enlightened political institutions, democratic balance, and good sense. The common people, always the first, and last, victims of political terror, need help, and the indifferent silence of the world press about their plight is not the right way to go about giving it to them. It is one of the ironic peculiarities of the creeping horror that its victims of tomorrow do not want to hear about it today; it "depresses" them and their defense against it is the averted gaze, the deaf ear and, often, a thin disbelief. It is, however, now solidly established in the New World and we must remember that there is no Monroe Doctrine against it.

This report from Colombia was translated by Harriet de Onis.

Senator Tobey Confidential:

SIN *in the White Mountains*

LEE MORTIMER

PEOPLE who don't travel much like to keep some pleasant images of various picturesque regions of America in their mind. The more genteel Sunday supplements help keep these images going and nobody falls for them more heavily than people who live in big cities. They like to think of certain states of the union as old-fashioned rural retreats where the fields are green, and the people lead the good, simple life, tilling the soil, attending church regularly and sending kind-hearted, earthy people to our national legislative body. It's a nice custom. I, personally, find no more soothing reading than a charming atmospheric piece on one of the dreamy New England provinces, with lots of characters sitting around on cracker barrels, discussing contemporary problems with homely wisdom, in old-fashioned, twangy accents.

It is with genuine sadness that I must pass on the news that our bosky dells and woodlands have been invaded by the forces of corruption and urbanization. The square dance has been replaced by the fox-trot and the rhumba; the husking bees and quilting parties have given way to more sinister amusements, at least in the historic, sparsely populated state of New Hampshire, the home of Senator Charles W. Tobey. Not far from the former haunts of Emerson and Whittier, swanky hotels have burgeoned in the wilderness. Bookmakers stroll down shady paths, the whirring and clicking of roulette wheels drowns out the sweet hum of bees, the murmur of innumerable horse-rooms falls steadily upon the summer air.

As I write this, the public records of the Collector of Internal Revenue in Portsmouth, N. H., show that