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The Truth Commission and its Truths

Undoubtedly, the CEV report will contribute to the knowledge of the conflict with its interview data and in some parts the analysis. But the final report as a whole will not be the truth of the conflict.



The Truth Commission has just published its report on the Colombian conflict. As expected it is a very detailed report and covers many aspects of the conflict and therefore it is impossible to make a detailed criticism in a single article. This article aims to make a critique of the document entitled Call for GREAT PEACE and in subsequent articles I will address some points in more detail such as regions, businessmen and drug trafficking.



Of course there are very positive aspects, such as the statistics compiled, some proposals they make and also the victims' accounts they include. However, there are also very problematic aspects in the ideological field and how they present the conflict, the actors, motives and there is an underlying idea in the document that we must move towards a new society, with changes, of course, but a society that remains the same in terms of the economy. It dismisses from the outset any class struggle as something not only anachronistic but as something undesirable, independent of the methods used.

The document is full of many adjectives, some emotional, something that is not a criticism in itself, the emotion takes place in this scenario, but it is imbued with Christian references and the Catholic faith as such. We should not be very surprised considering that the chief is a Jesuit priest, Francisco de Roux s.j. But for this very reason, it starts from assumptions that are not shared by all and are very questionable.



Francisco de Roux, President of the Commission. Image: EFE.

It starts with the affirmation and asks "We do it from the question that has questioned humanity since the earliest times: where is your brother?" I don't know if the first part is true, but the question about the brother presumes that we know and share the concept of brother. In the Catholic faith we are all brothers theoretically, although in practice we are not. But the idea informs a concept brought from family therapy that the Colombian conflict is between brothers who love each other or at least can come to love each other, as a woman can come to love the man who abuses her in their relationship or the man can stop abusing her and love her as she deserves. It is a very questioned concept (rightly) in family therapy but applied in many countries that went through peace processes and truth commissions. But it is not true, this conflict is not between brothers, but between interests. The conflict has a name and surname, and also a surname of ancestry and has as victims the others. There are power relations. There are also economic interests. It is an insult to say that [the cocoa farmers](#) of the country like [Luís Carlos Sarmiento](#) and the [Santos family](#) are brothers of their employees, that associations like [FEDEGAN](#) represent people who are brothers of the displaced peasants.



Luis Carlos Sarmiento

Although the report acknowledges the role of some entrepreneurs in the conflict.

... what has been serious because of the pain and injustice on the victims is the confirmation of business initiatives protagonists in the conflict that paid paramilitary groups in order to displace and dispossess the lands and territories of the communities, and to implement agribusiness or mining businesses, or that within the enterprises stigmatized the workers and are accomplices in the murders of hundreds of trade unionists. [1]

Such figures responsible for the murders of hundreds of trade unionists are the brothers of no one but their shareholders. They were killed as part of a strategy of wealth accumulation, the most degrading reason there can be.

The position of the CEV turns the businessman into brothers, although it recognizes that ... after four years of listening to the drama of the war, the Commission assumes that if profound changes are not made to the model of economic development of the country, it will be impossible to achieve the non-repetition of the armed conflict that will be repeated and evolve in unpredictable ways.

But despite not making a specific analysis of the conflict and the economy, the CEV calls on the business community to avoid a resurgence of the armed conflict.

To the State, society and, particularly, to the entrepreneurship of large industrial and financial projects, to give priority to guaranteeing the conditions of well-being and dignified life of individuals and communities, without exclusions, from a shared vision of the future to overcome the structural inequalities that make this country one of the most inequitable in the world in the concentration of income, wealth and land. [2]

It is part of his discourse that we are all brothers. Instead of criticizing that call they make to a society where the well-being of the people is a priority of the entrepreneurs, a single question is enough: Where does that happen? What are the countries where that happens? Clumsy references are often made to Switzerland or Sweden, ignoring that it is not so true there and the social welfare programs in Europe (those that remain) are the product of social struggles and largely financed by the super-exploitation of the [Global South](#). It is a chimera and part of the liberal mythology, which is usually sold in elections every four or more years depending on the country, but it does not exist in reality anywhere and cannot, legally a company watches over the good of its shareholders and more nobody.



The lack of an analysis of the economic model as a factor in the conflict is a great weakness, something that I will analyze in another article. But in a conflict over land, where landowners and businessmen murder peasants and trade unionists, not analyzing the context of the economic model is a lack of truth.

The CEV, however, commits another great lack of truth when they repeat the old saying of the businessmen and the State that paramilitarism is reactive, that is, it reacts to the presence of the guerrillas. It seems a bad joke that at this point in a commission that supposedly seeks the truth such a lie is repeated: a lie that many organizations that today praise the CEV, denied at the time, when they did not receive so many checks from USAID and the European Union.

So is the exposure of companies that paid armed groups large amounts of money as transaction costs indispensable to keep the projects active. And the reality of economic actors who, desperate for the guerrillas and in the face of insecurity, contributed to the [creation of the Convivir](#) and at other times sought out the paramilitaries to bring their security of terror. Then there were those who took advantage of the abandoned lands in the midst of terror to buy with front men and set up projects. And others who with money put members of the Military Forces in their private service. [3]

When the bloodthirsty [Carlos Castaño](#) named his paramilitary organization Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, he did so for a reason, the need to present his barbarities as a necessary evil, that of self-defense. Fellow Jesuit Javier Giraldo s.j. has spent his entire life fighting against such a lie. He has documented how paramilitarism has existed since before the founding of the insurgencies and was not reactive, but was a state policy. [4]



The problem with the approach of ignoring the state and its role and saying that we are brothers is to ask for reconciliation on that basis, that we are brothers. De Roux in his presentation asked several times "as we did" and calls for reconciliation. But there is no such thing as us. As [Javier Giraldo](#) points out.

A similar effort is required to translate the value of Christian reconciliation into the realm of juridical and political relations. There, a public clarification of guilt could not be avoided, nor the explicit condemnation of the mechanisms, structures and doctrines that made the crimes possible, nor corrective measures that close the way to their repetition, nor reparation to the victims and society. The very nature of a political community means that, if there is no explicit and profound social sanction that has an impact on social memory, crimes are not delegitimized. Otherwise, the Christian value of forgiveness can reach its maximum perversion: to go from being a creative act of fraternity to being an act that conceals the institutionalization of crime (bold is not from the original) and destroys the protective barriers of human dignity. [5]



["In Colombia, there is a script of extermination of social organizations that is repeated":
Javier Giraldo, S.J.](#)

The CEV points to the example of Germany after World War II as an example to follow. It usually indicates the poverty of arguments when someone refers to the Nazis to speak ill of another, as to say such a leader of a country is the new Hitler. But it also indicates a certain poverty when it comes to the subject to talk about reconciliation and so on in post-war Germany. However, the CEV did.

The German friends who accompany us in the Commission process have taught us that their people regained dignity and pride when, even decades after the Jewish genocide and the war crimes committed, they took ownership of the suffering of the victims, embraced the wound as the body of a nation and recognized collective responsibility. [6]

It is not true what they say. First of all, post-Nazi Germany was not a denazified country. Several figures of that time occupied positions of high responsibility, among them [Kurt Waldheim](#), an officer of the Nazi Army was [Secretary-General of the United Nations](#) and President of Austria and war criminal. [Adolf Heusinger](#) was the chairman of nato's military committee,[7] and [Johannes Steinhoff](#) was in charge of Germany's area force after the war. [Kurt Georg Kiesinger](#), was a militant of the Nazi party, works hand in hand with the Nazi propagandist [Goebbels](#) and then between 1966 and 1969 served as president of Germany (chancellor).

Another Nazi [Wernher von Braun](#) designed the bombs and rockets of the Nazis received a very good salary from the US to put a gringo on the Moon. None confessed or accepted responsibility. And let's not forget that young militant of the Hitler Youth, a certain [Joseph Ratzinger](#) who became the head of the Catholic Church. Of course, the latter, being a young man, had less responsibility than the others.

The Nazis' anti-gay legislation applied until 1969 and between 1946 and 1969 under the law, 50,000 people were tried and while the Nazis held high positions the Communists were forbidden to work in the public administration and persecuted them and other dissidents such as pacifists. Even under the "communist clause" victims of the Nazis who were communists did not receive compensation. [8] They chose a very bad example, or perhaps De Roux is aware of the example he chose.

However, it is about mixing one myth with another. It is surprising that they did not quote South Africa, perhaps because it is easier to see the reality of their truth commission and it is a more accurate comparison than Germany after the war.

But what they mean is that if the Germans could accept their collective guilt, why can't Colombia do it? But there are no such collective faults, or at least not as De Roux and company claim. Many Germans lost their lives in the fight against the Nazis, it is estimated that the Nazis murdered 288,000 opponents even before Hitler came to power. They were not all, and among the many that did sound names that today we find in our homes, Siemens and Krupps both companies that [used slaves in their factories](#) and had very close relations with the Nazi party to name just two companies or [Hugo Boss](#), the Nazi militant who enriched himself by manufacturing the uniforms of the Nazi party, then the wehrmacht and of course the SS (that's why they looked so good). And of course [Bayer, the company that manufactured the Zyklon-B gas](#) they used, still exists and remains just as rich. After the war, 13 directors of the latter company were convicted of war crimes but were released without serving all their sentences and resumed their positions in the company.

The executioners remained in power with a tale of collective guilt. The Nazis were a political project of a sector of the German bourgeoisie to stop the rise of the communists, any resemblance to cattle ranchers proclaiming Puerto Boyacá as an anti-communist capital is mere coincidence, I imagine.

The reference to Germany as an example of reconciliation is a cheap tale. If Colombia follows the same path, the surnames Mancuso, Uribe, Santo Domingo, Samper, Santos and others will be the dominant surnames in the future, with their economic and social power intact.



The CEV also addresses the issue of so-called False Positives and says something very true on the subject that "If there had been ten, it would be very serious. If there had been a hundred, it would be to demand the change of an army. There were thousands and it's an eyesore." [9] But almost often they say that:

There was no written law or order that sent it, but the feeling of the soldiers who shot was to be doing what the institution wanted, because of the incentives and pressures that demanded immediate results of corpses, the publicity that was given to "the discharged" and the protection of the perpetrators. [10]

Yes, it is true that there was no law or written order to do that. But we cannot expect criminals to leave easy evidence for us. There was no law, but there were incentives as they point out. There were directives and a bonus system that encouraged the killing of civilians. Who authorized these payments? The then Minister of Defense, Juan Manuel Santos. What does the document say in front of Santos?

Former President Santos – who was the Minister of Defense from the end of 2006 to the end of 2008 – came to the Commission to contribute to the truth with his testimony, as a former president and public servant, and focused his intervention on a rigorous analysis of the false positives, to conclude by asking forgiveness from all the families and Colombia, and invited the Military Forces to apologize to the national and international community. [11]

It is not true, his analysis was not very rigorous and ended up asking for forgiveness, as the CEV says, but at the same time he said that he did not go. He took up Samper's excuse in the face of drug trafficking and said that everything went behind his back and he lied several times in his statement before the CEV. [12]

Undoubtedly, the CEV report will contribute to the knowledge of the conflict with its interview data and in some parts the analysis. But the final report as a whole will not be the truth of the conflict. The CEV affirms that "we do not share that position according to which there are many truths that are worth the same on the same issue." [13] Yes, not all "truths" are the same, it is time to analyze them, discuss them, contrast them with the facts and even look at who enunciates them to see which perspective is closer to the truth, but in this case it is not the "truth" of the CEV that is the truth. Nor do I share that idea that any truth is worth the same, however powerful and well received the writers of that truth may be.

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[11] Ibid., p.28

[12] Ó Ó Loingsigh, G. (12/06/2021) Santos washing his image and his hands <http://www.elsalmon.com.co/2021/06/santos-lavando-su-imagen-y-sus-manos.html>

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