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Jorge Eliecer Gaitan and his term as mayor of Bogota, Colombia, June 1936 to February 1937

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JORGE ELIECER GAITAN
AND HIS TERM AS MAYOR OF BOGOTA, COLOMBIA
JUNE 1936 TO FEBRUARY 1937

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Inter-American Studies Program
The University of the Pacific

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Inter-American Studies
With a Major in History

by
Ruth Ann UpdeGraff
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INTRODUCTION

One of the most controversial figures in Colombian history is that of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, whose assassination on April 9, 1948, ended a twenty-year career in national politics.¹ The Colombian writer-diplomat, Juan Lozano y Lozano, has distinguished Gaitán as the man most responsible for creating a "new mood" in twentieth century Colombian politics.² Essentially, this "new mood" is that of increased interest in national social problems which, during the lifetime of Gaitán, was accompanied by an increasing

¹Gaitán was first elected to public office in 1928. Luis Emiro Valencia, "Apuntes biográficos sobre Gaitán," La Nueva Prensa, 109:32, April 11, 1964. However, Gaitán had been an active participant in political debates and campaigns for more than a decade before his official entry into politics. Record of such participation is found in a work compiled by Consejo de Bogotá, Alberto Figueredo Salcedo (ed.), Colección Jorge Eliécer Gaitán: documentos para una biografía (Bogotá: Imprenta Municipal, 1949), pp. 133-139. This includes clippings relative to the political activity of Gaitán as an unofficial spokesman for the Liberal Party in the 1918 presidential elections. Among the editions of the Colombian newspapers from which these clippings have been taken are: El Tiempo [Bogotá, Colombia], December 22 and 29, 1917; Gaceta Republicana [Bogotá, Colombia], January 12, 1918; La Patria [Bogotá, Colombia], [n.d.]; and Heraldo Conservador [Bogotá, Colombia], [n.d.].

²Juan Lozano y Lozano, "Mis contemporáneos: Jorge Eliécer Gaitán," Obras selectas: poesía-prosa (Medellín: Editorial Horizonte, 1956), pp. 287-88.

demand on the part of the masses for significant participation in the political processes of the nation.

Before Gaitán, Colombian politics had been controlled by the wealthiest or most socially prestigious families in the nation. Although members of this oligarchy were not always themselves directly involved in the legislative processes, their money or influence seem to have been invariably behind those who were.³ It was accepted that if anyone from outside this circle of los que mandan⁴ were to enter politics, he did so through patronage or by distinguishing himself as worthy of "oligarchic" status.⁵

Jorge Eliécer Gaitán was the notable first exception to this rule. As will be discussed in the following chapter, by the time Gaitán entered Colombian politics he had

³Vernon Lee Fluharty, Dance of the Millions: Military Rule and the Social Revolution in Colombia, 1930-1936 (Pittsburgh Press, 1957), pp. 182-87, cited in Lewis Hanke, Reading #25, "The Colombian Upper Class: White, Privileged, Competent," Mexico and the Caribbean (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1959), pp. 154-156.

⁴los que mandan, literally, "those who command." This phrase is commonly used in Colombia to refer to "the oligarchs."

⁵An excellent example of such transformation is that of the Conservative poet-president, Marcos Fidel Suárez, born out of wedlock and raised in a hovel now preserved as a national shrine. Despite his humble background, Suárez, who served as Colombian chief executive from 1918 to 1922, was a conservative in politics and conceded little, if anything, to "the common man."

become so alienated from the oligarchy that oligarchic support of Gaitán, and his support of the oligarchy, had become virtually impossible. Nevertheless, Gaitán soon became a powerful force in national politics. He accomplished this by finding an alternative to oligarchic support in the theretofore politically dormant masses.

Before Gaitán, the Colombian masses had been little more than appendages to the two, century-old political parties in the nation, the Liberals and the Conservatives. Both of these parties represented almost identical cross-sections of Colombian society and both, as noted, were controlled by the oligarchs. Their distinguishing feature was their positions on such academic questions as the advantages and disadvantages of the Church in politics and centralized and federal systems of government. Neither party concerned itself with its nation's social problems.⁶

Gaitán complained early in his political career that "behind all . . . [the] talk . . . [exists] a deplorable social reality."⁷ He noted that great numbers of the people the traditional parties claimed to represent were poorly fed, clothed, and sheltered.⁸ It was by emphasizing this

⁶Fluharty, op. cit., p. 2; and Robert J. Alexander, Today's Latin America (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc.), pp. 148-150.

⁷Lozano, loc. cit.

⁸Ibid.

that Gaitán succeeded in winning over enough support from candidates endorsed by the traditional parties' leaders to be repeatedly⁹ elected to the National Congress as an avowed opponent of the privileged class that controlled it.

The years Gaitán spent in national politics correspond to those in which an unprecedented amount of social legislation was being adopted,¹⁰ and as will be discussed, the death of Gaitán marks the beginning of a period of counterrevolution in Colombia. Because of this parallel between social and economic reform with the life of Gaitán and counterrevolution with his death, a mystique has arisen in Colombia in which Gaitán is considered to be social revolution incarnate. Foremost among those promoting this mystique is the only child of Gaitán, a daughter, Gloria Gaitán de Valencia, whose public statements are typically variations on a theme expressed in her 1963 introduction to a reprint of her father's doctoral dissertation. In it she declares, "Gaitán is not dead. He lives in the hearts of the Colombian people. . . . As the Cid Campeador after death . . . [Gaitán] will attain victory . . . national and social revolution."¹¹

⁹Valencia, op. cit., pp. 32, 34, and 36-40.

¹⁰Fluharty, op. cit., pp. 43-99.

¹¹Gloria Gaitán de Valencia in introductory remarks,

The period of counterrevolution set off by the assassination of Gaitán is seemingly on the wane today in Colombia. Even Gloria de Valencia, ardent critic of the current administrative arrangement,¹² concedes that some progress towards social goals, as she defines them, is being made, although she compares this progress to "that of a cyclist in a sports car race."¹³ To the casual observer, her criticisms seem justified. In spite of the efforts of hundreds of Colombians working for social and economic reform through various official and semi-official bureaus, emaciated children and tattered lepers continue to be seen begging for subsistence in the streets of major Colombia cities.¹⁴ With such grim testimony to the failure of the Colombian government to meet even these rudimentary needs of

Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, Las ideas socialistas en Colombia (Bogotá: Editorial América Libre, 1963), p. x.

¹²That arrangement, the Frente Nacional or National Front, equally divides administrative, legislative, and judicial responsibilities between Conservative and Liberal officials. Implemented by constitutional amendments in 1958, the arrangement is scheduled to last for a sixteen-year period. John D. Martz, "A Qualified Democracy," Martin C. Needler (ed.), Political Systems of Latin America (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand, Inc., 1964), p. 214.

¹³Gloria Gaitán de Valencia in a conversation with the author in the Valencia home in Bogotá on September 11, 1966.

¹⁴An observation of the author who has spent a total of twenty-four months in Colombia during two different trips to that country in the past five years.

its citizenry, one can understand the relative success the more militant elements seem to be having in promoting the image of Gaitán as a "Cid Campeador" and in directing his battle cry of twenty years ago, "¡a la carga!",¹⁵ against the status quo of today.

Six months before his death, Gaitán had been named the official candidate of the Liberal Party for the 1950 presidential campaign.¹⁶ Few doubt that Gaitán would have been elected to the presidency had he lived.¹⁷ Much

¹⁵"¡a la carga!", literally, "Charge!" This slogan is so closely associated with Gaitán in Colombia today that it frequently appears on pictures of the leader and on commemorative plaques. An example of the latter is that in "Barrio Jorge Eliécer Gaitán" between Calles 73 and 81 and Carreras 37 and 48 in Bogotá, which dedicates the neighborhood to: "Jorge Eliécer Gaitán. Por la restauración moral y democrática de la República, ¡a la carga!" Consejo de Bogotá, op. cit., p. 15. It appears that Gaitán first used the slogan in attacks against the Liberal president, Eduardo Santos, during the 1938-1942 administration. Charging corruption by "the oligarchs," Gaitán appealed to radio audiences to join him in the "Moral and democratic restoration of the Republic," using the now celebrated slogan at the conclusion of the speech. In 1946, after the Conservative candidate won the presidential election, Gaitán returned to the ranks of the Liberal Party with a revision of the slogan, "Por la reconquista del poder, ¡a la carga!", literally, "Towards the reconquest of power, charge!" Valencia, op. cit., p. 39.

¹⁶Max L. Moorhead, "Colombia," Britannica Book of the Year: A Record of the March of Events of 1947 (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1948), p. 211.

¹⁷John D. Martz, Colombia: A Political Survey (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), p. 50.

speculation has arisen on what would have been the course of Colombian history had Gaitán lived and served as president. Complicating the question is the fact that the assassination of Gaitán not only eliminated him from Colombian politics but also provoked a popular uprising, the notorious Bogotazo,¹⁸ which frightened moderate politicians into accepting the extraconstitutional measures undertaken by reactionary leaders "in the interest of order."¹⁹ For almost a decade following the assassination and the Bogotazo, Colombia, formerly lauded as "the Showcase of Democracy" in South America, was virtually a police state under the administrations of Laureano Gómez and his successor by coup, General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla.²⁰

When speculation arises on a Gaitán presidency,

¹⁸Bogotazo, is the name given to the disastrous riots which broke out in central Bogotá following the death of Gaitán in that city on April 9, 1948. A contrived word, it links the augmentative suffix, "-azo," to the name of the capital to suggest the magnitude of the riot. For descriptions of these riots, the reader is referred to the following: Willard L. Beaulac, Career Ambassador (New York: Macmillan, 1951); Jules DuBois, Freedom Is My Beat (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1959); and John D. Martz, op. cit., pp. 55-68; and for literary treatment, José Antonio Osorio Lizarazo, Día del odio (Buenos Aires: Ediciones López Negri, 1952). Photographs of the destruction are included in La Nueva Prensa, 95:36-56; and 132:17 and 21.

¹⁹Fluharty, op. cit., pp. 110-11.

²⁰Hanke, op. cit., pp. 54-55.

emotions also arise. The man is either beatified or damned. His critics call him an opportunist and predict a Gaitán dictatorship comparable to those imposed by Gómez and Rojas Pinilla. These critics depict Gaitán as one of those individuals who combines a special talent with historic circumstances to further particular interest. They define Gaitán's particular interest as that of achieving unlimited political power and say that he used his special talent in oratory to exploit the discontent inherent in the industrialization of Colombia in order to attain that power. They claim that a program was only incidental to the politics of Gaitán and that a key element in his approach was the fomentation of discontent. Typical is Rafael Arciniegas, gentleman farmer and aficionado²² of Colombian politics. During a conversation with the author at his comfortable finca²³ outside of Bogotá, Arciniegas explained:

Gaitán was an expert at criticism. However, when pressed for solutions to the problems he publicized, he was as limited as any of us in producing effective solutions. This is what ultimately ended his term as mayor of Bogotá. The people, themselves, threw him out after he failed to achieve what he had taught them to expect of a public servant.²⁴

²²aficionado, literally, fan, or enthusiast.

²³finca is the word most commonly used in Colombia to refer to a farm or ranch.

²⁴Rafael Arciniegas to the author during a visit to

Countering the critics of Gaitán are extremely vocal groups that tend to represent Gaitán as a self-sacrificing savior of the Colombian masses. They perceive a certain "naive faith" as the "tragic flaw" of their hero, and they have a good basis for their argument that he was indeed destroyed by a heroic idealism. Shortly before his assassination, Gaitán was offered bodyguard protection by an official of the Colombian Ministry of the Interior.²⁵ Gaitán turned down the offer, responding, "I do not want detectives. The people are my protection. Does that seem insufficient?"²⁶

In the following pages the author offers a biography of Gaitán and a summary of his accomplishments in the only administrative post he ever held in public life, the mayoralty of Bogotá, to broaden the basis for speculation on a Gaitán presidency. At this point it should be emphasized that a mayoralty, even of the national capital, is not

his family's country home outside of Bogotá, in September 1966.

²⁵Alberto Niño H., Antecedentes y secretos del 9 de abril (Bogotá: Editorial Paz, [n.d.]), p. 12.

²⁶Ibid., p. 65. As Niño relates the incident, Gaitán declined the offer, emphatically telling the official that he did not want a special bodyguard. "El pueblo es mi guardia. ¿Le parece poco?"

considered a stepping stone to the presidency in Colombia.²⁷ Nevertheless, the responsibilities of a Colombian mayor parallel those of the president although on a much smaller scale. Both president and mayor are responsible for directing all governmental services pertinent to the community they serve. Both president and mayor are the principal policymakers of their particular community. Their decrees, if unopposed by a significant number of their communities' legislators, are law. Both president and mayor are checked in their political activity by an elected body of legislators. On the municipal level, this body is the city council, which deals with municipal problems in a manner corresponding to that with which members of the National Congress deal with those of the entire nation.²⁸

Further parallels can be seen when one considers the circumstances of Bogotá and of the nation at the time Gaitán assumed the mayoralty in 1936. With the industrialization

²⁷Austin F. MacDonald, Latin American Politics and Government (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1954), p. 417.

²⁸Oscar Peña Alzate (ed.), "Poder ejecutivo," Constitución política de Colombia, Título III, Capítulos I-III, cited in Código Administrativo (Medellín: Editorial Bedout, 1965), pp. 189-198; and Alzate (ed.), "Regimen de los municipios," Constitución política de Colombia, Título VI, Capítulos I, IV, and VII, cited in Código Administrativo, op. cit., pp. 291, 301-309, 337, and 365-75.

of Colombia underway,²⁹ vast numbers³⁰ of rural folk were lured into the cities by the promise of improved and living conditions. These migrants generally arrived unprepared for the demands of industrial employment and urban living. Unemployable, many settled in shanties ringing the cities. There, without work, without their traditional means of feeding and clothing themselves, and without any apparent bonds to the urban world their miserable dwellings surrounded, they began to experience a previously unknown anonymity among others who shared their economic plight but not geographic identity. A primary problem of both national and municipal chief executives during this period was the incorporation of these urban poor into productive and healthy community life.³¹

Another interesting parallel between the two executives, which arose from the circumstances of the time, is the fact that both, as political figures particularly responsive to the demands of urban society, were just beginning

²⁹Luis Ospina Vásquez, Industria y protección en Colombia: 1810-1930 (Medellín: Editorial Santa Fé, 1955), pp. 298-299, and 303-304.

³⁰See Chapter I, p. 21.

³¹Germán Arciniegas is a speech delivered to students and faculty of the University of the Pacific's Spanish-speaking liberal arts school, Elbert Covell College, in May 1966.

to replace the rural-based patron, an economic figure, in directing the destiny of the majority of Colombians.

The paper is divided into three chapters. The first describes the setting for the initial political activity of Gaitán: the Colombian capital, Bogotá. The second is a biographical study of Gaitán. The third examines the impact of Gaitán on Bogotá during his term as mayor. An epilogue briefly discusses Gaitán after his mayoralty.

Appreciation is extended to the staffs of the Bancroft Library at the University of California at Berkeley, the Biblioteca Luis Angel Arango and the Museo Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in Bogotá, as well as the staffs of the Bogota Municipal Archives and the Colombian Embassy in Rome for their assistance in the project. Invaluable contributions were made by the widow of Gaitán, Amparo Jaramillo de Gaitán, and her daughter and son-in-law, Gloria and Luis Emiro Valencia, who made available albums of clippings relative to the early years of Gaitán and those of his mayoralty. Also adding invaluable to the effort was the Colombian writer, Juan Lozano y Lozano, a life-long acquaintance, devoted friend, and discerning critic of the controversial Colombian.

Translation from the Spanish are those of the author, unless otherwise indicated.

CHAPTER I

BOGOTA

Bogotá, Colombia, birthplace of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán and center of his political activity, ranks after La Paz, Boliva and Quito, Ecuador, as the highest capital city in the New World. Thus, in spite of its proximity to the equator, Bogotá, at 8,563 feet above sea level, has a relatively chilly climate even when the sun is bright and the sky overhead is an intense blue.

It has been said that the briskness of the climate has contributed to the city's celebrated intellectual activity. Since the early days of the nineteenth century, Bogotá has been referred to as "the Athens of America" in recognition of the artistic tastes and talents of many of its leading citizens.¹

A traditional pastime in the city has been the tertulia or serious discussion. Favorite topics have been politics, philosophy, and poetry. Intellectual prowess is a trait more highly prized than military skill, and citizens

¹Fred A. Carlson, Geography of Latin America (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1952), p. 299; and Andrew Jackson Lamoreaux, "Bogota," Encyclopaedia Britannica (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1945), vol. III, p. 780.

take pride in the popular belief² that more scholars than soldiers have served as president of Colombia.

The city itself provides numerous cultural opportunities, and it has long been served by more than a dozen different universities, a public library, a museum of natural history, an observatory, botanical gardens, and one of the finest symphony orchestras in South America.³

Bogotá was founded in 1538 by a Granadine lawyer-turned-conquistador, Gonzalo Jiménez Quesada.⁴ Located at

²When Constantino Martinez Villamarin compiled Presidentes de Colombia (Tunja: Imprenta Departamental, 1947), the number of Colombian presidents who had been generals equaled the number of those with the academic title, "doctor." According to Martinez, 112 individuals had served in the presidency during the 135 years between the nation's self-proclaimed independence in 1810 and Alberto Lleras Camargo's first presidential term in 1945. Of these men, 30 had had the academic title, "doctor," and 30, the title, "general."

³Lamoreaux, loc. cit. It is recorded that Baron Alexander von Humboldt, the German scientist who is believed to have been the first to refer to Bogotá as "the Athens of the Americas," was particularly impressed by the botanical gardens when he visited the city in the early 1800's. According to Bailey W. Diffie in Latin American Civilization: Colonial Period (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Stackpole Sons, 1945), p. 550, these gardens had been commissioned by a viceroy, Archbishop Antonio de Caballero de Gongora, and were organized by José Celestino Mutis, "who spent many years classifying plants. . . ." Mutis' work was continued by a former student of his, Francisco José Caldas, credited with having "had more than 5,000 plants in his herbarium before he lost his life in the Wars of Independence."

⁴For a finely-drawn portrait of the quixotic Jiménez, the reader is referred to Germán Arciniegas' biographical

the foot of two abruptly rising peaks in the Eastern Cordillera of the Colombia Andes, the city first served as a military outpost for the Spanish. The territory it was to control was the vast savannah land, 90,625 square miles in area, that bounds the central western section of the Eastern Cordillera. This region had been previously under the domination of a sedentary Amerind culture, the Chibcha.

Estimated to have had about three hundred thousand inhabitants at its zenith,⁵ the Chibcha Empire never attained the great size nor advanced level of technology that characterized the Aztec and Mayan Empires to the north and the Inca Empire to the south of its lands. Nevertheless, the Chibcha were of adequate number and social stability to survive the Spanish conquest. By the twentieth century, however, those of pure Indian blood comprised only about 7 per cent of the total population. Still, traces of Indian blood remained in the estimated two thirds of the savannah population classified as mestizo.⁶

study, The Knight of El Dorado, Mildred Adams (trans.), (New York: The Viking Press, 1942).

⁵Julian H. Steward and Louis Faron, Native Peoples of South America (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, Inc., 1959), p. 212.

⁶mestizo, literally, a person of mixed blood. In Spanish America the term is usually applied to those of mixed Spanish and Indian blood. Hubert Herring, A History

As the nature of Spanish activity in the Americas evolved from conquest to consolidation, the function of Bogota evolved from that of a military outpost to that of a service, trade, and social center for the colonizers of the savannah. Because of its isolated location,⁷ Bogotá remained apart from the influences of the outside world. As late as the 1920's, it still had the appearance of a rather simple community of land-owning patricians who would ride into town from their neighboring farms for supplies and socializing; of merchants who tended a variety of small stores that provided savannah inhabitants with some of the necessities, and a few of the amenities of life; of artisans who produced necessities; of directors of trade and commerce and men of transport, who secured amenities; and of professional men who pulled teeth, removed appendixes, designed houses, settled legal disputes, ministered to the spirit, and buried the body.

It can be assumed that there were also the usual number of servants and bureaucrats and corps of semiskilled workers and day laborers. The later two groups would typically have been employed in Bogotá's "industry" of the

of Latin America from the Beginnings to the Present (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), p. 16.

⁷Carlson, op. cit., p. 294.

period: the production of beverages, leather and tobacco goods, construction materials, and textiles--all of which were destined for the home market.⁸

This was the setting in which many of the leading figures of twentieth century Colombia, among them, Gaitán, grew into manhood. Listening to some of them recall their youth, one can visualize these men, gathered together in a white-washed adobe cafe in downtown Bogotá, discussing politics over a tinto⁹ or canelazo,¹⁰ or listening to a new arrangement of the traditional bambuco¹¹ played by one of them on a tiple, the twelve-stringed Colombian guitar.

In spite of developing within the same basic social

⁸Pan American Union, "Bogotá," American City Series, 5A, (Washington: Pan American Union, 1937), p. 8.

⁹tinto, the Colombian name for a demitasse serving of strongly-brewed, black coffee.

¹⁰canelazo, a drink which originated in colonial Bogotá. It is made by soaking cinnamon sticks in a sweet liquor, preferably aguardiente or brandy, for several days. Before serving, the cinnamon is strained from the liquor, the liquid is heated and served hot in glasses with sugar-frosted rims.

¹¹bambuco is described by Joaquín Piñeros Corpas; Lorna Martín, Mary West, Joan Safford, et al. (trans.), in Introducción al cancionero noble de Colombia: Introduction to the Noble Songbook of Colombia (Bogotá: División de Divulgación cultural del Ministerio de Educación, [n.d.], p. 19, as:

"the most representative of the national tunes. . . . Although some people consider the bambuco to be derived from the currulao, which is of Negro origin, it is really a true product of mestizo or hybrid music."

setting as their forefathers, the men of this generation seemed to sense as early as the 1920's that they were destined to see radical change in their homeland.¹² Of particular interest to them was the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia.¹³ Following the events in Russia as closely as the time-lag permitted, many of these bogotanos began to talk of the revolution they, themselves, would bring to Colombia. A leading group of such men became known as "Los Nuevos" and held forth at the Café Windsor, which occupied the ground floor of the Hotel Franklin in downtown Bogota.

Café Windsor discussions reflected the ambivalence of this generation of "revolutionaries." Their subject matter was indeed revolutionary, but their approach (one in which they, the privileged, would assume the key roles) was traditional.¹⁴ It is reported that Gaitán, then a law

¹²W. O. Galbraith, Colombia: A General Survey (London and New York: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1953), p. 37; and Antonio García, Gaitán y el problema de la revolución colombiana (Bogotá: Cooperativa Nal. de Artes Gráficas, Ltda., 1955), pp. 48 and 81.

¹³García, op. cit., p. 79.

¹⁴García, op. cit., p. 50. Among those plans which García lists typical of Los Nuevos were: giving a social basis to politics which formerly "had been neutral on the question of class," creating a revolutionized concept of property rights, and "changing from a merchantilistic to industrialistic economic orientation." Another aspect of Los Nuevos' rebellion, although incidental to this paper, is discussed by Galbraith, op. cit., p. 37. According to

student at the National University in Bogotá, attended several of the Windsor discussions, but, " . . . found them frivolous and full of fantasy."¹⁵

Gaitán had little respect for the typical Cafe Windsor habitué, the patrician-born intellectual whom other middle-class youths might strive to imitate. From available evidence, it is impossible to determine what was primarily responsible for the rift between Gaitán and the oligarch intellectuals. Class lines were not so rigidly observed that a middle-class youth with the intellectual virtuosity of Gaitán would be excluded from the Windsor clique.¹⁶

Nevertheless, Gaitán had nothing to do with the oligarchs. Perhaps his schoolboy contact with the heirs of the oligarchs, children too young to merit the special respect and treatment usually accorded them in class and on the playground, had embittered Gaitán beyond later recon-

Galbraith, the group not only:

"set out to make known in their country the main trends and the products of international thought . . . [but also endeavored] to attack and destroy the ideas and forms of the chief representatives of the preceeding literary generations."

¹⁵José Antonio Osorio Lizarazo, Gaitán: vida, muerte, y permanente presencia (Buenos Aires: López Negri, 1952), p. 65.

¹⁶Again the reader is referred to the example of Marcos Fidel Suárez (see Introduction, p. 2), whose intellectual virtuosity gained him entry into such circles.

ciliation with them.

It would be unfair to suggest, however, that the alienation of Gaitán from the oligarchy was primarily emotional. Their extremely different backgrounds had resulted in very different points of view. From his earliest years, Gaitán had been exposed to the ugly social realities that the Windsor group was just beginning to consider. Thus, Gaitán and the young patrician thinkers of the 1920's entered manhood with different conceptions of their society to guide them in their subsequent social, economic, and political activity.

While "Los Nuevos" were discussing revolution, the Colombian government was involved in a program of material development which was to provide the basis for real revolution. For the first time since securing national independence, Colombians were enjoying a long period of nation-wide peace.¹⁷ With this peace came prosperity,¹⁸ and by the administration of the Conservative president, Pedro Nel Ospina (August 7, 1922 to August 7, 1926), the

¹⁷ Jesús M. Henao and Gerardo Arrubla, J. Fred Rippey (trans.), A History of Colombia (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1938), p. 532.

¹⁸ Most of it related to American investment which more than quadrupled during the 1920's. J. Fred Rippey, The Capitalists and Colombia (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1931), pp. 152-176.

government was in a position to finance various public works.¹⁹ An example of the material progress made during the Nel Ospina years can be seen in the growth of the Colombian railway network. In 1922, there was less than 950 miles of railroad track in Colombia.²⁰ By 1926, over 1,400 miles of track were in use.²¹ A 1919 study of the use of electric power in a specific area of Colombia noted that "750 caballos de fuerza"²² were being produced by power plants in the region, while another study, issued in 1928, shows the same locale producing "3,350 caballos" of electric power.²³

In the larger cities, water lines, telephones and streetcar lines were being established at a rapid rate.²⁴ But of the public works, improved transportation seems to have made the greatest impact on the spirit and physiognomy of the cities. In Bogotá, development of air transport²⁵ bound the once isolated capital to the rest of the nation

²⁰Ospina Vásquez, op. cit., p. 352 ²¹Ibid.

²²A caballo de fuerza is the amount of energy needed to lift 75 kilograms to one meter of height in one second.

²³Ospina, op. cit., p. 394.

²⁴Ibid., Chapter VIII, pp. 346-419.

²⁵Colombians take pride in the fact that their nation was the first to establish regular commercial flights in the Americas.

and world. Bogotanos thus lost their vantage point from a relatively isolated spot in the world as they too, became caught up in the complexities of its twentieth century society. Moreover, improved land transportation opened the way for peasant migration into the city.²⁶ Bogotá began to swell in size.²⁷

²⁶ Germán Arciniegas at Covell College. See p. 11.

²⁷ Although the Pan American Union's description of Bogotá, op. cit., mentions that the first population census was taken in that city in 1630 (at which time the inhabitants of that community numbered "3,000"), the author was unable to locate census records to formulate growth-rate percentages for the period discussed in this chapter. From various unofficial sources, she did find that Bogotá's population was "95,000 in 1885, 100,000 in 1900," Daniel Ortega Ricaurte, Cosas de Santafé de Bogotá (Bogotá: Editorial A B C, 1949), p. 23, and "235,400" in 1928, Howell Davies (ed.), The South American Handbook 1930 (London: Trade and Travel Publications, Ltd., 1931), p. 270. The Pan American Union pamphlet cited puts the city's population at 271,124 in 1934 and estimates that it would pass 300,000 by 1937. Here it should be pointed out that a report is currently being made on the accelerated growth of Bogotá during the early twentieth century by a team of researchers headed by an economic historian, William Paul McGreevey, at the University of California at Berkeley.

CHAPTER II

JORGE ELIECER GAITÁN

Contrary to popular opinion, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán did not come from the most humble strata of Colombian society. He was the son of a man described as "typical of the Colombian middle class"¹ and a woman lauded in her later years as "one of the most distinguished teachers of Bogotá."² Nevertheless, the image of Gaitán as "el hijo del pueblo"³ persists, and Gaitán, himself, helped to promote it. It was an essential part of his plan to consolidate the mass support necessary to participate in Colombian politics independent of oligarchic control.

Jorge Eliécer Gaitán was born in Bogotá on January 23, 1898,⁴ the first born of Eliécer Gaitán Otalora and

¹Osorio Lizarazo, op. cit., p. 11

²"Muere la Madre de Gaitán," El Tiempo, op. cit., February 23, 1937,

³"el hijo del pueblo," literally, "the son of the people" is a phrase frequently used by Gaitanists in referring to their leader. On September 23, 1966, the author attended a rally held by Gaitanists in a small, rather run-down, downtown Bogotá movie theatre. Two leaflets were passed out to the approximately two hundred people in attendance. One of the leaflets had the words for a five-versed "Himno del Hijo del Pueblo," printed on it. See Appendix A for a reproduction of this leaflet.

⁴Valencia, op. cit., p. 32. However, the year of Gaitán's birth has also been given as 1900 (Lozano y Lozano)

Manuela Ayala de Gaitán. Soon after his birth, the business interests of his father collapsed.⁵ The elder Gaitán thereupon transferred his wife and infant son from their modest home in Barrio de Las Cruces,⁶ in which Jorge Eliécer had been born, to a shabby, working-class neighborhood, Barrio Egipto, where Jorge Eliécer grew up among ragged companions whose playground was the street.

The failure that resulted in his move to Barrio Egipto was not the first experienced by Eliecer Gaitán. Earlier attempts at newspaper publishing had also ended in financial disaster.⁷ In spite of his economic difficulties, Eliécer Gaitán still prided himself on his "middle class"⁸ status and emphasized his inherent "superiority" over those

and 1903 (José María Córdoba). Gaitán's passport, issued in 1926, lists his age as "twenty-three." Consejo de Bogotá, op. cit., p. 388. However, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán's certificate of baptism, issued by Bogotá's Cathedral Parrish on March 12, 1898, and reproduced in the Consejo de Bogotá, op. cit. collection on p. 13, confirms the date of Gaitán's birth as January 23, 1898.

⁵The author was unable to establish the exact nature of the business. José María Córdoba describes it as "un almacén por la Calle 11 entre Carreras 10 y 11 cerca de el una salsamentaria y un hotel restaurante. ..." José María Córdoba, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán: tribuno popular de Colombia (Bogotá: Litograficas 'Cor-Vall,' [sic.]; [n.d.]), p. 7.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Osorio, op. cit., pp. 13, 15, and 17.

⁸Ibid., p. 11.

of the artisan and working classes with whom his latest financial misfortune had forced him to live.

Manuela Ayala de Gaitán presented a sharp contrast to her husband. A primary difference was that she was to be considered "a success" in life. Also, she sympathized with the socially and economically handicapped people whom her husband despised.⁹ Moreover, she was a nonconformist, rebelling from the "respectable classes" with which her husband sought to identify.

An ardent Liberal, Manuela Ayala left the capital's Escuela Normal¹⁰ at sixteen to teach in the neighboring community of Subachoque. Apparently, her stay in Subachoque was short,¹¹ and outspokenness in the classroom prompted various dismissals from subsequent teaching positions.¹² It was during her early years in teaching that she was accused of being affiliated with Masons and was excommunicated from

⁹From the Introduction. Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, Las mejores oraciones de Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, 1919-1948 (Bogotá: Editorial Jorvi, 1958), pp. iv-v.

¹⁰Escuela Normal, a teachers' college.

¹¹In a memorandum to the author in May 1967, Juan Lozano y Lozano described Subachoque as "a relatively important town in Cundinamarca, about 90 miles from Bogotá, with a Liberal majority."

¹²Córdoba, op. cit., p. 8.

the Church.¹³ The document which records her marriage to Eliécer Gaitán on July 6, 1895, indicated that she was then "the widow of Domingo Ferrero," a man about whom nothing else is known to the author.¹⁴

Her involvement in controversial activity continued even after the birth of Jorge Eliécer. It is reported that she and the boy narrowly escaped with their lives after Manuela Gaitán admonished the townspeople of Chocontá for their persecution of a practicing Presbyterian.¹⁵

As would be suggested by these brief descriptions of his parents, Jorge Eliécer grew up in a home split between two very strong and very different personalities. Moreover, he became the object of a perpetual tug of war between the two. Eliécer Gaitán, struggling to provide for his ever-increasing family,¹⁶ wanted the boy to quit his schooling to help augment the meager income of the family. Manuela Gaitán was equally determined that the boy continue his formal education. Her will prevailed, and she even managed to

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴From "Informacion Matrimonial" compiled by Vicario Auxiliar, Arturo Garrido Campo, of the Las Cruces Parrish in Bogotá for the Consejo de Bogotá, op. cit., p. 23.

¹⁵Córdoba, op. cit., p. 8.

¹⁶Jorge Eliécer was the first of seven children born to Eliécer and Manuela Gaitán. Osorio, op. cit., p. 18.

supplement his classroom education with lessons of her own. Besides helping him with the traditional disciplines of reading and arithmetic, she also imparted some of her social philosophy.¹⁷ A principal tenet was that an "individual must be evaluated in terms of his personal worth rather than by economic or social circumstances."¹⁸

Eliécer Gaitán made little attempt to conceal the fact that he did not particularly like Jorge Eliécer, who began to emerge as the favorite of Manuela Gaitán.¹⁹ Possibly the elder Gaitán was jealous. Possibly he saw in his "pathetic-looking child, with long disproportionate features, . . . [and] dark blood reflecting the blood of an Indian ancestor"²⁰ a confirmation of his failure to provide well for his family or perhaps even more irritatingly, of his own humble antecedence.²¹ For whatever reason or

¹⁷Osorio, op. cit., p. 20.

¹⁸Introduction. Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, Las mejores oraciones, op. cit., p. v.

¹⁹From a conversation between the sister of Amparo Jaramillo and the author in the Valencia home in September 1966. The sister, who knew both Manuela and Eliécer Gaitán, felt Jorge Eliécer, the first born, was the favorite of his mother and even inherited her sensitivity, "because he was the only one of her numerous children conceived in love."

²⁰Osorio, loc. cit.

²¹There is a definite social stigma attached to dark skin in Colombia. "The darker the skin, the lower the social strata," seems axiomatic in the Colombian popular mind.

or reasons, he continued to bully the boy for not leaving school to help out with the family income.

Nevertheless, Jorge Eliécer remained in school. After completing primary work at the Escuela San Vicente de Paul, he was enrolled in a trade school directed by the Christian Brothers.²² At the later institution, Jorge Eliécer is remembered as a "precocious but undisciplined student who, despite his diminutive size, was frequently involved in fist fights with his classmates."²³ He reportedly once even threw an ink pot at one of the friars.²⁴ During these years, he did contribute to the family income by peddling secondhand books in the Bogotá train terminal.²⁵

The first newspaper article found by the author which refers to Jorge Eliécer Gaitán reflects a rebellious nature:

Last night the police in Chapinero²⁶ took into their custody the youths, Jorge Eliécer and Manuel José Gaitán, who had run away from their parents' home the night before last.²⁷

²²Córdoba, op. cit., p. 8.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Osorio, op. cit., p. 30.

²⁶Chapinero was then a small community a few miles north of Bogotá. Today, it has become incorporated into the city and is the site of some of Bogotá's most fashionable residences.

²⁷An excerpt from the July 13, 1911 Gaceta Republicana which was featured in a column by one of Bogotá's

Shortly after the incident, Jorge Eliécer was sent to Facatativá, a small town located about 25 miles northwest of Bogotá, where he was enrolled in the María Gooding Colegio, a school established and run by a close friend of his mother.²⁸

Jorge Eliécer spent only a year at the Gooding school. The author found nothing relative to the circumstances of his return, nor much on his activity for the next two years. Juan Lozano y Lozano believes he was a scholarship student at a modest colegio by Martín Restrepo Mejía.²⁹

In 1914, the Colombian Ministry of Education received a letter from Eliécer Gaitán requesting that his son be granted a scholarship for study at either of the nation's two most exclusive preparatory schools, the Jesuit's Colegio San Bartolomé and the Colegio del Rosario.³⁰ His request

leading columnists, "Emilia." Entitled, "La Decadencia de la Imaginación," this column appeared in a July 1936 issue of El Espectador [Bogotá, Colombia], [n.d.].

²⁸Osorio, op. cit., p. 24; and Valencia, op. cit., p. 32.

²⁹Lozano y Lozano in conversation with the author in Rome, April 1967.

³⁰From a letter from Eliécer Gaitán to the Minister of Public Education, dated "Bogotá, 12 de 1914," and appearing in Consejo de Bogotá, op. cit., p. 41.

was turned down. In their response, Ministry officials explained that scholarships were not available for study in those schools.³¹

The following year Jorge Eliécer, himself, secured a scholarship to attend a second-rate but still socially prestigious preparatory school, Colegio Simon Araújo. In spite of young Gaitán's admiration and even affection³² for the director, Dr. Araújo, he is reported to have been very unhappy at the school where "economic and social circumstances" indeed seemed to serve as an important criterion when determining a person's "worth."³³ There, the economically privileged reportedly teased him about his well-worn clothing³⁴ and made an issue of his unusually dark complexion with the derisive nickname, "El Negro."³⁵

It is possible that it was during his years at the

³¹From a memorandum written by the Minister of Public Education, Emilio Ferrero, dated November 7, 1914, and cited in Consejo de Bogotá, op. cit., p. 42.

³²Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, "Simon Araújo," written in 1916 and included in Consejo de Bogotá, op. cit., pp. 45-46.

³³Osorio, op. cit., p. 28; and Heliodoro Linares, Yo acuso! (Bogotá: Editorial Iqueima, 1959), p. 54. The reader is advised to check Mr. Linares' statements against those of other writers before arriving at any conclusions.

³⁴Osorio, op. cit., p. 28.

³⁵Ibid., p. 33.

Araujo School that Jorge Eliécer began to formulate those goals he would pursue in later life. A miserable present can prompt fantastic dreams for a better future, and Jorge Eliécer's goals³⁶ can be safely described as "fantastic dreams" when one considers his circumstances at that time.

"Success," as defined by the student Gaitán, would be manifested in:

. . . the great European universities he would attend, the spectacular trials in which he would successfully defend his client, the multitudes he would someday lead, the beautiful aristocrat he would . . . marry, and the . . . ease with which he would solve the economic, social, and international problems of Colombia as president of that nation.³⁷

It is also possible that it was during his years at Araujo that Gaitán developed a quality that helped him to achieve many of these goals--the ability to evaluate himself and his environment with what seems to have been unusually keen insight. As an outsider at Araújo, Gaitán was in a position to reflect upon himself and his surroundings perhaps a little more objectively than had he been more involved with his peers.

Certainly, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán was not the first Colombian from a modest background to have had ambitious

³⁶Lozano y Lozano, "Mis contemporarios: Jorge Eliécer Gaitán," Obras selectas, op. cit., p. 289.

³⁷Ibid.

dreams and a keen sense of what was necessary to realize them. What is important is that he succeeded in realizing most of them. That he did so in spite of his unpromising background is a tribute to a third element in the character of Gaitán, unusual tenacity which, by his adult years, had been refined into extraordinary self-discipline.

Juan Lozano y Lozano provides an example of the tenacity of young Gaitán in the following passage from his book, Obras selectas: poesía-prosa.

One day in 1914, a group of distinguished citizens gathered in the Parque de los Mártires in Bogotá to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Colombian Revolutionary War hero, Ricaurte.

Three civic leaders had been invited to speak for the occasion and a pretty little girl from the aristocracy, Maruja Vegas (who was later to become the wife of Carlos Arango Vélez³⁸), was to recite a poem.

Each time a speaker left the podium, a disagreeable incident occurred. A ragged-looking youth, who was not on the program, appeared on the platform, saying, "Senor presidente de la República, señoras, señores. ..." ³⁹

At this point of his attempted discourse, the boy would be escorted back to the audience by policemen who resorted to more drastic measures each time it was necessary to remove the youth.

Their vigil relaxed, however, when the program ended and people stood up to leave. At this point, Jorge Eliécer once more mounted the speakers' platform and,

³⁸Carlos Arango Vélez was Gaitán's predecessor in the mayoralty.

³⁹"Mr. President of the Republic, ladies, and gentlemen. . . ."

in an excellent voice, delivered his own patriotic speech.

The president and the distinguished guests returned to their seats and the public stopped to listen. Jorge Eliécer, upon finishing, was much applauded.⁴⁰

The self-discipline of Gaitán in his adult years is evident in many of his endeavors. He seems to have had little patience with anything that in his opinion, was not done thoroughly or well, and such pursuit of perfection was not limited to matters inspired by thought. He despised his sickly physique and, although by nature "inclined to sloth,"⁴¹ he sought physical perfection by embarking upon a strenuous program of rowing by which he eventually built himself up to "corpulence."⁴²

It was through self-disciplinary measures that Gaitán also attained a university education. After Araújo, Gaitán could no longer count on his parents for providing his basic support. Thus, Gaitán, himself, had to meet his basic needs during his university years. At the time, it was unusual for a Colombian university student to be employed in work other than his studies; the "part-time" position which has

⁴⁰Lozano y Lozano, op. cit., pp. 289-290.

⁴¹Lozano y Lozano, "Aniversario de Jorge Eliécer Gaitán," Obras selectas, op. cit., p. 485.

⁴²Osorio, op. cit., p. 47.

helped many North American university students through their university years, was virtually unknown. Nevertheless, Gaitán assumed full-time work to maintain himself. Apparently the job was not particularly lucrative,⁴³ and Gaitán was forced to discipline himself not only in terms of time, but also in terms of money. He is recalled by his university classmates as "studying throughout the night"⁴⁴ by the "meager light of public plazas."⁴⁵ It has also been said that he skipped regular meals by killing hunger with agua de panela⁴⁶ and cheap bread.⁴⁷

In 1924, four years after he had entered Colombia's Universidad Nacional, Gaitán was awarded a doctorate in Law and Social Sciences. His tesis de grado⁴⁸ was an essay

⁴³The exact nature of this work is not known to the author. However, the popular idea is that it was some sort of office job.

⁴⁴Osorio, op. cit., p. 45.

⁴⁵Oliverio Perry, Quien es quien en Colombia, (Bogotá: Editoriales ARGRA, A B C, and ANTENA, [n.d.]), p. 126.

⁴⁶agua de panela is a beverage consumed by the Colombian peasantry. It is made by adding panela, a crude form of sugar resembling dried and hardened brown sugar, to hot water. However, its use is not limited to Colombia's lowest classes. Aristocratic Colombians join others in drinking it for its "medicinal value."

⁴⁷Lozano y Lozano, "Mis contemporarios," Obras selectas, op. cit., p. 289.

⁴⁸tesis de grado, or thesis for degree. Joaquín

entitled, Las ideas socialistas en Colombia. In it, he set forth many of the ideas he later used in his political campaigns such as the ownership of land by those who work it, the supervision of production and administration of industry by its labor force, state intervention in economic planning, and equal benefits for capital and labor.⁴⁹

Gaitán was not well-liked by the oligarchic element at the university. He is described by one of the group as having been "petulant, bitter, vane,"⁵⁰ and having had inordinately "bad taste."⁵¹ Another recalls Gaitán as "an intensely bitter youth driven by an all-consuming desire to sobresalir,⁵² a characteristic that dominated whatever idealism he might have had."⁵³ This critic of Gaitán also

Ospina, op. cit., notes that the thesis was "not especially original but was well-coordinated and, considering the novelty of the idea among us, caused quite a stir." The thesis has been published and reprinted several times, and a copy is available in the Main Library at the University of California at Berkeley.

⁴⁹Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, Las ideas socialistas en Colombia (Bogotá: Editorial Minerva, 1924), pp. 16, 18, 19, 21, 31, and 40.

⁵⁰Lozano y Lozano, "Mis contemporarios," Obras selectas, op. cit., p. 289.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²sobresalir, liberally translated means "to be a standout," or to surpass others in a particular achievement.

⁵³Rafael Arciniegas in conversation with the author, September 1966.

related that whenever Gaitán joined "their group" for whatever discussion they might be having, he would not be content unless all attention focused on him.⁵⁴

In spite of his demanding work and study schedule, Gaitán found time to undertake various extracurricular projects while at the university. He founded a cultural extension program that provided night classes for day-laborers.⁵⁵ He was the university's representative-by-correspondence to the Society of Arts and Sciences in Bremen, Germany.⁵⁶ His articles and essays on contemporary politics, decidedly more theoretical than practical,⁵⁷ appeared in the Bogotá press with relative frequency. He also assumed the counsel for the defense in two spectacular criminal trials.

The first of these trials was that of a worker accused of stealing money from a socially-prominent Colombian at gunpoint. At the conclusion of the trial, Gaitán attracted national attention by delivering an impassioned

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Osorio, op. cit., p. 61; and Perry, op. cit., p. 162.

⁵⁶From a clipping from "Cromos," dated "marzo de 1921" and appearing in Consejo de Bogotá, Colección, op. cit., p. 100. Valencia, op. cit., p. 32, also mentions that Gaitán held the position.

⁵⁷Consejo de Bogotá, Colección, op. cit., pp. 75-77, 103-107, 110, 114, 116-117, 119-121, 133-135, 140, 144-145, 148-149, 150-155, 158, 161, 163, and 166, among others.

twelve-hour plea for the defendant.⁵⁸ It was in a second trial, however, that Gaitán's talent and approach as a defense attorney, were established.⁵⁹ This second trial is still recalled by bogotanos who remember it by its popular name, "The Case of La Ñapa."⁶⁰

"La Ñapa" was the nickname given to a young peasant woman, Eva Pinzón, who allegedly had seduced the mates of several of her rural neighbors. Overcome with jealousy, a group of neighborhood women killed "La Ñapa" in the course of a crude investigation to determine whether or not the girl was pregnant. The Colombian public felt repulsion for the crime, but Gaitán nevertheless volunteered counsel for the women.

Basing the defense on the concept that an individual is the product of his environment, Gaitán focused public

⁵⁸This case was known as the "Vélez Lora" case. The defendant, Antonio Vélez Lora, "un hombre del pueblo," admittedly broke into the office of socially prominent Emiliano Laserna and, at gun-point, forced the latter to give him 5,000 pesos. Osorio, op. cit., pp. 68-69. Gaitán's defense convinced the jurors that Velez was only recovering money unjustly taken from him by Laserna. Valencia, op. cit., p.32; and Osorio, op. cit., p. 69. Osorio makes the point that, previously, a worker would have had little chance of winning the public's sympathy under such circumstances.

⁵⁹Perry, op. cit., p. 162.

⁶⁰"La Ñapa," literally, "the discount." The author found no explanation for this unusual nickname.

attention on the plight of the peasant.⁶¹ He argued that the murder of "La Ñapa" was not so much the crime of the defendants as it was that of the society which had brutalized them to the point of being capable of such savagery.⁶² Although the women were convicted, the press credited Gaitán with a major victory as he succeeded in creating public awareness of the miserable condition of the masses.⁶³

After receiving his doctorate from the National University on October 29, 1924, Gaitán rented a flat in a dilapidated,⁶⁴ downtown office building, on Carrera Séptima between Calles 13 and 14. Using furnishings rented at two pesos⁶⁵ a day, he set up his first law office.

According to Osorio Lizarazo, who offers the most detailed biography of Gaitán that the author was able to locate, the young graduate dedicated his first months of

⁶¹Osorio, op. cit., p. 74.

⁶²Ibid., pp. 74-75.

⁶³Ibid., p. 76.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 85.

⁶⁵Lozano y Lozano, in response to the author's query about the value of the Colombian peso, at that time, wrote in a memo:

"En 1920, un peso colombiano equivalía exactamente a un dolar y, a veces, tenía un ligero premio sobre el dolar. En Colombia circulaba el oro de mano en mano y los policías y las sirvientes eran pagados en libras esterlinas. Gaitán y yo gastabamos en Roma lo mismo: Cién pesos colombianos mensuales, que hoy equivalen a menos de seis dolares."

practice to extending his legal education.⁶⁶ He selected cases according to what he, personally, would learn during the process of defending his client, rather than according to what he could earn. Thus, he continued to provide free counsel for the indigent, in spite of the fact he could not afford it. Osorio relates that the economic position of Gaitán at that time was so precarious that sometimes he was unable to pay the daily fee for his rented furnishings, and the owner would remove them, leaving Gaitán, "without anything to sit on."⁶⁷

During his second year of practice, Gaitán strengthened his financial position. He had established himself as a formidable defense attorney⁶⁸ and attracted and demanded high fees from those able to pay. He continued to live frugally, however, and by 1926, had saved over 1,000 pesos.⁶⁹

With the money, Gaitán began to plan for study in Europe. He selected the Real Universita di Roma,⁷⁰ world

⁶⁶Osorio, op. cit., pp. 86-87.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 85.

⁶⁸Perry, op. cit., p. 162.

⁶⁹Osorio, op. cit., p. 93. Osorio states that the only luxury Gaitán permitted himself during this year was that of several hours of rowing each week at a concession located on the banks of the now dried-up Rio Fucha in Bogotá.

⁷⁰Real Universita di Roma, the Royal University of Rome.

center for the study of penal law,⁷¹ as the site for his continued study. One of the most celebrated members of the faculty at that university was a renowned scholar of positivist law,⁷² Enrico Ferri.

⁷¹Valencia, op. cit., p. 32.

⁷²Positivist law refers to that approach in which categorical definition of crime is replaced by consideration of the environmental circumstances of the alleged social transgression. Lozano y Lozano was one of many to note that Ferri was one of the most celebrated scholars in the field of positivist law. In the following memo to the author concerning Gaitán's choice of Rome for post-doctoral work, he wrote:

"Gaitán, que fué siempre exigente consigo mismo, comprendía que necesitaba estudiar a fondo la especialidad de su predilección, o sea el derecho criminal. Por entonces, la sede de esos estudios era la Universidad de Roma, en cuya facultad de Derecho y Ciencias Políticas el celebre Profesor Enrico Ferri había creado hacía años y seguía dirigiendo una especie de Seminario, o sea la 'Scuola d'Appliazione Giuridico Criminale'." Allí, con base en teorías de Lombroso, un grupo de insignes juristas, sociólogos, psicólogos, antropólogos, estadísticos, etc. como Giuseppe Lergi, Scipio Sighele, Otto Lenghi, etc. [sic.]; había aplicado los principios de la Ciencia Positiva de Compte y de Lombroso, a la ciencia criminal, que hasta entonces era de carácter estrictamente jurídico y clásico. Se clasificaban--en la escuela clásica--y se definían los delitos y luego se establecía una correspondiente tarifa de penas. Contra esa escuela clásica, Ferri proclamó la necesidad del estudio de la personalidad del delincuente, de su ambiente social, sus taras psíquicas, etc. Así surgió la nueva ciencia inventada por Ferri, de la "Sociologia Criminal." Ello constituía entonces una revolución y alumnos y profesores de todos partes del mundo venían a escuchar el nuevo mensaje de Ferri, que era un hombre superdotado y de sus grandes y apostólicos compañeros. Las teorías de la Escuela Positiva están hoy en gran parte revaluadas. Algunos jóvenes abogados colombianos como Rafael Escallón, Carlos Arango Vélez, Carlos Lozano y Lozano, habían en años anteriores hecho este curso y sembrado la inquietud en nuestro medio. Ferri, que se pagaba mucho de su celebridad

Gaitán realized that his savings, alone, would not be enough to finance his projected year of study in Europe. He consequently turned capitalist and spent 700 pesos to establish a small pharmacy, "Drogueria Venenciana."⁷³ He convinced his younger brother, Manuel José, then a student at the National University Medical School, to leave his studies for a year to manage the store. The immediate profits were to go towards Gaitán's living expenses while in Europe. Later profits were promised Manuel José for completion of his schooling.⁷⁴

Gaitán left Colombia for Rome in July 1926. He was considered an outstanding student at the Italian university. He was awarded his doctorate in jurisprudence, magna cum laude, on July 11, 1927,⁷⁵ at which time aged Ferri,⁷⁶ was

internacional, era muy benevolo con sus discípulos, y a Gaitán lo distinguio mucho."

⁷³"Drogueria Veneciana," literally, "Venetian Drugstore." The store, which no longer functions, was located on Calle 12 in front of Plaza Nariño. Osorio, op. cit., p. 94.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 93. According to Gaitán's daughter, Gloria de Valencia, Manuel Jose Gaitán did succeed in obtaining his degree in medicine and is still practicing in Girardot, a small town about 110 miles west of Bogotá on the Magdalena River in tierra caliente.

⁷⁵Perry, op. cit., p. 162; Joaquín Ospina, op. cit., p. 24; and Valencia, op. cit., p. 32.

⁷⁶Ferri died in his eighties soon after Gaitán's return to Bogotá.

moved to comment that of all the students he had taught during his long career, Gaitán had been "the most interesting and extraordinary."⁷⁷ When Gaitán returned to Colombia six months after having been awarded his degree in Rome, a letter from Ferri was awaiting him, informing him that university officials had unanimously elected him the recipient of the school's coveted "Premio Ferri"⁷⁸ for his work in penal law. Ferri also announced that one of Gaitán's works on premeditation was scheduled to appear in the May 1928 issue of the Italian journal, Scuola Positiva.⁷⁹

Following receipt of the degree in Rome, Gaitán spent

⁷⁷From an article, "Le Fué Concedido el Premio Ferri al doctor Jorge Eliécer Gaitán," in El Tiempo, op. cit., [n.d.].

⁷⁸Premio Ferri, literally, "Ferri Award," was established in 1911 to honor "the most worthy student" in the classes of the maestro. When awarded to Gaitán, it included the cash award of 1,000 Italian lira which Gaitán used to establish the "Premio Republica de Colombia" for the most promising law students of that country. El Tiempo, loc. cit.

⁷⁹From a letter from Ferri to Gaitán dated January 20, 1928 and reproduced in Valencia, op. cit., p. 38. When at the University of Rome Library in March 1966, the author was unable to locate the journal referred to in this letter, Scuola Positiva, but subsequent research in the University of California at Berkeley Library revealed this particular issue is available at the Harvard Law School Library. Its complete title is Scuola Positiva: Rivista de Diritto e Procedur Penale. It was being published in Milan at the time this particular article appeared.

several months touring Europe. According to his passport, he visited Austria, Czechoslovakia, Germany, Belgium, and France.⁸⁰ In Paris, he encountered a group of young Colombians enjoying the Bohemian life of the Latin Quarter.⁸¹ Among these young men was the journalist, Alejandro Vallejo,⁸² who was to write of Gaitán's days in Paris.⁸³

Vallejo and his friends became acquainted with Gaitán half a world away from the structured society of their homeland. Gaitán became acquainted with them after having distinguished himself in a great university. Although he impressed Vallejo as being somewhat of a cultural parvenu,⁸⁴

⁸⁰The pages from his passport have been reproduced in Consejo de Bogotá, op. cit., pp. 352-58.

⁸¹Alejandro Vallejo, Hombres de Colombia: memorias de un colombiano exilado en Venezuela (Caracas: Avila Gráfica, [n.d.], p. 42.

⁸²Vallejo, now living in Caracas, became a close friend of Gaitán and was at his side at the time of the assassination.

⁸³Vallejo, op. cit., pp. 40-62.

⁸⁴Ibid. Vallejo was somewhat stunned by Gaitán's unusually strong intellectual curiosity.

"... [Gaitán] demostraba una formidable pasión para conocerlo todo. Desde las seis de la mañana estaba a pie. Visitaba museos, asistía a conferencias, a los teatros, a las exposiciones, a los conciertos, a los mitines políticos, compraba libros, visitaba a los hombres famosos. ... Naturalmente, a nosotros nos era imposible seguirlo en todas sus andanzas. Además, para mi gusto, al ritmo de sus inquietudes no era el mío."

Gaitán was well-received by the journalist and his friends who admired his "quick wit," "fantastic imagination," and "special appeal for the ladies."⁸⁵

In Europe, Gaitán kept informed of the course of Colombian politics, which were at that time entering a period of public dissatisfaction with the Conservatives then in power.⁸⁶ A popular criticism was that the Conservative president, Miguel Abadía Méndez, was sacrificing national interest in the process of attracting and perpetuating foreign investment in Colombia.⁸⁷ The administration's treatment of striking banana pickers on the United Fruit Company's leased plantations in the Department of Magdalena late in 1927 seemed to bear out these criticisms. Abadía had appealed to the striking workers to return to their jobs. When they refused, he ordered Colombian troops to force them back to work at gunpoint.⁸⁸ In the melee

⁸⁵Ibid. Vallejo relates that among Gaitán's conquests was a French countess who later named a chateau after one of the fantastic characters in a tale invented and told to her by Gaitán. From the Vallejo text, one also has the impression that Gaitán was well received by the ladies of Prague.

⁸⁶Osorio, op. cit., p. 100.

⁸⁷J. Fred Rippey, op. cit., pp. 180-182.

⁸⁸The New York Times, April 14, 1929, Part III, p. 4, col. 6; and Perry, op. cit., p. 163.

which followed, 107 Colombians lost their lives.⁸⁹

Gaitán arrived in Barraquilla⁹⁰ from Europe shortly after the incident. In Barranquilla, he called upon a Liberal journalist, Clemente Manuel Zabala,⁹¹ for details of the tragedy. Together, they toured the area of the ill-fated strike. Gaitán interviewed the survivors of the massacre and incorporated his findings in a report Zabala published in his Barranquilla newspaper, La Nación.⁹²

The article appeared at a time when the Liberal Party, almost half a century out of power, sensed in the indignation of the public over Abadía's bloody suppression of the strikers an opportunity for political come-back. Gaitán's journalistic attack on Abadía, essentially a cry for social justice, was translated into political attack by Liberal Party leaders as they began their assault on crumbling Conservative hegemony.

⁸⁹"Las Investigaciones del Dr. Gaitán," El Espectador, op. cit., July 24, 1928.

⁹⁰Barranquilla, located on the Magdalena River delta near the confluence of that river with the Caribbean, is the chief port of Colombia and one of that nation's largest cities.

⁹¹Zabala, about whom the author found no further reference, was described by Lozano y Lozano as "... un contemporaneo ... aficionado a la literatura, que no hizo carrera."

⁹²Osorio, op. cit., pp. 118-120.

Using Gaitán's social protest in their political attack, Liberal leaders, deliberately or accidentally, converted Gaitán into a national figure almost overnight. His identity as a national hero thus established, Gaitán was selected by Liberal Party officials to head the party ticket in his home department⁹³ of Cundinamarca in the 1928 midterm elections.⁹⁴ On March 20, 1928, exactly two months after his return to Colombia, Gaitán was elected to the Colombian House of Representatives.⁹⁵

Gaitán immediately distinguished himself in the House with impassioned pleas for indemnification for the widows and orphans of the "Banana Zone Massacre."⁹⁶ After announcing that his salary as a congressman would go towards such indemnification, his colleagues approved governmental indemnification.⁹⁷ During this term, Gaitán also proposed bases for new labor legislation including increased protection for strike participants.⁹⁸ He also contributed to

⁹³A "department" in Colombia is an administrative unit more or less comparable to a "state" in the United States.

⁹⁴Joaquín Ospina, op. cit., p. 24; and Perry, op. cit., p. 163.

⁹⁵Valencia, op. cit., p. 32.

⁹⁶"El Verdadero Problema Nacional es el de Las Bananeras," El Espectador, op. cit., [n.d.].

⁹⁷Osorio, op. cit., p. 126.

⁹⁸Ibid.

the growing public dissatisfaction with the Conservative Party by his incessant criticism of the Abadía regime.⁹⁹

In the 1930 presidential election, Gaitán again running on the Liberal ticket, was elected to a second term in the House. The Liberals also succeeded in electing a president, Enrique Olaya Herrera, a patrician, who was also the first man to represent the Liberal Party in the presidency since Rafael Núñez abandoned the Liberal Party in 1886 during his second term as president.¹⁰⁰

Gaitán continued to assert himself during his second term in the House. During the opening days of Congress, he proposed a constitutional reform which would make the Republic "re-evaluate its concept of the people and begin to consider them in human terms and not just in terms of what they could produce for the state."¹⁰¹ The reform called for a strengthened guarantee of the right to strike and also included a provision whereby employers would be required to furnish their workers with medical care and recreational

⁹⁹Ibid, pp. 126-128.

¹⁰⁰Martínez, op. cit., appendix; Osorio, op. cit., p. 136; and Indalecio Liévano Aguirre, Rafael Núñez (Bogotá: Compañía Grancolombiana de Ediciones, S. A., [n.d.]), p. 268.

¹⁰¹Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, "Proyecto de reforma constitucional," cited in Valencia, loc. cit.

facilities.¹⁰² Also, he began to consolidate a personal following by going into workers' neighborhoods and the countryside and urging the poor of these areas to unite behind him in his campaign against the privileged classes of Colombia.¹⁰³ Interestingly, this tactic did not result in any loss of power within the oligarch dominated Congress, as seen by Gaitán's election to the presidency of the House of Representatives in 1932.¹⁰⁴

However, President Olaya began to concern himself with Gaitán's growing power.¹⁰⁵ Troubled by economic crises resulting from the world depression and committed to a splinter group of Conservatives who had entrusted him with "holding the line" against radical Liberals,¹⁰⁶ Olaya was in no position to consider the reforms being urged by Gaitán.¹⁰⁷

It is claimed that Olaya tried to bring the young legislator under his own control.¹⁰⁸ He reportedly

¹⁰²Ibid.

¹⁰³Osorio, op. cit., pp. 124-125, 127, 128, and 137.

¹⁰⁴Perry, op. cit., p. 162; and Valencia, op. cit., p. 34.

¹⁰⁵Ospina, op. cit., pp. 137-138.

¹⁰⁶Fluharty, op. cit., p. 43.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., pp. 43-44. ¹⁰⁸Osorio, op. cit., p. 138.

flattered Gaitán with his apparent confidence and attempted to influence him by awarding him various state honors.¹⁰⁹ It is even said that Olaya arranged to have Gaitán invited to banquets, receptions, and other social functions normally closed to individuals of his social background.¹¹⁰

In 1932, Olaya sent Gaitán on a tour of Central America and Mexico¹¹¹ to rally international opinion to the side of Colombia in her dispute with Peru over the possession of the Amazon port of Leticia. Gaitán's skill as an orator served Colombia well, particularly in Mexico where he was initially received in the capital's Central University with hostility.¹¹² While there, he was challenged to debate the Leticia question with an Aprista student, Carlos Manuel Cox. Gaitán's rebuttal to the accusations of his youthful challenger won him the approval of the Mexican audience.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹Ibid., pp. 138-140.

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 153.

¹¹¹A United Press dispatch date-lined "Mexico," entitled "En Gran Escandalo Degenera el Debate que sobre Leticia iban a Sostener Gaitán y un Aprista," and appearing in the Valencia collection of newspaper clippings on Gaitán. The article, taken from an unidentified newspaper, reported: "... hojas volantes circularon en Mejico, en que pedían la expulsión de Gaitán por ser agente de imperialismo yanqui." Commenting on the article to the author in Bogotá in his home in September 1966, Gaitán's son-in-law, Luis Emiro Valencia (in whose library hangs a large picture of Karl Marx), laughingly dismissed the assertion as "stupid communist propaganda."

¹¹²"En Gran Escandalo. . .," loc. cit.

¹¹³Osorio, op. cit., p. 153.

A year later, the Olaya-Gaitán alliance, if one indeed existed, ended in bitter dispute. According to Osorio, Olaya summoned Gaitán to his office, to tell him of a plan to convert Bogotá into a special district.¹¹⁴ Gaitán, who had in the meantime been elected to the Bogotá City Council,¹¹⁵ refused to endorse the president's plan to bring his native city under the control of the central government. Olaya reportedly lost his temper and, in his anger, allegedly accused Gaitán of ingratitude for the protection and favors he had given him.¹¹⁶

Humiliated by Olaya's insinuation that he had been his protege, Gaitán reportedly became an avowed enemy of the president.¹¹⁷ A few months later, he announced that he had left the Liberal Party to organize his own following as the Unión Nacional Izquierdista Revolucionaria,¹¹⁸ or "UNIR."

¹¹⁴Ibid., pp. 156-157.

¹¹⁵Perry, op. cit., notes that Gaitán served continuously on the Bogotá City Council from 1929 to the time of his death.

¹¹⁶Osorio, op. cit., p. 157.

¹¹⁷Ibid., pp. 157-158. It should be noted that Dr. Lozano has serious reservations about this interpretation of Gaitán's split with the Liberal Party. Lozano believes that neither Gaitán nor Olaya had any personal animosity towards one another and that Gaitán's departure from the Party at this time was prompted by purely ideological considerations.

¹¹⁸Unión Nacional Izquierdista Revolucionaria; literally, the National Union of the Revolutionary Left.

The initials of the organization spell a Spanish verb meaning "to unite," and the unification of the disinherited members of both Liberal and Conservative Parties as an effective force against the oligarchy was Gaitán's basic goal.¹¹⁹ Borrowing heavily from the ideas put forth in his doctoral dissertation, Las ideas socialistas en Colombia, Gaitán drew up the following credo for "UNIR":

1. Land must belong to those who work it.
2. The unproductive latifundio¹²⁰ is a crime against [the] economy and [the] society.
3. Only capital won by work is justifiable.
4. Capital gained through speculation and the exploitation of man is illicit and criminal.
5. Workers must supervise the production and administration of industry.
6. There is no difference between capital and labor in the economy because neither of the two could function without the other.
7. The state has the right to intervene in the direction of the economy.
8. Elections must stop being a farce or a business and those elected should only be the most worthy and capable candidates.¹²¹

¹¹⁹Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, "El Manifiesto del Unirismo," La Nueva Prensa, 95:65-80, April 6, 1963.

¹²⁰latifundio is defined as a "large, landed estate," by Benjamin Keen, Readings in Latin American Civilization, 1492 to the Present (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1955), p. 476.

¹²¹Gaitán, op. cit., pp. 16, 18-19, 21, 31, and 40; and Osorio, op. cit., pp. 162-163.

It is interesting to note that one month after Gaitán broke with the Liberal Party to form "UNIR," his colleagues in Congress elected him "Segundo Designado a la Presidencia de la República," or second vice-president of the nation, which put him only two heart beats away from the top administrative post in Colombia.¹²²

In Congress, Gaitán applied his oratory to his fight for the incorporation of the "UNIR" credo into national law. He also continued to visit areas in which there were concentrations of poor to rally support for the "UNIR" program.¹²³ In June 1934, he was an important figure in the direction of a railway workers' strike in the Department of Antioquia, the most industrialized region in Colombia.¹²⁴ It was during this time, on one of his frequent trips to the Antioquian capital, Medellín, that Gaitán met Amparo Jaramillo, a strikingly beautiful girl,¹²⁵ whom Juan Lozano y Lozano describes as from a "poor, yet one of the most

¹²²Osorio, op. cit., p. 152; and Valencia, op. cit., p. 36.

¹²³Osorio, op. cit., pp. 164-167.

¹²⁴Valencia, op. cit., p. 36.

¹²⁵Today Mrs. Gaitán, who owns a small antique shop, "Girasol," in the Teusequilla section of Bogotá, is as strikingly handsome as she was beautiful in pictures in the May 1936 newspapers that announced her marriage to Gaitán.

socially prestigious families in Medellín."¹²⁶

Amparo Jaramillo had been following the activities of Gaitán with interest and admiration.¹²⁷ For almost a year before the Antioquian strike, she had been cutting out newspaper articles on Gaitán and pasting them in a scrapbook.¹²⁸ When she met Gaitán at a Medellín party in June 1934, Amparo Jaramillo did not fail to mention her scrapbook. Gaitán visited her in her family home the following day, and after two years of correspondence, they were married in an austere, private ceremony at the Iglesia de la Candelaria in Medellín on May 27, 1936.¹²⁹

Meanwhile, Gaitán's attempt to make "UNIR" a permanent, effective force in Colombian politics had failed. By 1936, he had returned to the ranks of the Liberal Party where he assumed control of the extreme left wing.¹³⁰

¹²⁶Lozano y Lozano in conversation with the author in Rome in March 1967.

¹²⁷Amparo Jaramillo de Gaitán and her sister in conversation with the author in Bogotá in September and October 1966.

¹²⁸Ibid.

¹²⁹El Diario /Medellín/, May 27, 1936; and El Diario de Antioquia, May 27, 1936.

¹³⁰Perry, loc. cit., claims "UNIR" failed because it was " . . . overshadowed by the developing social programs of the Liberal Party at the time." In a memo to the author, Lozano y Lozano declared the "UNIR" failed because of the

This is briefly the background and position of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán when he was appointed to the mayoralty of Bogotá on May 20, 1936. Interestingly, he was nearing the realization of those goals he reportedly professed as a student. He had attended a great European university. He had successfully defended clients in spectacular trials. He had become a leader of multitudes, and within a matter of days, he would be married to a beautiful aristocrat.

Thus Gaitán, on the eve of assuming the mayoralty of his native city, was probably a man very pleased with himself.¹³¹ As one examines his program as mayor in the following chapter, one is asked to consider whether Gaitán,

opportunism of the men Gaitán had selected to administer the program.

"Gaitán no pudo reclutar gente de valía para su movimiento. Los que entraron deseaban participar en la política activa y hacer elegir a las corporaciones públicas. Se presentaron a las primeras elecciones y fueron barridos [*'trounced'*]. Gaitán atribuía al 'manzanillismo' [*'petty graft'*] de sus amigos el fracaso. Estos amigos, por el contrario, decían que Gaitán no quería sino servirse de ellos para su triunfo sin dejarlos participar en nada. Este es el argumento del libro de López Giraldo, El apostol desnudo."

For those interested, a copy of this rather difficult -to-locate book is available at the Luis Angel Arango Library in Bogota.

¹³¹The description of Gaitán as "a man very pleased with himself," was taken from an essay written by B. Moreno Torralbo, entitled, "Gaitán ante si mismo," which appeared in a June 1943 edition of the Conservative paper, El Siglo and was reprinted in Consejo de Bogotá, op. cit., pp. 21-28.

wittingly, or perhaps unknowingly, was attempting to translate his personal success story into one applicable to all humble-born bogotanos.

CHAPTER III

THE MAYORALTY

Reflecting upon the life and mayoralty of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, one is aware of the similarity of the man's approach in the administration of personal and public affairs. As an administrator of his personal destiny, Gaitán was quite successful. Even by the time he was appointed to the Bogotá mayoralty at the relatively young age of thirty-eight, he had reached a point in his own life where he must have felt more or less in conformity with his "ideal self." In office, Gaitán seemingly poured energy formerly directed towards the realization of that "ideal self" into those means whereby he hoped to convert his native city into his concept of an ideal society.¹

Unfortunately for Gaitán, the principal means by which he had realized his own potential, initiative and self-discipline, are qualities an individual, himself, must develop. Gaitán could ask but not demand them of the general public. Nevertheless, he did demand them of the public,

¹This idea is based on Erik H. Erikson's theory that "a reformer is an individual who learned when a child a pattern of resolution of a personal problem that caused him intense anxiety," as quoted in Everett Einar Hagen, On the Theory of Social Change: How Economic Growth Begins (Homewood, Illinois: Dorsey Press, 1962), p. 6.

and for eight months the response was generally favorable.

As in anything Gaitán ever undertook, his eight-month term as mayor of Bogotá was an emotional, almost traumatic, experience for most everyone connected with it, and when the public finally tired of the demands imposed upon it by its energetic leader and he was recalled, his dismissal was also an emotional, almost traumatic experience.

As the following text illustrates, Gaitán was a peculiar blend of radical and conservative, idealist and pragmatist, or as expressed by one of his few confidants, " . . . a revolutionary who loathed disorder."² Tensions born of this dilemma were transmitted from Gaitán, the administrator, to the citizenry administered, and not unlike the masses who were at that time reacting rather similarly to the tension-charged personalities of Hitler and Mussolini, the Bogotá public was stimulated to unprecedented public spirit, and then provoked to extreme indignation, even hostility, by the strong and exciting personality of their leader.

Gaitán was named mayor of Bogotá on May 20, 1936, by the then newly-appointed governor of Cundinamarca, Parminio Cárdenas Galvis.³ The position was at the time being held

²Niño H., op. cit., p. 4.

³Parminio Cárdenas, in Cundinamarca Gubernatorial

by Francisco J. Arévalo, former secretary of the municipal government, who had been designated interim mayor after the resignation of Carlos Arango Vélez from the mayoralty in March of that year.⁴

The man who appointed Gaitán, Governor Cárdenas, was himself new to office, having been only a short time earlier appointed by the Liberal president, Alfonso López.⁵ Cárdenas had formerly been a senator and supreme court justice. In both positions he had acquired the reputation of being a reformer.⁶ He indicated his continuing interest in reform in his acceptance speech in which he emphasized his particular interest in municipal reform and then announced his appointment of Gaitán to the Bogotá mayoralty.

"The mayor," Cárdenas declared, "is the nerve center of good departmental administration."⁷ He described his ideal mayor as one who not only possessed great civic spirit, but great social conscience as well, and warned that

Decree #369, 1936, May 20, 1936, quoted in El Espectador, op. cit., May 1936.

⁴When in Bogotá, the author met with Dr. Arévalo who still serves as municipal secretary. He has stepped in several times as interim mayor, including the period following the resignation of Gaitán as mayor. Dr. Arévalo, who was municipal secretary under Gaitán, remembers the latter as "a most difficult man to work for," and as "extremely exigent."

⁵El Espectador, loc. cit.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

the latter quality was indispensable for any mayor who was to work effectively with his administration. He said he would not tolerate "parasites" who fed on the office,⁸ and added that:

The mayors in my government will be individuals with initiative who will elaborate on plans for improvement. . . . Above all, they must concern themselves with bringing social justice, culture, and economic well-being to the masses of workers and peasants, today abandoned and deserving better fortune.⁹

Referring to the specific problems facing his municipal administrators, Governor Cárdenas mentioned the "lack of a professional attitude" on the part of civil servants and declared that such failure at professionalism had resulted in "ineffective use of public funds."¹⁰ It was impossible with available materials to determine whether or not Cárdenas was suggesting that Bogotá functionaries were among the corrupt, but if graft were present in Bogotá, it meant particular concern for departmental and even national officials at that time. The city was on the eve of the four-hundredth anniversary of its founding, and both departmental and national governments were contributing money to help bogotanos prepare for a commemorative celebration.¹¹

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Bogotá Municipal Decree #214, 1936, July 14, 1936, relates that 206,000 pesos were donated by the nation and 5,000 pesos by Cundinamarca to the Bogotá Public Works

Towards the end of his speech, Cárdenas announced his appointment of Gaitán and indicated his strong support for his choice with the following declaration, "I would like to announce that between the new mayor and myself exists a most absolute and perfect agreement."¹²

At the time of the appointment, Gaitán was president of the Bogotá City Council. He was also a congressman, a member of the Department's penal commission, and a professor of jurisprudence at the Universidad Libre, where he held the more honorary than functional title of rector. He also had a sizable law practice.¹³

Gaitán accepted Cárdenas' appointment almost immediately after being approached by the governor about the position¹⁴ but asked for two weeks time before assuming office in order to settle his "personal affairs."¹⁵ Cárdenas consented to such an arrangement, "providing Gaitán would assume the post immediately in the event of an

Department for the fourth centennial celebration preparations.

¹²El Espectador, loc. cit.

¹³El Tiempo, op. cit., May 21, 1936.

¹⁴A copy of the text of Cárdenas letter to Gaitán requesting the latter to serve as Bogotá mayor is reproduced in Appendix B of this paper.

¹⁵El Tiempo, loc. cit.

emergency,"¹⁶ and thereupon named Jaime González Ortiz, municipal secretary of hacienda during the Arango Vélez administration, to serve as temporary mayor.¹⁷

González's reaction to Gaitán's appointment was one of the first recorded in detail in the Bogotá press. González asserted that, "The great intellectual and moral gifts that Gaitán possesses which are well known, are the best proof that the administration will be a successful one."¹⁸

The issue of El Tiempo which carried González's comment also related that:

. . . even the most distant towns in Cundinamarca have contributed to the infinite number of telegrams . . . that have been received and . . . [which indicate] that enthusiasm [for the appointment] is unanimous.¹⁹

Even a leader of Colombian banking interests joined in the praise. Eduardo Vallejo, the chief of the superintendencia bancaria²⁰ declared:

Dr. Gaitán will be an excellent mayor of Bogotá. He

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸El Tiempo, op. cit., May 22, 1936.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰superintendencia bancaria means banking superintendency, and at that time was:

"... una institución oficial que vigila la actuación de los bancos privados y oficiales, principalmente con el objeto de ver si cometen infracciones a la ley bancaria. Fue creada hacia 1920 por consejo de la misión financiera

is an individual of great prestige, intelligence, and organizational ability. . . .

Personally, I like the new mayor. Regarding an official statement of the bank on the appointment, I can not as of yet say anything because up to this point the junta has not discussed it. However, I believe that Dr. Gaitán will perform magnificently as mayor; he now enjoys enormous prestige and has a vast preparation. . . .

I do not believe that any motive exists that could provoke resistance on the part of the bankers to the new mayor. . . .

Dr. Gaitán is well-regarded, and, above all, . . . he is intelligent. And, with an intelligent person, one can quickly arrive at a reasonable resolution of any differences. . . .²¹

Speculation on Gaitán's impending mayoralty filled city newspapers. Among those considering the appointment was the El Espectador columnist, Roberto Julio González, who wrote in a late May edition in his column, "Zig-Zag":

Gaitán accepted the mayoralty because he knew that in that position he could put new life into the public administration of the capital city. . . .

Gaitán is not simply the demagogic agitator which many imagine him being. He knows enough not to

americana que presidió Mr. Kemmerer (the Money Doctor). El cargo de jefe de esa oficina es uno de los mas importantes de la jeraquía burocrática nacional."

Definition taken from a memo from Juan Lozano y Lozano to the author.

²¹Interview with Dr. Eduardo Vallejo, "Los Banqueros Hablan sobre el Estado de la Negociación/ Todos están de Acuerdo en que la Negociación Avanzará con la Presencia de Gaitán," El Tiempo, op. cit., [n.d.].

undertake any project that would not benefit the capital. . . .

Gaitán is an honest man, of great knowledge and wisdom, strong, straight, and active. . . .²²

Amid the public comment following the announcement of his appointment, Gaitán made use of the two weeks he had been granted. Momentarily escaping the public eye, he flew to Medellín, and in a quiet ceremony, married Amparo Jaramillo Jaramillo on May 27, 1936. The following day, the newlyweds returned to Bogotá where Mrs. Gaitán was warmly received by stunned, but delighted bogotanos.²³

On June 8, 1936, Gaitán took the oath of office for the mayoralty and became the twenty-seventh man to serve as Bogotá's mayor since the municipality was reorganized in 1891.²⁴ The oath of office was administered by the first

²²Roberto Julio González, "Zig-Zag," El Espectador, op. cit., May 1936.

²³"El Matrimonio de Ayer en Medellín," El Tiempo, op. cit., [May 28, 1936].

²⁴From information gathered from various volumes of the Bogotá Municipal Decrees. The first decrees in the Bogotá Municipal Archives' collection were those of Mayor Higenio Cualla who served from 1891 to 1898. Eight mayors succeeded Cualla until July 1905 when Bogotá was made into a special district and was served by three governors. The respective terms of these eight mayors and three governors are: 1 month, 1 month, 14 months, 4 months, 13 months, 16 months, 1 month, 9 months, 5 months, 4 months, and 4 months. In August 1908, Bogotá again became a municipality and had sixteen mayors serve up to the time of Gaitán's appointment. Their respective terms of office were: 16 months, 18

judge of the municipality, Carlos Saúl Goyeneche.²⁵

With his pledge to serve the city faithfully as mayor, Gaitán became more directly responsible for the alleviation of his native city's problems than he had been at any other time in his career. These problems were as unpleasant to contemplate as they were numerous. As discussed in Chapter I, Bogotá, experiencing the first stages of industrialization, was losing its equilibrium as the number of its inhabitants out-paced the community's capacity to absorb them. The city's patrician philosopher-poets had grown cynical, as seen in the words of Calibán,²⁶ a political commentator of the oligarchy whose column, "Danza de las Horas," still appears in Santos' newspaper, El Tiempo:

At last, Bogotá has her mayor! How will he fare? What will he do about the lepers and abandoned children who fill the streets, the filth of those streets, the houses without electricity, the beggars, the lazy bureaucrats, and the poor transit service?²⁷

months, 30 months, 1 month, 2 months, 4 months, 4 months, 4 months, 14 months, 25 months, 4 months, 10 months, 2 weeks, 8 months, 6 months, and 3 months.

²⁵El Espectador, op. cit., June 9, 1936.

²⁶Calibán is the pen-name used by Enrique Santos Montejo, a brother of the former president, Eduardo Santos. The name was probably taken from the novel by Jose Enrique Rodo, Ariel (Boston: Houghlin Mifflin Company, 1922), in which "Calibán" is the personification of a "materialistic," and "pragmatic" United States.

²⁷Calibán, "Danza de las Horas," El Tiempo, op. cit., June 10, 1936.

A few days earlier, Gaitán had suggested what he would do in an interview published in "Pluma Libre."²⁸ In the interview, Gaitán was asked his plans for the four-hundredth Centenario celebration, apparently a preoccupation of some of the city's more favored citizens who wanted Bogotá to be decorated for its anniversary. Gaitán responded that:

Bogotá, which today appears horribly deficient, lacking everything, is the product of a century of neglect. . . .

Now, with the occasion of the Centenario, each one wants to reconvert it overnight into a great, modern city, according to his particular conception of what a great, modern city should be. And this is not possible.

But, what is possible, is to begin, as soon as possible, with energy and without timidity, the realization of a program which, whatever it may be, is carried out to its finish.²⁹

Gaitán urged that "collective action"³⁰ be used in the realization of such a program:

Colombians must stop being spectators, and become actors . . . and must work for the interest of the community, rather than for their own personal interests.³¹

He concluded the interview declaring that he, personally, had relinquished all other demands upon his time,

²⁸"Pluma Libre," May 30, 1936. When asked by the author to identify "Pluma Libre," Dr. Lozano replied, "No recuerdo 'Pluma Libre.' Debió de ser periódico de existencia efímera, sin importancia."

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid.

"except for the rectorship of the Universidad Libre"³² to dedicate maximum energy to the demands of the mayoralty.

As noted, at the time Gaitán was installed as mayor, the Bogotá citizenry was particularly concerned with the city's physical appearance. Gaitán's response was an appeal for collective action. He had declared that rather than having municipal employees attempt to realize extensive physical change in the city, bogotanos, themselves, must undergo an attitudinal change, one that would ultimately be manifested in the desired physical change.³³

Paradoxically, Gaitán's initial decrees called for extensive physical transformation, in more or less minor areas, to foment this attitude. In his first decree as mayor, Gaitán ordered that individual citizens assume the responsibility of cleaning the city walls.³⁴ Each property owner was required to clean his particular extension of wall exposed to public view. He authorized the municipal police force to enforce the order. All who refused to cooperate were to be fined from 10 to 50 pesos.³⁵

This decree was followed by similar ones. Property owners were also made responsible for the following:

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Bogotá Municipal Decree #153, 1936, June 9, 1936.

³⁵Ibid.

enclosing open lots,³⁶ repairing public thoroughfares,³⁷ and constructing sidewalks.³⁸ In order to avoid creating a patchwork system of sidewalks, the last decree obliged property owners of each block to meet together and decide upon one of three specified materials: asphalt, cement, or paving stone, for their particular block. They were furthermore to agree upon a certain width and level for their block's stretch of sidewalk. They were given six months to complete the project. If they did not cooperate, they were to be fined up to 50 pesos for each week the construction remained incomplete.³⁹

In another decree, Gaitán required property owners to light all buildings which faced public thoroughfares.⁴⁰ When a newspaperman challenged that the local power plant was not capable of supplying so much electricity, Gaitán responded, "If everyone who is accustomed to lighting, sacrifices one of his lights, there will be enough energy to go around."⁴¹

³⁶Bogotá Municipal Decree #167, 1936, June 20, 1936.

³⁷Bogotá Municipal Decree #181, 1936, June 26, 1936.

³⁸Bogotá Municipal Decree #189, 1936, July 2, 1936.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Editorial, Mundo al Día, [Bogotá, Colombia], June 1936.

Some of Gaitán's decrees in the "collective action" aspect of his overall program for Bogotá appeared somewhat arbitrary. Perhaps the best example of such arbitrary measures is his fifth decree, issued on June 13, 1936, just five days after he had been installed as mayor. In it, Gaitán gave home and business owners until July 19 to paint residences and store fronts one of five colors: cream, ivory, yellow, dull pink, or light brown. He forbade dark colors, red or blue.⁴² The reasoning behind this rather unusual order was that light colors would give the city a cleaner, brighter look. Blue, red, and even lighter shades of those colors were prohibited because of the close association of those colors with political parties in Colombia. In spite of the publicity given these reasons in the Bogotá press, the decree was the first of several which made a growing number of bogotanos suspicious of their new mayor. A strongly individualistic people, they resented being told what color they were to paint their property.⁴³

Exigent as Gaitán was of the general public, he was even more demanding of his staff. This paper has included the remarks of Governor Cárdenas and Columnist Calibán, which suggested the need for administrative reform at the

⁴²Bogotá Municipal Decree #158, 1936, June 13, 1936.

⁴³Fluharty, op. cit., pp. 167-68.

municipal level.⁴⁴ Gaitán left no doubt that he intended to undertake such reform. His primary objective seems to have been that of making optimum use of staff and materials already on hand. Immediately after taking the oath of office, he made an inspection tour of the Municipal Palace. He noted that the time clock was not functioning and ordered its immediate repair.⁴⁵ He set his office hours from 8 A.M. to 1 P.M. and 3 P.M. to 7 P.M. and declared that municipal employees were expected to spend the same amount of time on the job. Reminding them that the hours of their working day were from 8 A.M. to 12 noon and 2 P.M. to 6 P.M., he asserted that they would be fined one peso for every five minutes they were late to work.⁴⁶ Summarizing his position he declared, "In short [I will require] intensive work with each completing his particular task and, whoever fails to do so, a la calle."⁴⁷

In the course of his eight month administration, Gaitán sent approximately ⁴⁸ fifty-five municipal employees

⁴⁴See pp. 59 and 64.

⁴⁵"Más Limpieza y Más Luz, Primera Orden de Gaitán," El Tiempo, op. cit., June 1936.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in a speech delivered at the banquet celebrating his inauguration as mayor as quoted in El Ejecutivo de Bogotá, " El Tiempo, op. cit., June 1936.

⁴⁸It is impossible to determine the exact number of

"a la calle."⁴⁹ Most of those dismissed were minor functionaries,⁵⁰ but several higher-level officials were also fired for "incompetence." One of them was a medical doctor who worked for the municipality's mental hospital.⁵¹

During the inspection tour of the Municipal Palace, Gaitan also came across 15,000 refuse containers, purchased during a previous administration, but never placed throughout the city. Gaitan ordered that they immediately be taken out of storage and put into service. He then arranged for the city's existing fleet of garbage collection trucks to be run on double shift⁵² and for crematories constructed during an earlier administration for the elimination of garbage to be repaired and returned to use.⁵³

those dismissed for incompetence from the texts of the decrees because several decrees mention "several employees," rather than give a specific number. Also, some of those who went on record as having "resigned," may have done so in fear of an incriminating dismissal.

⁴⁹a la calle, literally, into the street.

⁵⁰The following are those decrees which cite dismissals for "incompetence" during the Gaitan administration: Bogotá Municipal Decrees #160, 164, 168, 169, 179, 185, 209, 211, 247, 248, 252, 254, 256, 260, 263, 271, 276, 285, 294, 295, 303, 310, 311, 316, 321, 329, 331, 338, 340, 341, 350, 352, 358, 365, 370, 385, 412, 430, 441, 450, 453, 459, and 468 in 1936 and #34 in 1937.

⁵¹Bogotá Municipal Decree #311, September 3, 1936.

⁵²"Multado un Inspector. . .," El Tiempo, op. cit., June 1936.

⁵³Ibid.

The reaction of the press to this aspect of Gaitán's activity was favorable. An editorial in a June 1936 issue of Mundo al Día related, "The theme of the day is our new executive. The city has not seen a mayor such as this for over half a century."⁵⁴

An editorial in the July 7, 1936 El Tiempo observed:

Gaitán has declared an all-out war against filth, the sordid aspect of poorly repaired streets, and dilapidated houses, against grafting bureaucrats, bad administration and poorly organized public services.⁵⁵

El Día ran a photograph of the new mayor with the following commentary:

Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, in only a few days, has translated the beauty of Bogotá into reality. . . .

Jorge Eliécer Gaitán is . . . the first public administrator who will have succeeded in transforming this metropolis into a clean, orderly, modern city worthy of its importance.⁵⁶

Mundo al Día in another article on Gaitán, also ran a photograph of Gaitán over the following declaration: "Bogotá has awakened! And Mayor Gaitán has washed its face."⁵⁷

⁵⁴Editorial, Mundo al Día, op. cit., June 1936.

⁵⁵Editorial, El Tiempo, op. cit., July 7, 1936.

⁵⁶El Día [Bogotá, Colombia], June 1936.

⁵⁷"Bogotá Está Cambiando su Faz," Mundo al Día, op. cit., June 1936.

Gaitán used a variety of approaches for his general clean-up of the city. He announced that special funds being appropriated by departmental and national governments would go towards the construction of a new aqueduct and extended sewage system, " . . . instead of regal palaces, splendid streets, and luxurious monuments."⁵⁸

In addition to working for basic cleanliness, Gaitán also issued decrees for aesthetic improvement of the city. Some dealt exclusively with ornamentation, such as that which provided for trees to be planted along Avenida Carácas, one of the city's main thoroughfares.⁵⁹ However, most of the decrees issued by Gaitán for aesthetic improvements reflected other considerations. Beggars and abandoned children were ordered off the streets with violators sent to special asylums for their care.⁶⁰ Loitering in the streets was also prohibited. The latter regulation prompted a Bogotá columnist to write a satirical "Man in the Street" in which the fictitious participants of an imagined interview were afraid to give more than abbreviated answers because of their fear of being mistaken for loiterers. Yet even this

⁵⁸"El IV Centenario de Bogotá," El Día, op. cit., June 1936.

⁵⁹"La Obra de Gaitán," La Razón [Bogotá, Colombia], [n.d.].

⁶⁰"Más Limpieza y Más Luz. . .," loc. cit.

humorist recognized the measure as a logical step in Gaitán's efforts to alleviate congestion in the downtown area.⁶¹

Another action purportedly taken for decongestion of the downtown area was the demolition of an enormous, concrete monument dedicated to the Colombian patriot, Ricaurte, and located in the middle of Carrera 13, another of the city's principal thoroughfares.

The monument had been given to the city only a few years earlier by the Conservative oligarch, Laureano Gómez.⁶² As will be noted in the epilogue, Gaitán and Gómez were the antipodal forces that threatened to pull Colombian politics off center for over a quarter century. Each seemed to regard the other as an "evil genius," endowed with diabolic energy.⁶³

Gaitán described Gómez's monument as an "unharmonious

⁶¹"Alfileres," El Gráfico [Bogotá, Colombia], August 1936. Even as late as 1963, the congested condition of downtown Bogotá prompted the following commentary in the South American Handbook, 1963, op. cit., p. 283:

"The old quarter is very congested with noisy traffic, but the City's reputation for volubility triumphs even over this, for the pavements are clotted with ardent talkers: some of them sometimes hold out in the middle of the street and interfere with the traffic."

⁶²"Multado un Inspector. . .," loc. cit.

⁶³See Epilogue, p. 100.

and antiaesthetic hunk of rock . . . one of those tricks foreign artists have managed to pull off on Colombians who . . . are innocent in matters of art," and furthermore, "it was a traffic hazard."⁶⁴ During the night of June 25, 1936, wrecking crews reduced the monument to rubble.⁶⁵

Regardless of what Gómez might have been thinking of Gaitán at this particular time, Bogotá newspapers continued to lavish praise upon the new mayor. The aspect of his administration which seemed to elicit the greatest amount of enthusiasm was his "collective action" approach which apparently had sparked civic spirit. El Día commented:

It is admirable that the municipal government has corrected so many grave deficiencies in so little time.

It is also admirable that Dr. Gaitán has set a fire in the hearts of bogotanos which feeds intrepid activity.⁶⁶

El Espectador declared:

Something has uprooted our traditional pessimism: the dynamic faith of Mayor Gaitán and the discovery of public spirit in Bogotá.

Bogotanos have the tendency to accuse themselves of the coldest apathy, the hardest egotism; of indifference

⁶⁴"Multado un Inspector. . . .," loc. cit.

⁶⁵"El Monumento ha Desaparecido," El Espectador, op. cit., June 26, 1936; and "La Demolición de un Monumento," El Tiempo, op. cit., June 26, 1936.

⁶⁶Editorial, "Política Municipal," El Día, op. cit., June 1936.

and indolence. Hope is prohibited and illusions discredited.

We have lived under this theme. But why?

[Bogotá had] . . . latent public spirit, awaiting the voice of an animator.

More than the title of builder of this or that, or that of inventor of punctuality, Gaitán deserves that of Discoverer of Public Spirit.⁶⁷

Indeed, by Gaitán's second month in office, the public seems to have been animated by apparently unprecedented demands upon their initiative and executive capacity. El Día reported, "There are only a few buildings which remain unlighted and practically all proprietors have ordered construction of their piece of sidewalk."⁶⁸ El Espectador noted:

Bogotá has been rejuvenated, and its physical aspect is today very agreeable. It is fair to say that the public has effectively contributed to the conversion of the mayor's decrees into reality, without delay or rebellion.⁶⁹

Gaitán had responded to Calibán's challenge.⁷⁰ The city's exigencies had been met or were at least, beginning to be met. Provision had been made for the lepers and

⁶⁷Editorial, "El Espíritu Público," El Espectador, op. cit., July 1936.

⁶⁸El Día, op. cit., July 22, 1936.

⁶⁹Editorial, "Higiene por Dentro," El Espectador, August 1936.

⁷⁰See p. 64.

abandoned children who filled the streets, for the houses without electricity, for the beggars and lazy bureaucrats. One could say that with these rather superficial accomplishments, the ground had been cleared for Gaitán's principal program, and with the appearance of individual initiative and the ability to execute an order on the part of the Bogotá citizenry, the foundation for that program had been laid.

We can now consider Gaitán's program. As proposed in an earlier chapter, the basic problem of modern Bogotá, in fact, of modern Colombia, seems to relate to those concentrations of urban dwellers beyond the pale of productive, healthy city life. The unattended lepers and abandoned children, the filthy streets, the homes without electricity, the beggars, and perhaps even the lazy and corrupt bureaucrats and pessimistic general public were simply some of the many manifestations of the problem.

The poor of Bogotá had remained on the periphery of community life for many reasons. As indicated in Governor Cárdenas' inaugural speech, they had been victims of various economic and social injustices.⁷¹ Reform was needed on many fronts for their incorporation into community life. In selecting an area for initial reforms, Gaitán seems to have

⁷¹See p. 59.

been attempted to repeat, on a community level, the transformation he had undergone as an individual. He himself, had grown up on the economic, social, and geographical peripheries of the city. Technical, cultural, and in a certain sense even physical training⁷² had helped him become a central figure.

Technical training for the populace, such as that achieved by Gaitán, was beyond the capacity of any one individual with limited time and funds in office, but Gaitán attempted a beginning. In addition to contracting thirteen new school buildings, he was also responsible for the creation of municipally-run "Institutos Profesionales" for young men and women between the ages of fourteen and twenty. These institutes provided general education courses in the mornings and vocational training courses in the afternoons. Products made in the vocational training program were sold to help finance the program. During Gaitán's term, approximately two hundred men and five hundred women were enrolled in the program.⁷³

⁷²According to Gloria de Valencia, her father took long walks and also swam to help develop his diaphragm to improve his oratory. One will also remember his earlier interest in rowing to build up his physique.

⁷³"13 Nuevos Edificios para Escuelas Serán Terminados en Bogotá en seis Meses," El Tiempo, op. cit., June 1936; and "Institutos Profesionales," La Razón, op. cit., [n.d.].

Gaitán's program for cultural enrichment had three basic approaches. One was having the entire citizenry participate in certain projects. Although there is no information on how Gaitán selected projects for community-wide participation, each of those chosen emphasized the beauty of a particular human characteristic or endeavor. Projects realized during the Gaitán administration for the entire citizenry were two free-admission concerts, a book fair, and "Children's Week." The first concert, held in the Municipal Bull Ring in October 1936, was attended by over twenty thousand bogotanos.⁷⁴ The Colombian National Symphony Orchestra and a Chilean pianist combined in a program which included Wagner's Overture to the Meistersingers; Tschai-kowsky's Piano Concerto, Opus 23; selections from Strauss's Rosenkavalier; De Falla's Fire Dance; and the Polovenian Dances from Borodin's "Prince Igor."⁷⁵ In November 1936, a second concert, featuring the German ballerina, Erika Klein, and the National Band, drew an estimated twenty-three thousand to the bull ring, indicating the growing popularity of this type of function.⁷⁶

⁷⁴"Más de Veinte Mil Personas Llenaron el Circo de Toros," El Tiempo, op. cit., October 1936.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶"Grande Entusiasmo por el Concierto," El Tiempo, op. cit., November 1936; and "Erika Klein Baila ante el

The second type of community-wide activity, "La Feria del Libro,"⁷⁷ opened on Saturday, October 10, 1936. It was designed to promote interest in books and reading and seems to have enjoyed the enthusiastic support of the city's book dealers, who set up special exhibits of books in their stores. They were rewarded for their efforts. During the fair, over forty-seven thousand books were sold. One store, "Librería Volundad," reportedly sold over a thousand volumes of Spanish classics during the first three days of the Fair.⁷⁸ Another, "El Mensajero," sold over five hundred volumes of South American history during the same period.⁷⁹ All stores reported above average sales in poetry, short stories, sociology, philosophy, and works on the theatre.⁸⁰

The third community-wide activity, "Children's Week," was celebrated from November 15 to 21, 1936, and focused adult attention on the special world of the child. Each of the seven days was dedicated to a special theme, such as "Games," "Songs," "Stories," and "Toys." During the week, various programs featuring children participants were held. Baskets of fruit and new articles of clothing, donated by

Público Bogotano," La Razón, op. cit., November 1936.

⁷⁷"La Feria del Libro," El Espectador, op. cit., October 1936.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Ibid.

the citizenry, were given out to needy children, and nine thousand story-books also acquired through individual contributions, were indiscriminately distributed among the city's young.⁸¹

A community-wide project, proposed, but never realized, was an exposition of locally produced flowers, furnishings, and handicrafts. Gaitán had expressed the hope that local artists would take the initiative in organizing such a program. He suggested that prizes be awarded for the best contributions.⁸²

Gaitán, incidentally, seemed to encourage competition. As noted in the previous chapter, he even used the money he had won with the Ferri Award to establish a prize for the best legal essays by Colombian students.⁸³ As mayor, he used competition as a key element in several of his proposed cultural projects. He also used a more subtle form of it to help finance his innovations by publicly acknowledging donations to the municipality by individual bogotanos.⁸⁴

⁸¹"La Semana del Niño," El Tiempo, op. cit., [n.d.].

⁸²"Una Campaña de Cultura Popular Desarrollara la Alcaldía de Este Ciudad," El Espectador, op. cit., August 1936.

⁸³See Chapter II, footnote 78.

⁸⁴"100,000 Vale la Sala de Maternidad," El Espectador,

A second part of Gaitán's program for cultural education was that of providing the city's economically underprivileged with special cultural services. Among them were free movies,⁸⁵ conferences on hygiene "and other practical matters,"⁸⁶ and mobile libraries.⁸⁷ The latter went into service in September 1936, and were based in "bibliotecas ambulantes"⁸⁸ which volunteer helpers conducted throughout workers' neighborhoods.⁸⁹ Proposed, but not established, were municipal nursery schools for workers' children and popular choruses with prizes for the best presentations.⁹⁰

In spite of the fact that not all of Gaitán's proposals were being carried out, bogotanos remained relatively enthusiastic about their new mayor. He had brought

op. cit., [n.d.]. In this article which primarily deals with a proposal never realized by the Gaitán administration, Gaitán publicly acknowledged donations to the municipality by various businesses and individuals.

⁸⁵"Una Campaña de Cultura Popular. . .," loc. cit.

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷"Se Crearán Pronto Centros de Lectura," El Tiempo, September 1936.

⁸⁸bibliotecas ambulantes, mobile libraries.

⁸⁹"Se Crearán Pronto. . .," loc. cit.

⁹⁰"Una Campaña de Cultura Popular. . .," loc. cit.

a new approach to the mayoralty; he had shown the community how to use available human and material resources effectively. He had taken the initiative in determining the needs of the community and could suggest, in detail, how those needs might be met. Some of his observations apparently seemed novel to bogotanos and his proposals, if not always entirely original, were newsworthy.⁹¹ It was Gaitán who required that all public buildings with stoves or furnaces be equipped with fire extinguishers and who required the placement of filters on factory chimneys to reduce the soot in the air.⁹² It was Gaitán who spelled out hygienic practices for restaurant and cafe personnel and who penalized merchants that cheated customers with deceptive measuring practices.⁹³ Gaitán commissioned a group to study traffic patterns to help facilitate the flow of men and goods throughout the city and augmented the number of traffic police.⁹⁴ He proposed the construction of "sanitary

⁹¹Literally hundreds of newspaper clippings on Gaitán's eight months as mayor fill the Valencia scrapbooks.

⁹²Bogotá Municipal Decree #427, 1936, November 25, 1936; and Bogotá Municipal Decree #436, 1936, December 1, 1936.

⁹³Bogotá Municipal Decree #373, 1936, October 10, 1936; and Bogotá Municipal Decree #397, 1936, November 2, 1936.

⁹⁴El Tiempo, op. cit., August 1936.

kiosks" to provide the pedestrian not only with rest-room facilities, but also with stamps, stationery, tobacco goods, lottery tickets, newspapers and magazines, soap, razor blades, and all the other commodities vended in the European kiosks which had probably served as his model.⁹⁵ Further mayoral action put the municipal archives in order and provided the blind of the city with white walking sticks.⁹⁶

In September 1936, Gaitan initiated a physical education program for bogotanos by establishing a municipal sports committee.⁹⁷ The group was composed of the city's public relations director, a representative of the National Commission on Physical Health, and the presidents of the Cundinamarca Football League, the Sports Union, and the American Sports Club; and it was drafted to study the problem of physical education in Bogotá and to recommend the means "to promote interest in sports."⁹⁸

Perhaps as a result of the committee's recommen-

⁹⁵"Un Nuevo e Importante Servicio Tendrá Bogotá," El Tiempo, op. cit., August 1936.

⁹⁶"La Alcaldía Ordenó Varios Translados Presupuestos," La Razón, op. cit., [n.d.]; and Bogotá Municipal Decree #301, 1936, September 2, 1936.

⁹⁷Bogotá Municipal Decree #322, 1936, September 10, 1936.

⁹⁸Ibid.

dations, Bogotá celebrated "Sports Day" in early October.⁹⁹ The occasion was essentially a sports promotional campaign, but it included a parade in which over six thousand students and athletes, clad in gym wear, marched down Séptima, a thoroughfare.¹⁰⁰

The Bogotá archbishop was scandalized by the event. He likened the parade of young athletes with its emphasis on physical prowess to the youth rallies then being staged in Germany and Italy by Hitler and Mussolini.¹⁰¹ It was a significant, if then unpopular, criticism of the mayor, as it was the first time Gaitán's activity had been openly compared with that of contemporary Fascist leaders.

The Bogotá press sided with Gaitán. An interesting rebuttal to the protest of the archbishop was presented in an Espectador article by Jorge Padilla entitled, "Elogio del Cuerpo."¹⁰² In it, Padilla argued that divine beauty was reflected in man's physical, as well as spiritual, attributes.¹⁰³

⁹⁹"El Arzobispo Decidió Prohibir el Desfile Deportivo Mañana," El Tiempo, October 1936. Despite this headline, the parade did take place.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹⁰¹Ibid.

¹⁰²elogio del cuerpo, liberally translated means in praise of the body.

¹⁰³Jorge Padilla, "Elogio del Cuerpo," El Espectador, op. cit., October 1936.

The archbishop's view of Gaitán's policies was to be shared by a growing number of bogotanos, however, as Gaitán began to implement the third part of his cultural training program--that of requiring certain cultural practices of the citizenry. Gaitán seems to have taken these measures to lessen the distinction between "civilized"¹⁰⁴ bogotanos, and those on the city's social periphery. Among the measures was the requirement that the traditional dress of the poor, the ruana¹⁰⁵ and alpargates,¹⁰⁶ be discarded in favor of European-style overcoats and shoes.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, everyone was ordered to take an occasional bath.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴The idea for the use of this particular adjective at this point was taken from an editorial, "El motín y la autoridad," which appeared in La Voz del Sinú, a provincial newspaper. The writer of this editorial objected to:

"...la obstinación de los señores de volante para vestirse decentemente con un traje característico, como se usa y acostumbre en todas ciudades civilizadas. ..."

¹⁰⁵ruana is the Colombian adaptation of the traditional South American poncho.

¹⁰⁶alpargates are slip-on sandals of canvas with rope soles.

¹⁰⁷Bogotá Municipal Decree #333, 1936, September 15, 1936.

¹⁰⁸Bogotá Municipal Decree #373, 1936, October 10, 1936. In the first article of this decree, heads of families are made responsible for seeing that every member of their household bathe. Infractions were punishable by one to ten peso fines.

Immediately, the constitutionality and practicability of the order fell under attack. El Tiempo polled the public on the extraordinary decree with almost unanimous results--bogotanos did not like it.¹⁰⁹ The following comments are presented in the order of their appearance in the El Tiempo poll:

Anastasio Rodriguez. Carpenter. Union member.
"What prevents us from wearing shoes is their cost."

Escipión Fernandez. Blacksmith. "It is not right for someone to tell another what to wear. I, personally, will not exchange my ruana for the most expensive overcoat."

Martín Amezcuita. Owner of a /trained/ fox. "A pair of leather-soled Santanderian alpargates costs 80 centavos.¹¹⁰ They last a month or two. I go all over the city with my fox. I walk a lot. When I was in the army, I had to wear shoes. The stockings made my feet sweat. My toes hurt. I got corns. What's wrong with alpargates?"

Alcides N. Street sweeper. "Of course, everything has to be as Dr. Gaitán thinks it should be. We are not civilized here and civilization is important. Of course, we will miss our ruanas and shoes will pinch our feet. But, we will be señores.¹¹¹

Luis Jiménez. Butcher. "If I am given shoes and an overcoat, then the Devil take my alpargates and ruana. If not, then it's my alpargates and ruana and the Devil take the decree."

¹⁰⁹Poll, "La Ruana, Los Alpargates, y El Baño: Los Interesados Opinan Sobre las Disposiciones del Alcalde," El Tiempo, op. cit., /n.d./.

¹¹⁰centavos, cents.

¹¹¹señores, gentlemen. Here it is used derisively.

Carmela de Gaitán. No immediate relation to Dr. Gaitán/ Housewife. Middle class. "That about bathing? It's ridiculous. I have three children and two indias.¹¹² What if the indias don't want to bathe? What if they say they are sick? What proof is there that they aren't? Must I call a doctor to confirm it? If so, it would be preferable to pay a fine than a doctor bill."

Luis Martinez. Ticket-taker on a bus. 22 years old. Night school student who hopes to study electrical engineering by correspondence. "If one doesn't bathe in Bogotá, it's because the means are lacking. In my home, in fact, in all the homes in our neighborhood Belén there are no bathtubs. In fact, there is hardly any water. We must go to the fountain on Calle 6 for water for cooking and for laundry. If we all use this water to bathe with, then what will we cook with? If bathing is to be made a requirement, we must first complete the new aqueduct and then construct baths in every home. Furthermore, I bet Dr. Gaitán doesn't bathe in cold water. How am I to heat bath water in my home?"

Heliodoro Manrique. Middle class. Employee. "Don't talk to me about the cleanliness decree. What has happened to our inviolable individual rights? What if I don't feel like bathing? Who's going to make me? And, if I don't want my children to bathe? It's enough that one washes his hands and face and rinses out his mouth. Bathing the entire body? Why? Suppose I catch cold, and it develops into pneumonia? And I die? Who is going to provide for and educate my children?"¹¹³

Gaitán, nevertheless, seems to have maintained his overall popularity with his constituency throughout the remainder of 1936 as he continued to innovate and accomplish noticeable, albeit rather superficial, changes. Among these

¹¹²indias, literally Indians. This term is frequently used in Colombia when referring to domestic servants.

¹¹³Poll, "La Ruana, Los Alpargates. . .," loc. cit.

changes were the illumination and paving of the area around the Municipal Bull Ring¹¹⁴ and the establishment of a popular library.¹¹⁵ Gaitán financed the latter by personally appealing to members of the North American, British, German, Italian, Spanish, French, Syrian-Lebanese, Polish, Jewish, and Mexican colonies in Bogotá for funds.¹¹⁶

In December, El Tiempo published the results of another poll. This one concerned the public's general appraisal of Gaitán and his accomplishments. Almost without exception, those interviewed were enthusiastic.

Rafael Limonge. "Everything looks fine to me."

Eugenio Uribe. "Admirable! If he continues in this fashion, he will surely be a presidential candidate."

Eduardo González Quijano. "Very admirable! And I even had to paint my store front."

Oscar Tejada. "All good citizens are happy with what Dr. Gaitán is doing."

Ismenia Ospina. "I like him!"

Luis Borda. "I have the greatest esteem for him. We will help him."

Ignacio Franco. "Marvellous. Marvellous. Marvellous. I second him in all his measures for the good of our city."

¹¹⁴El Espectador, op. cit., [n.d.]. This untitled article also noted that the bull ring was the property of the Banco de Bogotá.

¹¹⁵El Tiempo, op. cit., July 22, 1936.

¹¹⁶Ibid.

Juan de J. Castrillón. "He has had to do what he has done."

Antonio Sandoval. "Formidable!"

Daniel Alfredo Díaz. "Gaitán is a practical man. He has shown us that the smallest details are the greatest details."

Pablo E. Montejo. "Eso se llama un alcaldazo!"¹¹⁷

Eladio Sánchez. "The beautification of Bogotá was necessary. But, I question the means by which it has been done, and I say this not having suffered any prejudices."

Emilio Pinilla. "I am an admirer of Dr. Gaitán. As mayor, he is admirable."

Benjamin Parra Jaramillo. "Marvellous. A-1."

José Sánchez. "I am delighted. This mayor knows what to do."

Benjamin Rodriquez. "Do I like him? You bet I do!"

Ruben Camargo. "He will go down in history as the Mayor of the Century."¹¹⁸

Gaitán's accomplishments as mayor were even recognized abroad. The Center of Colombian Socialist Culture in Mexico sent the following letter to El Tiempo offices:

[We] . . . have followed the work of Dr. Jorge Eliécer Gaitán with great interest and we wish that even from Mexico sincere applause be heard.

¹¹⁷See Chapter I, footnote 18 for the idea of alcaldazo. Eso se llama un . . . is literally, this is called a. . . .

¹¹⁸Poll, "La Opinion Rodea al Doctor Gaitán en su Labor en Favor de Bogotá," El Tiempo, op. cit., December 1936.

In the brief period of five months, he has outlined and is beginning to produce a great work. There is a surplus in the municipal treasury, public works have developed quickly, schools have been constructed, trees have been planted, streets have been paved, workers' neighborhoods have received special attention, sports have been promoted, and popular concerts have been presented. Also, a revolutionary Book Fair has been celebrated.

These accomplishments move our delegation to congratulate Dr. Gaitán for his transforming work, realized as mayor of the Colombian capital.¹¹⁹

In late December, at what appears in retrospect to have been the peak of his popularity as mayor, Gaitán left Bogotá for a three-week vacation to the Colombian Caribbean coast.¹²⁰ In his absence, Julio Roberto Salazar Ferro, his secretary of state, was delegated to act as mayor.¹²¹

Gaitán returned to his post on January 8, 1937. He spent the first ten days of his return on routine matters, primarily appointments.¹²² Then, on January 19, he resumed work on one of his relatively new projects: that of systematizing the city's taxi service.

Two basic considerations seem to have underlaid

¹¹⁹Letter, appearing under the title "Felicitación al Alcalde de la Ciudad de Bogotá," El Tiempo, December 1936.

¹²⁰"El 20 de Diciembre Se Ausente de la Capital el Doctor Jorge E. Gaitán," El Tiempo, op. cit., [n.d.].

¹²¹Ibid.

¹²²Bogotá Municipal Decrees #7-21, issued between January 8 and 18, 1937.

Gaitán's attempted regulation of taxi service. One was that the public be guaranteed fair rates.¹²³ The other was that taxi drivers, as other individuals who served the public, be "presentably" dressed, according to Gaitán's particular concept of presentability.¹²⁴ This project would seem consistent with Gaitán's controversial, yet apparently popular approach.

The first steps taken by Gaitán to systematize taxi service are difficult to determine and involve a bit of a mystery. The author found nothing relative to the systemization plan in the 1936 press, although it appears that a decree requiring uniforms of the drivers was issued sometime in late November of that year. Strangely, this is the only one of the 374 decrees that Gaitán issued during his term as mayor that is missing from the Archive's bound collection. The author was unable to find anyone at the Archives able, or willing, to explain its disappearance. It was issued between routine decrees dated November 23, 1936¹²⁵ and November 25, 1936.¹²⁶ The only clue to the contents of

¹²³Bogotá Municipal Decree #26, 1937, January 19, 1937.

¹²⁴Bogotá Municipal Decree #425, 1936, [n.d.].

¹²⁵Bogotá Municipal Decree #424, 1936, November 23, 1936 grants a municipal employee a sixty-day leave of absence.

¹²⁶Bogotá Municipal Decree #426, 1936, November 25,

the missing decree found in the Archives is Decree #46, 1937, issued by Gaitán on February 8¹²⁷ of that year, entitled "Those Means by Which Decree #425, 1936, on Taxi Drivers' Uniforms is to be Implemented."¹²⁸

When Gaitán resumed his work on the regulations in mid-January, he did not return to the question of uniforms which he had apparently resolved to his own satisfaction with the November decree, but rather tackled the problem of fair rates. He decided that fair rates could best be assured by installing municipally-regulated tariff meters in the drivers' cabs.

Suddenly, Gaitán's treatment of the taxi drivers became first page news. The drivers, quiet in November, became very vocal about the uniform provisions. Their

1936 acknowledges a resignation and names a replacement.

¹²⁷This was the date the taxi drivers' strike began.

¹²⁸Bogotá Municipal Decree #46, 1937, February 8, 1937. This decree authorized the Municipal Commissary to sell uniforms at cost to taxi drivers, a privilege previously extended only to those on the municipal payroll. It also declared that it was:

"not indispensable for . . . [Taxi drivers] to wear a specific type of uniform, rather [they could select] any one of several available styles."

The final article of the decree suggested that the uniforms could be purchased at the commissary on credit, and provisions were made to guarantee that credit payments would be met.

protest, coming so soon after the announcement of metered rates was obviously prompted more by personal than by ideological considerations. Still, their protest was accorded the dignity of an ideological "cause." The press criticized Gaitán's requirements as an abuse of civil liberty. Criticism by individuals was more extreme. The public seemed to conclude that Gaitán, who had decreed what colors bogotanos should paint their buildings and now what types of clothing they should wear, was actually the very worst of that era's villains--a fascist dictator.

In view of the growing hostility, Gaitán turned from work on his decree on metered rates to amend his November decree on uniforms.¹²⁹ Nevertheless, the drivers remained defiant and threatened to strike if the original decree were not immediately repealed.¹³⁰ Gaitán answered that it was technically impossible for the drivers to strike. He argued that strikes were used in labor-management disputes; not in disputes between a particular group of individuals and duly-installed public officials.¹³¹ It was a dangerous statement

¹²⁹Ibid.

¹³⁰Osorio, op. cit., p. 197.

¹³¹Ibid. Gaitán's statement that a "strike" against duly-installed public officials was impossible, was met with the accusation that he was a dictator, some claiming of the "fascist" variety and others calling him a "communist." After he was dismissed from the mayoralty, Gaitán answered these accusations in a speech delivered in the House of

for Gaitán to make as it put his tenure as mayor in doubt.

On February 8, 1936, taxi service stopped in Bogotá.

Subsequent events were described by Osorio:

Disorder spread throughout the city. Rebelling groups marched down the streets, threatening to destroy businesses and stopping traffic. . . .

The following day word spread that the railway workers would join in the strike, cutting the city's supply-line for foodstuffs.

. . . Improvising orators held forth, insulting Gaitán and accusing him of being a fascist¹³² and a

Representatives where he had been reelected as the delegate from Cundinamarca. The following excerpt was taken from the text of that speech as quoted in an untitled article in La Razón, op. cit., [n.d.]:

"¿Fascista Luis Cano [one of the founders of El Espectador]? ¿Fascista Juan Lozano y Lozano cuya inteligencia noble apoya la misma tesis? ¿Fascistas los médicos y los ingenieros que me apoyan? ¿De manera que toda vez hay una actitud energética y que tal cosa se plantea, tenemos una actuación fascista? ¿Acaso el fascismo es el respeto a la ley? Es todo lo contrario. Es la negación de la norma en sí. Es al contrario porque ni el fascismo, ni el comunismo aceptan el derecho."

¹³²As noted in the previous footnote, Gaitán was accused of "fascist" tactics during his mayoralty. However, it cannot be said that Gaitán had any respect to the prototype fascist, Benito Mussolini, whom he had had the opportunity to observe while a student in Rome. In an interview with Clemente Manuel Zabala which appeared in an undated edition of La Nación under the title, "Una Carta Sobre la Política Italiana," Gaitán deplored Il Duce's "Inconsistency." "Un día le da a perseguir a la Iglesia y al siguiente Adula al Papa." Furthermore, he was repulsed by the "terroristic tactics" which were seen in:

"...el asesinato de Matteotti, el incidente de Girolomini, la violación del domicilio, el pilaje a la

dictator. . . . Unrest increased.

Gaitán, with unlimited confidence in his own oratory, personally went out into the streets to placate the crowds and to explain his motives for the decree. . . .

. . . Yet all of Gaitán's impetus was rendered impotent in front of the collective hostility.¹³³

Gaitán finally appealed to the Colombian president, Alfonso Lopez, to use his influence to terminate the railway strike,¹³⁴ so that transport of food stuffs could be resumed. Meanwhile, the taxi drivers' strike had become bloody. The February 14, 1937 edition of The New York Times ran the following article, date-lined Bogotá, February 13, on the last hours of the Gaitán mayoralty:

Eight striking chauffeurs were shot today, two perhaps fatally, in a clash with police at a demonstration against a decree requiring chauffeurs to wear uniforms.

After the demonstration, in which thousands participated, Mayor Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, who had issued the decree, was removed in view of the imminence of sympathy strikes throughout the country, and the decree was suspended.¹³⁵

biblioteca de Benedetto de Croce, el garrote, la ronda nocturna, y el espinaje."

Interestingly, Gaitán even commented on the oratory of Mussolini to which his own is sometimes likened. Gaitán observed, " . . . sus discursos, que muchas veces erigen el dialogo con las multitudes, tienen mucho de representaciones teatrales."

¹³³Osorio, loc. cit., p. 197.

¹³⁴Ibid.

¹³⁵This refers to the decree now missing from the bound collection.

The new mayor is Francisco Samper Madrid.

The strike was immediately called off and the streets were filled with exultant bus and taxi drivers and their friends.¹³⁶

The mechanics of Gaitán's dismissal from office were simple. Governor Cárdenas, in June lavish with his praise of Gaitán, simply recalled him. Gaitán left office most unwillingly and was quoted by the press as declaring, "I did not resign; I was deposed."¹³⁷

On the surface, it is difficult to understand how a man who had been dedicated to the mayoralty, who had made many new and apparently popular proposals while in office and who had begun to implement a great number of these proposals by using resources already at hand rather than calling for additional money and material, could have become a popular villain overnight. It is thus easy to attribute the man's abrupt fall from grace to a deliberate plot.¹³⁸

¹³⁶The New York Times, February 14, 1937.

¹³⁷"'Yo No He Renunciado/ Se Me Ha Destituido,' Dice el Doctor Gaitán," El Espectador, op. cit., February 1937.

¹³⁸Osorio, loc. cit., summarizes this argument. It is essentially an indictment of President López whom Osorio declares felt threatened by Gaitán's rising popularity. He claims López, "el director supremo de los sindicatos, que habían surgido bajo su protección legal," engineered the taxi drivers' strike in order to give him cause to remove Gaitán from office. Gaitán's family still subscribes to this theory.

However, after reconsidering the method by which Gaitán was implementing these proposals, the precarious nature of his administration becomes apparent. The essence of Gaitán's effectiveness as mayor was the unusual degree of public spirit he had aroused in bogotanos. Because Gaitán, himself, typically worked at high pitch, he failed to realize the energy his strong personality had generated in others could someday be spent. By January, the people were tired, and the seemingly inexhaustible Gaitán promised no respite. Like the patrician Vallejo confronted by Gaitán in Paris,¹³⁹ the Bogotá public found it " ... imposible seguirlo en todos sus andanzas."¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹See Chapter II, p. 43.

¹⁴⁰" ... imposible seguirlo en todas sus andanzas," liberally translated means " . . . impossible to follow him in every undertaking."

EPILOGUE

Immediately following his dismissal as mayor, Gaitán returned to his seat in the National Assembly¹ where, as legislator, he was in the more comfortable position of being able to transform idea into word on the statutes without being directly responsible for its application. As seen in the discussion of his mayoralty, Gaitán was a man of ideas, and expressing them was his forte.

These ideas were not always offered as bases for legislation, either. In fact, one of the first presented to the National Assembly upon his return was his conviction that he had been unjustly relieved of the mayoralty.² His argument received voluminous and sympathetic coverage in both the Bogotá and provincial press³ and apparently did much to re-establish his reputation as a selfless, energetic worker dedicated to the good of the common man.

The man's prestige among his professional colleagues

¹The seat had remained unfilled since Gaitán left it in June "to dedicate maximum energy to the demands of the mayoralty." Osorio, op. cit., p. 199.

²"Yo No He Renunciado. . . ." loc. cit.

³Clippings of these numerous articles, editorials, and even cartoons, have been preserved in the Valencia scrapbooks.

was also re-established, if it ever had, in fact, been lost. In August 1937, the Second National Congress for Colombian Lawyers elected him to the Colombian Academy of Jurisprudence.⁴ The following year, he was sent to Rome to represent Colombia at a world-wide Congress for Criminal Lawyers.⁵ In 1939, he was elected to the Supreme Court by his colleagues in the National Congress.

Such rapid and apparently easy movement to these prestigious positions so soon after his sensational deposition from the mayoralty illustrates the peculiar appeal Gaitan had to his fellow Colombians. Milton Puentes, the author of several biographical sketches of Gaitán,⁷ compared his subject to "an Indian rubber ball that, no matter how hard it is thrown to the ground, always bounces back up

⁴Luis Emiro Valencia (ed.), Gaitán: Antología de su pensamiento económico y social (Bogotá: Ediciones Suramericana, 1968), p. 42.

⁵Ibid., p. 43.

⁶Perry, op. cit., p. 163. Córdoba, op. cit., p. 13, notes that Gaitán thanked his colleagues for the honor but did not accept the position as it would have necessitated giving up his private law practice.

⁷Mr. Puentes, a minor politician from Boyacá during the 1930's and 40's, today lives in Bogotá. An ardent Gaitanista, he has written passionately of his fallen leader in several books, among them: Gaitán (Bogotá: A B C, [n.d.]); Grandes hombres de Colombia (Bogotá: Hispana, 1962); and Historia del Partido Liberal Colombiano (Bogotá: Prag, 1961).

again."⁸ Nevertheless, Gaitán's post-mayoralty political life was not an easy one. Originally the lone spokesman for the Colombian masses, he began to be challenged in that role by two oligarchs, Laureano Gómez and President Alfonso López. By the late 1930's, Colombia, traditionally viewed as one of the few Latin American countries where "ideas, not men,"⁹ have determined the course of national politics, was already beginning to be torn apart by the strong personalities of Gaitán, Gómez, and López.

The only point the three had in common was that of hating the other two. It is difficult to determine when their mutual "hate-fest" began, but by the early 1940's, it was fully matured. Gómez and López not only faced one another as traditional Conservative-Liberal enemies but also as individuals with naturally conflicting temperaments. Both were from the oligarchy; however, privileged family background was their only common characteristic. Gómez, an arch-Conservative desirous of retaining the "purity" of a Church-oriented, feudalistic society, was a complex, almost mystical personality. López, described by Lozano y Lozano

⁸Milton Puentes in conversation with the author at his home in Bogotá in September 1966.

⁹Henao, op. cit., p. 539.

as a "businessman's Liberal,"¹⁰ was a rather simple, pragmatic individual.

López threatened Gómez by trying to bring to Colombia the type of revolution originally called for by bourgeois leaders of eighteenth century France. He wanted to convert Colombia's essentially feudalistic society into a modern, capitalistic one. And, as president of Colombia from 1934 to 1938, he frightened even the moderate members of his own party with his attempts to realize such revolution within his four-year term of office.¹¹

López's interest in the Colombian masses seems to have been secondary and pragmatic. He apparently believed that expanded business interests were contingent upon the improved economic circumstances of the common man and thus introduced legislation to improve the common man's economic lot. It was basically this attitude which alienated López from the third political force, Gaitán.

When comparing López to the eighteenth century bourgeois revolutionaries in France, one is tempted to continue the analogy by relating Gaitán to the revolutionaries of nineteenth century France whose interest in the common man

¹⁰Lozano y Lozano, "Mis contemporarios," op. cit., p. 288.

¹¹Martz, op. cit., p. 35.

was primary. As with those men, Gaitán's primary political objective was purportedly that of bringing the common man into the mainstream of national life.¹² If forced to make a choice, it was of secondary importance to this type of revolutionary whether or not such incorporation of the masses into national life was accomplished within the existing political forms. While the author was unable to find any indication that Gaitán ever actually called for armed force to realize his dream of social revolution, his vigorous verbal attacks on the existing political structure conceivably led to such conclusions among some of his followers.¹³

Gaitán considered the reforms of President López as part of a plot to create a new oligarchy, made up of businessmen and industrialists, as insensitive to the condition of the masses as the traditional, landed oligarchy had been.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the reforms Lopez was able to imple-

¹²Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, "La Plataforma de Colón," /his plan for achieving such incorporation, delivered in the Colón Theatre in August 1945/ cited in La Nueva Prensa 132: 39-45.

¹³There is no doubt in the mind of Gloria de Valencia that her father condoned the use of armed force in the advancement of revolutionary ideals. The author is more inclined to accept the interpretation of Gaitán's revolutionary nature offered by Niño H. See p. 57.

¹⁴Gaitán, "Contra el mal use de la palabra 'revolución,'" Mejores oraciones, op. cit., p. 159-166; and from

ment as president, with a twelve million peso budget,¹⁵ were those basic to Gaitán's own social goals. It was a difficult situation for Gaitán. Unwilling to attempt physical removal of Lopez from the presidency, Gaitán consequently had to reconcile himself to seeing López representing himself as a popular savior--the role Gaitán felt rightfully his.

However, in spite of certain traces of naïveté, Gaitán was a clever man who could meet the challenge of the well-entrenched, but prosaic, López. Forced by circumstances to concede López's de facto leadership of the material revolution, Gaitán reasserted his identity as popular leader by becoming the "intellectual leader of the revolution."¹⁶

How López reacted to Gaitán's attempts to undermine his position as the absolute leader of revolution is a moot question. Some say he ignored him. As noted in Chapter III, others contend that he was so positively committed to the political destruction of Gaitán that he had arranged the latter's overthrow as mayor.¹⁷ However, at this point, it

conversations with Luis Emiro Valencia in the Valencia home in Bogota in the autumn of 1966.

¹⁵Lozano y Lozano, loc. cit.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Among them is Osorio, op. cit., pp. 197-98; as well as all the members of Gaitán's immediate family.

is necessary to turn, once more, to a discussion of Laureano Gómez, the man who ultimately succeeded in destroying both Gaitán and López.¹⁸

When Alfonso López was elected to a second term as president of Colombia in 1942, Laureano Gómez was the publisher of the most important Conservative newspaper in Bogotá, El Siglo, which he had founded in 1936. Gómez used his publication to slander López.¹⁹ Not only did Gómez attack the López administration; he also spread malicious rumors about López's personal life as well.²⁰ In 1943, López neared emotional breakdown, and after requesting temporary leave from his office, he left Colombia for almost a year's residence in New York City.²¹

Late in 1944, López returned to Colombia and his duties as president. Again Gómez began to harrass the man, and López finally broke under the pressure. In July 1945, the latter submitted his resignation from the presidency,

¹⁸As will be seen, in the case of Lopez the destruction was total. Gaitán, however, recovered after Gómez engineered the Liberal defeat in the 1946 presidential election. There are many who believe, however, that Gómez was also behind the assassination of Gaitán. Among those of this theory are the widow and daughter of Gaitán.

¹⁹Martz, op. cit., pp. 39-44; and Osorio, op. cit., pp. 231-33.

²⁰Martz, loc. cit.

²¹Osorio, op. cit., p. 234.

and a moderate Liberal, a thirty-nine year old journalist named Alberto Lleras Camargo, was installed as interim president. Gómez had managed to eliminate López from the political scene.

Meanwhile, Gómez's other arch-rival, Gaitán, continued to win positions of increasing responsibility in the national government. In 1940, he was appointed minister of education by the incumbent president, Eduardo Santos (1938-1942).²² In this capacity, he organized "calzado escolar," a project to provide schoolchildren with shoes, "demo-
cratización de cultura," a series of popular concerts and exhibitions to bring the fine arts to the masses, and "alfabetización del país," a literacy program.²³ He also proposed the standardization of educational materials throughout Colombia,²⁴ but this measure was defeated in

²²Córdoba, op. cit.; and Perry, op. cit., p. 163.

²³The author has no information on the degree to which these programs were implemented. Perry, loc. cit., says that Gaitán was able to obtain contributions from several of the nation's big businesses to help finance the projects.

²⁴Niño H., op. cit., p. 114, relates how Gaitán confided in him that he favored and was considering asking Congress for centralized public education. Niño reportedly replied that this was a basic tenet of the Conservative Party whereupon Gaitán declared that he really did not care whose tenet it was; he was interested in the idea because it appeared to be the most effective way of administering the public school program.

Congress.²⁵

In 1941, Gaitán was elected to the Senate from the southwestern Department of Nariño.²⁶ In 1944, during López's temporary leave from the presidency, Gaitán was named minister of labor by Lopez's vice-president, Darío Echandía.²⁷ As labor minister, Gaitán made an inspection tour of working conditions on plantations along the Magdalena River, in the oil fields of Barrancabermeja,²⁸ and in the textile factories of Antioquia.²⁹ When he returned, he began work on an elaborate plan for labor reform which Congress ultimately turned down.³⁰

As the 1946 presidential campaign approached, Colombians began to contemplate the possibility of a Gaitán presidency. The Conservative Party, discredited during the Abadía years, had failed to recapture its former position as a formidable contender in Colombian politics. Consequently,

²⁵Valencia, op. cit., p. 38.

²⁶Ibid.; and Osorio, op. cit., p. 38.

²⁷Valencia, loc. cit.; and Perry, loc. cit.

²⁸Barrancabermeja is the headquarters of Colombian oil extraction and is located in a hot, humid basin about midway between Bogotá and Barranquilla along the Magdalena River.

²⁹Valencia, loc. cit.; and Osorio, op. cit., p. 235.

³⁰Valencia, loc. cit.

the real battle for power was within the Liberal Party itself, which at that point was split between López Liberals and those following Gaitán.

At the 1946 nominating convention, the moderate wing of the Liberal Party triumphed, and Gabriel Turbay,³¹ a López man, was named as the Liberal candidate for the forthcoming elections.³² Gaitanists thereupon held a nominating convention of their own, and on September 23, 1946, in a meeting held in Bogotá's bull-ring, an excited crowd proclaimed Gaitán "Candidato Popular a la Presidencia de la Republica."³³

A recently-cut phonograph record, "Caudillos y Muchedumbres," preserves several of Gaitán's presidential campaign speeches.³⁴ In them, Gaitán firmly aligns himself

³¹Interestingly, Gabriel Turbay had been one of the leaders of the Colombian communist movement in the 1920's. García, op. cit., p. 38.

³²The incumbent president, Alberto Lleras Camargo, who had stepped in as interim president after the resignation of López, was not considered for the nomination because he was too "eclectic" to be considered a dependable "Party man." Martz, op. cit., p. 42.

³³Candidato Popular de la República, literally, Popular Candidate of the Republic. Córdoba, op. cit., p. 14, related that over five thousand individuals came from all parts of Colombia to serve as delegates for the convention and an additional forty thousand people filled the stands of the Bull Ring as spectators.

³⁴"Caudillos y Muchedumbres," loc. cit.

with the worker. It is interesting to listen to the man's querulous tone and use of popular speech in promoting the image of "el hijo del pueblo," and to hear his audience's frenzied response.³⁵ Colombian politics, once a rather scholarly discussion of the relationship of Church to State or of free versus controlled trade, had become the battleground of conflicting class interests.

Because the Conservatives had not entered a candidate, Gaitán's target was the official candidate of his own party, Gabriel Turbay. Turbay responded. As the two Liberals tore away at one another, Laureano Gómez watched with keen interest.

Then Gómez acted. Approaching Gaitán who, as an unofficial candidate presumably was the underdog of the contest, Gómez emphasized their common hatred of López and offered to put the support of the Conservative press behind Gaitán. Incredible as the offer seemed, Gaitán accepted it.³⁶

The strategy behind Gómez's strange alliance with Gaitán soon became painfully clear to the Liberals. Six weeks before the election, the Conservatives announced an entry of their own, Mariano Ospina Pérez.³⁷ Ospina talked

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Niño H., op. cit., pp. 2-3.

³⁷Martz, op. cit., p. 45.

of "Unión Nacional,"³⁸ government above party politics.³⁹ The approach was apparently calculated to appeal to Colombians of both parties who were witnessing one of the most bitter presidential campaigns in Colombian history.

Split between Turbay and Gaitán, the Liberal Party fell victim to the contrived "Unión Nacional." On May 5, 1946, the Unión's candidate, Ospina Perez, was elected to the Colombian presidency with 565,894 votes or 42 percent of the total vote cast. Turbay received 437,089 and Gaitán, 363,849.⁴⁰ Soon after the election, Turbay retired to Paris where he suffered a heart attack and died. Gaitán was left as "jefe unico"⁴¹ of the disheartened Liberals. Cooperating with the more moderate element of the party, Gaitán began an energetic campaign to recapture lost support with the slogan, "Por la reconquista del poder, ¡a la carga!"⁴² On October 26, 1947, the Liberal Party named Gaitán its official candidate for the 1950 presidential campaign. Mean-

³⁸Unión Nacional, literally, National Union.

³⁹Martz, loc. cit.

⁴⁰Pat Holt, Colombia Today - And Tomorrow (New York: Praeger, 1963), p. 38.

⁴¹Valencia, op. cit., p. 40. Jefe unico, means only leader.

⁴²"Por la reconquista del poder, ¡a la carga!" can be translated, "Towards the reconquest of power, charge!"

while, Ospina's Unión Nacional, was confronted with serious problems. Besides a rapidly rising cost of living,⁴³ the new administration was confronted with the problems of rural violence.⁴⁴ Deaths resulting from this phenomenon, la violencia,⁴⁵ began to number in the hundreds.⁴⁶ Ospina responded to the violence by sending the army into the hinterlands to control the situation.⁴⁷ Soon, the rumor was rife that the government was taking measures only against Liberals implicated in la violencia.⁴⁸ Civil war threatened.

At this point, Gaitán organized one of the most dramatic mass demonstrations in Colombian history. On

Martz, op. cit., pp. 49-50; and Valencia, op. cit., p. 39; discuss Gaitán's post-election activity.

⁴³Martz, op. cit., pp. 48-49.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 50-52.

⁴⁵la violencia, literally, the violence. This refers to a Colombian phenomenon of vendetta-type killings among country folk which has been studied by a team of Colombian sociologists including Orlando Fals Borda.

⁴⁶The reader is referred to the aforementioned study by German Guzmán Campos, Orlando Fals Borda, and Eduardo Umaña Luna entitled, La violencia en Colombia: estudio de un proceso social (Bogotá: Editorial Iqueima, 1962), for death toll statistics.

⁴⁷Martz, loc. cit.

⁴⁸Ibid.; and Gaitán, Mejores oraciones, op. cit., p. 434.

February 7, 1948, at two o'clock in the afternoon, he led Colombians through the nation in a "Manifestación del Silencio."⁴⁹ In silence, thousands of Colombians, many carrying the national flag bunted in black,⁵⁰ paraded into the central plazas of their communities. In Bogotá, the demonstrators gathered in front of the presidential palace and listened as Gaitán delivered one of his most famous speeches, "Oración por Paz."⁵¹ In it, he quietly called upon President Ospina to use presidential influence to bring about a rapid end to the violence.⁵²

The "Manifestación del Silencio" was more than a display of the power Gaitán then wielded over the Colombian masses; it was also an example of the dignity Gaitán had attained for himself and his fellow Colombians. Participants in the demonstration remained rational and orderly throughout the gathering and following the "Oración," departed in silence.⁵³

⁴⁹"Manifestación del Silencio," literally, "Manifestation of Silence."

⁵⁰Osoario, op. cit., p. 289.

⁵¹"Oración por Paz," "Prayer for Peace." An English translation of its final paragraphs has been included in Martz, op. cit., p. 53.

⁵²Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, "Oración por Paz," cited in Miguel Angel Gaitán, El porque de un asesinato y sus antecedentes (Bogotá: Minerva Ltda., 1949), pp. 131-34.

⁵³Osoario, loc. cit.

Two months later, as he was leaving his downtown law office for lunch with friends, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán was shot to death. The man who allegedly⁵⁴ fired the shots was an otherwise undistinguished young man named Juan Roa Sierra who was beaten to death on the spot by apparently casual passers-by.⁵⁵ No one has yet determined the motives for the murder, although theories abound. Conservatives blame the communists; communists and Liberals blame the Conservatives. Other claim Roa Sierra acted on his own volition. The Colombian government called in detectives from Scotland Yard to work on the case but with no results.⁵⁶

Regardless of the motives, Gaitán was dead. Hearing of the assassination, many of the bogotanos who had participated with dignity in the "Oración" demonstration two months earlier, became a crazed mob. An eyewitness to their tragic reaction compares their destruction of central Bogotá to that of London during the "blitz."⁵⁷ Compounding this

⁵⁴Alejandro Vallejo, "El asesinato de Jorge Eliécer," Cromos [Bogotá, Colombia], 2555:68-69, September 19, 1966. In this article, written by a man who was at Gaitán's side at the time of the assassination, it is argued that "El asesino autentico se escapó."

⁵⁵Osorio, op. cit., p. 295.

⁵⁶All that is popularly remembered of the Scotland Yard detectives' visit is that their suitcases were stolen as they waited at the airport for someone to drive them into Bogota.

⁵⁷German Arciniegas, "¿Hacia dónde va la América

tragedy was the fact that the Ninth Inter-American Conference was meeting in Bogotá at the time, and the corps of international journalists that had come to cover the conference did not hesitate to give the outside world detailed descriptions of the "Bogotazo."⁵⁸

The Bogotazo had focused attention on the death, rather than on the life of Gaitán, but even if he had inconspicuously disappeared from Colombian politics, Gaitán's accomplishments during his twenty years of public service would have been enough to distinguish him among twentieth century Colombian leaders. He initiated mass participation in Colombian politics. He held a variety of posts in the Colombian government as member of both houses of Congress, as speaker of the lower house, as diplomatic envoy, as minister of labor, as second vice-president of the nation, and as mayor of Bogotá. To each job he brought a well-trained and extraordinarily fine mind that not only grasped complex concepts but also the most mundane details. His energetic pursuit of his ideals was recognized even in his lifetime.

Latina?" from Entre la libertad y el miedo (Santiago de Chile: Editorial del Pacífico, 1955), pp. 21-24, as cited in Eugenio Chang-Rodríguez and Harry Kantor, La América Latina de hoy (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1961), p. 8.

⁵⁸Martz, op. cit., p. 57.

When speculation arises on what type of a president Gaitán might have been, it is wise to recall the tensions which arose between Gaitán and his constituency during his tenure as mayor. But it also must be remembered that no matter how much the highly geared mind and excessive energy of Gaitán actually separated and at times even alienated him from the common Colombian, the masses continued to identify with Gaitán and Gaitán with the masses.⁵⁹ While conflicting temperaments made it impossible for them to work with one another for sustained periods of time, they were still able to work for one another, faithfully and well.

⁵⁹One of the most frequently quoted excerpts from the speeches of Gaitán is the declaration, "Yo no soy un hombre, soy un pueblo."

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APPENDIX

Organización Nacional Jorge Eliécer Gaitán

" J. E. G. A. "

APPENDIX A



Himno del hijo del Pueblo

I

Hijo del pueblo que oprimen cadenas
Esta injusticia no puede seguir;
Si tu existencia es un mundo de penas
¡Antes que esclavo prefiere morir!
¡Antes que esclavo prefiere morir!

II

Los oligarcas y los arribistas
Que así destruyen la patria heredad
Serán barridos por los "Gaitanistas"
Al fuerte grito de la libertad.
¡Al fuerte grito de la libertad!

III

Que te guíe la estrella del mundo
Que mañana se habrá de crear:
No se forma la Patria del pueblo
Sin las manos que saben luchar.
¡Sin las manos que saben luchar!

IV

Que tu brazo jamás se detenga
En la lucha por la libertad.
¡Si eres digno de ser hombre libre
Haz del pueblo tu causa y tu afán.
Haz del pueblo tu causa y tu afán!

V

Hijo del pueblo que oprimen cadenas
esta injusticia no puede seguir;
Si tu existencia es un mundo de penas
Antes que esclavo prefiere morir.
¡Antes que esclavo prefiere morir!

VIVA LA "JEGA"

APPENDIX B

The following is a reproduction of the letter written by govenor Parmenio Cárdenas on May 20, 1936, requesting Jorge Eliécer Gaitán to assume the mayoralty of Bogotá. It appeared in an untitled clipping from El Tiempo, op. cit., May 21, 1936.

Señor doctor don Jorge Eliécer Gaitán -- E.S.M.

Me es altamente honoroso participar a usted que por decreto numero 369 de esta fecha, la gobernación del departamento tuvo a bien designarlo como alcalde principal de la ciudad de Bogotá.

Al comunicar a usted esta designación, deseo expresar de manera especialísima la confianza que anima al suscrito sobre inmediato aceptación, para así corresponder a los legítimos y sinceros deseos del gobierno y la ciudadanía bogotana.

Si usted se sirve aceptar el cargo mencionado, le ruego tomar pronta posesión de el.

Con sentimientos de distinguida consideración y personal aprecio, me suscribo como de costumbre su servidor y afectísimo amigo.

Parmenio Cárdenas

APPENDIX C



In private life, one of the most distinguishing characteristics of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán was his wit. Sometimes the general public was treated to a glimpse of it as when a reporter from the Bogotá newspaper, Mundo al Día, decided to illustrate an article he had written on several political personalities with autocaricatures done by his subjects. Gaitán drew the above representation of himself. The reporter, impressed by the artistic talent of his controversial subject, felt obliged to comment that Gaitán had omitted drawing in eyes. "With the same malicious grin that he had captured in his drawing Gaitán responded, 'I will not draw in my eyes. My eyes are the only beautiful part of me!'" Mundo al Día, op. cit., [n.d.], p. 33.