



CUSLAR Newsletter

Spring 2007

The Committee on U.S.-Latin American Relations
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Good News!

Progress in the struggles for truth and justice in Colombia, fair wages for farmworkers, and an end to terrorist training at the SOA! Read on to learn how CUSLAR is part of all this good news....

SOA Watch Founder Spurs CUSLAR Activism to Close the SOA

In his gentle voice, Fr. Roy Bourgeois, founder of School of the Americas Watch, gave a strong message of hope at a CUSLAR-sponsored presentation on April 2.

Before speaking on the Cornell campus, Fr. Roy enjoyed a welcome dinner with Ithaca College and Cornell students and local Ithaca residents. The energy in the room was palpable as people, ranging in age from teens to senior citizens, shared their motivations and experiences in activism.

At his talk later that evening, Fr. Roy spoke about the success SOA Watch has had in convincing the governments of Venezuela, Argentina, and Uruguay to stop sending their troops

for training at the US Army School of the Americas, now called the Western Hemispheric Institute for Security Cooperation.

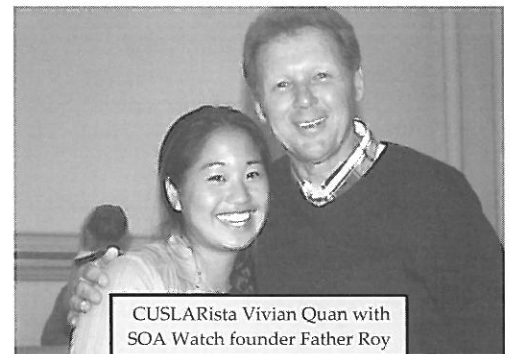
He also reported that the change in Congress has brought new hope to the SOA Watch movement. Thirty five of the representatives who voted to fund the SOA last year were unseated in November; the legislation lost by only 15 votes. During this current Congressional session, the movement is cautiously optimistic that the tide can finally be turned.

Encouraged by Fr. Roy's visit, CUSLAR joined in the SOA Watch's national days of action later in April. CUSLARistas designed and created an educational display of white crosses and information on the SOA which graced the Arts Quad, one of the main areas of the Cornell campus. Many people commented on the display. One student even emailed CUSLAR:

I walked by (and read) your signs today on the Arts quad and think they're rockin'. The success of mobilization in Latin America today, I think, will not be an international success unless people like YOU continue to do what you do.

That evening, students and others attended a screening of the SOA Watch video "Guns and Greed" and the feature film "Romero". This film introduced many students to the story of Archbishop Oscar Romero, hero in the struggle for justice in El Salvador and victim of SOA graduate violence.

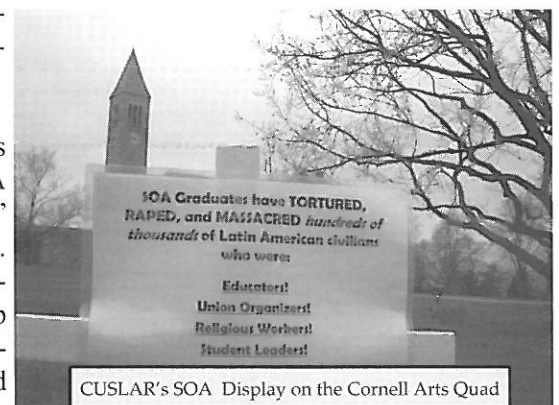
At our events in April and while tabling on the Cornell campus, we provided postcards for people to use to



CUSLARista Vivian Quan with SOA Watch founder Father Roy

write to their local representatives urging them to support HR 1707, which would cut off funding to the SOA. The cross-section of students who wrote hailed from a dozen states, so a wide variety of lawmakers heard from us.

CUSLARistas are determined to join in the rally at Ft. Benning in November, in hopes that it will be a victory celebration. Give the CUSLAR office a call if you'd like to join us on the trip, or in efforts to raise awareness about the SOA.



CUSLAR's SOA Display on the Cornell Arts Quad

THIS JUST IN: As we go to press, we've learned that, at a meeting with Fr. Roy Bourgeois and others from SOA Watch, President Oscar Arias of **Costa Rica** has agreed to stop sending Costa Rican police officers to the SOA for training. One of the delegates wrote of the meeting, "Several of us had tears in our eyes..., and Arias was one of them. He spoke of the brutality that this school has unleashed on El Salvador...Argentina, Chile and Bolivia. It was clear that he had absolutely no hesitancy in making this decision."



Photos from
Arm-of-the-Sea Theater's
performance of
La Cosecha/The Harvest



Farmworkers: The Struggle for Decent Pay and Equal Rights

On March 31, CUSLAR was proud to host Arm-of-the-Sea Theater company from the Hudson Valley in their performance of "La Cosecha/The Harvest." Using the compelling drama of mask and puppet theater, this production told the story of Cesar, a young man from "south of the border" who heads north in search of a better life. He is mistreated by the *coyote* who brings him across the border, and is forced to work as a virtual slave to pay off the cost of his passage. Amazing and colorful papier

maché masks, live music and sound effects made this drama come alive for young and old audience members alike. In the end, Cesar reclaims his dignity and stands up for his rights.

Hosting this production presented a great opportunity to introduce the campus and the broader community to two important farmworker rights campaigns:

Farmworker Fair Labor Practices Act: Here in New York State, farmworkers and their allies have been working for years to change labor laws that exclude farmworkers. For example, unlike other workers, farmworkers do not

receive overtime pay or have the right to bargain collectively, and they are not covered by the same state occupational health and safety laws as other workers. Legislation to change this situation has been blocked for several years in the New York State Senate in Albany.

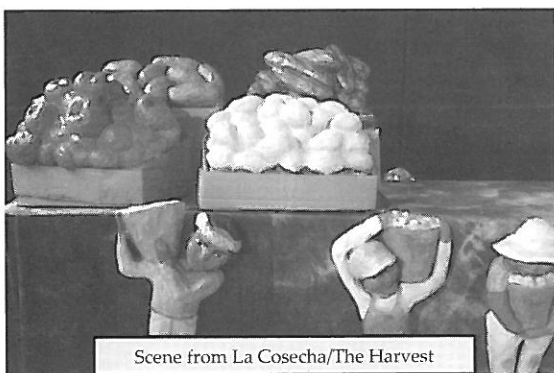
At the performance, audience members were provided with information about this legislation. In the following weeks, CUSLARistas collected and mailed dozens of postcards to State Senate President Joseph Bruno to demand his support of this equal rights legislation.

Coalition of Immokalee Workers McDonald's Campaign: Farmworkers harvesting tomatoes in Florida receive virtually the same rate as they did 25 years ago-- around 42 cents for a 32 pound bucket. This means they have to pick 2.5 TONS of tomatoes in the course of a 10-hour working day to make the equivalent of minimum wage. The Coalition of Immokalee Workers, a community-based worker organiza-

tion, led a successful campaign to make Taco Bell, a major buyer of tomatoes, increase the price it pays for tomatoes, with the increase going directly to the farmworkers in southern Florida.

CIW launched a similar campaign with McDonald's and after two years of frustration, was on the verge of calling for a boycott. At the time of the La Cosecha performance, CUSLARistas were gearing up to attend a rally being organized by CIW and its allies at McDonald's headquarters near Chicago.

However, just a few days before the rally, McDonald's agreed to pay a penny more per pound for tomatoes!



This increase will go directly to the workers, effectively *doubling* their wages. Instead of a rally, CUSLARistas and others from Ithaca attended what became a victory celebration in Chicago.

CIW and its allies all over the country are now directing their efforts to yet another major buyer of tomatoes, the fast food chain Burger King.

What should we do with all those postcards waiting to be signed and sent to McDonald's CEO? Should we shred them to make confetti for a victory parade, or change the name on them and pass them along to the CEO of Burger King?

Update on Colombia and Our Sister

Community in Cajibío

CUSLAR coordinator Laurie Konwinski was able to attend the Colombia Support Network's annual meeting in Madison Wisconsin, thanks to the support of the Central New York CSN chapter. At the meeting, participants learned much about the current tragedy in Colombia, and about many positive developments as well. The decades-old civil war rages on in Colombia. All sides continue to perpetrate human rights abuses: murders, disappearances and kidnappings. The ill-named "Justice and Peace" initiative demobilizes paramilitary fighters and offers reduced sentences to paramilitary commanders in exchange for full confessions

and reparations to victims.

Despite the numbers of *paras* taking advantage of this law, paramilitary groups are still being formed under new names, while paramilitary leaders, it has been revealed, continue to direct operations from inside prison.

However, the new law has been helpful in bringing the truth to light. In scandalous testimony, paramilitary leaders have revealed their connections with the Colombian government. Members of the Colombian Congress and local elected officials have been named as collaborators with the AUC. (The AUC, or Self Defense Corps of Colombia, is the largest of the paramilitary groups, and deemed a foreign terrorist organization by the US State De-

partment.) Two senators and a member of the House of Representatives have been charged in the formation of paramilitary death squads. Even the current Minister of Defense and the Vice-President have been accused of working with the *paras* before being elected to office.

The scandal is coming closer to Colombian President Alvaro Uribe, who was met with very tough questions by US Congressional leaders during his recent visit to the US. Because of his party's connection to these allegations, passage of the bi-lateral free trade agreement with the US appears to be on hold, a good thing for the small farmers who would suffer from the effects of this "globalization."

Film: Welcome to Colombia

Wednesday July 11, 6:00pm
Tompkins County Public Library

An overview of the political situation in Colombia with discussion to follow.

The Central New York Chapter of the Colombia Support Network meets in Cortland the first Wednesday of the month, at 7pm.
Call the CUSLAR office for a ride.

In other good news, the Polo Democrático Alternativo, a progressive party in Colombia, is growing in strength. Also, the new attorney general, Mario Iguaran has had the courage to move forward on human rights cases that have languished in the Colombian justice system.

Among these is the massacre at La Rejoya in the state of Cauca, the region where our sister community is located. Paramilitaries slaugh-

tered 11 civilians during this incident in 2001. New witnesses have come forward as the attorney general moves on this case. Our Central New York chapter stands ready to file an *amicus* (friend of the court) brief in support of the testimony.

In August CUSLARistas will be part of a Central New York delegation to our sister community in Cajibío. Activists from Syracuse, Cortland and Ithaca are creating a scrapbook for the delegates to present to our friends in Cajibío. The book will feature photos of our beautiful local landscape and of activists at work at rallies and other events in this area. We want to encourage our friends in Colombia, showing them that we are with them in the struggle against war and imperialism.

In the run-up to the delegation, we will be showing the film "Welcome to Colombia" on the evening of July 11, and doing follow-up events after the delegates return. Stay tuned!



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