

Committee
On
US
Latin
American
Relations

CUSLAR NEWSLETTER

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A Project of CRESP
Anabel Taylor Hall, Cornell University
Ithaca NY 14853

**FOCUS ON:
GUATEMALA**



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Editorial

The Truth Omission: The U.S. Media and El Salvador

To long-time readers of the CUSLAR Newsletter, the "revelations" of the Truth Commission report detailing the worst crimes and abuses during El Salvador's gruesome decade, came as no surprise.

For those of us who have followed events in El Salvador, the only surprise has been that the crimes of the Salvadoran government are finally receiving the intense, blunt coverage in the U.S. media that was so absent in the past.

Granted, the worst atrocities of the war were reported by the major media. Some of the most tragic episodes — the 1980 murder of Archbishop Oscar Romero on orders from Roberto D'Aubuisson (a U.S.-trained military officer who founded the ARENA party that still rules the country), the rape and murder in 1980 of four U.S. church women by Salvadoran National Guardsmen, and the 1989 execution of six Jesuit priests and their two housekeepers by members of the U.S.-trained Atlacatl Battalion — were too notorious for anyone to ignore.

Yet, as Jeff Cohen, executive director of FAIR magazine, and Norman Solomon point out, had the most influential media outlets fought to expose the true nature of the Salvadoran Military's war against its own population, many of these war crimes — paid for by U.S. taxpayers — could have been averted.

In a recent report, Cohen and Solomon note some of the most flagrant examples of the mass media's failure to tell the the American public the truth about the war in El Salvador:

*** In January 1982, New York Times journalist Ray Bonner reported on a massacre of hundreds of children, women and men in El Mozote carried out by the Atlacatl Battalion. After Washington launched a smear campaign against Bonner, the Times pulled him out of El Salvador. (A 1982 Wall Street Journal editorial slurring Bonner complained: "Communist sources were given greater credence than either the U.S. government or the government it was supporting.")*

Bonner's reporting has been totally vindicated by the UN Truth Commission, which excavated the mass graves. But the cowardly removal of Bonner by the Times executives in 1982 sent a powerful message to mainstream U.S. journalists who stayed behind in El Salvador: Reporting the facts — when they conflict with Washington — can cost you your job.

*** In February 1988, New York Times correspondent James LeMoyne (who had taken over Bonner's old beat) wrote a vivid account of an atrocity in El Salvador — the public execution of two peasants by FMLN guerrillas. But the event never happened. It had been invented by a Salvadoran army propaganda officer and placed in a right-wing San Salvador newspaper — which LeMoyne read and reported as fact. It took six months of petitioning before the Times would even acknowledge the error.*

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Cover Photo of Rigoberta Menchu, 1992-93 Nobel Prize winner, was taken by Marilyn Anderson of Rochester, New York

The Committee on US-Latin American Relations (CUSLAR) is a project of the Center for Religion, Ethics and Social Policy (CRESP), based at Cornell University. Since 1965 we have worked in Ithaca and the surrounding area to promote a greater understanding of Latin America and the Caribbean. We are particularly concerned with the role of the United States in influencing the social, political and economic conditions of the region.

The CUSLAR Newsletter provides our members and other concerned individuals with information and analysis on topics relevant to Latin America and the Caribbean. The positions of the authors do not necessarily reflect the positions of CUSLAR as an organization. The CUSLAR Newsletter committee cooperates with authors to reach mutually acceptable editorial decisions. If you are interested in writing for the Newsletter or working on the committee, please call the CUSLAR office at (607) 255-7293. We welcome your suggestions and letters to the editors.

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HAITI

Lit La Va Kontinuye -- The Struggle Continues

Natasha Labaze

Dec 16, 1990—Courageous Haitian men and women go out and vote. In the U.S. Newspapers, I see my brothers and sisters standing in line, one person pressed tightly against another. The blood-bath of the November 1987 elections is still vivid in their minds. Though the blood stains have been washed away from the floor of the polling place, the blood which runs through the veins of the voters can be spilled at any moment. However my brothers and sisters decide to take the risk to vote in 1990 because they realize that whether they vote or not, their lives are still at risk. So standing close together as they shelter one another, they vote. The result: sixty-seven percent of the the Haitian population has voted for Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide. The people spoke in December 1990—not the guns, as Paul Latortue of the University of Puerto Rico would say.

February 7, 1991—The inauguration of the first freely elected President of Haiti. Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide is inaugurated as president of the Haitian people. He calls himself the servant of his people, preaching justice and equality through the redistribution of wealth. And he reminds us, "Men Anpil, Chay pa lou" (Many hands make the burden lighter) and "Seul nou faible, ensemble nou fort, ensemble, ensemble nou se Lavalas." (Alone we are weak, together we are strong, together, together we form a waterflood)—a waterflood to cleanse out all the corruption and exploitation perpetuated by the previous governments.

Sunday September 29, 1991—7 months after President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's inauguration, the Haitian army, backed by some members of the Haitian bourgeoisie, drives the President into exile. We must remember that President Aristide was not killed. Personally, I believe he will return to office after a long and bloody struggle. We need to remember that the spirits of those who were murdered are not ashes left untended but are a

source of fuel to the Haitian struggle.

Thousands of people have been killed since the coup and the majority of the Haitian population's economic sustenance has crumbled. Some say more than 12,000 people have been killed, others say 3000; but it is not the exact number that is important. You do not need to see more than one person lying on the ground, dying of hunger or bullet wounds, to feel the need to help.

The murder of our Haitian brothers and sisters has not been recorded because, according to the present regime, it has never occurred. Yet headless bodies are found in Ti Anyen (which ironically means Little Nothing)—indeed, this illegitimate government considers the lives of our brothers

and sisters found murdered in Ti Anyen as nothing of importance.

Enforced silence reigns in Haiti. If the military regime cannot silence

"Seul nou faible, ensemble nou fort, ensemble, ensemble nou se Lavalas." (Alone we are weak, together we are strong, together, together we form a waterflood)

you, they kill you. The fear is such that when I ask a young two year old boy named Aristide:

"What is your name? Is it TiTid?" He vehemently shakes his head "No."

"But what is your name then?" He shrugs his shoulders silently.

No answer. His mom lets us know that he was once very proud of his name.

I laugh hysterically with tears rolling down my face at the boy's innocent fear. But I am also afraid, angry, saddened, frustrated...

Political activist and singer Manno Charlemagne remarked that Aristide is **not** the "saviour" of the Haitian people, he is their "confidence." I trust Aristide because I believe in reaching out and sharing our resources for the betterment of all our lives—rich or poor.

¹ TiTid is the affectionate nickname given to Aristide. [Ed.]

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Haiti

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Under President Aristide's government the Haitian people were not driven to take rickety boats in search of a political voice and economic relief. There was nothing to flee from—there was a home to build.

It is estimated that since the coup of September 1991, 45,000 Haitian men, women and children have fled the oppressive military regime. They are fleeing from political persecution and economic deprivation. They are seeking a Life, a Voice.

Under the May 24th, 1992 order of former President Bush that is still being followed by President Clinton, Haitian refugees are not granted temporary asylum and are coldly returned to their life under a violent and corrupt government.

Presently close to 200 Haitian political refugees are still being held in the U.S. Naval Base at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba and are not offered temporary asylum in the United States. They have not been allowed to enter the United States because they have tested positive for HIV. They are jailed behind barbed wire fences under armed guard. They are not allowed phones or letters, and have only limited access to lawyers, independent doctors, and journalists.

They have attempted to voice their discontent, but their protests are halted with fire hoses, dogs and aluminium baton beatings. The leaders of the protest are incarcerated and isolated in a rat infested camp. Recently, the Haitians in Guantánamo have gone on a hunger strike. According to Professor Harold Koh of Yale Law School in an article published in "Refugee Reports" of January 29, 1993: The government

"hold[s] these people...in what I think is the first HIV concentration camp in history....They could be taken out in a single plane, with a single stroke of a pen...They could be brought here by the Attorney General in one of three ways: through parole; by humanitarian waiver; or by the lifting of the HIV exclusion, which the Clinton Administration campaigned that it would do upon taking office."

The Haitians in Guantánamo are caught between a home currently being destroyed by violence and a potential host country which not only rejects them but incarcerates them in deplorable conditions. We need to grant temporary asylum to the Haitian people forced to flee from their home while preparations are made for the return of democratically elected President Aristide to Haiti.

Summer 1992—As I mount a Taxi in Petion Ville, Haiti I hear a loud siren and look around to see military tanks patrolling the streets. Policemen and soldiers with long automatic guns seem to be on every corner. I believe a government which needs violent security enforcement such as this is an insecure government. It will not last forever.

I visit the pediatric section of the State Hospital of Port-au-Prince, Haiti. I see children with tuberculosis, children in comas, children with illnesses the state claims they have no funds to cure.

There used to be nuns who adopted some of the children but they have been chased away by the military. Their actions are deemed too political. The number of abandoned children with illnesses increases.

But I also see the premature babies in sterile incubators. Soon they will grow into strong healthy growing babies. I believe the movement for liberation and justice in Haiti may be premature, but it will live and it will grow into a fruitful struggle.

The voices of freedom and justice have not been completely silenced. Students allied to the Lav-alas movement unite to vent their discontent, demonstrate and go in hiding when necessary.

If we do not free ourselves now, the language for justice and equality will soon be on the tongues of these premature Haitian babies—the next



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Haiti

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generation to pursue the struggle.

And we need not forget, as President Aristide remarked, if the baby is not born long after its' due period, Cesarean remains an option.

There is a Haitian proverb which says, "Deyen mon gen lot mon" (Behind every mountain there is another mountain). We have climbed over the mountains of 1804, of 1934, of 1986, of 1991 and we have yet to climb over many more.

Lit la va kontinye —The struggle continues. The day of justice and democracy will come when one is not afraid to say one's name, one's beliefs. As another young boy named Jackson six or seven years of age answered me when I forgot his name and inquired "What's your name again?" "Titid" he said over the laughter and singing of the other children. "What?" I said remembering at that moment that his name was Jackson. "TiTid" he answered smiling. His friend comes over, elbows him and says "What are you saying to the lady?" but I smile in intimate understanding of our fight against brutality and exploitation.



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Building Bridges to Cuba

CUSLAR is working to provide multiple opportunities for people to build relationships with the people of Cuba. In the era of "Free Trade", Cuba has been cut off from most kinds of normal international exchange by an intensified United States embargo that prohibits companies linked with any U.S. corporation from trading with Cuba, and prohibits cargo vessels that dock in Cuba from subsequently docking in the United States. A small island nation that has maintained relatively high standards of living despite its largely Third World economic structure, Cuba is truly suffering from this economic and diplomatic war.

While many argue Cuba's need for political renewal, those with an in-depth understanding of the problems of the island point out that solutions for Cuba must come from within. Few Cubans or international observers think that another invasion from Miami would bring about greater social or economic well-being, or would even be politically possible. Meanwhile, a strangulation of Cuban economy and society that cuts people off from basic foods, writing paper, antibiotics, and cultural and intellectual exchange is clearly not an attack on Fidel Castro but rather an attempt to destroy Cuban society - and therefore the Cuban peoples' capacity to determine their own destiny.

The profound ignorance about Cuba that exists in the United States must also be addressed. Just across the border in Canada, people have no trouble visiting Cuba, hearing live Cuban music, or buying Cuban products. The embargo was recently condemned by the United Nations. With opposition to the embargo growing both domestically and internationally, it is possible that it will soon end up in the dustbin of Cold War history.

CUSLAR has formed a Cuba Working Group to look at the ways we can build bridges to Cuba. Some ways to get involved include:

Storm Disaster Relief (the "Blizzard of '93"). Contact:
 "Good Neighbors Disaster Relief Appeal"
 Cuba Information Project
 198 Broadway, Room 800
 New York, NY 10038
 (212) 227-3422

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Modernization in Honduras

William Gibson

I was recently in Honduras as a member of a Presbyterian "Task Force on Sustainable Development, Reformed Faith, and U.S. International Economic Policy." Everywhere we went—from a farm workers' cooperative to the Minister of Planning to the U.S. Ambassador—people were talking about the latest land reform legislation, known as the "Modernization of Agriculture Law." While everyone agrees that the new law is a continuation of the "structural adjustment" policies promoted by the International Monetary Fund, a fierce debate has arisen over what the implications of the reform will be.

Government and banking representatives spoke to us of the benefits of structural adjustment to date. Among the achievements they cited were containing the fiscal deficit and reducing the inflation rate to under 10%. Additionally, they pointed to the stable exchange rate and the fact that international funding organizations are much more receptive to Honduran requests for financial assistance than when the policies were adopted in 1990. Although these short-term gains are impressive, they concede that long term economic reactivation remains more elusive.

For the campesinos the most important question was whether they would be able to keep the land they have acquired and to gain more. Government officials contended that farmers need technical assistance to move production away from subsistence crops (basically corn and beans) to more profitable cash

crops for foreign and local markets. The campesinos, however, remain skeptical. They fear that the new law will make it even harder to implement a meaningful land reform law, for which they have long fought. "The purpose of this law is to concentrate the land into even fewer hands—to enrich a few people, especially some of the high officers in the military," explained Carlos, a member of the Union of Campesino Workers. The demand that they produce for the export market could lead to their eventual eviction from the land by large landowners.

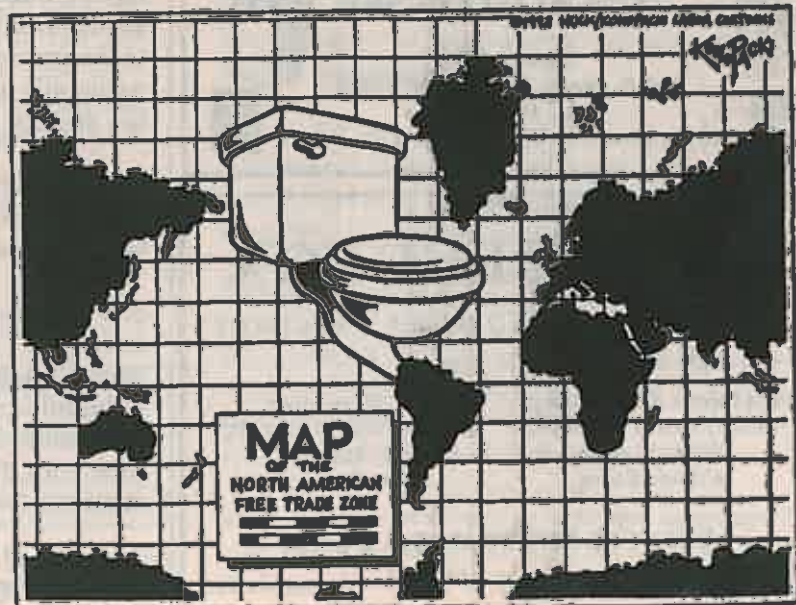
No one that we talked with denied that structural adjustment, with its emphasis on deficit reduction, external debt repayment, and production for export, neglected the social sector and contributed to worsening conditions for the majority of the Honduran people. Officially, this was regarded as the short-term price which had to be paid in order for the country to modernize. Eventually, we were told, the "policy of overflow"—of giving

priority to economic growth—would greatly improve the nation's long-term outlook.

Critics of structural adjustment point out that deficit reduction has been achieved primarily through regressive changes in the tax laws. While the sales tax has been increased from 3 to 7%, the maximum income tax had been reduced from 40% to 30%. Moreover, although the basic exemption from income tax was doubled from 10,000 to 20,000 lempiras, few poor and working class people have seen any benefit since inflation has reduced the value of the lempira by 75%.

Some twenty five to thirty thousands jobs have been created by the establishment of industrial parks and free trade zones in which businesses operate tax-free and pay only for public services. However, these jobs are characterized by very low wages and extremely harsh working conditions. We were told of female employees who have ac-

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Honduras

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tually been sterilized without their knowledge.

We heard repeatedly about ecological deterioration—from massive shrimp-farm development, deforestation from poor timber management, erosion of hillside cropland, and mounting population pressures. One speaker lamented the lack of a "culture for care." On a more ominous note, we heard an army colonel comment on the radio that there were no communists anymore—only ecologists.

During a visit to his office, the U.S. Ambassador argued that "The economy must be modernized, [but] the equity problem is hard." He spoke of the population boom (saying it "has to be controlled"), declining rainfall resulting from deforestation, inappropriate cattle-grazing, overfishing, a bloated, inefficient public bureaucracy, corruption and human rights violation, and "decades or morass."

It comes as no surprise that the campesinos expect little from modernization. Rather they place their hopes in the struggle to recover their land. "The point" they said, "is not to give to us, but let us help ourselves."

Under the prevailing global rules, imposed by the IMF and international financiers, every economy must be modernized, even if this means the further devastation of its ecological base and the further intensification of inequality. Those of us who stand in solidarity with the campesinos must continually struggle to change these.

-William E. Gibson
Eco-Justice Project,
CRESP

Building Bridges to Cuba

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Medical Aid Campaigns to ship basic medicines to Cuba. Contact:

U.S.+Cuba Medical Project
1173a Second Ave., Suite 232
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MediCuba
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Washington, D.C. 20009
(202) 667-3730 or 234-2000

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(212) 633-6646

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The Quincentenary, a Question of Class, Not Race

An Interview with Rigoberta Menchú
Translated by Aníbal Yáñez

*Rigoberta Menchú, a Maya-Quiché Indian, won the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1992 for her work in the name of indigenous people of Guatemala and for Human Rights. Rigoberta has made two visits to Ithaca with large support from CUSLAR. This interview, made before the awarding of the Prize, carries special resonance now as 1993 has been designated International year of the Indigenous People by the United Nations. Rigoberta's insights help us to make sense of the barrage of propaganda we faced with last years Quincentenary "celebrations", as well as light the way for us to go from here. This interview is taken from *Latin American Perspectives* © 1992, reprinted by permission of Sage Publications, Inc.*

Interviewer: What do you think of the official celebrations that are being promoted in the First World on the occasion of the quincentenary of Columbus's arrival in America?

Rigoberta Menchú: I think that they have to be seen in the context of the kind of relations established by the countries of the First World with those of the Third World and of economic and political interests. The commemoration of the Quincentenary is really taking shape more in the political and economic relations between governments than among the people. I think that we should turn it into a true expression of the people—and not just of the indigenous people (that would be folklorism) but of all the people of the continent. More than this, we must find a way to make this expression international. Those of us who consider ourselves truly committed to our peoples have this obligation. It is very difficult because even our brothers the indigenous people who participate in parliaments and congresses generally represent minorities and therefore do not get a hearing. I believe that we must unite all the voices; we must agree where we can and make these agreements a priority as the date approaches. Our peoples are building their future every day; they will not wait until 1992 to see whether there will be a struggle.

I: Spain promoted this celebration a number

of years ago under the title of the "discovery" of America. What is your opinion of this?

RM: I think that to speak of discovery is to minimize the values of our peoples, especially given that our ancestors had an age-old culture.

I: What is the explanation for this false term's being the official Spanish position and that of many Latin American governments?

RM: The first thing to understand is that the Quincentenary represents political interests, economic interests, and even issues of legitimacy. A just evaluation of history and of what is taking place today has been set aside. The celebrations so far have not reflected popular opinion, much less that of the indigenous peoples. The ancient owners of the continent are not truly represented. The Quincentenary ought to be an evaluation of events that is just, dignified, and true. For two years now we have been proposing to the United Nations that 1992 be declared an international year in recognition of the struggle and resistance of indigenous peoples, that all the indigenous leaders who have given their lives and blood for liberation be recognized and honored, and that there be an evaluation of events that is fairer and closer to reality. Our peoples' oppression must end before we can aspire to a true encounter of two cultures. The looting and exploitation of our peoples must also end.

Our peoples' oppression must end before we can aspire to a true encounter of two cultures. The looting and exploitation of our peoples must also end.

I: What does it mean for your own cultural identity that you have learned Spanish?

RM: I learned Spanish because I needed

to; when I left my Quiché community I realized that otherwise it would be impossible to share experiences with brothers from other places. Understanding the language of a people means the possibility of understanding their universe, their world, their ideas. Spanish has given me the opportunity to know something about the lives and struggles of other peoples, from South Africa to the Amazon. Also, I have seen how important it is for the natural leaders of a community to learn a universal history that enables them to develop a solidier and broader consciousness. I value Spanish as a means of communication and of learning. I wish I could speak more languages.

I: In an interview we conducted with the

COMMITTEE ON US-LATIN AMERICAN RELATIONS

Rigoberta Menchu

Continued from previous page

Native American leader Leonard Peltier, he spoke to us of the "Indians" they call "apples" [red on the outside, white on the inside] who betray their own brothers. From Spanish colonial times we know of caciques who enjoyed privileges. Every colonialist project tries from the outset to coopt some stratum within the people itself to facilitate its work. What do you think about this?

RM: Our own experience tells us that the fact that someone is Indian does not necessarily mean that he is a good person, that he is incapable of doing anything wrong. This is far too simplistic given the realities of our peoples. On this continent and specifically in Guatemala there are Indians who have aspired to political careers, to economic leadership within a system imposed on the majority. And it does not matter that they are conscious of what is happening in our country - of the violations, of the blood that has been spilled by our people - as long as they have privileged lives and limited political space. There are some who have been totally absorbed by the system and have become ringleaders of the most criminal and repressive kind. They feel ashamed of their own people, who are poor, and go so far as to change their names. But there are also others who because of ideological deformations, because of indoctrination (what in Guatemala we call brainwashing) have become criminals and have participated, either personally or indirectly, in the massacres. This is why we must view the situation of the Indians objectively, not romantically. To the degree that an Indian has had privileges to defend and has participated in profiting from the labor of others, he has become transformed to the point that he is even crueler. It is not a question of race but one of class.

I: When Columbus arrived in these lands he thought that he had reached India and that its inhabitants were therefore "Indians." Fifteen years later it became clear that this was another continent. Why is it that 500 years after that historical mistake was corrected the original inhabitants of



the continent are still called "Indians"?

RM: Well, in the case of Guatemala, for example, we could call an assembly of all the indigenous peoples to decide what we want to call ourselves. This has not been possible because there are other, more urgent problems that we must solve.

Now, I would venture a personal opinion. For a long time, and through many stages, the term "Indian" has had only a negative, deprecatory connotation. Calling someone an Indian is saying that he is inferior and ignorant. It may be that we are ignorant of technology, but that is because we have not been given access to it; and this does not mean that we do not know many things. Because of all they represent in terms of struggle, of ancient values, I have stated that I am very proud of my roots. I feel that I am truly a granddaughter of the Mayas, and I am proud of what the term "Indian" means for us.

I: Do you think that this term, being part of a discourse of domination, should be replaced?

RM: That is a decision that is up to the peoples, but it is crucial that the conditions exist for it to be made - and not only the decision regarding their name but also, for example, the interpretation of their land. I believe that indigenous peoples' feelings for the land are not yet understood. The land for us is not only an economic resource but a source of culture: it is life and roots. Agrarian reform in our homeland must therefore take all of this into account.

I: Another part of the same official discourse maintains that there were neither victors nor vanquished. There is talk of the birth of a new culture, the mestizo, which supposedly reflects the contributions of both Europeans and "Indians." Would you

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More Bitter Fruit:

Workers' Rights in Guatemala's Banana Industry

Ann Peters

There has been a growing concern with labor conditions and environmentally destructive practices in the banana plantations of Central American countries and other banana-exporting nations.

In Ithaca, the Greenstar Cooperative Market decided in 1991 to institute a "tax", or mark-up, of three cents per pound on bananas sold in the store, and to set aside that money for donations to labor unions working with agricultural workers in the banana industries of Latin America.

CUSLAR worked with the Politics of Food Committee at Greenstar to establish a reliable way to route funds to unions, and at this time the money is equally divided between the Committee of Campesino Unity (CUC) and the National Unity of Guatema-

lan Workers' Unions (UNSI-TRAGUA) in Guatemala. The CUC works with small farmers who also contract as temporary farm-workers on large plantations. UNSITRAGUA works with unions in the banana industry, as well as with a variety of unions in other industries. In February 1993, I met with International Representative Sergio Guzmán of UNSITRAGUA, to talk about the current situation of banana workers and the work of the unions affiliated with his federation.

The banana industry in Guatemala, as is the case throughout the Caribbean Basin region, is an export-oriented industry organized in a plantation system. Large amounts of fertilizer, pesticides, and fungicides are applied to the plants in order to produce large and unblemished fruit. Permanent and temporary workers on the planta-

tions - predominantly men - are frequently exposed to heavy doses of these chemicals. Workers in processing - predominantly women - are also exposed to these chemicals when washing, sorting and packing the fruit. The low wages, long hours, unsafe working conditions and lack of adequate health care are primary concerns of the banana workers.

Recently, the European Community has restricted access to its markets by Latin American banana exporters, establishing quotas on American bananas for each of the European countries. The plantation owners have responded to this move towards European protectionism by calling on banana workers to make sacrifices in wages, benefits and working conditions. If workers are not prepared to sacrifice, they warn, the entire industry could go bankrupt.

According to the plantation owners, in order to make back their anticipated losses from the closing of the European markets, they must expand their exports to lower-priced North American markets by increasing banana production without raising costs. Using the threat of bankruptcy, the growers are demanding that the laborers work longer hours for the same wages. They insist that workers must accept cut-backs in the economic and social benefits that have been won over time by the banana workers' unions. The plantation owners are also putting pressure on workers to accept replacement of their unions with so-called "Solidarity Associations" organized by the employers.

The industry owners are also



Bitter Fruit

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implementing changes in the manner in which seasonal plantation workers are hired. Until now, temporary workers have been hired directly by the banana growers. The permanent workers' unions have applied pressure for temporary workers to be hired at the same wage level negotiated for permanent workers, and for the company to keep temporary workers on in permanent positions. Plantations are increasingly hiring workers through temporary contracting agencies. The temporary agencies do not provide health care benefits, pay only the minimum daily wage, place no limit on the length of the working day, and are free to dismiss workers at will. In some cases, the contracting agencies are actually ghost companies operated by the plantation owners themselves. These satellite companies also allow the plantations to avoid taxes.

The union leaders have also denounced the poor working conditions endured by the women who pack, classify, and inspect the bananas. Working under great pressure from 6 am to 6 or 7 pm, seven days a week, the women work with knives in washwater laced with powerful fungicides, and often accidentally cut their hands. They must stand all day in the washwater and are not provided with protective footwear. It is a common practice to illegally employ workers under 16 years of age in banana packing. As they gain expertise in the more specialized jobs, the women are pressured to work even longer hours so the company can avoid contracting more workers.

The banana companies have

maintained that low wages, long hours, and abysmal working conditions are the only way that they can remain in business and provide employment. Yet to the unions, the industry's cries of poverty ring hollow in the face of large-scale expansion and massive capital investment by the COBIGUA company, one of two banana export companies in Guatemala. All the banana unions affiliated with UNSITRAGUA work on plantations in the COBIGUA group. In the past few years, the company has been buying up cattle ranches neighboring their plantations and converting them into banana fields. A year ago COBIGUA financed a major construction project, filling entire swamps to build large highways to ship the bananas. The company also bought the exclusive rights to the use of Puerto Barrios, Guatemala's only major Caribbean port.

While the banana industry must adjust to the changing conditions of international trade, this can not be used as an excuse to deny workers their rights to a living wage, decent working conditions, basic health benefits, or the ability to organize themselves. While the unions struggle to maintain their ground, they are calling on the international community to help their cause.

In Ithaca, we are proud that the Greenstar Cooperative Market is providing both the CUC and UNSITRAGUA with moral and financial support. We hope that the Greenstar will serve as an example to other food cooperatives in other communities across the United States, and that we will be able to establish reliable contacts with other banana industry unions in Latin America.



A Banana Tax?

In 1991, the membership of the Greenstar Food Cooperative voted to institute a tax of three cents per pound on bananas sold in the store. This tax was the initiative of the Politics of Food Committee, a member committee of the coop that looks at issues of food production and distribution such as labor rights and pesticide use in the production of a particular crop.

The committee was deeply disturbed by the labor conditions in regions of Latin America where bananas are produced. Since bananas are a popular food, it seemed feasible to support organizations working for labor rights for banana workers, including the right not to be poisoned by pesticides.

They came to CUSLAR looking for a reliable way to get money to one or more farmworkers' unions working with banana workers. We suggested the Grassroots Guatemala Fund operated by NISGUA, the Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala. Initially, Greenstar authorized the banana money to be sent to the Committee of Campesino Unity, and money was sent to that organization until the Greenstar's store burned to the ground in January 1992.

In April 1993, the Greenstar Council authorized including the union federation UNSITRAGUA as a recipient of banana tax money, and money collected since the opening of the new Greenstar store in September 1993 will be split equally between both organizations. The Politics of Food Committee of the Greenstar is interested in finding reliable ways to fund other banana workers' organizations. If you would like to get involved, contact Rusty Malchow at 257-2865 or Ann Peters at CUSLAR, 255-7293.

Negotiating Peace in Guatemala: **URNG Leader Discusses Progress and Backlash**

Sara Luisa Palmer

Comandante Gaspar Ilom of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) came to the United States for the first time to speak at the United Nations in December 1992. CUSLAR was fortunate to be able to participate in an interview with him at that time. The conversation centered around recent events in Guatemala and their effect on the process of negotiations between the Guatemalan government and armed opposition.

Ilom had found support from the international community for the URNG's insistence on immediate verification of the recent accords on human rights. "Without verification," affirmed Ilom, the first substantial accord of the negotiations "would only serve as government propaganda, in order to say that they have the problem of human rights solved and that some day they will comply with the accord." He stated that he received hospitality and support from high ranking U.N. officials and from dozens of U.N. missions, including all of those important to Central America and the Latin American nations participating in the Central American peace process. Ilom said that he considers United Nations participation to be vital in furthering the peace process in Guatemala. He also considers that the United States can play a positive role in putting pressure on the Guatemalan government to negotiate, and in building on its recent support for human rights.

On the other hand, in early December the Guatemalan government showed little inclination to further the peace process. Instead, Ilom considered that the government was already showing every sign of preparation for a military offensive. "They are concentrating troops, there are large scale plans," said Ilom. "Also, they are including another auxiliary [force]... They have armed and are training more civil defense patrols," to make up troop deficits and in violation of the human rights accords. "That is to say that the crux of this offensive is to incorporate in combat the civil defense patrols, or part of the patrols... in selected zones. The thing is that they enter the war, either as part of army actions or in actions of direct support to the troops."

Another indication of the government's real attitude towards the furthering of the peace accords, according to Ilom, is the bombing of Communities of Population in Resistance (CPRs) in the Ixcán area. The bombing was intensive enough to destroy communities and send new refugees into Mexico from



among "a population who are accustomed to this... who are helping each other, who have shelters in which to endure the bombardment." He also noted that such attacks on communities are frequently attributed by the army to the URNG, and that the U.S. public should be wary of false accusations, rumors and assembled "evidence" attempting to link the URNG to military provocations, drug trafficking and other illegal acts.

When asked about the significance of Rigoberta Menchu's winning of the Nobel Peace Prize, Ilom responded that "Giving the Nobel Prize to Rigoberta Menchu has been the greatest act of historical justice seen on the part of the international community. And that has provoked, as could not be otherwise, discomfort, fear and anger on the part of the reactionary sectors... It has provoked a resurgence of the historical consciousness that the roots of our country are indigenous." He also noted that the Nobel Prize does not appear as something either "strange, surprising or unexpected, but rather arrives in a proper moment, fruit of all of this struggle and sacrifice - but in a form that complements and catalyses the movement."

Ilom noted that on the international level the prize served to turn the attention of the world to Guatemala, and to sweep away the disbelief of many who had long been unwilling to accept the existence of human rights violations of such a horrific, large

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On a Rocky Road: International Accompaniment and Human Rights in Guatemala

Ann Peters

The awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Rigoberta Menchú has set off waves of hope and fear in Guatemala. Grassroots organizations such as human rights groups, indigenous rights groups and progressive union and student organizations have come together to celebrate and take strength from this recognition of their struggle. Military and government spokespersons have veered between expressions of nationalist pride (after all, she is a Guatemalan), attempts to co-opt Rigoberta for their own purposes (with no luck), and a return to bitter accusations that she is a spokesperson for "subversives."

Many of us who over the years have met her, heard her speak or even had the opportunity to translate for her may be frustrated that the Nobel Prize hasn't had a greater impact on Guatemalan government and military policy. Still, we must admit that it has raised human rights as a more open issue of national debate.

Two other Guatemalans also won international recognition this year for their work on human rights. Helen Mack won the "Right Livelihood Award", established in 1980 as an alternative to the Nobel Prizes, for her untiring work to bring to justice the killers of her sister, anthropologist Myrna Mack. Myrna Mack founded the respected social science research center AVANCSO, and worked extensively with people displaced by the violence of the 1980s. Her assassination has been traced to a member of the elite Presidential



Helen Mack, sister of slain anthropologist Myrna Mack

Guard, and the investigation of his superiors continues.

As this newsletter goes to press, a friend of CUSLAR is in Guatemala demonstrating the results of painstaking computer research that will link specific massacres and individual assassinations to the movements of troop units and individual military careers. This kind of work will be vital to future lawsuits and the work of a Truth Commission for Guatemala.

Unionist Byron Morales of the UNSITRAGUA union federation won the Febe Elizabeth Ve-



Byron Morales of UNSITRAGUA

lasquez Labor Rights Prize, given in The Netherlands in memory of the assassinated Salvadoran unionist. UNSITRAGUA now receives regular funding from the Greenstar food Coop's store tax on bananas. Byron Morales has suffered repeated death threats in the past year, while continuing his work in his UNSITRAGUA and in the Coordinator of Civil Sectors. The Coordinator seeks to bring together representatives of diverse interest groups within Guatemala to develop policy proposals for economic, social and political reform and to seek to have those proposals considered in the Peace Negotiation process now underway between the Guatemalan government and military, and the URNG armed opposition.

Meanwhile, Kennedy Human Rights Award winner Amilcar Mendez has been forced into temporary exile after years of death threats were replaced by lawsuits as a means to harass him and prevent his work. He works with the Council of Ethnic Communities "Runujel Junam" ("Everyone is Equal") — CERJ —, an organization founded to resist the forced labor of Maya community members in "civil selfdefense patrols", where they are required to carry out paramilitary functions and other unpaid labor for the army. Amilcar Mendez spoke in Ithaca and other communities in this region in 1990.

CERJ leader Justina Tzoc was brought to Ithaca by Amnesty International last spring, and returned to our area this April

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10th as the keynote speaker at the yearly conference of the Latin American Student Union at SUNY Cortland. Justina is the CERJ representative to the Maya federation "Majawil Q'ij" ("New Dawn") that has grown from work around the 500 Years of Resistance campaign. As a Quiché Maya leader and human rights activist, she was one of the sponsors of Rigoberta Menchu's Nobel Prize candidacy, and she is an eloquent spokesperson for indigenous rights. On Saturday, May 8th, armed men burst into the CERJ office in Guatemala City asking for Justina, who happened to be out, and proceeded to steal money, a com-



puter disk and other documents, and the FAX machine that provides CERJ with a vital link to international human rights organizations. Anthropologist John Sosa of SUNY Cortland has sent a FAX machine to Guatemala, replacing the one stolen. CUSLAR is working with him and other sponsors of JustinaTzoc's tours in this region to raise the money expended in purchase of the machine.

The National Coordinator of Widows of Guatemala (CONAVIGUA) was the principal sponsor

of Rigoberta Menchu's Nobel Prize candidacy in Guatemala. CONAVIGUA has taken leadership in the areas of human rights, women's rights and the demilitarization of Guatemalan society. Their comprehensive policy proposal calls for an end to the current racist policies of military conscription, the institution of a conscientious objectors program and an alternative civilian service option, and the civilian conversion of military-managed "development" programs. The army has recently accused CONAVIGUA and particularly its leader Rosalina Tuyuc of being guerrilla agents, stating "proofs" that they refuse to make public.

Significant work in support of human rights in Guatemala has come out of sectors of the religious community. Archbishop Quezada Toruño continues to act as a mediator in the peace negotiations, and has recently renewed his commitment to a broader and more meaningful dialogue on policy issues by agreeing to act as a conduit for proposals from the Coordinator of Civil Sectors.

The Multipartite Commission is an ecumenical group formed to facilitate contact with the Communities of Population in Resistance (CPRs), internal refugees who live in hiding from the army, and to call for their acceptance as civilian communities. This commission has facili-



Rosalina Tuyuc of CONAVIGUA

tated visits of large delegations to these communities and has born witness to the bombings and army attacks against them that have driven more Guatemalans into Mexico as refugees in the past six months. The ecumenical Campaign for Life and Peace continues to call for justice for the many priests, catechists, and all the other Guatemalans who have been assassinated in the past few years.

The organized return of Guatemalans who have lived for ten years as refugees in Mexico continues. The first wave of refugees entered the country on January 20th, only to receive inefficient and obstructionist treatment by the Guatemalan authorities. However, thousands of people lined the

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Rocky Road continued from previous page

road to greet them as the caravan of 72 Mexican buses proceeded to Guatemala City. Among the many international observers who accompanied this first return were a Peace Brigades International (PBI) group led by former Ithacans Liam Mahoney and Carolyn Mow (formerly of CUSLAR), as well as CUSLAR's friend Jim Veeder. Witness For Peace also has organized accompaniment delegations for that return and for the other waves of returning refugees. Ithacan and CUSLARena Alison Hillman has recently gone to Guatemala to join the permanent team of Witness for Peace, and will be leading such delegations.

The returning refugees are facing extremely difficult conditions: their former lands have been given away to other landless families, and because they are well organized and have suffered at the hands of the military, they are treated with fear and suspicion by Guatemalan authorities. Some communities in the United States are considering long-term "sistering" relationships to provide continuing contact with and support for these communities. With our strong and diverse local ties to Guatemala, Ithaca would be a good community to develop a sistering relationship with a refugee community or with one of the many other communities in Guatemala struggling for land rights, cultural rights, and basic health and education.

In the past six months, Rigoberta Menchu's Nobel Prize seemed to open up a space in the Guatemalan press for coverage of human rights issues. And so much has been happening in Guatemala on these issues, that the daily press has been literally dominated by news about these

organizations, and about the attacks on their work by government spokespeople and "unnamed agents".

The first backlash against the press came in December in the form of accusations by President Serrano that the press was acting to support a subversive agenda by publishing stories on these incidents as well as columns and cartoons questioning the government's position. The second backlash came in the form of an anonymous "death list" with names of 24 people, about half of whom are journalists. Others on the list include Byron Morales and several student leaders who were on the delegation to the CPRs. Accused of "subversion", their sentences were to go into effect on April 1st. Fortunately, none of them have been killed or "disappeared" to date.

International support is what keeps most leaders of Guatemalan organizations alive and able to continue with their work. Please consider joining a delegation to accompany them in Gua-

temala, or joining our telex network to accompany them from afar (see form below). Give whatever donation you can to the human rights organization of your choice. And stay in touch with CUSLAR.

Organizations doing accompaniment work in Guatemala include:

The Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala (NISGUA)

1500 Massachusetts ave. NW
Suite #241
Washington, D.C. 20005
(202) 223-6474

Witness For Peace
2201 P St. NW, Room 109
Washington, D.C. 20037
(202) 797-1160

Peace Brigades International
Box 1233, Harvard Sq. Sta.
Cambridge, MA 02238
(617) 491-4226

More information on these organizations is available in the CUSLAR office.

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Uruguayan Proposal Shows Option For Repression

A Return to Old Military Tactics

Samuel Blixen

Facing increasing opposition to his political and economic policies, President Luis Alberto Lacalle has proposed a law that would allow the armed forces to intervene in domestic conflicts.

The proposal is seen by many as Lacalle's response to the social unrest and growing opposition to the government's current neoliberal stance.

Political analysts interpret the proposed law not only as a hard-line policy toward social conflict but as a reactivation of the National Security Doctrine, which was thought to have gone out when democracy was reinstated in 1985.

The proposal gives the president the authority to mobilize the military to carry out repressive measures for an unlimited period to maintain public order. Legislative approval, which is required in cases of international conflict, would not be needed in response to internal strife.

The bill's articles concerning human rights make Lacalle's intentions clear. Crimes involving human rights abuses committed by the armed forces would fall under the jurisdiction of the military courts instead of civil courts. All military actions would be considered acts of obedience to authority and interpreted as legitimate defense measures unless proven otherwise.

"With this proposal the executive branch is giving the force of law to the concept that, in military terms, part of the population should be considered the enemy," said Gen. Victor Licandro, who was imprisoned for 11

years for his democratic stance during the 1973 coup.

Licandro, who heads the defense commission of the leftist coalition Frente Amplio, said this implies "legislating a principle of the doctrine of low-intensity warfare," a strategy promoted by the US Defense Department.

The reaction to the proposal, which was endorsed by Lacalle and the Minister of Defense Mariano Brito, has been one of caution despite its serious implications. The opposition repeated

The Uruguayan armed forces never gave up their intention of playing a central role in national politics despite allowing the return to civilian rule.

its call for a national debate on the armed forces' role in the country. Congress has taken an ambivalent stance on the issue.

All political parties agree that the military's mission is exclusively the preservation of national defense. Nevertheless they have generally supported Brito's efforts to rebuild the legal framework to support the old military objectives.

Licandro has repeatedly charged that the Uruguayan armed forces never gave up their desire to play a central role in national politics despite allowing the return to civilian rule in 1984. They have maintained control of strategic areas, such as

telecommunications and the administration of ports and airports. They have also defended their financial autonomy and the size of their budget and have resisted any attempts to investigate and sanction human rights violations.

After lying low for a while, the armed forces returned to the scene two years ago. With the help of Brito, a law professor, they were able to include in the appendix to the national budget a provision that authorized them to "maintain domestic peace" in exceptional circumstances.

Although that first attempt to resurrect the National Security Doctrine did not go unnoticed, the congressional majority approved the appendices without modification.

Three years ago, the conservative government introduced a neoliberal economic package that required drastic fiscal adjustments and provided no safety nets. Lacalle has imposed a series of recessionary measures to reduce the fiscal deficit and inflation. Taxes have been raised, salaries frozen and foreign exchange rates held down, aggravating the deficit in the balance of trade at the expense of the export sector.

Servicing the foreign debt has become a priority. The renegotiation of the debt has been described as "disastrous," particularly in using national gold reserves for a "buy back" to eliminate the outstanding debts to commercial banks.

Lacalle's policy caused grow-

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Drowning the Usumacinta: Proposed Mexican Dam Threatens Rainforest and Ancient Mayan Cities

Mike Spezio

Environmentalists, indigenous people, archaeologists and fishermen are denouncing the Mexican government's plan to build a series of hydroelectric dams on the biologically diverse Usumacinta River. The plan was shelved in 1989 due to domestic and international pressure, but has recently been reintroduced in its entirety. Construction of the first dam is slated to begin in 1994, at Boca del Cerro, at the mouth of the San Jose Canyon, 20 miles from the Guatemalan border. The project threatens the ecology of the Lacandon Rainforest, the largest surviving rainforest in North America. Homero Aridjis, president of the Mexican environmental organization Grupo de Los Cien 1, recently called for the halting of the plan, which will flood an area at least 500 square miles wide. "The Usumacinta is essential for the natural circulation of water in the rain forests of the region.... Its well-being and fate are inextricably linked to that of the Lacandon Forest," stated Mr.

Aridjis at a recent press conference.

Environmentalists are not alone in opposing the plan. Because two of the region's most important classic Maya sites, Piedras Negras and Yaxchilan, border the Usumacinta, archaeologists have also voiced their opposition. The proposed first dam, at Boca del Cerro, would flood much of Piedras Negras, submerging magnificent ruins of temples, palaces, sports arenas and baths. Additional dams would flood Yaxchilan, forever covering known or undiscovered sites.

The Lacandon Indians, the most direct descendants of the Maya, inhabit dozens of communities which lie along the river. These communities would almost certainly be ruined by the rising waters. This is coupled with the adverse affects to Mexico's most important wetlands resource, the Great Delta Wetlands. It is feared that this 4.9 million acre freshwater ecosystem, which supports Mexico's largest shrimp fishery as well as several other large fisheries, will

be irreparably damaged by the changes to the seasonal pattern of water flows caused by the proposed dams.

The Inter-American Development Bank is currently funding a \$2 million feasibility study for the development of a regional power network, in which the proposed dams are included. However, the funding for the dam's construction has not yet been secured and construction has been delayed. Therefore, groups opposing the dam feel international pressure could stop the project. These groups have mounted an international campaign, asking people to write or call various officials to express their opposition to the Usumacinta dam.

Further information about this project can be obtained by writing to the following addresses:

Grupo De Los Cien
Sierra Jiutepec No. 155-B
Lomas Barrilaco
11010 Mexico, D.F.

Mr. Enrique V. Iglesias
President, Inter-American Development Bank
1300 New York Ave., NW
Washington, D.C. 20577
tel:202-623-1101
fax:202-623-3614

President
Carlos Salinas de Gortari
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... the more things stay the same: Labor Rights in Chile

Steve Vanek

Over the last three years, Chile has been undergoing a transition from the Pinochet Dictatorship (1973-1990) to a system of electoral politics. Despite significant political change, the center-left *Concertación* government has not abandoned the neoliberal model of economic policy, established in the second half of the dictatorship. The situation of construction workers in Chile's capital, Santiago, reveals the problems this model has created for working-class Chileans.

The legal framework for labor relations in economic sectors which lack fixed worksites or stable work schedules, has not changed significantly since the end of the dictatorship. These sectors include construction and Chile's high-growth fruit export industry. The restrictive legal framework, as well as extensive subcontracting, makes construction an unstable and insufficient form of employment for many of Santiago's 200,000 workers.

A brief history of Chilean labor relations during the past ten years is helpful in understanding the current situation. In 1979, the *Plan Laboral*, an entirely new body of Chilean labor law, was decreed as part of an effort to institutionalize the Pinochet dictatorship. The *Plan Laboral* replaced labor legislation which had evolved since the 1930s and, by the 1960s, had given Chilean Labor an extensive legal framework recognizing their demands (although in practice Chilean governments often repressed these demands).

An example of this

framework in the construction sector was the *Tarifado Nacional*, established in 1968. Under the *Tarifado*, a tripartite commission of labor, government, and industry representatives decided industry-wide standards for working conditions and pay. This institution improved conditions and work stability in the construction sector, a sector which in most countries is inherently unstable. The establishment of industry-wide standards was a great improvement for construction unions, because negotiating conditions at many small and constantly-changing worksites is difficult. It is not surprising that the type of regulation embodied by the *Tarifado* is a

The legal framework for labor relations in economic sectors which lack fixed worksites or stable work schedules, has not changed significantly since the end of the dictatorship.

long-term goal of construction unions in Chile today.

The 1979 *Plan Laboral*, which put an end to the old labor law, established the legal framework for a very flexible labor market, in which employers were given an undisputed upper hand in labor relations. Unions, which had been persecuted and banned since the 1973 coup, were allowed to exist but were highly restricted. Unions were supposed to limit their actions to one company and thus had no right to collective bargaining procedures. A

sixty-day "legal strike" was permitted by the law for unions who would then be required to negotiate, thereby reducing the effectiveness of strikes. Severance pay and other measures designed to discourage and cushion firing practices were abolished.

According to the neoliberal ideology of the "Chicago Boys" and their supporters in the dictatorship, a flexible labor market meant that employers would hire workers more readily because of the lack of regulations on employment.

"Transitory workers" like construction workers and most agricultural workers suffered more than others from the *Plan Laboral*. They were given no right to collective negotiation under the new law. Effective unions were seen as obstacles to corporate efficiency and competitiveness, an opinion shared by the construction worksite bosses in a recent government survey.

A second and related trend has added to the problems of construction workers. The 1980 labor regulations have favored the rise of a business structure in which subcontracting and temporary employment is common. As Alvaro Diaz, a Chilean researcher, has written, "Large companies stand at the top of chains of production formed by a conglomerate of medium and small businesses which are subcontractors or suppliers." As a result, the labor force can be divided between "central" workers with stable work and contracts (which is the case in the largest construction firms) and a large mass of "peripheral" workers (part-time and short contract)

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and "external" workers (subcontracted by another firm). This pattern of employment is similar to the situation found in the United States.

Subcontracting in construction may involve workers with written contracts who come to a site for a few days to install wiring or put in reinforcement rods for the pouring of concrete. Small groups of workers may also be hired for a day or a few days at a time, with only a verbal agreement about their work. These workers are reported by subcontractors as "consultants" and do not receive any benefits. Information about subcontracting was difficult to obtain, but several companies reported that they were subcontractors, with 10-15 workers scattered at sites around Santiago.

In 1990, the Plan Laboral was revised by the newly elected *Concertación* government headed by Christian Democrat Patricio Aylwin. These reforms extended collective bargaining rights to unions dealing with more than one company, and to *Confederaciones*, or groups of unions. Worker safeguards to discourage firing, such as severance pay, were reinstated. However, "transitory" sectors like construction were excluded from the right to collective bargaining. Furthermore, severance pay does not apply to many of the short-term jobs in construction.

The problems created by neoliberal regulation of the labor market and the subcontracting structure of employment are clear to many construction workers. At one large construction site, the presence of subcontractors at the site and a possible union action to demand their



removal was a major issue raised by workers at a union meeting. As a worker at another site put it, "Pay gets reduced as it passes through the hands of different bosses, since one business takes a job, then gives it to others, each one taking a piece of the pie". Another worker lamented, "We live in permanent job insecurity, either because of the uncertainty of construction work or because of the poor pay. One can work many hours when there is work, but there isn't any possibility of health benefits or insurance."

Many workers also showed skepticism towards unions. Unionization in construction is at about nine percent of the work force, and unions which are successful at negotiations need prior company approval, which limits their effectiveness. At a major public water works project, a union petitioned both the company and the semi-private water works over issues of pay and safety in excavations. Government officials at the utility told the union that negotiations of a tripartite nature were no longer acceptable. The union was also virtually ignored by the company. Because of the uncertain and half-legal status of the union, many members did not

join an attempted work stoppage.

At many sites, some workers were suspicious of unions, claiming that unions arranged terms with employers at the worker's expense. Others complained that unions were indecisive and lacked force in presenting the demands of workers. However, sixty-nine percent of the workers in the survey viewed unions "favorably" or "very favorably". About a third of the non-unionized workers said that an attempt to organize had never been made, or that fear of their employers was a barrier to forming a union. Although the benefits of organized labor were acknowledged, the process of subcontracting and the current legal restrictions have led to a crisis of legitimacy for unions.

Many unions have responded to these obstacles by attempting to rebuild worker membership and press for small-scale gains at each construction site. An example of this is the *Sindicato Metropolitano*, which maintains a close relationship with each worksite and company where it organizes a union. Close relations with individual con-

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tractors conform more to the model of labor relations of the Plan Laboral. This strategy has led to charges of collaboration by other unions who, in an older style of union action, fight for global gains at a national level.

A national strike called by the *Confederation of Construction Workers* (CTC) in October of 1991 caused the withdrawal of the *Sindicato Metropolitano* from the CTC. The *Sindicato* claimed that the strike ignored the needs of workers at the base and the strike eventually failed. This demonstrated the tradeoff between trying to meet short-term goals in order to build the national labor laws. Clearly, all of the construction unions share the common goal of obtaining national regulations which would improve their bargaining position and a change in the subcontracting structure of employment.

In the case of Santiago's construction workers, it is especially clear that the Chilean Government's continued adherence to neoliberal policies has threatened the already precari-

ous position of many lower income Chileans.

Officially, unemployment now stands at about thirteen percent in construction, compared to an overall unemployment rate of just six percent (although government figures are usually suspect). The rate of unemployment may decrease with greater government spending on infrastructure (like Santiago's new subway line), and the boom in private construction in wealthy neighborhoods. Increased employment, as well as continuing membership drives, will probably strengthen the union's negotiating position. However, the subcontracting structure of employment, which makes construction work unstable and poorly paid, is likely to remain.

The Aylwin government has declared its intention to create a more equitable social system in Chile after seventeen years of repression under the dictatorship. But by not calling for fundamental changes in the structure of employment and the labor relations laws for "transitory" workers, Aylwin seems to have given up the fight to bring Chile out of Pinochet's dark legacy.



Review: Raúl García Zárate in Concert

This spring, CUSLAR was proud to host a concert with Peruvian guitarist Raúl García Zárate. He played in Cornell's Barnes Hall on Sunday, April 11th.

Dr. García is known for his adaptation of the music of the Central Andes to solo instrumentation and the concert stage. While his style of presentation is in the tradition of classical guitar, the structure of his music is faithful to the folk traditions of his home region of Ayacucho and other regions of Peru.

His concert featured musical forms with prehispanic Andean origins, such as the *wayno* and the *yaravi*, as well as music with its roots in the *criollo* culture of the Andean coast, such as the *marinera*. In this time when the Andean nations, and particularly Peru, are torn by violence and economic devastation, we are thankful to have a time to appreciate the strength and beauty of Andean culture.

We hope that Dr. García will be able to return again to tour in the United States.



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Rigoberta Menchú

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agree with these ideas?

RM: That is a hoax. It is only necessary to look at the number of indigenous people who have died compared with the number of Spanish dead to know who were the victors. It is only necessary to look at the current condition of the people to understand who is the victor. It is true that expressions of indigenous culture have been integrated into mestizo culture, but in general indigenous culture has been pushed aside, discriminated against, or simply served as decoration.

I: This concept of mestizaje is similar to another one, the idea of the "encounter of two worlds," which makes it appear that two cultures were joined and harmoniously gave rise to something totally new. Is it true that Latin American culture contains indigenous and European contributions in equal measure? Does such a balance really exist in mestizaje?

RM: We know that mestizaje did not come about because the Spaniards were thinking about equality and mutual respect. Many of our grandmothers were raped, and the product of that rape cannot be compared with the harmony of the encounter of two sentiments or of two cultures. Today our countries power is in the hands of creoles or privileged mestizos. This speaks to us of the imposition of one culture over another. Five hundred years later we are still living the consequences. First it was the Spaniards, but later came others: Germans, North Americans, and so on. Can you imagine what the vision of the universe, the concept of nature that our people still hold would mean for a new and more humane society?

I: The national heroes who have become stereotypes and are celebrated by governments on a political level, for example, Tecumun Uman in Guatemala - are they really representative of the indigenous people?

RM: They are figures whom we must recover and in some measure already have recovered from official history. It is said, for example, that Tecumun Uman did not know about horses, that he thought that he was killing the rider when he killed the horse. Our people are perfectly capable of recognizing the difference between a human being and another animal. How can they tell us such falsehoods? Here we see quite clearly the signs of the discrimination that is used to justify oppression and exploitation.

I: Is brotherhood between "Indians" and "non-Indians" possible in pursuit of a common goal?

RM: Of course it is possible. I can speak quite a bit about this because of the experience of our organization, the Committee of Peasant Unity (Comité de Unidad Campesina - CUC). It arose precisely under those conditions - enormous barriers between Indians and ladinos. If the CUC was repressed and persecuted, if there were attempts to destroy it, it was because its role was that of doing away with the disunity among the people. I have had the opportunity to meet many compañeros who are not Indians but are fighting in the same cause. I recall Marianela García, the Salvadoran compañera from the Human Rights Commission. She set a great example for many women; I talked with her about the identity and the brotherhood of our peoples, and she was Salvadoran and mestiza. When I learned that Marianela had been killed, I was filled with sorrow because I knew about her ideas, her ideals, her sacrifice. When she died, not only El Salvador, but the entire continent, lost a daughter.

I: What is the way to win recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples and of the people in general?

RM: An appropriate option would be to support projects such as this one for the emancipation and identity of Latin America. While in some places it may not be possible to raise one's head because it will be chopped off, that does not mean that those heads do not exist. This is a process that has been taking shape day after day with the efforts and the sacrifice of our people. The alternative is in the people themselves and in those who are with them.

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Uruguay

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ing resistance among workers and business-people. Opponents accuse him of undermining the productive sector to benefit the financial sector and of sacrificing domestic needs to meet foreign commitments.

Although first approved by referendum, the law allowing the government to sell state enterprises, a pillar of Lacalle's economic strategy, was repealed by a large majority in a second plebiscite in December.

The December vote revealed the public's lack of support for the government's actions, which was further underlined by a police strike. The president called out the army to maintain order in the cities, but more than half of the troops failed to follow his orders.

To re-establish the loyalty of the security forces, Lacalle raised police and military salaries, the only economic concession granted over the next four

months. As labor conflicts grew, sectors of Lacalle's governing coalition began to desert to form new political coalitions.

Despite lack of legislative support and fragile relations with the armed forces, during his March 15 annual address to Congress, Lacalle announced that he was committed to maintaining his economic policies.

Since then his two remaining allies, the vice president and the leader of the governing party's progressive faction, pulled their representatives out of the Cabinet.

Lacalle has ignored calls to sack Economy Minister Ignacio de Posadas, an attorney for international corporations, and announced a new package of economic policies that will raise taxes to cover government spending. He has also attempted to speed up negotiations to privatize several public companies, which, while not specifically covered in the December referendum, have nevertheless come under scrutiny as a result of the

vote.

By submitting the bill on domestic intervention to Congress in April, Lacalle was openly confessing his intention to continue his neoliberal economic policy and signaling his preference for repression over negotiation in case of serious protests or disturbances.

The measure also served to restore good relations between the military and the administration. The armed forces had felt victimized by the government's neoliberal policies and had resisted the restructuring of the armed forces that threatened troop levels and funding.

Patching up delicate relations with the military has brought with it the resurrection of the ghost of the National Security Doctrine. The real tragedy has been the silence of a significant portion of the country's politicians, who appear all too willing to return to the past.

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Gaspar Ilom

Continued from page 12

scale and systematic nature. "A friend told me the other day - someone from Norway who had been in Guatemala - that he had spoken in Norway for many years about what had happened in Guatemala, but people thought that it was impossible that in Guatemala the things he spoke of could really happen. Even though he carried photographs. They said no, it was an exaggeration. From the moment of the Nobel Prize, this news was institutionalized, sanctified. The parents, the family of this woman who received the Nobel Prize were assassinated by the army. If

that happened, in Guatemala the rest had [also] happened."

Ilom considered the reaction of the Guatemalan government to have been "on the one hand negative, and on the other hand very stupid... Obviously, they are not going to share the positions of peace, of grace, of human rights, but on the other hand they might have not made it obvious that they didn't want this." He noted that there had been violent attacks, accusations of subversion and lawsuits against people and organizations who gathered to celebrate the awarding of the Nobel Prize, and against the major media who reported on these activities.

Despite the repressive stance taken by the government

and the aggressive actions of the military, Ilom considers this to be a period dominated by the initiative of the popular movement and by moments of terrible weakness for the more rigid and reactionary sectors of Guatemalan society. He observes that the traditional power blocks in Guatemalan society are shrinking and becoming internally divided, and that representatives of diverse sectors of the Guatemalan people are coming together with new and substantial solutions to the problems of their country.



The Truth Omission: The U.S. Media and El Salvador Continued from page 2

*** Throughout the 1980's, news reports in national media regularly used euphemisms to describe El Salvador. The government was referred to as a "democracy" or a "fledgling democracy." Military leaders who assassinated priests were termed "moderates." Reporters spoke of "a civil war that has claimed 70,000 lives" — when they knew from briefings at the San Salvador Archdiocese human rights office that over 90 percent of the dead were not battle casualties, but civilians killed by government security forces and allied death squads. In deference to Washington, news accounts referred to "human rights abuses on both sides" — when evidence showed them running about 30 to 1 toward the government.*

In El Salvador, after the U.N. report was made public, right-wing groups immediately went on the offensive, calling it "illegal, unjust, incomplete, partial and anti-ethical," among other things. At the

same time as they questioned the report's veracity, these groups also gave their "immediate and unconditional" support to an amnesty for those implicated in it.

In the United States, without the benefit of a truth commission to uncover its cowardly past, the national media outlets have already issued themselves an amnesty for their failure to blow the whistle on a terrorist regime financed by U.S. taxpayers.

Atrocities continue to occur in Central America, Haiti, the Andean nations, the Amazon rainforest, and in the streets of Rio de Janeiro. At CUSLAR, we are dedicated to providing you with the information that the mainstream media continue to ignore. Stop by our office in Anabel Taylor Hall, and come to our talks and movies to find out the rest of the news that the New York Times doesn't see "fit to print."

-Daniel Fireside-

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