Summer 1994

Zapata Vive...

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MENTAL BLOCKADE

Over the years CUSLAR has hosted scholars, activists and artists from virtually every Latin American country, creating people to people ties throughout the hemisphere. Yet, in organizing a conference on U.S.-Cuban Relations this April, we have learned that Cuba, a mere 90 miles south of Florida, remains the farthest from our understanding.

Back in February, working with Joy Gordon, a professor of philosophy at Yale, we submitted a request to the State Department for visas so that the featured Cuban speakers, Doctor Juan Antonio Blanco, and Professor María del Pilar Díaz Castañón, as well as the Reverend Raúl Suarez could attend conferences at Cornell and at several other universities in the Northeast.

Much to our surprise, we received strong support and encouragement from politicians and professors, and many ordinary citizens. The State Department was another story.

Initially we submitted letters of support from Congressman Maurice Hinchey, as well as faculty, Department Chairs and Deans from the departments of Philosophy, Government, English, Comparative Literature, and the Latin American Studies Program at Cornell. Yet we were told that only Professor Díaz-Castañón, who teaches political philosophy would be allowed in.

We followed up with another round of letters and phone calls, this time including Cornell Hillel, the Episcopal church, Senator Daniel Moynihan and many others. We were then informed that our country might be able to survive a couple of lectures from Doctor Blanco, a former diplomat, author of dozens of books on foreign relations, and currently Director of the Felix Varela Center for Ethics (a non-governmental organization) in Havana. Reverend Suarez, a Baptist Minister, member of the Cuban National Assembly and director of the Martin Luther King Jr. Center in Havana, was another story.

At this point we decided to play hardball. First, noted historian, Arthur Schlesinger Jr. sent a letter to the State Department telling them to "grow up," and then Cornell's President Frank Rhodes sent them a letter, but, alas, to no avail. Suarez' visa was denied.

Because there is no direct mail or telephone communication between the United States and Cuba, and because travel by U.S. citizens is severely restricted by U.S. law, conferences such as ours provide a rare opportunity for direct, open international dialogue. As citizens, we cannot participate in a democracy in an intelligent and informed manner without opportunities to discuss, question and learn.

We are appalled that the State Department has so little regard for academic freedom or for the exchange of ideas and information in a democracy. It is not only improper but profoundly destructive to undermine something as ordinary, and as urgent, as international dialogue between the United States and Cuba.

In the presentations by Dr. Blanco and Professor Díaz-Castañón and the question and answer period that followed, a complex picture of Cuba and the current crisis emerged that defied Washington's attempts to view everything as black and white. By continuing to host conferences like this one and by building bridges instead of walls, we can make those 90 miles seem not quite so far. --D.F.

The Committee on US-Latin American Relations (CUSLAR) is a project of the Center for Religion, Ethics and Social Policy (CRESP). Since 1985 we have worked in Ithaca and the surrounding areas 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 committee cooperates with the 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. Articles and letters to the editor should be sent to: CUSLAR, G-29 Anabel Taylor Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853.

The CUSLAR Newsletter is partially funded by the SAFC of Cornell University. The content does not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the SAFC or Cornell University.

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Daniel Fireside
By Linda Farthing

One morning at the experimental agricultural station in La Jota, Bolivia awoke to find their driveway covered with an orange colored powder. The substance was tumeric, which the station, using funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development, had encouraged local farmers to grow instead of coca leaf. When the market for the spice never materialized, the frustrated peasant farmers responded by dumping their vats of tumeric at the agronomists' feet.

Frustration is a common sentiment these days for campesinos, the indigenous farmers who live in the Chapare where 80% of Bolivia's coca is grown. For eight years, these campesinos, who produce one third of the world's coca leaf, the bulk of which is processed into cocaine for U.S. markets, have been promised "alternative development." Headlines proclaiming millions of dollars in aid have appeared regularly in local newspapers, fueling the expectations of the 40,000 families who eke out a marginal living in the Chapare's scrubby, semi-tropical plains.

The coca leaf has long been an important part of Andean culture. Indigenous Bolivians chew or drink in tea an estimated 10,000 metric tons of coca a year, using it to fend off altitude sickness, stomach upsets and hunger. It is present in every rite of passage, from agricultural rituals to marriage to death. Bolivia's efforts to have the leaf internationally recognized as different from highly processed cocaine have to date been unsuccessful. Various coca products developed by enterprising Bolivians, from toothpaste to medicinal tonic, have been left without an export market.

In the fields of the Chapare, the United States, funder and director of the war on drugs, adopted a carrot and stick approach early on. "Our strategy is to use interdiction to keep the price of coca so low that campesinos are forced to eradicate their crops. Then we'll give them roads, schools, technical assistance, and so on," explained an AID official working on the Chapare project in 1987.

Campesinos couldn't afford to count on vague promise of development assistance, especially not when prices for coca were high. "For us, coca eradication without development means hunger and misery," states campesino leader Valentin Gutiérrez. "When money really goes into alternatives, then we will pull up our coca." The result of this standoff during the 1980's was that many of the millions available for development were never spent.

The U.S. stepped up efforts in 1990 with the introduction of a five year U.S. $2.2 billion "Andean Initiative" which aimed to substantially reduce the flow of cocaine into the United States from the Andean region. It showed little success: in the two years the Initiative was in effect, the quantity of cocaine available in the U.S. increased by a third. With the election of President Clinton, hopes were raised that policy would change substantially. Unfortunately for the coca growers, the policy remains much the same with the only major difference being a reduction in the funds available to realize it.

Eradication remains a crucial component in the revamped strategy. The U.S. has tried to lure campesinos to pull up their coca by offering $500 for each acre voluntarily eradicated. When coca prices took a dive in

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1990 because of repression in Colombia, peasants flocked to the government’s eradication office. Paco Rodriguez was one of them. “We had to wait more than three months to get the compensation promised. What were we supposed to live on?” he asked.

But even without the delays, campesinos are hard pressed to turn the money into other crops. Many of the plants that are promoted take several years to bring to maturity, five to eight in the case of coffee, three for pepper. Juan Vargas recently eradicated one of his six acres of coca and planted pineapple. “It produces for four years, but takes two years for fruit to appear, and only has one harvest a year. Coca has four,” he explains as he walks through the sharp stalks. “Thank God I have my coca to support my family while we wait for the pineapple to grow.”

The La Jota agronomists themselves acknowledge the superiority of coca as a cash crop. Bumping along in the back of a pickup through the station’s 200 acres of experimental macadamia nuts and exotic fruits, an agronomist admitted, “The ones who have taken out all their coca are completely out of luck. They have no income at all.”

A focus of alternative development is the production of high quality tropical products for Chile and Argentina, as both countries have no tropical zones of their own. However, this plan seems unrealistic, given that only about 800 kilometers of roads are paved in a country twice the size of France, and none of them connect landlocked Bolivia to its neighbors.

Running through the flat scrubland, the main road within the Chapare was paved in 1988. It has since been frequently used as a landing strip for planes moving coca or semi-processed cocaine paste. Meanwhile, the curvy treacherous road up to the high valley city of Cochabamba, the most logical local market and export point from the Chapare, was left in disrepair until the end of 1990. It is still not finished.

Once off the main road in the Chapare, the reason for farmers’ preference for coca becomes immediately obvious. Forty six kilos of fragile bananas, carried several kilometres through often knee deep mud, perhaps on the back of a bicycle, bring about $2. With its price high at present, the same weight of dried coca, baled in large jute bags, is worth $52.

Agronomist Roberto Fernandez estimates that severe price fluctuations since late 1989 have led at least 30% of Chapare families to eradicate some of their coca. By USAID’s own calculations, their programs, run through the Bolivian government, are reaching less than 10% of these families.

Those who decide to substitute other crops for coca face enormous challenges. Credit, financed through the sale of donated U.S. wheat, is available at 13%. Although the borrower receives local currency, repayment must be made in dollars. As a result, campesinos assume the added burden of an average 17% annual devaluation of the boliviano, putting real interest at 30%.

Credit is not the only difficulty. Technical assistance necessary to develop new productive agricultural systems is virtually non-existent. Until this year, a total of nine agronomists were available to visit the farms of the 40,000 campesinos in the Chapare. This number has since been beefed up to 22.

Just a small part of what is slated as economic assistance by the U.S. actually goes into development programs. Eighty-five percent provides balance of payments support, which helps the country pay off its foreign debt and attract private investment. Only $22 million of U.S. aid was destined for the Chapare in 1992. Economic Minister, Samuel Doria Medina, has called for $400 million a year for five years to wean the economy off cocaine.

Efforts to make the government and the U.S. fulfill their commitments have led to the consolidation of five powerful campesino federations, nationally affiliated with the Campesino Confederation and the labour movement (Central Obrera Boliviana). Local unions have been the principal organization in the Chapare since colonization of the area began in the 1960’s. They decide who can settle where, arbitrate disputes, and build schools and roads. To discredit the often militant unions, U.S. officials have called their leaders drug

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While the carrot has most certainly been a failure, the U.S. has always shown a preference for the stick. Overall, interdiction is 70% of the anti-drug budget (excluding the balance of payments support). Those who bear a good deal of the brunt of the repression are the campesinos. A report released in December 1993 by the Andean Information Network, a volunteer group of foreigners in Bolivia concerned about the impact of current U.S. policy, points this out in detail. With the assistance of Bolivia's Human Rights Assembly, the report documents cases of torture and murder at the hands of U.S.-funded and trained antidrug police.

Researchers who are being held in prisons revealed that the majority are indigent, as larger drug traffickers can bribe their way out of custody before they even reach jail. A draconian anti-drug law passed at U.S. insistence permits no bail, and innocent bystanders, snatched up in the drug police's zeal to show the yanquis "success" in their efforts, have spent up to five years in jail clearing their names.

Many campesinos argue that forcing prices low and increasing repression has had an effect very different from encouraging substitution. "What worries me most is that peasants are being pushed into crime by these policies. They are turning to work in cocaine production, stamping paste or assisting in drug running instead of dedicating themselves to alternative crops like I have," says Felix Gomez who has eradicated 90% of his coca. Although considered by La Jota agronomists a model farmer, Gomez says he is bankrupt. "Who is going to dedicate themselves to all this hard work when they can see that someone like me has lost everything?" he asks.

The U.S. has attempted to involve the Bolivian military in interdiction efforts, a strategy also pursued in Colombia and Peru. In countries notorious for military coups (Bolivia holds the world record) such a strategy only makes sense in the context of the U.S. determination to win the "drug war" at any cost. From 1990 to 1991, the U.S. upped its support to the military from $4 million to $36, conditional on the military intensifying its campaign against drug traffickers.

Large injections of U.S. military aid were last sent to Bolivia in 1956, when the U.S. conditioned economic assistance on the rebuilding of the country's military after it had been dismantled by the 1952 Revolution. The rebuilt military quietly gained strength until it overthrew the civilian government in 1964, plunging the country into 18 years of military rule. And the last time the military was involved with the cocaine trade, they were running it, during the brutal narco-dictatorship of Garcia Meza in 1980-81.

For these reasons, Bolivian reluctance to involve the military is understandably widespread. The government claims the military will only go after drug traffickers and leave campesinos alone. But as one campesino leader asked, "Will these soldiers be trained to know the difference between a drug trafficker and a campesino? Do you think they will stop and ask before they shoot?"

Campesinos already harrassed by the police have no interest in having them joined or taken over by the military. In a meeting of Andean coca producers held in La Paz, Bolivians listened with growing apprehension as Peruvians described the violent situation in the coca-growing Huallaga valley where army and guerilla groups are waging war, with peasants caught in the middle.

In February of this year, the government, bowing to constant U.S. pressure to meet eradication targets or lose aid, attempted to force eradication in the Chapare. The result was a series of violent clashes with police as coca growers blocked roads and organized self-defense committees. In March, after extensive negotiations with coca grower representatives, the government backed down.

For the past three years, Bolivian non-governmental organizations have been working closely with the growers' unions to help coca producers diversify their crops. Here the focus has been placed on integrated regional development, rather than programs exclusively devoted to coca eradication. These organizations have also promoted the legalization of coca leaf so that alternative coca products could find an international market.

Efforts are being made to set up the Andean Information Network in the U.S.

The Network, founded in Bolivia in 1991, is committed to the promotion of just and effective solutions to the cocaine problem for the peoples of both the Andes and the U.S.

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THE NEW MAYAN WAR

By Luis Hernandez

On January 1st, the day the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) went into effect, a previously unknown guerrilla group in the Mexican state of Chiapas burst onto the national scene by capturing a half-dozen towns by force of arms. The army took four days to drive them back into the mountains at the cost of a hundred lives. As the badly shaken Mexican government tries to negotiate a settlement, the rebels—led by the eloquent, green-eyed Comandante Marcos—are gathering sympathy around the country.

The Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) emerged from the New Year’s uprising as a national political force. The Zapatistas’ claim to a following in other parts of the country and their threat to spread the war elsewhere are both entirely credible. But Chiapas is their home base, and to explain how an oppressed and impoverished peasantry came to view armed struggle as their best option—and were able to pull off an insurrection—we must examine the particular experience of Chiapas’ recent history.

This peasant war, the current incarnation of a tradition of cyclic Indian revolts, grow out of nearly 20 years of political agitation in the countryside, primarily over land. The agrarian reform that in some landholdings. Many of these vast cattle ranches were created through violent and illegal invasions of ejido (community-held) or national land.

In the Ocotlan Lions Club, as recently as 1971, there hung a sign that was the ranchers’ motto: “In the Law of the Jungle it is willed/that Indians and blackbirds must be killed.” Threats, jailings and killings of peasants—sometimes at the hands of the ranchers’ private armies, other times the result of the army or a judge acting on the ranchers’ behalf—fill the pages of Chiapas’ tabloid press. Several international human rights organizations, among them Amnesty International and Americas Watch, have documented these attacks.

The state judiciary has shut out the peasantry. Nearly every democratic organization active in Chiapas has members in jail.

states practically eradicated the large latifundios of pre-revolutionary Mexico was never fully implemented in Chiapas. The state is the principal source of the nation’s coffee, and just over a hundred people (0.16% of all coffee farmers) control 12% of all coffee lands. Land tenure is actually more skewed than these figures suggest, since some properties are registered in the names of third persons in order to evade constitutional restrictions on maximum size. These large farms have the best land, most of the credit, and the best infrastructure.

Yet the real problem isn’t in coffee, it’s in cattle. According to 1980 figures (the most recent available), some 6,000 families hold more than three million hectares of pastureland, equivalent to nearly half the territory of all Chiapas’ rural

Committee on US-Latin American Relations
Montesinos Mogar, strongman of the town of Motozinla and until recently state leader of the National Peasant Council (CNC), one of the PRI's organizations. Among other things, this representative of Chiapas' peasants controls all transport in the area of Motozinla, where he was elected mayor three times, and is currently a federal congressman. His wife heads up the regional Civil Registry; his compadre Hermelindo Jan Robiero is the tax collector; his brother-in-law is the mayor of Sittepec; his nephew is the mayor of La Grandeza; another compadre is the mayor of El Porvenir.

In the highlands a relatively large number of political bosses are Indians, many of them bilingual teachers. These caciques usually control the marketing of liquor, soft drinks, flowers, candles and fireworks. Needless to say, they benefit from the practice of traditional rituals in which these products are consumed. They often control transportation and land rentals as well; and of course, they control the PRI and CNC municipal committees. Not surprisingly, political dissonance is frequently expressed as religious differences which question the mechanisms by which the caciques accumulate wealth. For example, Protestants who refuse to participate in funding fiestas for the patron saints are sometimes expelled from the community and their lands confiscated.

These local political bosses—Indian and non-Indian alike—have used demands for regional autonomy to block the federal government's efforts to modernize traditional modes of domination. "Chiapas para los chiapanecos" may be an appealing slogan in a country as overly centralized as Mexico, but it has been employed to keep democratic grassroots movements from allying with progressive federal officials. Similarly, when war erupted in nearby Central America, the Chiapas Family moved quickly to convince the federal government that the state's stability depended on strengthening, rather than weakening, their stranglehold on political and economic power. To fight this oppressive system, the peasants of Chiapas have founded some of the country's most important regional organizations. Chiapas' small coffee producers were the first to challenge the state coffee company, and to set up self-managed coffee farms. They were the second group in the country to found a rural credit union. They were pioneers in the production of organic coffee—along with farmers in neighboring Oaxaca—and in the development of alternative marketing channels.

The growth of peasant struggle throughout the state after 1974 was influenced by a number of factors. The influx of 15,000 to 30,000 Guatemalan temporary workers to the large coffee farms, undercutting the pay of migrants from the Chiapas highlands, prompted agricultural workers to organize. Growing population and unemployment increased the pressure on land and drove many to petition for agrarian reform. This was further complicated by the arrival in the early 1980s of nearly 80,000 Guatemalan refugees fleeing the dirty war in their country. Unplanned colonization of the jungle caused ecological disaster by 1985, and brought the agricultural frontier to a close.

Peasants were also assisted by "outside" organizers. Liberation theology-inspired Catholic clergy began to do politically oriented pastoral work. Several new political parties started doing grassroots organizing, among them Proletarian Line, People United, the Independent Organization of Agricultural Workers and Peasants-Mexican Communist Party (CIOAC-PCM), and the Socialist Workers Party. And in 1979 a broad-based democratic union movement emerged among the state's teachers, some of whom began organizing peasants.

Three key organizations from the mid-1970s still exist today. The union of Ejido Unions works primarily in the Lacandón Jungle, the northern part of the state, and the Sierra Madre Mountains. It seeks to win peasant control over the productive process by pressuring the state through mobilization, but it prefers negotiation over direct confrontation. The second organization, CIOAC, focuses on organizing the seasonal and permanent workers on coffee farms and cattle ranches in the towns of Simojovel, Huitzitlán and El Bosque. It has sought to link the union struggle to the electoral and programmatic activities of the old Communist Party, and later to its successor, the Unified Socialist Party.

The third main group, the Emiliano Zapata Peasant Organization (OCEZ), grew out of the community of Venustiano Carranza. It struggles for land and against repression, primarily by confronting the state through direct action. In addition to these three, a number of local organizing efforts resulted in land takeovers and bloody confrontations with local bosses, but all of them suffered repression and internal divisions.

The widespread insurgence

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among the state’s primary and secondary school teachers for better pay and the democratization of their union had a great impact on broader social struggles. Beginning in 1979, thousands of teachers held strikes, work stoppages, sit-ins and marches to Mexico City. In the process they sought the solidarity of parents, the majority of whom were peasants. These, in turn, viewed the teachers’ struggle as an object lesson in how to achieve their own demands.

Once the democratic teachers’ movement managed to win control over the state union, it became an interlocutor with the state government on behalf of the peasant movement, and encouraged teachers to “link up with the people.” In 1986, teachers took up the struggle of corn farmers for an increase in the guaranteed price of corn, landing seven of their leaders in jail.

By August, 1989, the teachers had organized five teacher-peasant conferences, in which some 400 community representatives participated. The organization that emerged from this process, Peasant-Teacher Solidarity, was quite successful in promoting democracy in the countryside.

They won control of many municipal committees of the PRI, as well as several mayорships in Indian towns. At the beginning of the administration of Governor Patrocinio Gonzalez Carrido in 1989, the movement controlled 14 municipal governments. But by the time his term ended last year, several of the movement’s mayors were in jail for corruption—some for good reasons, others on trumped-up charges—and one had been assassinated on the orders of the local political boss.

A new cycle of struggle began on October 12, 1992 at an astounding demonstration in San Cristóbal de las Casas to commemorate the five-hundredth anniversary of indigenous and popular resistance. Thousands of peasants from different ethnic groups took over the narrow streets of the colonial capital of the Chiapas highlands and vented their rage on the symbol of white domination—breaking into bits the statue of conquistador Diego de Mazariego. According to some of the participants, that moment marked a turning point, a catharsis of collective anger which brought into people’s consciousness what many already felt: that armed struggle was the only path to achieve Indian demands.

The people who preached the need to take up arms had been doing careful grassroots organizing for some time in the Lencandon Jungle and several highland communities in the area. Their movement remained underground and grew by recruiting key cadre from the legal organizations operating in the region. They persuasively argued that armed struggle was justified by the explosive combination of unresolved land claims, lack of social services, institutional atrophy,
authoritarian political bosses, monstrous deformations in the justice system, and the general lack of democracy.

Although the colonization of the Lacandón Jungle was initially promoted by the large lumber companies who needed workers to cut the trees, it intensified as a result of the failure of agrarian reform in Chispas and elsewhere. From the 1940s onward, the people who came to live in the jungle were those who had lost the struggle for land at home. Some were sent to this frontier by an agrarian bureaucracy unwilling to challenge the large landowners, while others were simply pushed off their lands and had nowhere else to go.

In their efforts to build communities and lives in the uninhabited jungle, they relied on the presence and accompaniment of the Catholic Church, which in this region was particularly respectful of people's traditional customs—and on the notable absence of governmental institutions. Religion became the glue that held these new communities together. Catechists not only taught people the "word of God" but, literate and mobile, many of them able to speak Spanish, they became key links to the outside world.

A second element that gave cohesion to these communities was the struggle for title to their land. In 1972, President Luis Echeverría gave 66 Lacandón Indian families title to 614,321 hectares, and denied all rights to the 26 indigenous communities of other ethnic groups. The signing of the Joint Accord for the Protection of the Lacandón Jungle in March, 1987 opened a process of negotiation which culminated in January, 1989 when President Carlos Salinas de Gortari signed a presidential decree to title the properties of the 26 communities. But these negotiations and accords lay a lot of hard work on the part of the region's peasant organizations. In the process, peasants came into increasingly bitter conflict with large ranchers who were expanding into the jungle, violently expelling people from their lands, and accusing them of promoting land takeovers. Attacks by ranchers not only united the peasants of the jungle but fed their sense of collective identity as victims of abuse by the wealthy.

Two strategies were always present in these struggles. On the one hand were those who encouraged the formation of democratic resistance organizations and the promotion of peasant self-government. On the other were those who believed this was necessary but insufficient, that only changing the system through armed struggle could provide a real solution. The first vision gave rise to organizations such as the Union of Ejido Unions; the second to what today is known as the Zapatista National Liberation Army. For years the path of peasant self-government was considered primary, despite the closed attitude of local and state officials. Only in the past three years has this position lost influence among the region's inhabitants. One basic reason is the continued conflict with ranchers and their hired guns. Although the ranchers lost title to much of the jungle, they maintained control of most of the natural and cultivated pastureland and of the that graze there.

Accustomed to quick and easy profits from cheap land and cheap labor, ranchers blamed peasants for falling profits caused by their own lack of investment, and proceeded to throw more peasants off their land. Any peasant organization that requested land through the agrarian reform became a target of rancher violence, supported and often carried out by local officials.

The insurrection also grew out of the economic crisis. The prices of the region's major products—wood, coffee, cattle and corn—have all deteriorated drastically. The 1989 moratorium on woodcutting (a step back from the accord signed in 1987) denied peasants an important source of income. The fall of the international coffee price of coffee from US$120-140 per hundredweight in 1989 to an average of $60-70 today, as well as federal economic policies, led to a 65% drop in income for coffee producers over the past five years. What’s more, the dismantling of the federal coffee company, Inmecaf, deprived peasants of marketing mechanisms and a source of technical assistance.

The region was hurt by the falling profitability of cattle ranching. Corn farming, too, lost productivity due to population growth and the consequent reduction of 30-year slash-and-burn cycles to two-year ones. With a few miserable handouts, Salinas' much-touted National Solidarity Program (PRONASOL) was barely able to soften the blows of falling income and fewer jobs. Despite their innovative efforts, the new self-managed enterprises grouped in the National Coordinator of Coffee Growers' Organizations were also unable to stop the increase in impoverishment.

The third factor behind the turn to arms is the government's incapacity to resolve the underlying political problem, which would involve dismantling...
POLITICAL KILLINGS INCREASE IN GUATEMALA

By Trish O'Kane

Among the pictures of bikini-clad women advertising cars and other luxury goods, small, macabre articles keep appearing in Guatemalan newspapers.

"Two unidentified male bodies were found yesterday in a ravine in a Guatemala City shantytown. Both had been shot in the head at close range. Their hands were tied behind their backs with barbed wire and they had been tortured," the article read.

While progress has been made recently in negotiations toward a peace accord, and the number of bodies turning up has diminished from the mass terror of the early 1980s, the killings continue, and repression has been elevated to a computerized science.

With 54 assassinations, January was the worst month in five years according to the Archbishop's Human Rights Office. Since then more than 80 death-squad style killings have been reported.

But the 1993 Archbishop's Human Rights Report published earlier this year is not just about paramilitary death squads or disgruntled army officers gone awry. The report describes an institutionalized high-technology system of terror, which picks victims according to cost-benefit analysis.

"We're talking about a structure with multi-disciplinary teams that can record and analyze political personalities in the country; a structure with logistical support and data processing capabilities that can act with impunity. The sectors that carry out the violence adapt their actions to the political circumstances and analyze the political cost of a particular action. International pressure is very important for this reason," the report said.

Despite this reality, on March 4 the United Nations ruled that a special observer to monitor human rights in Guatemala was unnecessary. As usual, the annual UN human rights conference was the scene of feverish last-minute lobbying by Guatemalan human rights groups to get sanctions.

Government lobbyists sent by President Ramiro de León Carpio were the winners in the "Battle of Geneva," as the event has come to be known. This occurred despite a 54 percent increase in human rights violations under the de León administration, as compared to the Jorge Serrano administration, according to the archbishop's office.

"There was so much hope that the human rights situation would improve with de León. But he has changed and become a defender of counterinsurgency, the armed forces and the civil patrols. It seems paradoxical but there has been a gross increase in human rights violations since he assumed power," explained Factor Méndez, director of the Center for Research, Study and Promotion of Human Rights (CIEPRODH).

Méndez said violations have increased because civilian power is overshadowed by military power. "The real power is still the army. This explains the abrupt change in de León's discourse. He fell into the same trap that all civilian presidents have fallen into. The office of the presidency has very little maneuvering power."

When de León became president last June, the forces of repression in Guatemala were quiet for a few weeks after the change in government. Then a month after de León took office, he received their message. On July 3, political leader and newspaper editor Jorge Carpio de León's cousin, was murdered. Carpio and three companions were gunned down by 30 armed, masked men while he was traveling in a caravan in Quiché.

The government promised an immediate and thorough investigation. More than 1,000 army specialists were sent to Quiché, where they knocked down doors, searched houses without warrants and terrorized the population. In a country where political murders are rarely resolved, within 24 hours de León announced that the murder was a "common crime," and five days later, police presented a dozen members of a local gang as suspects.

Later, after months of investigation, Government Minister Arnoldo Ortiz Moscoso announced that Carpio's murder

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¡CUBA SÍ, BLOQUEO NO!

By Hank Strunk

"If I had only known my friend was on drugs, I would have talked with her.

"If I had only known they were down to their last cent, I would gladly have helped out."

Americans are like that. My 4-week adventure on the "Pastors for Peace 3rd Friendshipship to Cuba" was a vacation, a mind-bender, an obligation to sound the wake-up call here at home, to arouse you sufficiently...to avoid your hand-writing lament, "If I had only known the suffering and destruction of dreams that the US Blockade of Cuba was causing, I would've done my part to lift the blockade in '94!"

What does the Blockade really mean to ordinary Cubans? Cuban American, Raymundo del Toro, truckdriver from Newark, NJ, says his 19-year-old son living in Cuba has gone from 140 to 90 lbs in the last year because of tight food rationing in Cuba; a Cuban artist attending a conference in Mexico received a phone call recently saying that his son, for lack of common medicine, died of an asthma attack; acres of ripe vegetables rot in the countryside because there is too little fuel and too few trucks to transport the crops to hungry urban populations; sugarcane mills, tractors, and combines sit idle because spare parts 90 miles away are part of the US blockade; after age 7, there is no longer a guaranteed ration of milk available; scarcity of newpaper, computers, pencils, tablets, hamper children's schooling and communication generally, all sorts of prescription drugs, wheelchairs, specialty medical equipment are in very short supply. How much stress can a population endure? I don't know. I sensed apprehension but also a strong team spirit, a tenacity to preserve and advance Cuba's unique, hard-won achievements.

Continued on page 20

Pastors for Peace Update

In February and March of this year the "Pastors for Peace 3rd Friendshipship to Cuba" rolled through dozens of cities throughout the United States, collecting humanitarian aid for the people of Cuba, in defiance of the 32-year-old U.S. embargo. Ithaca Mayor Ben Nichols declared "U.S.-Cuba Friendship Week," and CUSLAR and the Tompkins County U.S.-Cuba Interfaith Friendship Committee raised more than a ton of material aid and $1,500 in cash. Ithacan Carl Whittaker joined the Caravan as a driver. Additional funds were used to send urgently needed insulin to Cuba via an organization in Canada.

After brief delays at the U.S.-Mexico border, almost all of the aid was allowed through. Among the items held back by the Treasury Department were computer equipment, typewriters, an electric piano(!) and a satellite dish intended for Rev. Raul Suarez' Ebenezer Baptist Church in Havana to promote "people to people" communication. After pressure from Pastors for Peace, the media, solidarity groups, members of Congress, and of course CUSLAR members, all the remaining aid was allowed to enter Mexico. Inexplicably, after the satellite dish was in Mexico, the State Department had a change of heart and pressured the Mexican authorities to seize the dish and return it to the United States. Currently the dish is in the possession of Mexican Customs.

Another disturbing incident occurred as PFP leader Rev. Lucius Walker and a Cuban Canadian citizen were driving a pickup truck across the border with the remaining aid when they were stopped by U.S. Customs agents. When they refused to leave their truck, they were charged with resisting arrest. Walker was also charged with assaulting a police officer! Their cases are pending.

To join CUSLAR's Cuba Working Group or to find out more please call our office at (607) 255-7293.

-Daniel Fireside
By Ann Peters

In March 1994, we were fortunate to have Cuban demographer Ernesto Rodriguez speak for CUSLAR. Here we summarize some of the main points presented by Rodriguez during his visit, hoping not to do any injustice to his more complex and detailed presentations. Our explanatory asides are presented in italics.

The United States has been the primary target of emigrants from the nearby island of Cuba since the last century. Migration to the United States was strongest during periods of violence, such as during the struggle for independence from Spain in the late 1800s. Still, the emigration since the 1950s has a special character, and must be considered in the political context of the Cuban Revolution and the subsequent relationship between the U.S. and Cuban governments.

The political and economic factors which have conditioned Cuban migration to the United States have varied over the years. After the Cuban Revolution, large scale migration occurred between 1961 and 1965. In this phase, the migrating population was not representative of the Cuban population as a whole. Wealthy people and people with many years of education and professional training were overrepresented: people who lost businesses and properties nationalized by the Cuban state wished to leave the country and had skills and connections that facilitated emigration to the United States. The "Cuba Adjustment Act" provided financial support for Cubans while they sought resident status in the United States. Migration between 1961 and 1965 reached astronomical levels, with most people emigrating for political reasons.

This was due to political polarization, not economic hardship. The majority of Cubans benefitted from policies that provided improved health care, education, job opportunities, and personal security, while a substantial minority lost jobs, possessions, social status and personal security. The economic difficulties of the 1960s were associated with the flight of financial capital and highly trained people from the country, and with the initiation of the U.S. embargo. Cuba was cut off from its primary sources for industrial imports and their maintenance, and its primary market for agricultural exports and the tourist industry. The U.S. pressured its political allies to join the embargo, forcing Cuba to look for trading partners in the geographically distant Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Thus Cuba has paid a high price for its Revolution, exacted by successive U.S. governments.

Migration levels were much lower in the late 1960s and the 1970s. In 1972, a new bilateral accord between the U.S. and Cuba set procedures for a certain number of legal applications for migration to the United States each year. Because of the social and economic stress caused by the migration patterns of the early 1960s, the Cuban government restricted the emigration of certain categories of people defined by age, educational status and line of work. The demographic profile of Cuban emigrants since the early 1970s corresponds in general to the Cuban population as a whole: dominated by working class people and homemakers, with educational levels more typical of a "first world" than a "third world" population.

In the early 1980s, an incident with asylum-seekers at the Peruvian embassy in Havana ultimately led to the Cuban government's decision to temporarily end emigration restrictions. Over one hundred thousand people left the country at this time as part of the "Mariel boatlift." Responding to accusations that Cuba's prisons were full of political dissidents, Cuba allowed prisoners to voluntarily emigrate. As a result, large numbers of the "Marielitos" ended up in prison camps in Florida. The U.S. has since sought to deport these "undesirables" back to Cuba, complicating recent U.S./Cuban negotiations on migration policy.

In the later 1980s and 1990s, migration to the United States has largely for economic reasons, like migration from the rest of Latin America. Family reunification is another important factor. Rather than receiving support from the U.S. government, current Cuban migrants depend on the support of family members already in the

Ann Peters is a former CUSLAR Coordinator.
United States and on networks of connections within the Cuban exile community.

There are now very few restrictions on emigration on the part of the Cuban government. Due to the fact that the U.S. heavily restricts the number of legal immigrants processed in Cuba, but still freely provides resident status to Cubans who have been illegally in the United States for one year, most migrants choose illegal avenues. This includes precarious travel in small boats, travel through third countries, or staying on after legally visiting a relative in the United States. As a result, most of the illegal immigration today is the result of U.S. rather than Cuban restrictions.

A memo dated January, 1994, recently leaked from the U.S. Interest Section in Havana complains that most Cubans now applying for legal migration to the United States do so under false pretenses. As political persecution is favored by U.S. authorities as a motive for migration, the memo states that large numbers of would-be migrants present false claims of belonging to real or fictitious organizations in opposition to the Cuban government, or even create such organizations and associated political incidents with the apparent purpose of establishing documented activism for an asylum claim. Addressed to the Secretary of State, the CIA and the Immigration and Naturalization Service, this leaked memo has been widely publicized in Cuba but its significance has not been noted by the U.S. mainstream press.

The complex machinations of would-be emigrants and the economic hardships that spur them to migration are both the result of the U.S. embargo against Cuba. After the collapse of the socialist bloc, the Terricelli Bill (“Cuban Democracy Act”) moved to tighten the economic stronghold on Cuba extending the embargo to shipping companies that dock in Cuba and placing sanctions on foreign subsidiaries of U.S.-based multinational corporations if they trade with Cuba. As a result, the island of Cuba is hard put to either obtain or produce basic medicines, books and newspapers, and many other industrial goods for domestic consumption. This economic attack focuses on the basic goals of the Cuban Revolution: universal health care, free and high quality public education, and a decent standard of living for all Cubans.

While it can be argued that most Cubans still live better than most other Latin Americans, they have long considered it their right to compare themselves with the citizens of the “developed world.” As a result, a sense of deprivation and deep dissatisfaction predominates in Cuba today. While the U.S. campaign to destroy support for the Cuban government through economic strangulation may find success, it is tragic that the Cubans stand to lose some comforts and advantages that we lack in the United States. Cubans continue to count on many public services, civil rights and social values associated with the Cuban Revolution, and they are deeply suspicious of plans by extremist groups in the Cuban exile community to “retake the island” for themselves.

At the same time, the Cuban government is trying to set the conditions for more normal relationships of communication, family visits and migration between Cuba and the United States. While the flow of dollars in “remittance” from Cuban exiles to family members on the island is considered not to be economically productive and to be socially divisive, the interest in investment in Cuba expressed by more moderate sectors of the Cuban exile community may be welcomed in the near future.
Interview: Isabel Allende and the Magic of Her Spirits

By Elvira Sánchez Rueda

When Isabel Allende wrote The House of The Spirits it was like an exorcism, a way of taking from her soul all of the ghosts that she had housed within; ghosts that had been haunting her and not leaving her alone. Her work not only allows us to learn of the political and social realities of Chile — extended to Latin America — but it opened, and is opening, a door for women to garner a voice and a place in literature. Today, twelve years later, the novel has arrived at movie theaters in a multi-million dollar production that began its run in the United States in April.

Bringing a novel as complicated as The House of the Spirits to the theater was no easy task, and for this reason, the author consistently turned down selling the rights to various Hollywood film companies that offered to turn her work into film. It was only when she met the Norwegian filmmaker Billie August, winner of the Cannes Film Festival with his production of Pelle the Conqueror, did she allow him to take over the production of her work. Isabel Allende feels truly satisfied with the final result of the film. One reason is because even though she did not intervene in its filming, she was consulted with many aspects of the movie, and many decisions were made with her approval. [In the U.S., the film has come under criticism for the absence of Latino actors in the leading roles.]

"The movie reminds me of Doctor Zhivago or Gone with the Wind," Allende says to explain the combination of elements that characterize a film of this nature. The cast is composed of Jeremy Irons in the role of Esteban Trueba, Meryl Streep, as Clara del Valle; Glen Close, as Ferula; Antonio Banderas as Pedro Tercero and Wynona Rider in the role of Blanca. The outside scenes were filmed in Portugal, where they found a country home that fit the description of "Las Tres Marias", and the interior shots were filmed in a studio in Denmark. The only scene that was not filmed in either of these places was the coup d'état which was filmed in Lisbon. Allende would have preferred the movie to have been filmed in Chile, where the events took place, but she knew that the military powers would never allow it.

Her second play, Of Love and Shadows, has also been adapted to film and will be coming out at the latter part of the year. Unlike The House of The Spirits, this movie was made with a smaller budget and is primarily made up of Spanish-speaking actors. Antonio Banderas plays the role of Francisco and Jennifer Connelly, the only North American in the film, is cast in the role of Irene.

Isabel Allende, in an exclusive interview from her home in San Francisco, California spoke on the movie and other topics such as her mission as a writer and the current reality of Latin America.

Q. Does the movie The House of the Spirits capture the feeling of La Casa de los Espiritus?

A. It captures the history. It tells the story well, for the movies have resources that literature does not have. The only thing missing is the smell, but everything else is there. There is music, action, beauty, color, scenery, and great actors. It is truly a super production. It doesn't have a completely Chilean flavor, but it does capture a universal dimension. Now, of course, it has none of the magical elements. This is barely suggested because every time magical elements are brought to the screen, they become

Elvira Sánchez Rueda, from Colombia, is a graduate student at Cornell University.
La paz no se decreta, se construye
con ladrillos de amor y de esperanza
se afirma en la Justicia de hombres libres
que aman la verdad y no la transan.

Peace is not decreed, it is constructed
with bricks of love and hope,
it is affirmed in the Justice of free people
that love truth without compromise.

Translated By
Anna Didanno

If you're looking for a great anthology of short stories, then I highly recommend the January-June, 1991 issue of the Latin American Literary Review, which is in fact an anthology of short fiction by Latin American women writers. The editors of this special issue, Kathleen Ross of Duke University and Ivette E. Miller of the University of Pittsburgh, chose stories from twenty-three twentieth-century women writers from across Latin America. Ross writes an excellent introduction to the volume, and along with the fiction, the volume includes an extensive bibliography on "women writers in general, feminist literary criticism, and the writings of each individual author both in the original language and in translation" (13).

This special issue of the Latin American Literary Review should be of interest to a wide variety of readers: scholars working in the field of Latin American literature, those who are new to the field, and those who have a general interest in literature or women's writing. Many of the authors in this anthology will be familiar to an international audience. The collection also goes far in introducing to an English readership those writers who are less well-known outside Latin America. Although the volume concentrates on contemporary writings from the eighties, the editors also include several writers from the '40s, '50s, '60s, notably Silvina Ocampo (Argentina), Lydia Cabrera (Cuba), Julieta Campos (Mexico) and Clarice Lispector (Brazil). Other well-known writers whose works appear in this volume include Ana Lydia Vega (Puerto Rico), Isabel Allende (Chile), Claribel Alegría (El Salvador) and Nelida Piñón (Brazil).

In the introduction, Ross explains some of the factors that went into deciding which works to anthologize: "to achieve a representation of authors from different regions of the continent, to see several writers translated into English for the first time, to include new or recent work by established writers, and to gather the work of some excellent translators of Spanish and Portuguese" (12).

Although the editors stress the diversity of these authors, they also highlight certain common themes that unify the volume. For instance, the anthology brings to the forefront a complex set of issues of translation. The editors ask the readers to consider some of these translations as "critical works in their own right," and to remember that translation is ultimately an act of interpretation and "close reading." Literature produced in translation, they point out, contains the narrative voices of both author and translator. Each story is thus accompanied by biographical notes on the translator as well the author.

By placing the more current of these works in the context of economic crises, state violence and civil war, the editors also suggest the other themes that link these writers together: immigration, exile, ethnic tensions, interpersonal relationships in times of struggle, and "the change in women's roles both in the family and the larger society, and the impact of those changes on sexuality and perception of self" (15).

Some of my favorites: Olga Nolla's "A Tender Heart" (Puerto Rico), translated by María de los Angeles Navarez. Here the dreams and ambitions of a happily married couple clash when they migrate from Puerto Rico to New York. The story explores the changes in gender roles and family expectations that migration occasions, dwelling especially on some of masculinity's more entrancing illusions. Cristina Peri Rossi's "The Art of Loss" (Argentina), translated by Asa Zats — a blow-by-blow description of tango bar encounters, where anonymity and the rigid codes of the dance give the narrator "celestial" experiences — except for the one time her partner spoils the dance by talking of the sordid realities of Argentina's economic recession.

-Estelle Tarica

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In the late 1980s, thousands of Salvadoran villages, refugees from the civil war, vacated the refugee camps in Honduras and took back their land in El Salvador. Going Home, an intriguing collection of photographs and testimonials from Salvadorans and Internationals who participated in the repatriation, provides an insightful account of a path-breaking and difficult event.

The book is photo-journalistic and yet intensely personal. It documents several years of struggle among the Salvadorean refugee camps of Colomanegua, Mesa Grande, and San Antonio to return to El Salvador and reclaim their land. The testimonials include detailed descriptions of life in the camps and the journey back to El Salvador, as well as survivors' accounts of atrocities committed during the war in El Salvador. In fact, be careful: Part I opens with the words of Maria, a survivor of El Mozote Massacre, and you will hardly find a more personal, graphic and moving account. Her words, as are the words of all the contributors, serve as a powerful antidote to the outrageous amnesia we suffer thanks to the mainstream press.

Throughout, Going Home relies most on the words of eyewitnesses to tell an important piece of history. The editors' Introduction supplements the photographs and text by providing useful background information on the history of the war and the political contexts framing the repatriation. My only criticism of the book: perhaps too many of the pictures are of anonymous women or children, too often the universal symbols of the spoils of war. Much more interesting are the photographs of refugees in their workshops and gardens, or of their actual return to El Salvador in buses and on foot.

Going Home is organized roughly chronologically, divided into four sections: "Life Before and In the Camps," "Going Home," "Life in the Villages," and "Accompaniment." Above all, this account of the repatriation stresses the courage and determination of the refugees, their highly organized and productive lives despite hardship. Over and over, the international visitors and accompanists are impressed with the refugees' dignity, strength and warmth, and with the combination of organized effort and pure hope that made their struggle to regain their lands a success.

For those who know little or nothing of the refugee repatriation, this book is a wonderful way to understand history. For those who followed the events more closely, Going Home will provide you with an especially intimate glimpse of a trying and hopeful time.

- Estelle Tarica


This book is a series of beautifully written reflections on unspeakably horrible events. Falla examines the perverse logic of the Guatemalan military which led them to massacre entire families and communities in the Ixcan region of Guatemala. Somehow Falla's loving attention to the language and viewpoint of his witnesses makes this book more than just an account of violent tragedy. It is also a celebration of the survival of the child, the sibling, the spouse or the neighbors who tell the story and retain their own humanity after all that they have lived through.

When the Spanish language edition of Massacres in the Jungle was published in Guatemala by the University of San Carlos Press, the Guatemalan army responded with vehemence denial and personal attacks on the author in the press. Shortly afterwards, there were bombings and army incursions into the areas where massacre survivors live in hiding in the Ixcan rainforest. These "Communities of Population in Resistance" throughout the region have sought recognition as non-combatant civilians who should not be attacked by the army.

In one military raid, the army found a hidden cache of church and community supplies, including Falla's personal papers. It turns out that this Jesuit anthropologist had been living among the survivors for years, acting as a parish priest and collecting testimonies. The Guatemalan military announced in triumph that Falla was a guerrilla commander.

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an accusation which could only be read as a death threat, forcing Falla into exile.

After fifteen years of human rights reports and numerous testimonies about the bloodbaths carried out by Guatemalan security forces, you would think that Falla’s book would not have provoked much a violent response from the military. Their response only served to validate the very testimony it sought to undercut. But there are several things about this book which makes it unlike most previous human rights reports. First, it was first published in Spanish in Guatemala, at a time when Maya-led human rights organizations had gained national prominence. Second, Falla’s writing is based not only on interviews with witnesses and survivors, but also on the years that he spent accompanying them in their pain and hardship.

Third, the book does not maintain a cold, minimalist style of narrative that seeks to validate itself as “objective” in the face of horror, nor does it shout anger at the Guatemalan military. Rather, it speaks with some intimacy, sharing what the survivors saw, what they did, and what they thought about it. Sometimes a witness shocks us by demonstrating a clarity and thoughtful detachment that we might find more natural in a corner of forensic specialist. Sometimes she touches us by expressing simple and profound empathy for the suffering of those who died and for the pain and loss of the other survivors. Then Falla steps back slightly to share his own meditations on the nature and validity of the testimony and sometimes on the possible reasoning - or lack thereof - that led military commanders to order torture, assassination and massacres in a rising crescendo that culminated with the massive exodus of the population from this region in 1982.

The English translation published by Westview Press treats Falla’s language as lovingly as he treats that of his witnesses. As a result it is somewhat burdened and gloriously enriched by Guatemalan turns of phrase and their associated footnotes. All these personal, unexpected touches keep this book from having the numbing and depressing effects of a legal report or the evening news. Instead, Massacres in the Jungle, empowers and inspires the reader, just as Falla says his life among the clandestine survivors in the CPRs empowered and inspired him to be their chronicler - or as he might put it, to write their Gospel.

-Ann Peters


More than one hundred years after the end of slavery in the United States, and over a quarter-century after the civil rights legislation was passed, race continues to play an important role in the hearts, minds and institutions of this country. A society so totally affected by racism as the United States often projects upon other societies the same values and countervalues which are found within itself. Thus, racism is the same here, there, and everywhere else, and all societies are perceived through the very same cultural spectacles with which one's own society is perceived.

Not surprisingly, those who are looking for flaws within the Cuban revolution will inquire about the degree to which all social problems have been solved, and corroborating the existence of social problems they then proceed to denounce the revolution as a failure. Never mind that more than one hundred years after the U.S. revolution the Supreme Court was institutionalized segregation by the so-called "separate but equal" doctrine. Never mind that sixty-four years after that, black Americans were still marching for some official expression of universal freedoms. Skirting all of these issues and their historical contexts, otherwise serious scholars pretend to equate the "success" of a revolution with the solving of all social problems. That is to say, there are vestiges of racism in Cuba, therefore the revolution has not worked.

Pedro Pérez Sarduy and Jean Stubbs offer us in Afrocuba a different approach. This is a collection of essays or excerpts from a diversity of Cuban sources all dealing with Africanness in Cuba. In so doing, the editors treat us to much more than just racism. The reader is transported in time and space to the abakú or the afrocubano, that Luis Palés Matos has written of elsewhere, and to the babalú-ayé (the Catholic St. Lazarus), and to the “regla de palo,” an...
Afro-Cuban religion of Congo origin. We learn about “santería” of Yoruba origin, and of yemayá (the god of the sea) and of Changó (the pseudo-Catholic St. Barbara).

In this work, the focus is not just racism but blackness. It deals with Black Cuba singing, crying, working, and romancing. It deals with family, with colleagues, with soldiers of all races united for a common cause. It does deal with something called the “Black problem,” but it also deals with “the birth of national culture” including the heterogeneity of the population, as well as with the reality of national issues overriding the cultural and racial differences within the population. In other words, it does not hide the ugliness of racism, and in the various selections, one rethinks the influence of the United States on Cuban institutions from the turn of the century until 1959. Neither does it totally blame the United States for the existence of racism in Cuba. Indeed, the reader relives the angst of the Fathers of Cuban independence such as the white José Martí, and the mulattos Antonio Maceo and Máximo Gómez who fought tooth and nail against the racism which would internally defeat their dreams of independence from Spain. Attacks upon their persons came, not solely from Spain which played up the Haitian revolt, but from within the ranks of the Cuban military itself which was in constant fear of the “Black Caudillo” replacing the Spanish colonizers.

Afrocuba is a good, readable anthology of basic Cuban writings which serve as an introduction to race and ethnic feelings in Cuba and ¿qué sí sabe? it might even shed some light on race and ethnic relations in the United States.

[Afrocuba can be ordered from the Center for Cuban Studies, 124 West 23rd Street, New York, NY 10011, (212) 242-0559.]

- Héctor Vélez

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**Grassroots Action:**

50 Years is Enough Campaign

Grassroots community groups throughout the Third World have used sophisticated strategies to resist the structural adjustment policies of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Unfortunately, most U.S. taxpayers, who provide major funding for these financial institutions, know little about the economic hardships created by demands for austerity and privatization.

With a high level of media attention focused on both institutions during their 50th anniversary, U.S. advocacy groups have formed a coalition to publicize their shortcomings and press for reforms. So far the campaign, aptly named “50 Years Is Enough,” is backed by Global Exchange, Oxfam, Development GAN, International Rivers Network, Environmental Defense Fund, and more than two dozen other activist and church groups.

The aim of the coalition is “to limit the power of these institutions and to promote a public exploration of possibilities of creating new structures, or modifying existing ones, that could deliver more relevant and appropriate assistance,” says a recent release. Tactics will include a high-profile media campaign, organizing community leaders, and a major push during the World Bank/IMF Annual Meetings slated for Madrid in September.

The devastating human cost of structural adjustment programs is also the focus of “Policy Has a Human Face,” a citizens’ campaign launched by Witness for Peace. A week of local vigils and action around the Bretton Woods anniversary is planned for July 16-24, and the faith-based group has already begun a “Card-a-Week” lobbying campaign in which personal stories from Latin Americans are combined with letters to decision-makers.

Specific proposals for change in World Bank and IMF policies include:
- halting Bank support for environmentally destructive projects
- shifting from structural adjustment to sustainable, self-reliant development
- full and timely disclosure of World Bank information
- public exploration of alternative funding mechanisms
- a narrower role for the IMF
- separating debt relief from implementation of structural adjustment programs

For updates on the “50 Years” campaign, contact The Development Gap, Structural Adjustment/Economic Justice Action Group, 927 15th Street NW, 4th Floor, Washington, DC 20005. Tel: (202) 899-1566. To obtain Witness for Peace organizing kits and cards, write WfP, 2201 “P” Street NW, #109, Washington, DC 20037. Tel: (202) 797-1160.
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We 250 caravanners and the thousands of supporters in the 140 participating US cities see ourselves as catalysts for US policy change. Through Pastors for Peace we focus on removing the unjust US embargo-blockade of Cuba. We do not take a position on the internal affairs of the sovereign nation of Cuba. We assert that Cuba is not our enemy; that Cuba represents no security threat to the American people; that people-to-people interchange can open new pathways in diplomacy; that Cubans simply serve the right to their own future.

The United States is the only nation blockading Cuba and pressuring its allies to reduce Cuban trade. We have twice been condemned by the UN for our recent tightening of the blockade. And while spending millions of our tax dollars in destabilizing Cuba, we at the same time deprive ourselves of bio-medical advances made by Cuban researchers and pass up trading opportunities over to Japan, Spain, and other nations eager to sell cars, tractors, buses, computers, telephone systems, food, and medicine. And Cuban beaches are declared off-limits by the Clinton Administration.

Rep. Robert Torricelli (author of the Cuban Democracy Act that has tightened the blockade of Cuba) told a Georgetown University group, “I want to wreak havoc on that island... I want to bring down Fidel Castro.” While campaigning against President Bush, Bill Clinton accused the Bush Administration of missing “a big opportunity to put the hammer down on Fidel Castro and Cuba.” I think most upstaters have a far greater sense of fair play and goodwill than evident in these two proponents of the Blockade. Even in the city of Miami, where Cubans represented 59% of a February poll (reported in The Miami Herald), only 34% favored the Blockade, while 40% opposed it, while 23.6% had no opinion.

What can we do to achieve fair play for the people of Cuba? Can we the American people deliver the late 90s free of tricks against Cuba — free of documented assassination attempts, sabotage, bombings, biological warfare, harsh destabilizing trade blockades, incessant radio and TV propaganda broadcasts, information blackouts, coercion of our allies? Then perhaps the Cuban people will be able to preserve the wonderful achievements of the free high-quality universal healthcare, education, unexcelled literacy rate, housing, and cultural creativity while evolving a society where national paranoia and survival issues are not strong systemic influences or internal policy.

Hank Strunk is a Syracuse area activist.

SINGER

¡GRASSROOTS!
The conviction that all avenues of legal struggle had been exhausted was brought to a head by the harsh policies adopted by the state government in 1990, when the leaders of the "Xi'Nich" movement in Palenque and the parish priest of Simojovel, Joel Padrón, were jailed for supporting land claims. Although a broad regional mobilization, national protests, and Church intervention won their freedom, the experience was viewed as a watershed. If the achievement of such small victories in local conflicts required nationwide protests, people reasoned, then the only way to resolve the state's many problems would be by democratizing the entire country.

The final straw came when President Salinas—who had begun his administration with some encouraging signals (freeing prisoners and settling longstanding land claims)—backed the governor's iron hand and proceeded to impose the reform of Article 27 of the Constitution, ending legal protection for community ejido lands.

Given these material conditions, it's not surprising that the disciplined and tenacious efforts of political-military organizations to promote the option of armed struggle found fertile ground. Their cadre are not foreigners or outsiders, but local people familiar with the culture and rhythms of indigenous communities and well-known by broad sectors of the population. Add to this the evident military and ideological preparation, and it's not hard to grasp how they were able to launch the rebellion which shook the nation on New Year's Day.

The uprising was a mix of desperation born of a bitter present, and and uncertain future, and rage at past defeats and constant humiliation by the powerful. But it was also driven by the dream of recovering the great Indian nation that once was, and the incredible self-assurance people attained from having successfully conquered the jungle.

Many of the radical measures required to resolve the conflict in Chiapas are needed throughout Mexico: an agrarian reform that destroys the power of corrupt local elites; regional economic development programs led by grassroots organizations; a complete overhaul of the judicial system including purging the security forces of human rights violators; and democratic reform of the political system to end the PRI's monopoly control of public offices and mass organizations.

Not everyone in the Chiapas countryside believes, however, that the time to adopt the strategy and tactics of peasant warfare. Neither do all of the organizations that work in the zone of conflict wish to be considered belligerent forces. The uprising does, however, have sympathizers. People have long memories, and many see this as an opportunity to get back at their oppressors; but caciques and ranchers also bear many grudges, and know they need only call their enemies Zapatistas to exact revenge.

The peasant war in Chiapas has opened up issues that the national elites had hoped would be forgotten. It bared to the world a side of Mexico that was not taken into account when congress voted by acclamation "to join the First World." It is time to bring the political system in line with the overall maturity of Mexican society. The new Mayan war is a signal that the hour of real political reform has arrived—and there is no turning back.
Guatemala continued from page 10

was a political crime and that the suspects held were innocent. He implicated the local army-controlled civil defense patrols in the murder.

Despite Ortiz's promise in December that he would release the results of his investigation within days, he still had not released them as of March. Ortiz "resigned" as minister in February. According to one military analyst, he was sacked because he was too human-rights oriented.

In August, a month after Carpio's murder, a civil patrol in the western town of Cotztenango opened fire on a peaceful march of protesters, killing one and wounding several. Police had video recordings of those who fired upon the unarmed civilians, but it took several months before they were finally arrested.

These cases, just the most well-known of many, demonstrate how little control the civilian government has over security and paramilitary forces. This lack of control has been compounded by the recent weakening of human rights groups in Guatemala, in particular the office of the Human Rights Ombudsperson.

In the past several months, the country's fiercest human rights critics within the government have been silenced or bought off. While de León was ombudsman, his two assistants, César Alvarez Guadalupe and Maria Eugenia Morales, were more outspoken than their boss. Alvarez was continually in the countryside investigating abuses and criticizing the army.

Many expected that with de León as president these two would continue in their roles as human rights watchdogs. But within a few months, both were named to international posts defending the government in international forums. Alvarez is now ambassador to the OAS in Washington, and Morales was recently named ambassador to Spain.

The office of the Human Rights Ombudsperson has gone from continual public criticism to virtual silence. According to human rights activists, the office has been successfully infiltrated by military intelligence and workers can no longer be trusted.

Jorge García Laguardia, the current ombudsman, is steering the institution towards human rights education rather than investigating violations. García is the main government figure that monitors the human rights situation and has millions of dollars in resources from foreign embassies. He began receiving death threats shortly after taking office in July and reportedly is afraid of the army.

The ombudsman's attitude towards the job and his level of fear reflect the sad state of human rights in Guatemala. In an interview last year García said: "This is a difficult, traumatic and deceiving job. Imagine this, on my second day as ombudsman, Jorge Carpio was assassinated and we were asked to help. I haven't slept well since. I was a lot happier as a judge and a journalist than I am now in this job."
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