Committee
On
US
Latin
American
Relations

CUSLAR NEWSLETTER

CUBA

Still going...

IN THIS ISSUE

Editorial:

A Call To Justice

Jennifer Harbury's husband's death, after weeks of torture, was ordered by a high level military intelligence officer in Guatemala in 1992. "So what?" says my friend Bob. "We all know that's how they do these things."

According to Rep. Robert Torricelli, Efraín Bamaca Velasquez's assasination was ordered by Colonel Julio Roberto Alpirez, who was also responsible for the assassination of American hotel owner Michael Devine in 1990. Alpirez was trained at the infamous "School of the Americas" in Fort Benning, Georgia and was a paid agent or "asset" of the C.I.A. "So what?" says my friend Bob. "Most of the high-ranking Latin American military get training there and that's where the C.I.A. recruits them."

Torricelli says that the C.I.A. had extensive information on the two killings around the time they occurred, with telegrams and memos to prove it - yet Devine's killing has been under investigation by the U.S. Congress, supposedly, for four years. "So what?" says my friend Bob. "We all know that these Congressional oversight committees don't dare to - or don't want to - really find out what is going on."

But the State Department knew, too, even while Ambassador Marilyn McAfee was assuring Harbury that they would help her to find out the fate of her husband, known as Comandante Everardo. Since the C.I.A. was involved, they couldn't tell her about her husband's clandestine execution without due process because of laws protecting C.I.A. "sources and methods." "So what?" says my friend Bob. "We all know that those people just lie."

The Guatemalan Army has bathed its country in blood for forty years, under generations of officers trained by the United States. Its human rights record has often led Congress to cut off military aid - with the exception of officer training programs. The "G-2" military intelligence division basically runs the country, holding the civilian president hostage to his own "personal guard" and setting up despotic spy networks in every village and in every public and private institution. The close working relationship between the C.I.A. and the Guatemalan military has been constant, since the U.S.-engineered military coup of 1954 set Guatemala on its current spiral of deepening poverty and endemic violence. "So what?" says my friend Bob. "There are books published on that stuff."

But I say that the point is that our government, the U.S. government, is the friend of power-hungry thugs and greedy conspirators throughout our hemisphere, and has its finger right there on the bloody corpses and writhing torture victims. It's not just something that happened before - it is happening to someone right now, today, tomorrow, and our taxes are paying for it. "You know what?" says my friend Carmen. "The problem with this country is that the public just doesn't pay any attention. Your government isn't accountable to anyone, because as long as you're not the one bleeding - yet - no one cares what is going on."

"You're right," says Bob. "So when are we going to do something to stop this horror?"

-Ann H. Peters

The Committee on U.S./Latin American Relations (CUSLAR) is a Cornell University based group, founded in 1965, which seeks to promote a greater understanding of Latin America and the Caribbean. The members of CUSLAR are a diverse group of people united in our concern about the role of the U.S. in the social, political, and economic affairs of the region. Within this context we support the right of the people of Latin America and the Caribbean to self determination, and support their efforts to free themselves from a legacy of colonialism, exploitation, and oppresion. CUSLAR works for peace, justice, and greater mutual understanding in U.S./Latin American relations through education, solidarity and support of human rights.

If you are interested in writing or editing for the Newsletter, 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.

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"WE ATE ONLY TEARS"
A REFUGEE'S STORY

NOTE: An estimated 600,000 Peruvians became internal refugees, or desplazados, during that country's 14-year war with the Communist Party of Peru-Shining Path. Despite these numbers, however, only recently has Peru begun to address the serious problems faced by desplazados, including poverty, homelessness, and continued fear of political violence. According to the U.S. Committee for Refugees, there are at least 1.2 million displaced people in the Andes. Although the story of desplazada Teresa Rios (names and places have been changed), forced to flee the department of Apurímac, is unique, her experiences mirror those of thousands for whom war and its devastation has yet to end. Along with fellow desplazado activist Arturo Reyes, a Colombian also forced to flee because of political violence, Ms. Rios is touring the United States as a guest of the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Amnesty International to raise awareness of this serious human rights issue. Rios and Reyes recently spoke at Cornell at a forum organized by CUSLAR.

Ms. Rios' story was translated by Robin Kirk.

When I was 14, guerrillas came to my village in the Peruvian Andes. It was 1981, and they were unarmed. They said they came to teach us and punish those who exploited the village, like thieves and corrupt landowners. They promised to build roads and health clinics, which to this day do not exist in my village.

Instead, they began to kill. At first, it was only those who opposed them. But after the military arrived, and also began to commit abuses, the guerrillas targeted people who they believed had helped the soldiers. My grandfather, who had given an army patrol water, was among those killed. Although we wept and pleaded for his life, the guerrillas hung him, cut off his fingernails, cut off his testicles and slit his throat. I know because they made me watch.

If we refused to feed the soldiers, they called us terrucos, Quechua for terrorist. Yet if we fed the soldiers, the guerrillas said we were traitors. One night, soldiers came for my father. The next morning, we found his mutilated body with a sign that read, "In this way, all the terrucos will die."

That is where our great sadness began. We ate only tears. Later, guerrillas seized my brother, who I never saw again. In 1983, we fled my village in the middle of the night with several other families. We became refugees, what in Peru are called desplazados.

Although we did not realize it until much later, we were part of a huge exodus. Thousands of families were forced to abandon their homes, lands and animals. On my back, I carried my grandmother, who could not walk. Once, we had to hide in a cactus patch to elude the guerrillas who would have ordered us killed. My nieces and nephews fainted with exhaustion and hunger as we scaled the mountains, with only the blankets we had managed to grab for shelter.

In the city, though, we found not safety but suspicion. People glared at us and called us terrorists. Fearful, we could not say we were desplazados. Hired to work the fields, we were fed only once a day. When we arrived in Huancayo, we slept for days in the street until a woman took pity on us and sent us to a family with spare rooms. We cleaned their house for rent, but often went for days without eating.

At first, fear kept me awake at night, and I peered around every street corner for the guerrillas or soldiers who might kill me. My mother, elderly now, met every morning with sadness. Since we had always bartered our crops, we had to learn about money and buying food from market vendors, who, seeing that we were poor and peasants, tried to cheat us.

Slowly, we began to rebuild our lives. I joined an association of desplazados and began to teach others about their rights. For money, I washed clothes, cleaned houses, and did some weaving. Today, we still eat just twice a day, and around me I see our children suffering from malnutrition and disease, especially tuberculosis.

Some of our leaders, like Zenón Ramírez, were killed for daring to organize desplazados. Ramírez, who had been threatened with death, was dragged from his home, tortured, and killed by men that have yet to be identified. Yet we continue to insist that the Peruvian government owes us official recognition as desplazados and help to either fashion new lives or

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Setting the Record Straight: Cuba's AIDS Policy

By Karen Wald and Bill Strubbe

It is a subject rarely broached in gay circles; Cuba's controversial AIDS policy has made the island nation one of the only countries in the world where HIV infection is spreading arithmetically rather than geometrically. Cuba's policies which includes universal testing, contact tracing, semi-isolation, and fourteen provincial sanatoriums for those testing positive for the HIV virus, has largely succeeded in stemming the tide of HIV infection. Cuba's response to AIDS was unique, and at the controversy's core was the issue of limiting personal liberty versus the right of the public to be protected from a deadly virus.

As of December 1994, over 15 million HIV tests have been conducted in Cuba. The tests have found 1,098 HIV-positive citizens in the population of ten-million. Of those testing HIV positive, 71% are men, 29% are women, 44% of the men are gay and bisexual, and 56% are heterosexual. In addition, 323 people have developed AIDS and 226 people have died from the disease. Most HIV cases have been traced to sexual contact with visitors. Nine people were infected via blood transfusions, and only two cases appeared after blood was routinely screened in 1986. All pregnant women are tested within the first three months, and four babies have been born infected with the virus. These figures compare favorably with the outside world. Puerto Rico, for example, with a population 1/3 the size of Cuba, has over 34,800 infected people, and 216 infected children. New York City, with roughly the same population as Cuba, has over 70,000 full-blown AIDS cases, and an estimated 200,000 HIV carriers.

Karen Wald is a journalist living in Cuba. Bill Strubbe is a Boston-based activist.

In addition to the isolation and educational policies, Cuba's low infection rate is attributed to the curtailment of imported blood products, complete testing of the blood supply and all new blood donations, the use of sterilized needles in hospitals, and almost non-existent IV drug use. There has been increased sexual contact between Cubans and foreigners in recent years, although this has not led to an increase in HIV positive rate among women.

Cuba's overall AIDS program has come a long way from it's early days when the policy of virtual isolation of all who tested HIV positive created consternation in the gay and AIDS communities. "At the time, (in 1986) no one was exactly clear how AIDS was transmitted," explained Gustavo Kouri, the director of the Tropical Disease Institute where most AIDS patients in acute stages are hospitalized. "We decided to speak with the patients and most accepted this isolation as a way of helping the welfare of the society."

When the government made the difficult decision to isolate people with AIDS, Dr. Juan Carlos de la Concepcion was just beginning his practice as a physician in the mountains near Guantanamo. A blood donation given to him before he left Havana tested positive, and his long-cherished hopes of becoming a surgeon were dashed. Now 32 years old, he has lived in the sanatorium for seven years. "When I found out I was HIV positive and had to go to the sanatorium, I felt horrible, " he said. "But given what we knew then—people thought that even mosquitoes could transmit the disease—if I had been among the group of doctor's who had to make the quarantine decision, I would have probably said yes." Juan Carlos founded the "Grupo Prevención SIDA", a group of HIV positive patients at the Santiago de las Vegas sanatorium that eventually became a national commission. He also became the first person with AIDS (PWA) to show his face on national television.

Juan Carlos's compañero of 11 years, Raul Llanos, also lived in Santiago de Las Vegas. When Raul first moved to the sanatorium he had difficulty adjusting to the loss of freedom, especially when he knew he would never engage in behavior that would transmit the virus. But he eventually realized the government and doctors had the patients' and country's best interest at heart. "I don't think I'll ever accept having HIV, but I accepted the idea of being Cuban with HIV which included the sanatoriums," Raul said.

Contrary to popular images, Cuba's AIDS sanatoriums are clean, comfortable, and even

"luxurious" by Cuban standards. About 300 people live in the 40 hectares compound, and even the oldest and least attractive Acoiris buildings are far from being a prison. The nicest section of El Maranon is comprised of attractive one and two story apartments where single men and women and straight and gay couples live. Compared to the average Cuban home the living conditions here are exceptional. The apartments are nicely furnished, have color TVs, air-conditioners—a luxury in Cuba—and sports and exercise facilities are available. During this "special period" when foodstuffs are in short supply, HIV patients receive a high protein diet of 4,000 calories a day, twice that of the average Cuban.

When the question of human rights violations was brought up Juan Carlos said, "What do you think most people would prefer? To have a sanatorium like ours where they're taken care of and seen by doctors for free, or to be living like some people do in the streets of the United States and other countries and die for lack of medical care?"

Orlando, a 60-year old former musician, construction worker, and English teacher replied passionately, "Look who's talking about violating human rights! It's the United States government blockade that prevents us from buying AZT and DDI and other medicines. We have to buy the drugs from companies around the world, who risk US reprisals for selling it to us, and who charge triple the cost. Isn't that a violation of the human rights?"

While medical technology in Cuba may not be completely up to par with the United States, and access to foreign-made drugs and medications is limited due to the loss of its trading partners and the ongoing US trade blockade, Cuba is renowned for its high quality medical care which is both universal and free. Cubans generally have a good relationship with and trust their doctors. Cuba is also small enough to enable testing of most of it's population.

A fear voiced early early on in the American gay press was that the sanatorium policy was used as a measure to repress homosexuals. Both Raul and Juan Carlos are quick to deny it. Juan Carlos replied, "I think it was a measure to deal with AIDS, regardless of sexual orientation. By 1986 it was already clear in Cuba that the disease had no predilection for homosexuals or heterosexuals; that a majority were heterosexuals."

Cuba's quarantine policy has been constantly modified as medical knowledge expanded and patients made their requests known. Within the first year patients were allowed to go home several times a month with a chaperon. Some patients were allowed to work or attend class outside, and return to the sanatorium in the evenings. Patients receive classes on AIDS education, followed by a behavioral and psychological evaluation to determine whether they are responsible enough to come and go freely from the sanatorium. About 75% are able to leave freely; the rest must leave with a chaperone.

Tomas was among the first to enter the Santiago de Las Vegas sanatorium. He said, "I can tell you that I think it would be morally reprehensible to ever infect another person. And knowing what is safe and unsafe, I can be counted on to behave accordingly. But unfortunately, that's not true for everyone. There are all kinds of people in here and some of them should never be out in the street. "

Dr. Jorge Perez puts it a different way: "Some people just need more education before we can say that they would pose no danger to themselves or others." Daisa, a young woman in her 20s and a self-proclaimed "freekie" is an example. "What I can tell you is that freekies don't care about anything, and since we don't care about anything—that's it. We don't worry about having sex here, there, or how we do it..."

When confronted with the possibility of transmitting the virus in this manner, Diasa replied nonchalantly: "Yeah, well, that's the way it is, because when you're in a group thing and constantly changing partners. Then this chain starts forming..." Her reply to what she'd do if she was back on the street was: "Me? I'd keep on being a freekie." Unless therapists break through this devil-may-care attitudes, Daisa will likely never leave the sanatorium unescorted.

Cuba's AIDS education programs has taken major leaps

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Guatemala: Peace Talks, Elections and a Never Ending Dirty War

By Ruth Taylor

Nineteen ninety five could be a convulsive year for Guatemala. General elections are on the horizon, with potential candidates ranging from one time dictators to ex-rebels. And pressures to wrap up peace talks to end the nation's 34-year civil war— before the elections projected for October —are increasing. But while negotiators talk and politicians campaign, Guatemala's streets continue to be the sight of daily killings that are rarely investigated and never solved. Despite a year-old human rights accord and the presence of a U.N. monitoring team, Guatemala still earned a U.N. rating as a human rights abuser that requires international monitoring and recommendations.

Peace Talks Back On

Faltering peace talks may have gotten the boost they needed with a new U.N. proposal released February 17. Both rebel and government negotiators accepted the proposal which calls for a final peace in August. The U.N. has scheduled the first face-to-face meeting in three months between the two sides for March 13.

The U.N. proposal is a revised version of a plan presented to the government and the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) in January. The government accepted the original proposal, but the URNG called for changes. Now both government and rebels have accepted the revised document, although government officials say they preferred the original version with a final peace in April.

According to Frank La Rue of the Center for Human Rights Legal Action, "the guerrilla proposals prevailed" in the new document. Key sticking points to an acceptable plan had been the order of topics to be negotiated and the time allotted for each issue. The government had pushed for negotiating technical aspects like a cease-fire and demobilization at the same time as social, economic and political issues, such as indigenous rights and the agrarian situtation.

The new document bows to rebel demands that the issues that gave rise to Guatemala's civil war must be dealt with first. And the U.N. plan allows one month for each topic, rejecting government calls to speed up the pace of the talks.

The document also modifies a government request for an immediate cease-fire, proposing instead an agreement between rebels and government to reduce hostilities while talks are in progress. On acceptance of the proposal, the URNG offered to "suspend sabotage activities that don't have military implications."

The U.N. plan is the latest in a stepped-up campaign to bring the URNG and the government back to the negotiating table. Talks ground to a halt in December in the midst of discussions on Indigenous Rights and Identity, and had only inched forward since July when the last accord between the two sides was signed.

Since January the two sides have focussed on establishing a new schedule for the remaining rounds of negotiations. International frustration with the slow pace of the talks has

Ruth Taylor is a journalist in Guatemala.

been reflected in high-level meetings with U.N. officials and veiled threats. In a letter to President Ramiro de Leon Carpio, U.N. General Secretary Boutros Boutros-Ghali had warned that if the government and rebels did not accept this latest proposal, the United Nations would reconsider its role in the peace process. And international donors have said that future financing to Guatemala may depend on a speedy resolution to the war.

Rebels to Participate in Elections

In a surprising twist which may further complicate the peace process, guerrilla commander Pablo Monsanto told the daily La Hora in an interview published February 8 that the URNG will actively participate in this year's presidential elections — whether a final peace accord has been reached or not. Monsanto said Guatemalan voters desperately need an alternative to the right-wing clique that currently dominates the nation's political institutions.

The rebel leader would not name possible candidates, but said the URNG high command would not be among them. Instead, Monsanto said the rebels plan to promote a broad democratic front. "The candidates should be well-known figures who can bring together large segments of the population, and who have the backing of the democratic and grassroots forces in the country," he said.

Guatemala's existing political parties have long been criticized for not representing the vast majority of the population. Congressional elections last August brought out a mere 20 percent of registered voters — some seven percent of the total population. Among the congressional candidates swept into power by the low turnout is former coup leader and military dictator Gen. Efrain Rios Montt. Rios Montt — accused of overseeing hundreds of massacres in the early 1980s — hopes to run as a presidential candidate in the upcoming elections. According to analysts of the Myrna Mack Foundation, the URNG may have decided to participate to stop Rios Montt from a chance at the presidency.

President Ramiro de Leon called the URNG's plans to participate in the elections "the correct route to take," but conditioned URNG participation on reaching a final peace accord first. Pablo Monsanto, however, says rebel participation will not depend on the progress of the peace talks.

U.N. Human Rights Verdict

For the seventeenth year in a row, the U.N. Human Right's Commission evaluated Guatemala's efforts to curb human rights abuses. And on March 3, the commission voted unanimously to keep Guatemala in category 21 of its human rights scale. The decision means U.N. human rights expert Monica Pinto will continue to monitor the country and make recommendations on improving its human rights record — but Guatemala will not recieve U.N. condemnation as a systematic abuser of human rights. President de Leon — who flew to Geneva to address the commission — said he was satisfied with the decision. But while de Leon was defending his record in Geneva, a rash of execution-style killings in Guatemala had many wondering if death squads are once again on the rise. Twenty-two bodies were found in different parts of the country from February 20 to 22 — all showing signs of torture and a single shot to the head. A number of the bodies were also tied hand and foot.

Some government officials have tried to brush off the latest killings, saying they are the result of in-fighting among gangs of common criminals. But Helen Mack of the Myrna Mack Foundation pointed out that the army often uses gang member to commit crimes. "When these elements become dangerous, the army needs to 'clean up' its collaborators and informants. And because it is gang members who are dying, it is often very difficult to determine if there is any political origin to the violence," said Mack. For years, human rights groups have unsuccessfully called on the U.N. Human Rights Commission to place Guatemala under category 12, which results in U.N. condemnation for systematic violations. •

Mexican Miracle Over: Government Cries "Marcos Made Us Do It"

By Ulises Mejías Butrón

The reign of Mexican president Carlos Salinas de Gortari seemed to end spectacularly. During his last days in office, he toured the country inaugurating public works, loudly proclaiming Mexico's entrance into the "First World", and secretly handing out bulletproof luxury cars to family and friends. To millions of incredulous Mexicans, however, the new president Ernesto Zedillo took office with a different message: the dream is over...Mexico is a poor "Third World" country...prepare for more sacrifices.

The prediction became reality almost immediately. Within the first month of his dominization, Zedillo was forced to allow the nation's currency to float freely on international markets. It quickly plunged by 35%. Incomprehensible to most of the population, the fall of the peso brought panic, uncertainty, and the feeling once again that the Mexican people had been cheated.

The usual twilight of the idols within the ruling party, the PRI, ensues: the Mexican media, under the new government's direction, launches a campaign against Salinas and company. Wanted: the Harvard man who fancied himself the first director of the new World Trade Organization. But the former president already enjoys impunity outside of Mexico, and so the new Minister of Finance responsible for the unpopular devaluation measure, Jaime Serra Puche, Zedillo's classmate from Yale, turns into the scapegoat of the moment. Another head rolls. Zedillo's role as minister of budget and planning during Salinas' term is conveniently overlooked throughout the whole scam.

North American investors and bankers become weary and impatient. Their losses amount to $10 billion U.S. dollars. But it is important to recall, says the Mexico City newspaper *Corre La Voz,* that during Salinas' six year term North American investors made $100 billion in utilities at the Mexican stock market (the real salaries of Mexican workers dropped almost 50% during that time). Nonetheless, some financial firms now suggest investing in other Third World countries with better profit margins.

Devaluation Orchestration

To economic analysts around the world the peso devaluation hardly came as a surprise. During the Salinas term and with the implementation of NAFTA, many North American investors came to Mexico attracted by low wages and unenforced regulations. However, most of their investments were short-term and extremely easy to withdraw from the Mexican stock market. With the political turmoil of 1994, and the appearance of other, more appealing markets, investors became increasingly apprehensive about Mexico's efficiency as a money-making machine. With a few strokes of the keyboard they redirected their 'investments' somewhere else.

Mexican capitalists also did their share of evacuating funds. Those with access to privileged information, like the phone monopoly TELMEX and the media monopoly TELEVISA (belonging respectively to Carlos Slim and Emilio Azcárraga, two of Mexico's wealthiest men) even renegotiated their debts from dollars to pesos in time to avoid the asphyxiating debt that now torments most of Mexico's industries. Again, the burden falls on Mexico's poor and disenfranchised, many of whom now have bank debts which must

Ulises Mejías Butrón is an independent filmmaker currently working on a media project with CUSLAR

be paid with 50-60% interest.

Scapegoats In Ski Masks?

The Zapatista Army for National Liberation (EZLN) was officially cited by Serra Puche as the principal factor in destabilizing the Mexican economy. The conservatives, (the PRI and the private sector), accuse the Zapatistas of actively seeking violence and the destabilization of Mexico's economical, political and social 'well being.' This accusation, which amounts to a campaign of fear, was effective in bringing Zedillo to power and maintaining the status quo during the electoral transition. Apparently the PRI believes it will work again now that Zedillo's promises to the average Mexican families have disintegrated.

On the other hand some people, mainly liberal international journalists, celebrate the EZLN's actions as if they had been a carefully orchestrated plan to deliver a blow to the international economy. The problem with this perspective is that it envisions the EZLN as an avant-garde group that leads the way to revolution in the name of the masses. The agenda of the EZLN is to open up the way -with arms, if necessary- for the civil society to carry on the transformation of the current undemocratic system. If we are to believe in the EZLN's subordination to the will of the indigenous communities then we cannot conceive of their actions (reformist, revolutionary, or however one chooses to label them) as separate from the will of these communities. Because of the EZLN's solidarity with the marginalized sectors of Mexico, they could not possibly conceive of a devaluation as progressive, considering its immediate negative repercussions for the poor. The devaluation is the product of an ineffective, corrupt government, not a Zapatista's maneuver.

"It's Not My Fault, I Voted For The Opposition"

So read some bumper stickers in Mexico City's crowded streets. But to an extent, the opposition must share the blame for what is happening today in Mexico. The fault of the opposition lies not in what they did (but shouldn't have done), but in what they didn't do (but could have done), most notably putting aside differences to form a coalition in order to subvert the PRI.

The chance to form a coalition in 1994, and perhaps even a government of transition, has now passed. The political parties and civil society should have concentrated less on electoral reform (which after all didn't amount to much) and more on the other factors that constitute a democratic culture. It has been repeated endlessly: elections in themselves don't translate into democracy, especially in such an unequal system as that found in Mexico.

Particularly ridiculous is the campaign against Subcommander Marcos, supposedly revealed now as ex-professor Rafael Sebastián Guillén Vicente. Officials are saying that now that his identity has been revealed, his "importance as a symbol has vanished," and even that "whether he is captured or not is incidental." (New York Times, Feb 11).

The logic behind these statements has moved this writer to compare the situation to a surreal Mexican wrestling match, in which the PRI believed that unmasking its opponent in the ring would bring it the public's acclaim and recognition. Its strategy was thwarted the following weeks as Mexicans took to the streets to protest, many with signs proclaiming "we are all Marcos." Alas, the PRI does not want to admit that it was the goliath who was unmasked in January 1994. •

Banned in the USA

By Cris McConkey

Local groups are once again hoping to bring Mezcla, Cuba's top rock band, to Ithaca this summer. The last time Mezcla sought entry to the U.S. in November of 1993, they were denied visas. The group had been invited to tour the U.S. by a coalition of cultural, political, and educational organizations throughout the United States.

At a press conference organized immediately after the visa denials, legendary guitarist Carlos Santana called Mezcla's latest recording his favorite, and said of the band: "To me, Mezcla is the cleanest, freshest water I have ever tasted. I have been looking forward to meeting them, talking about touring with them, playing with them and making videos with them. The whole concept of 'global exchange' is what turned me on."

Several independent attorneys heard about the State Department's action and offered help in suing for a reversal of the visa denials. The law firm Bronson, Bronson & McKinnon, volunteered their services, and the national office of the ACLU offered to write an Amicus brief. All felt the time was right for a serious challenge to the arbitrary practices of the State Department with respect to cultural exchanges with Cuba.

Responding to pressure from the offices of Congresspeople Ronald Dellums of Berkeley and Nancy Pelosi of San Francisco, an unnamed State Department official disclosed to Congresswoman Pelosi's office that their rationale was based on a Reagan-era Presidential Proclamation which bars entry to "any employee of the Cuban government," and by extension anyone receiving money from the socialist state.

Advocates for the band were not impressed with the official reasoning. The Reagan Proclamation bears no date of termination, and therefore is a dubious legal document. The "Trading with the Enemy Act," which the State Department also invoked, was not applicable either, according to Mezcla's lawyers, since this was not a commercial tour and the group was not going to receive any compensation for their performances.

On November 28, 1993, a lawsuit was filed in Federal Court alleging infringement of the plaintiff's First Amendment rights to freedom of association, speech, and religion, and accusing the State Department of abusing its powers by acting arbitrarily and capriciously.

Mezcla's lawyers expect the lawsuit to be litigated this summer, despite two attempts to have it thrown out of court. Concurrent with the lawsuit, a second U.S. tour is being organized for June, 1995. Locally, letters of invitation were sent by the State Theater in Ithaca and the Landmark Theater in Syracuse.•

Cris McConkey is an Ithaca-based solidarity activist.

To join the effort to bring Mezcla to Ithaca, please contact Cris McConkey at (607) 387-9830 or email: jcm5@cornell.edu

Embargo Defied

Caravan Rolls On

By Erin Sheehan

CUSLAR joined forces with the Tompkins County U.S. - Cuba Friendship Committee to participate in the fourth Pastors for Peace Caravan to Cuba this fall. The Caravan directly challenged the U.S. embargo on Cuba and delivering 120 tons of badly needed humanitarian aid to the country in November. Local donations totalled more than $3,000, including medicine, school supplies, computer parts and powdered milk.

Although the 32-year-old U.S. embargo was overwhelmingly condemned at a recent U.N. vote, our State Department shows no signs of weakening its hardline position, even as conditions worsen in Cuba. Ithacan Tony Poole had the opportunity to observe the effects of the embargo, as he joined over two hundred other participants accompanying the aid to Havana.

According to Poole, every aspect of Cuban life has been affected by the embargo. Because of the shortage of spare parts, many factories are closed, putting people out of work. The drastic rationing of oil and gas has also contributed to plant shut-downs, and a massive reduction in public transportation. Moreover, staples such as soap, toothpaste, milk, shoes, paper, and sugar are in short supply.

Although previous caravans have crossed the Mexican border, organizers decided to challenge the embargo through Canada this year. On November 20, the caravanistas began their stand off at the border. By transporting boxes marked as intended for Cuba without the required permit, they were breaking United States law. Faced with the possible impounding of two of their vehicles, participants unloaded the supplies and carried boxes over the border. Although the two vans and two computers were not allowed to cross the border, the rest of the shipment was allowed into Canada.

From Buffalo, the Pastors for Peace group travelled to Montreal, where the Loading Dock Workers Union loaded the supplies on to boats destined for Cuba. Poole and his fellow caravanistas then flew to Havana, where they spent a week together distributing the supplies for the Cuban Ecumenical Council. The group was welcomed by the Cuban people, who were both grateful for the material aid and glad to see a formal challenge to the embargo.

Poole had the opportunity to attend the World Meeting of Solidarity With Cuba, a five day conference attended by people from more than 110 countries. The meeting was an uplifting experience for Poole, and it made the US position on Cuba seem even more out of synch with worldwide sentiment toward the island nation.

The success of the recent caravan has inspired plans for yet another Friendshipment Caravan this July. Anyone interested in helping get urgently needed aid to Cuba should contact the CUSLAR office. •

Erin Sheehan is an Ithaca-based activist

Interview With

Ernesto Cardenal

Ernesto Cardenal, priest and former minister of culture under the government of Daniel Ortega, recently resigned from the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN), but said he would return after the party has been renovated. A confirmed Marxist and staunch defender of liberation theology, he came to Ithaca as a guest of CUSLAR to read from his latest book ***Cosmic Canticle*** *(1993, Curbstone Press), an epic work of poetry that is a culmination of 30 years of his life and work. Below are extracts from an interview with Cardenal by Pascale Bonnefoy, which was originally printed in the Chilean publication Punto Final. In it he explains why he resigned from the FSLN.*

What happened in the FSLN?

Daniel Ortega has become the maximum, authoritarian leader, stripping away all vestiges of internal democracy in the party. Many of us have rebelled against this, including members of the National Directorship, such as legendary commanders Henry Ruiz and Luis Carrión, as well as Sergio Ramírez, who was Daniel Ortega's vice president during the Sandinista government and is now leader of the Movimiento de Renovación Sandinista in opposition to Daniel. [*The poet, Gioconda Belli, featured in the Winter '94 CUSLAR Newsletter, has also resigned* -ed.]

I resigned from the party to give more publicity to the opposition that rejects this one-man leadership. Others prefer to struggle within the party, but do not discard the possibility that they will have to resign. In fact, they are now being forced out of the party, threatened with expulsion.

How are these attitudes that you describe as "dictatorial" being expressed?

They were expressed in the last congress. It began with a minority movement within the Sandinista movement, centered around Daniel Ortega, called the *Izquierda Democrática*, which said that those outside the movement were not leftists.

In the congress, Daniel manipulated the masses with the party machinery he has controlled for a while now and removed Ramírez from the Directorship. Along with him, a lot of people who were not disciples of Daniel left.

How do you define the renovation movement?

Daniel called everyone outside of his group social democrats, bourgeois or neoliberals, in a style similar to that used in the communist parties in Europe that were overthrown.

They have maintained the orthodox line of the communist party, which considers itself the only vanguard. A party that has lost elections and has fewer activists than before cannot call itself the vanguard.

They are trapped in the past, stuck, and because of this, Sergio Ramírez's group called for a renovation of the party, to bring it in line with today's realities.

What strategic or ideological changes does this renovation movement stand for?

One cannot preach a radical socialism that is not possible in the current situation and that the masses do not accept. But one can talk about a democracy with socialist tendencies in the current reality; one that is in opposition to the neoliberal system that has had horrible results in Nicaragua. We must find an alternative to capitalism that is not an orthodox, unreal radicalism, which would lead us to another electoral loss and a return to the days of Somoza.

Does the FSLN think it can win the 1996 elections, or does it plan to start another type of struggle?

They (the followers of Ortega) are betting on going alone to the elections and winning overwhelmingly, which contradicts all the recent polls.

We will also go the elections, but capturing parts of the electorate which are not Sandinista and parties that are not from the far right. We are looking to the moderate right or center, such as the small parties of the *Unión Nacional Opositora* (UNO)- which carried President

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Life on the Frontera

By Ruben Garcia

During the past decade I have been drawn to "La Frontera," the 2,000-mile border between the U.S. and México. The Texas segment, known as the Valley, runs along the Rio Grande. Its migrant -worker settlements, or "colonias," stretch through the poorest counties in the land. This is also the area that forms the natural entry point for Central Americans trying to flee repression and civil wars, as well as Mexicans escaping hunger and hopelessness.

In the bustling city of El Paso, I first met Ruben Garcia seven years ago. He is one of the most impressive people I know—a highly intelligent philosophical activist, who had a religious "call" to devote his life to care for the poor. His dedication moved a circle of friends in Ithaca, with help from CUSLAR, to organize the Border Fund as a support group for refugees.

Ruben has been a real miracle worker. He gathered a handful of donations and set up a refugee shelter, Annunciation House, staffed by students and other volunteers from all over the country. They share their simple meals and sleeping bags with poor folks that appear at their door. Soon Ruben was able to add Casa del Peregrino, another shelter on the Mexican side of the river, in Ciudad Juarez. As word spread, he was able to expand to three more casas, two in El Paso and one in Juarez.

After interviewing Ruben for the first time on an evening in February 1988, I wanted to know how people came to him. He took me to the Rio Grande in his old Ford. The river here was broad and shallow. Behind us, on the bluffs, Border Patrol agents were conducting surveillance; as they trained headlights on the river, we saw human figures frozen on a sandbank. When the figures were out of the light they scuttled closer to the U.S. side, holding bundles that were their whole worldly possessions.

Some of these people, Ruben said, would find their way to Annunciation House and be given temporary shelter, a chance to phone relatives, a prayer service. What if the refugee flood dried up? If that happened, Ruben simply said, he would take it as a sign that his mission was completed and move on to something else.

Evidently, they have kept coming, and Ruben recently observed his seventeenth anniversary running the Casa. Here are Ruben's reflections on a life of "extending hospitality to the homeless poor" on the border:
-Harvey Fireside

These have been powerful years of presence, witness and solidarity with those who find themselves having to struggle under the weight of oppressive poverty, those who are escaping violence and unimaginable violations of the most basic human rights, and those coping with the personal and familial crises that so easily disrupt the lives of people on the margins of our societies.

When Annunciation House first came into existence in 1978, it did so out of faith calling for us to share life with the poorest of the poor. It quickly became apparent that in this border community, these included many refugees, almost all of them undocumented. Precisely because of their lack of documents, they found it almost impossible to meet their most basic human needs.

We became aware of individuals—men, women, teenagers, entire families with children and infants—having to sleep in alleys and under bridges, going without food or a place to clean up, not being able to use a toilet or getting a change of clothes. In the midst of this reality there was no doubt that refugees would be the primary focus of the work and hospitality that Annunciation House could offer.

In the intervening years, we've seen the political environments and sentiment toward refugees, immigrants and the poor in general change. During the 80s, concern for the homeless poor inspired concrete levels of support and acceptance. This concern expressed itself in the creation of new shelters and programs to empower the

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To volunteer or send donations, contact Ruben Garcia at Annunciation House 1003 E. San Antonio Ave., El Paso TX 79901-2620. Contributions to the Border Fund may be sent to Room 8, 102 The Commons, Ithaca, N.Y. 14850. Phone: (607) 272-2262.

Strawberry and Chocolate: A Cuban Cultural Shake

By Karen Wald and Bill Strubbe

Pandemonium reigned at the Havana screenings of the Cuban film "Strawberry and Chocolate". The film had just swept most of the awards at the Latin American Film Festival—best movie, director, script, actor, and supporting actress. Police were called in to control the thousands of Cubans hoping to attend the evening's final showings.

"Strawberry and Chocolate" portrays with humor, rage and tears the growing friendship of a young communist and a gay writer. The screen play, which was written by Senel Paz, critically examines a society which often frowns upon diversity and individual expression.

The film is set in the late which Paz describes as "very difficult and dark years in terms of cultural policy when dogmatism predominated..." Exemplifying that mind set is David (Vladimir Cruz), a naive member of the Young Communist League studying sciences instead of literature because "it's my duty to study something useful to society." David's life is turned upside down, however, when he encounters Diego (Jorge Perugorria), a witty, well-educated connoisseur of Cuban culture. Diego has a fondness for forbidden novels, Maria Callas, and tea spiked with American whiskey. When he writes a letter protesting censorship, his fate is sealed as an "undesirable." The closing scene aptly renders Diego's rage and grief as he explains to David why he must choose exile. Their tearful, final hug bridges the immense chasm between their lives.

From left to right: Juan Carlos Fabío (co-director), Mirta Ibarra (Nancy), and Tomás Gutierrez Alea (Director). Photo by B. Strubbe

The overwhelming response of the festival audience foreshadowed the public's reaction. "We felt it was a sincere film touching on difficult topics, that the story was moving and told with grace and humor, so we expected a positive response, " recalled Paz. "But the reaction went way beyond expectations..." Perugorria was equally impressed by the response. "Inside the theaters they reacted with such passion. They went from laughing to crying, or applauded something the character said...That Diego won the hearts of the Cuban people even though this is a macho country, that they've identified with a homosexual is an achievement for us."

As to whether Jorge had any qualms about playing a gay man, he replied, "No, it's totally different from Hollywood. Here there are no movie stars who have to watch their image. There are just actors who interpret roles."

The decision to portray Diego as somewhat effeminate disturbed some in the gay community. For Tomas Gutierrez Alea, the veteran director of nine feature films "It was a dramatic necessity. If Diego didn't have obvious effeminate mannerisms, David wouldn't have any reason to initially react negatively to him, or be afraid to be seen in public with Diego." As the movie progresses, Diego evolves beyond stereotype into an intelligent, mischievous, and less-than-perfect person capable of defending himself and the culture he loves.

"If we had made him

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In Review

Roberto Sosa, *The Common Grief*. Trans. Jo Anne Engelbert. Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press, 1994. 109 pps.

The Common Grief is a bilingual collection of poetry by the Honduran poet Roberto Sosa. From the very first poem one catches a glimpse of Sosa's extraordinary sensibility and masterful use of language to describe the simple things. This is one book, which appeals to both poetry lovers and the general public.

The collection is divided in two parts, which originally were meant to be two books, "The Weeping of Things" and "The Lifted Mask." As a voice for the people of his beleaguered republic, Sosa is particularly adamant in remembering the dead, and the living by writing poetic elegiacs. His poetry reflects his personal faith in humanity in spite of the violence, and cruelty that characterizes life in oppressed Honduras. The poem that gives this book its name, "The Common Grief" is a poignant portrait of quiet strength and resistance, as the mothers and daughters of the poem share the common pain of having loved ones "disappeared." Theirs is a collective voice in mutual solidarity that rises as one to say to the tyrants, "Hear us: alive they took them, alive we want them back."

In the second part of the book, in "The Lifted Mask" Sosa has gone from agape to eros. In these poems Sosa presents the reader with an exceptional picture of woman as both subject and actor. In the poem "Ruth, Who was a Lark" we envision the muse. Still in "The Swan" and "Simple" we see woman as lover and companion respectively. Sosa with his beautiful words full of meaning is creating for the reader a wonderful vision of the world. As he says in the introduction, "Poetry, is the last remaining lighthouse in the universe" (10). I cannot think of anybody better than Sosa to be the keeper of the flame.

-Ximena Naranjo

Roberto Sosa will be reading from *The Common Grief* on Thursday, March 30, at 8:00pm in the Commons Coffeehouse of Anabel Taylor Hall, on the Cornell Campus. The event is free and open to the public.

Manlio Argueta, *Magic Dogs of the Volcanoes/Los Perros Mágicos de los Volcanes*. English translation by Stacey Ross. Pictures by Elly Simmons. San Francisco: Children's Book Press, 32 pp.

Harriet Rohmer and Dorminster Wilson, *Mother Scorpion Country/ La Tierra de la Madre Escorpión*. Version in Spanish by Rosalma Zubizarreta & Alma Flor Ada. Illustrations by Virginia Stearns. San Francisco: Children's Book Press, 32 pp.

As a Spanish teacher, a life-long Hispanophile and now mother of a Mexican-American baby girl, I am always on the lookout for childrens' books in Spanish. While there seem to be more of them around these days, they are of varying quality. Most that I've seen in this country are translations of books originally written in English. Some of the translations are just fine, others are awkward, and some are O.K. as translations, but result in perfectly boring books: just imagine an unrhymed Spanish version of Dr. Seuss' The Cat in the Hat (Random House, 1967). The other problem with translations of U.S. "classics" is that they do nothing to introduce a child to elements of Hispanic cultures; in fact, by writing Spanish words under illustrations depicting a U.S. mainstream lifestyle, they even obscure the idea that there is such a thing as another culture.

Happily, some folks with concerns similar to the ones I've mentioned are in the business of making children's books. Review copies of two books published by The Children's Book Press of Emeryville, California recently arrived in the CUSLAR office. Both tell stories from Central America in English and Spanish. The translations, from Spanish to English in the one case and from English to Spanish in the other, are excellent.

The author of Magic Dogs of the Volcanoes/Los Perros Mágicos de los Volcanes is the well-known Salvadoran writer Manlio Argueta, whose One Day of Life brought him to prominence in this country 1983. Magic Dogs is based on Salvadoran folk tales about the cadejos, dogs who mysteriously appear at night to protect people from danger. In Argueta's original story, the landowner, Don Tonio, decides to get rid of the cadejos, because "the cadejos bewitch

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the people and make them lazy... The people don't work hard for us anymore. They want to eat when they are hungry and drink water when they are thirsty and rest in the shade when the sun is hot. And it's all because of the cadejos." Don Tonio calls in the "lead soldiers" (depicted as toys in 19th century uniforms), but they are defeated by the cadejos' great-great-grandparents, the volcanoes Tecapa and Chaparrastique (pronunciation guide provided for monolingual readers). I was especially struck by the idea of presenting the military, whose role has been so horrific in Salvadoran history, as slightly ridiculous toys (in the pictures their feet are rigidly attached to bases). When the volcanoes play a trick on them, they sit down to cry, but "the rocks were so hot their bottoms began to melt." The book's illustrations are exquisite, the work of a painter who had never done a children's book before. Here's hoping she's recruited for other projects in the future.

Mother Scorpion Country/La Tierra de la Madre Escorpión came out of a project author Harriet Rohmer carried out on the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua in the 1980s. In the context of the Sandinista government's program of "rescuing the culture" of Nicaragua's indigenous peoples, Rohmer collected Miskito stories; *Mother Scorpion Country* is based on one of those tales. Naklili is a young husband so in love with his wife that when she dies, he attempts to follow her to the land of the dead, Mother Scorpion Country. But he soon finds he does not belong in that land, and his isolation is rendered as a radical contrast of perceptions: where his wife, Kati, sees delicious tortoises she prepares for dinner, he sees black bugs; where Kati believes herself surrounded by green trees filled with fruit, Naklili sees only "the skeletons of trees that had died centuries before." He realizes he must return to the land of the living, but upon arriving he is faced with another dilemma: forbidden to tell his story, he can do nothing to calm people's fears that he has returned from the dead to harm them. Soon he is every bit as isolated as he was in Mother Scorpion Country: the quintessential man between cultures. In spite of the story's pathos, it eventually does have a happy ending. Naklili reconciles with his friends and relatives and is united with Kati in a happy death, celebrated by dancing and singing in Mother Scorpion Country. As is common in myth, the book has many elements that seem metaphorical or symbolic, giving it a mysterious, magical feel. The illustrations are fascinating, appearing to be photographs of pictures that are part painting, part collage.

The Children's Book Press describes itself as a "nonprofit community publisher." Its Spring, 1995 catalog presents an exciting collection of bilingual and multicultural books and tapes. Many of the books are bilingual in Spanish and English, and represent several different Latin American countries as well as groups of U.S. Hispanics. But there are also stories from African American, Jewish American, Eastern European, Asian American and Native American communities. Most of the hardbacks are priced at around $14.00; some titles are available in paperback for $6.95. Read-along cassettes in Spanish and English of some titles, "accompanied by authentic music from the cultures," can be purchased for $9.95. For catalog, write: Children's Book Press, 1461 Ninth Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94122.

-Norma Helsper
Associate Professor of Spanish
SUNY Cortland

The U.S.-Mexico Series:

No. 1: *The Challenge of Cross-Border Environmentalism (The US -Mexico Case)*, by Tom Barry with Beth Sims.
No. 2: *On Foreign Soil (Government Programs in US-Mexico Relations)*, by Beth Sims with Tom Barry.
No. 3: *Crossing the Line (Immigrants, Economic Integration, and Drug Enforcement on the U.S. Mexico Border)*, by Tom Barry with Harry Browne and Beth Sims.
No. 4: *For Richer, For Poorer (Shaping US-Mexican Integration)*, by Harry Browne with Beth Sims and Tom Barry.

Series published by Resource Center Press, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 1993.

Concurrent with the end of former president Carlos Salina's term, when officially Mexico was on

the threshold of the First World, the image of dictator Porfirio Diaz was revived in the form of large and colorful book published by and advertised heavily by Mexico's largest media monopoly. It was the private sector's homage to the man who cynically accrued his wealth by placing Mexico's resources in the hands of US capitalists, while lamenting the country's position "far from the hand of God but so close to the United States."

The nostalgia of the "good old days" of the *porfiriato* was extremely shortsighted, however. Assassinations, uprisings, Proposition 187 and a devaluation of the peso in 1994 have exposed the precariousness of the neoliberal integration of North America. Although *The US-Mexico Series* was written before these events, it puts into focus the problem intrinsic in the unequal marriage of North America. Its thesis is that such an integration will exacerbate the widening economic gap between the US and Mexico; between the upper and lower classes in the US; and between Mexico's rich elite and half of the country's population that already lives below the poverty line. The most valuable aspect of the *Series* is that it does so in a comprehensible, organized manner.

The first book in the Series, *The Challenge of Cross-Border Environmentalism*, argues that the degredation of North America's environment is caused by the neoliberal insistence in seeing the integration of the area in purely economical terms, resulting in elevated social costs for both Mexico and the US. The analysis discusses the implications of trade with little or no environmental responsibility.

The debate over the environment encompasses such issues as pollution, the salinity of land, the unequal use of resources, and the illegal trade of flora and fauna. In light of NAFTA's downward homogenization of environmental standards, it is difficult to imagine the governments of the US and Mexico making any substantial efforts to address these problems directly or efficiently.

Book number two, *On Foreign Soil*, critically looks at the history and role of US programs (governmental and non-governmental) in Mexico. The authors see these programs as a network of pressure mechanisms that ensure political stability in the southern neighbor, necessary to maintain US access to Mexican resources and to keep "a buffer from the poverty and radicalism that have characterized much of Latin America." (p.6) At the same time, they argue that this interaction between the two countries has allowed the PRI (Mexico's ruling party) to maintain power: The support that the US has given to Mexico—always planned, never unconditional—includes funds for family planning, modernization of the military and police, and food aid, used by the PRI to alleviate social tensions ensuing from neoliberal reforms. It also involves funds from the National Endowment for Democracy to support election poll counts, which could be controversial given that most of the fraud occurs before the elections. According to the authors, "Mexico's progress toward democracy depends above all on its own internal processes, but the fact that the United States has chosen not to emphasize democratization as strongly as it has pushed economic liberalization undermines political reforms while shoring up authoritarianism." (p.66)

The third book, *Crossing the Line*, addresses the problems of Mexican immigrants drug enforcement and the economic integration of North America. The coming and going of people, resources, corporations and drugs across the border have made it an area thriving with activity, although the consequences of such commotion have proved detrimental to the quality of life along the 1,952 mile line that separates the First World from the Third. Plenty of Fortune 500 companies have located on both sides of the border, but the wealth has not trickled down as neoliberals predicted. Those who believed that a neoliberal restructuring of Mexico's economy would slow down the immigration rates have discovered that the problem has been exacerbated by creating an enclave US industry in Mexico and by making it more dependent on the US. The movement of workers has increased proportionally to the economic crisis of Mexico, but this has not stopped the NAFTA negotiators from applying more of the same neoliberal policies.

Finally, the fourth book in the series, *For Richer, For Poorer*, brings together the most important issues of the other three, in addition to providing a straight-forward account of the US and Mexico's role in the global economy and a discussion of labor solidarity across the two countries. Particularly important is the chapter on free trade, which gives an in-depth analysis of the theoretical framework of free trade, its history, its shortfalls, and its

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implications for the environment. The consumer, and the sovereignty and democratic processes of North American countries. The authors also call for the development of legal and normative frameworks as well as institutional innovations in order to transform NAFTA into a mutually beneficial agreement. With the current democratic trends in the US and Mexican politics, these transformations have become a real challenge for the unempowered groups that propose them. The Series would benefit however, from a more comprehensive account of grassroots organizing and activism across North America.

The US-Mexico Series is valuable reading for both those approaching the subject for the first time and those wanting to expand their knowledge of US-Mexican relations. It is also an appreciable study of the impacts of NAFTA for those seeking an alternative to the neoliberal perspective. Separately or combined, these books provide an extensive and articulate look at the relations between these "distant neighbors."

-Ulises Mejías Butrón

Poetry Like Bread: Poets of the Political Imagination. Martin Espada ed. Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press, 1994. 284 pps.

Poetry Like Bread is an excellent anthology of political poetry that demonstrates the subversive power of beautiful words. The name of the anthology is itself full of poetic meaning. The editor, Martin Espada, drew his inspiration from a poem written by Roque Dalton, a Salvadoran poet, essayist and revolutionary: "I believe the world is beautiful/and that poetry, like bread, is for everyone." The anthology includes the works of thirty-seven revolutionary poets, all of whom have other volumes published by Curbstone Press. These poets use their words as a sword to combat cruelty, and to create worlds of beauty and hope. The book includes contributions from Latin American poets like Ernesto Cardenal (Nicaragua), Gioconda Belli (Nicaragua), Otto Rene Castillo (Guatemala), Claribel Alegria (El Salvador), Julia de Burgos (Puerto Rico), and Paul Laraque (Haiti), as well as North American poets like Margaret Randall and Sara Miles. This anthology then is truly "American" (although the voices of Chicana poets are noticably absent).

Most of the poets in this book are politically active, and their poetry is often an extension of their commitment to social justice. In some cases, such as Roque Dalton and Otto Rene Castillo, their commitment to telling the truth has cost them their lives. The poets that grace the pages of this book have used their words to express tenderness, beauty, love, pain, rage, defiance and hope. With their words they paint a vision of the world as it should be; theirs is a vision of hope for both the believers and the non-believers.

The poems are written in their original languages but good English translations are also provided. The poems honor the dead and give voice to those that are too powerless to speak for themselves. Many of the poems included are testimonials conveying a history of struggle, triumph and hope, both personal and political.

One of my favorite poems is "The Gloves," by Margaret Randall. In this poem we catch a glimpse of how humanity and compassion transcend the boundaries of order. Randall writes of a protest she attended in New York City. When a policeman saw her sharing one of her gloves with a friend, he unbuckled a pair of his own gloves and shared them with her.

Perhaps this is what these poets see when they look at a person: his or her potential for kindness, sensitivity, or compassion rising above the everyday cruelty and violence of reality.

This book is a testimony to the poets' subversive kind of hope and serene optimism in the midst of so much moral despair. It is a testimony to the human spirit. How can we give up after reading poems which envision futures of such justice and beauty?

-Ximena Naranjo

Peru
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return to our villages and rebuild. We did not flee for pleasure but to save our lives, often from violence perpetrated by the State against us.

Some families want to return, yet receive little help either in food, protection or the rebuilding of destroyed houses, schools and roads. Other families still fear violence and prefer to become part of the communities that sheltered us. Many mountain villages remain abandoned, with bombed-out structures and fallow fields marking the sites of unrecorded atrocities. According to government studies, 288 communities, most in the southern Andean states of Ayacucho, Apurimac and Huancavelica, were devastated in the war. Of those, 177 were completely abandoned.

In some areas, the military is now in control, and demands tribute in animals from returnees, barely able to feed and clothe their own children. Other communities, organized into civil defense patrols, sleep within mud forts for fear that guerrillas will attack, killing even the children. Although there is much talk of Peru's economic recovery, over 50 percent of Peruvians continue to live in poverty. Prosperity has yet to reach the poor, let alone desplazados.

We do not want to end our lives as desplazados. But neither are we willing to remain in the shadows, forgotten victims of a war most Peruvians are anxious to forget. If there is to be peace in Peru, our children will be the ones to build it. Born in flight, they hold the seeds for renewal. For them, we demand more. •

Cuba HIV
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since 1991. Public information campaigns have included television talk shows, radio, articles in all major print media, posters, school and work-place education, outdoor rock concerts, and face-to-face encounters between AIDS activists and teens in popular hangouts. But ignorance, fueled by age-old Cuban machismo, still persists.

Cuba's AIDS Awareness Day theme last year was "Living Together." The year's public education efforts were aimed at promulgating the message that, barring unsafe sexual activity, there is no danger of contagion. Dr. Perez and Juan Carlos have appeared on radio and on Cuba's major prime-time television program. Juan Carlos and three other HIV patients talked about their lives on another evening program.

"We teach PWAs not to be afraid of their condition, to show their face on TV. We think patients are the best people to convey the information." Juan Carlos said, "We are trying to raise consciousness, lessen the prejudices, instill dignity and take away the fear of saying I'm HIV positive. It's not shameful to have AIDS."

As of December 1, 1993, International AIDS Awareness Day, it was announced that HIV positive Cubans considered to be socially responsible—about 755—had the freedom to stay in the sanatoriums or return home. Should they choose home, free medical care, special food, housing assistance, and 100% of their salaries will still be received whether or not they return to their previous jobs.

Dr. Perez clarified: "New sero-positive people will be required to live in a sanatorium for three or four months while their medical situation is evaluated, and until we are sure they will not spread the disease. Then they can decide whether or not they want to stay."

Juan Carlos surmises that many people will decide to remain because for many the sanatoriums are home. "Besides the better living conditions, there is a sense of community..." This seems to be confirmed by recent experience. Of the 300 residents, only 90 applied for outpatient status.

Reinaldo and Maria, one of the first couples in the sanatorium in 1986, are typical. Reinaldo was infected with HIV while serving in the army in Africa and in turn infected his wife. Maria is head of the Neighborhood Council within the sanatorium and Reinaldo feels more fulfilled in his work as a mechanic and carpenter than he did as a truck driver. Both feel a sense of security, have found acceptance, understanding, and comradeship in the sanatorium that they did not find among family and friends on the outside. With the option of leaving they chose to stay. "Here, I have everything," said Maria. "The minute I don't feel well, I have doctors and nurses checking me. If I get depressed, the psychologist talks to me. Actually, I hardly get depressed because I'm so busy all the time."

Cuba's AIDS policy is far from perfect, but the use of such sensationalist terms as "prison" or "concentration camps" serves no one except to sell papers, and only adds to the extensive misinformation passed off as news in the US press regarding Cuba. It also disregards years of hard work and effort by dedicated Cuban AIDS activists and healthcare workers to both humanely care for the sick while also protecting society's health interests. It's time to set the record straight. •

Cardenal
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Violeta Barrios de Chamorro to power in 1990. We will form a common front.

An electoral triumph would be imaginable if the two Sandinista sectors ran together allied with other parties, with a candidate that possibly is not from FSLN.

Supposing that the FSLN wins these elections, what would the renovating sectors after that is different in terms of political politics?

There really are no important differences. Neither are there any immediate solutions to the current economic crisis.

We feel that in the current circumstances, change must be implemented more slowly, and the solution must not be capitalism. The only alternative to capitalism is socialism, but it will have to be a new socialism.

How have you been able to defend the gains of the Sandinista revolution during the UNO government?

We have done it well, but with this division in the party we will not be able to do it as well now. This defense was made mainly by the Sandinista deputies who were a minority in the Congress. With an astute use of alliances with other parties, Sergio Ramírez managed to divide the governing coalition and the FSLN was able to dominate voting in the National Assembly. In this way, he has stopped many laws that would have destroyed the works of the revolution. Not everything could be defended, but a good part of it was.

But now that Daniel is not acknowledging edging the Sandinista deputies, it will be more difficult to defend the revolution from Congress. All the FSLN deputies except for three are part of the renovation wing of the party.

What revolutionary gains have been lost?

Health care, which was free before, now is only for those who can pay. Access to education is getting more and more difficult for those who don't have much money, particularly higher education. There is 60 percent unemployment, making parents send their small children out in the streets to find a way to survive. There is a lot of poverty and hunger, and very little hope.

Other gains have been weakened but survive, such as a certain national awareness and a sense of sovereignty, of independence, in the face of *Yanqui* imperialist pressure. There is a greater sense of solidarity. •

Frontera
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homeless poor.

Greater attention was then given human rights in the face of violence and political turmoil in several Central American countries. The Sanctuary Movement was born, and legal projects were established to ensure representation for those needing the protection of political asylum. Throughout all those years, our houses hosted literally thousands of homeless and desperate individuals and families.

But the political climate has changed. It seems as if there is a growing resentment and hostility toward the poor in general and the homeless and immigrants in particular. This in turn has led to the implementation of "border blockades" of steel walls, the introduction of laws to cut or eliminate social programs and overall loss of sympathy for the poor. And yet the flow of people to the doors of our houses remains unabated. It's almost as if the poor and the homeless are expected to simply go away because the sentiments have changed.

Yet, every day someone knocks on the door of one of our houses. Perhaps it's a single young man or woman. Maybe it's an entire family or an elderly man the police found wandering the streets in Juarez. It might be a Guatemalan who fled his country out of a very real fear that his life was in danger. While the circumstances differ, they share the immediate reality: the only thing that stands between them and the street is our house.

Perhaps if we operated our houses out of the political mood of the moment, we could say to those standing at the door, 'Go

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Cultural Shake
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restrained and closeted then we'd be asking people to accept him because he seemed like a "real man." We wanted a gay man with pride, who completely accepts himself as he is," Paz said. "In previous years, the public would simply have been scandalized- furious- if a homosexual had been presented in any way other than to ridicule him. It would never have occurred to anyone for gay man to be the hero in a film."

"Strawberry and Chocolate" also broke another Cuban taboo. The dogmatism of the young communists is ridiculed. As Cruz puts it "Little by little the audience discovered Diego was being taken seriously, and that suddenly, the hero of the film was a homosexual, and the bad guy was a communist, which was a twist of conventional values."

Similarly, Paz suggests that the film shows us that Cubans could have been much freer with ideas and expression than they were. "That diversity will produce an enrichment of the social debate, not dissidence, social chaos, or rejection of the basic ideals of the Revolution."

Diversity was not always a paramount value in Cuba: homosexuals were sometimes sent to detention camps in the 1960's and socialist realism stifled artistic expression through the 1970's. But official and public attitudes are slowly evolving as evidence by Fidel Castro's public statements several years ago condemning the repression of homosexuals.

While there is movement towards increased social and artistic freedom, the economic crisis complicates matters. "Cuban artists desperately seek work outside Cuba because of the lack of materials, adequate working conditions, and possibilities of professional development," explained Cruz, who, after the dizzying success of the film in Latin America is entertaining offers from Brazil and Venezuela. "There is little paper, so a book that doesn't coincide with official policy is less likely to be selected/ There's no money for film and TV productions and so each project is carefully screened...and all this makes artistic life very difficult."

The portrayal of the female lead in "Strawberry and Chocolate" is another novelty for Cuban audiences. "The traditional conflict for women in Cuban film is usually reduced to a love triangle, someone stealing her husband, or the realization that her husband's machismo is keeping her from developing herself," said Mirta Ibarra, who won best supporting actress as Nancy. "If women are heroines it's as trade union activists or revolutionary fighters. What's interesting about Nancy is that she breaks out of the mold."

The character of Nancy originated in an earlier film of Paz, "Adorable Lies." Nancy is loving, human, and manic person who sleeps with men to help them with their problems, and afterwards feels used. "She's seeking love, and can't tolerate being called a whore. She's a very lonely woman, one who is unhappy with her relation to society," explains 46 year-old Ibarra, who began her professional career in 1967.

"Strawberry and Chocolate" is perhaps modest testimony that, while Cuba is intrinsically different than the USA, it is not the stagnant back-water incapable of self-evaluation and change commonly depicted in the US media. Champions of Cuba see the film as a victory of sorts, an indicator of the progressive transformation wrought by the economic and social upheavals of recent years where new answers are demanded in the face of a changing reality.

"One error made here was to think dogmatically and not let people have differing views regarding the Revolution, and so they became distanced from it," said Ibarra. "One of the beautiful things about this film is that it respects someone who sees reality differently."

Carrying the movie's theme of tolerance one step further Perugorria surmised, "David and Diego are different but they end up being friends. This could also be interpreted as saying that Cubans and Cuban Americans could accept our differences and we could fight to save our country. We could give each other a final embrace, like in the end of the movie, and then go have ice cream at Coppelia...strawberry, chocolate, or whatever flavor you like." •

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Thank You!

Frontera
Continued from pg 20

away. You should not be here.' But the truth is that our houses seek to listen to a different Spirit. And that Spirit calls upon us not only to welcome the one at the door but to go one step further and to identify with him.

I have yet to encounter one person or family that came to the door of one of our houses telling us that they wanted to be homeless, or that they liked having to flee their home or country, or that they liked staying in shelters, or that they were not terrified by the prospect of having to live on the street. But I do remember countless individuals and families, by the thousands, who expressed an astonished gratitude at finding houses that would welcome them—total and complete strangers—at such a critical moment in their lives. How many times have we not been asked, 'Why do you do it?'

Well, our response is probably the same one which those of you in the Border Fund would give when asked why do you support our work. We all hear the call to listen to a different Spirit. We are well aware that the coming months and years may be difficult and challenging for us as we continue to welcome and walk with the poor, be they homeless or undocumented. But faith has an incredible sustaining power, and we join with our countless guests in thanking God for that Spirit which has allowed you to walk this journey with us. •

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CUSLAR Calendar
April

Monday, 3 - "Mexico In Crisis" A talk by David Myhre, 8:00 pm, Commons Coffeehouse, Anabel Taylor Hall, Cornell University. Free and open to the public.

Thursday, 6 - "Cafe Concierto" Traditional music from Peru and Bolivia with Ayllu, 8:00 pm, Commons Coffeehouse, Anabel Taylor Hall, Cornell University. $6 donation at the door.

Wednesday, 12 - Film: "Looking For A Space" A look at the evolution of the relationship between the Cuban Revolution and lesbians and gay men. 8:00 pm, Uris Hall Auditorium, Cornell University. Free and open to the public.

Friday, 21 - "Two Voices From El Salvador" Two community leaders and grassroots activists from the city of El Charcón will discuss the changes in Salvadoran society since the end of the civil war. Co-sponsored by The Border Fund. A small donation is requested for community development projects in El Charcón. 8:00 pm, Commons Coffeehouse, Anabel Taylor Hall, Cornell.

Saturday, 22 - "Cafe Concierto" Colleen Kattau and friends make a return visit to play Nueva Canción and original progressive folk music from throughout the Americas. 8:00 pm, Commons Coffeehouse. $5 donation at the door.

Wednesday, 26 - Film: "Details of a Duel" A wry comedy set in a small town in Colombia. 8:00 pm, Uris Hall Auditoruim. Free and open to the public.

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