

CUSLAR NEWSLETTER

Fall 1996

New Terms of Struggle for Central America and the Caribbean



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Editorial:

A call for a free and open exchange of ideas

Here at CUSLAR we feel strongly that a free and open exchange of ideas is essential in our efforts towards a greater understanding of Latin American cultures. However, obstacles to this exchange often make our work difficult. It has been particularly problematic to foster an exchange with our neighbor to the south, Cuba.

Nevertheless, we are happy to report that after much effort on the part of dedicated activist, both in Ithaca and around the U.S., we were fortunate enough to host two of Cuba's premiere artists, Adria Santana and Pablo Menendez. Adria performed her award winning monologue, *"Las Penas Saben Nadar (Sink or Swim.)"* Her performance received an standing ovation from the diverse crowd who had come from all over the Finger Lakes region to see her. Pablo hosted a wonderful evening of music with local musicians to the great delight of his audience.

Unfortunately, after Adria and Pablo left Ithaca, we received a letter from the Roxberry Community College (RCC) in Boston reminding us that the struggle to engage in a dialogue with the Cuban people is far from over. Two university student researchers that CUSLAR has invited to Ithaca, as part of a speaking tour coordinated by RCC, have not been able to secure visas to enter the U.S. This is of great concern because earlier this year the U.S. denied visas to two other students also invited by RCC. The RCC is not stranger to controversy surrounding academic exchanges with Cuba.

As part of their academic mission, the RCC sponsors field studies trips to Cuba. The latest trip, however, has not gone unnoticed by the U.S. Treasury Department. Prof. Reeves, who facilitates the trips, has received a letter from the Treasury Department requesting "the names and current address of all individuals who participated in the field study in Cuba." Prof. Reeves has refused to comply saying that "regulations of U.S. travel to Cuba violate the rights of U.S. citizens to travel abroad, to seek information concerning public issues from foreign sources and to exchange information with people in other countries; rights which are guaranteed by the Constitution." Meanwhile, the newly acting Dean at RCC has ordered Prof. Reeves to accede to the U.S. Treasury demands.

This action by the U.S. government is unprecedented and an affront to academic freedom. Please join us in expressing our outrage at this infringement by writing to:

David Harmon
Chief, Enforcement Division
Office of Foreign Assets Control
U.S. Treasury Department
Washington D.C., 20220.

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 oppression. 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. You can also email us at: cuslar@cornell.edu. The CUSLAR Newsletter is published three times a year.

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Draconian Immigration Law

by Jeff Vogt

The Simpson Immigration and Financial Responsibility Act, passed through the Senate by a 97-3 vote earlier this year, is far more extensive and comprehensive in its scope than any other immigration reform package before it. Senator Simpson, shortly after its passage gloated over his victory, announcing "we have everything but the rack and thumbscrews for people who are violating the laws of the United States." The House proposed even more stringent legislation, including a denial of public education to the children of illegal immigrants, an issue which has already been decided by the Supreme Court in favor of immigrant children under the Equal Protection clause of the 14th Amendment.

Similar to its many early predecessors, such as the Immigration Bill of 1891, which was passed to exclude immigrants likely to become a public charge, and the 1921 bill which first established the quota system, which sought to limit immigration based on national origins, the current bill will radically reform federal policy. The currently proposed draconian measures promise to deprive many current resident

aliens and future applicants for legal immigration of rights that are recognized under current law.

Now, in a wave of anti-immigrant hysteria, reflected by such state bills as California's Proposition 187 and similar bills pending in southwestern border states, the call for repressive new measures is heard from the Rio Grande to Washington D.C..

Beside drastic reductions in the level of legal immigration, the new bill seeks a number of substantial changes to U.S. policy. Among them are:

- A hard line approach to immigrants seeking asylum in the U.S. by imposing stringent procedures for refugee status. The bill would cut in half the number granted asylum each year, to about 50,000.

- Doubling the number of border patrol agents to approximately 5,000.

- Requiring the sponsors of new immigrants to provide health insurance for up to five years, effectively cutting off access to Medicaid, Medicare or welfare benefits.

- Denying the right of automatic citizenship to the newborns of illegal immigrants. The Republicans are actually

proposing a repeal of the 14th Amendment which includes the birthright clause "all persons born", and is the constitution rational which grants citizenship to anyone born in the United States, including the children of illegal immigrants.

- Eliminating immigration preferences for siblings and adult children of legal immigrants. Those excluded would have to apply under a skill-based petition for entry and may easily be denied in ever shrinking allotments for skilled immigrant labor.

Fueled by populist cultural rhetoric concerning family values, jobs and morality, these measures will, ironically, further the disintegration of immigrant families by separating parents who have been working in the United States from reuniting with their children left behind with other relatives. The bill will further criminalize and ensure continuing poverty for the illegal immigrants and their children through stringent measures which will bar access to health care, employment, education, and welfare, among many other possible needs.

So what do these new measures mean for the people of Latin America? We need only look at Mexico and the relationship to current trade policy, namely NAFTA, to understand the catastrophic impact on immigration.

The chief argument against immigration proposed by the pundits such as Pat Buchanan is that there is a negative economic impact among the low pay job base. Since illegal immigrant are

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SLAVE LABOR: Maquilas in El Salvador

by Patricia Campos

For thousands of workers in El Salvador, the peace process did not bring justice. Today, approximately sixty five thousand Salvadorans work in the Salvadoran Free Trade Zones for miserable wages and under horrendous working conditions. These workers, mainly young women between the ages of seventeen to twenty-seven, sit in front of their machines sewing jeans, dresses, pants, shirts, skirts as fast as they can to fill heavy orders from retailers in the United States such as the GAP, Eddie Bauer and JC Penney who are stocking up their inventories for this year's "Christmas sales." To meet retailers orders, supervisors force employees to work ten to twelve hours a day, seven days a week, and with a million other restrictions that make their jobs more like "slave" work rather than dignifying work.

Free Trade Zones are industrial parks comprised mostly of assembly plants or "maquilas," which produce

exclusively for export. The government of El Salvador established free trade zones in an effort to attract foreign investment. Free trade zones are regulated by special laws which exempt maquilas owners from paying import duties on equipment and raw materials, and export duties on finished goods. In addition to exemption from tariffs, the Salvadoran government offers investors

the willingness of the government to ignore its own labor legislation.

The creation of free trade zones in El Salvador, and other Central American and Caribbean nations, forms part of the free market, export-oriented economic model promoted by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and the U.S. Agency for International Development. According to the free-market model, nations participate in the world economy with those products in which they possess a "competitive advantage;" that is, nations compete only with those goods that they produce best and more economically. In the case of El Salvador, its competitive advantage lies in its abundance of inexpensive labor. El

Salvador has a population of 5.1 million people; its current labor force is made up of 1.7 million people, 51% of which are women. The official unemployment rate is 10%, with an underemployment rate of 40% (those people employed in the informal market, i.e.: selling fruits on the streets, etc.). Faced with a high level of unemployment, ARENA, aided by USAID, turned to foreign investment as the answer for job creation.

El Salvador's first free trade zone was established in 1974 by

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Photo by Diane Greene



generous concessions such as subsidies on electricity and water rates, and exemption from taxes on profits. However, the biggest incentive for companies to come to El Salvador is the huge pool of unskilled cheap labor and



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EL SALVADOR Deserves a Better Future

by Ario Salazar

March of 1997 is a very important date for Salvadorans: it is the date of the second democratic elections since the signing of the peace accords. ARENA and the FMLN, as the two viable political parties, will be disputing control of the National Legislature (Congress), and some of the most important municipalities in the country (such as San Salvador and Tecoluca). Although this are not Presidential elections, the results will have great influence on what kind of future El Salvador will have. The political atmosphere in El Salvador continues at a crossroads; the FMLN and ARENA offer two different futures for El Salvador. If the ruling party ARENA wins, El Salvador will continue to undergo another long period of anti-popular neoliberal policies such as privatization, wage stagnation, unemployment, and lack of safety. The FMLN, on the other hand, with its social-democratic agenda, represents the only hope for us to build a better future for our children.

To better illustrate the importance of the elections, and to make some appreciations as to what seems to be awaiting us as Salvadorans in the future, I will lay out the factors which in my opinion represent the current political scene of El Salvador: the performance of the Calderon Sol government, ARENA's internal struggles to maintain an unified and strong party, and the FMLN's viability not only as an opposition party, but as a real option for governance.

During the presidential elections of 1994, we saw an opposition that was not strong

nor completely articulated in its political strategy and platform. This was due in part to the recent demobilization of the FMLN as a revolutionary army, but most importantly, it was due to its lack of experience as political party. Besides that, the historical division of the five FMLN factions was a real problem within the ranks; this problem was addressed and changed during the December-95 party convention when all of the factions were legally dissolved and the FMLN became a single powerful front. To this internal situation, we must add the national and international pressure during the period in which the FMLN's main focus was to keep working with the government to make sure that the agreements of the peace accords would be accomplished on the dates they were scheduled to happen. On the other hand, ARENA was a more consistent party during the 1994 elections, ready to mobilize its historical social base to the election urns. Their campaign, however, was never meant to expand their social base; they basically worked at maintaining the existing one intact.

The political scene for the 1997 congressional and municipal elections is completely

different from that of 1994. Nowadays, we see a much more powerful FMLN and a weak ruling party full of cracks and internal division. ARENA has lost its temple and consistency. This, of course, is not something new, ARENA has had divisions in its base since its creation; however, the difference now is that the divisions are obvious and the party's social base has become less satisfied with the party. ARENA economic restructuring programs have affected various sectors drastically—the popular sector, the middle class, and also a part of the bourgeoisie. ARENA used to represent most sectors of the bourgeoisie; now they do not represent the agricultural sector, or the industrial sector—they represent the interests of the financial, commercial, and coffee export sector. So, they are increasingly isolating a big fraction of their historical support base. This situation of chaos and constant strife within the ranks of ARENA has had some effects in its capacity to govern. ARENA has proven, since the beginning of the Calderon Sol administration, to be inconsistent in the implementation of its political



Photo: Zeno Wood

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HAITI continues to struggle for life

by Pierre Gingerich

When Father Aristide returned to Haiti, he found himself leading a country economically and organizationally ravaged by the coup, and occupied by the United States troops. Prohibited by the Haitian constitution from succeeding himself and forbidden by the U.S. government from extending his term to make up for the three years lost to the coup, Aristide finished his five-year term in February of this year. René Prével, his prime minister, replaced him. Like Aristide, Prével was elected by a landslide.

A number of U.S.-based organizations have played an important role during and since the coup years in raising awareness in the U.S. of conditions in Haiti. I traveled to Haiti 8-19 June 1996 with the Christian Peacemaker Teams

(CPT), a project of the historic peace churches (Mennonites, Church of the Brethren, and Quakers) of the U.S. and Canada. CPT is an experiment in applying the Christian ethic of nonviolence to actively address situations of violence and injustice around the world. Our delegation of three Canadians and five U.S. citizens met with church-based Haitian human rights workers, parliamentarians, policemen, former street children, journalists, and health and agricultural development promoters.

In particular, the delegation sought to learn about and address the U.S.'s past and continuing contribution to violence in Haiti. During the three years of the coup, the Army and FRAPH murdered some 5,000 people, and beat, tortured, and extorted money from many

parliamentarian who had been picked up and tortured, and as we visited the sites of a number of massacres under the coup.


The Haitians with whom we met were thrilled when Aristide returned. But while the Clinton administration touted the invasion as effective and forceful foreign policy for a humanitarian cause, our contacts, such as Necker Dessables of the Catholic Bishops' Justice and Peace Office, were less enthusiastic about its long-term effects for Haiti. Our conversations with him and with other Haitians made us more aware that the impacts of the coup are deep and long-lasting. The U.S./U.N. invasion left intact the principal structural effects of the coup, many of which are arguably policy objectives of the U.S. government:

1) Under the coup, members of popular organizations were killed, tortured, harassed, and forced into hiding. Many Haitians, observing the fierce repression visited during the coup on popular organizations which had worked openly before the coup, are less willing to be publicly active, out of fear of a new coup. These fears, kept alive by the continuing presence of unprosecuted human rights abusers who have not been disarmed, probably reduce the mobilization of popular opposition to the U.S.'s economic agenda for Haiti.

2) While there have been some reports of abuses by the new police, who were trained by the U.S. and Canada, our impression was that they are inexperienced, but not particularly corrupt. In a master

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stroke, Aristide pre-empted U.S. attempts to have Aristide loyalists purged from the military by abolishing the military altogether. However, recent moves appear to place President Préval's personal security ever more tightly under U.S. control. In September, the U.S. demanded and obtained the "retraining" of the 87-member Presidential Security Unit and the elements of the 200-member Palace Guard, and the purging of officers most loyal to Aristide, following accusations from the U.S. embassy that these forces were involved in the murder of two right-wing opposition politicians. Simultaneously, the U.S. brought in 31 heavily armed security agents to join the eight U.S. security personnel already stationed at the Presidential Palace (Haiti Progrès, 18 Sept. 1996). Whether or not the accusations against the Aristide loyalists are legitimate, the heavy-handedness of the Clinton administration, evidently concerned that its "success" in Haiti might unravel before the election, was remarked even by the New York Times. (17 Sept. 96).

3) A central mandate of the invasion forces was to disarm the old Haitian military and FRAPH. Nevertheless, by the admission of the U.S. embassy's own spokesperson, Catherine Hoffman, disarmament efforts to date have been almost entirely limited to the buy-back of 16,000 weapons, out of the 200,000 illegal arms estimated still to be at large. The policy of the occupation forces toward the ex-Army and FRAPH members, who are thought to hold the majority of these guns, has been essentially to ignore any weapons they don't actually

stumble across. Specific information which CPT has obtained and passed on to the U.N. on arms held by former FRAPH members has likewise been ignored. Meanwhile, insecurity mounts. Over the spring and summer, demobilized military grew more vocal and menacing in demanding "back pay". While we were in Port-au-Prince, the eighth policeman to be killed since January was shot as he returned home from a murdered colleague's funeral—the gunmen are unknown, but widely assumed to be connected with the military. And in August, twenty uniformed assailants with guns and mortars attacked Port-au-Prince police headquarters and the parliament building. The U.S. military has responded with an increased presence in the capital. While Clinton's eagerness to secure his "foreign policy success" in Haiti will undoubtedly protect Haiti from

an overt coup for the immediate future, it gives little comfort to the policemen and activists in popular organizations with whom we spoke, who fear current violence or a future coup.

Meanwhile, the U.S. continues to stonewall efforts bring to justice perpetrators of human rights abuses during the coup. The U.S. has yet to hand over in full and unexpurgated form more than 150,000 pages of FRAPH and Haitian Armed Forces documents, whisked away to the U.S. in the first days of the invasion. In addition to offering important information on FRAPH and Army activities under the coup, the documents would almost certainly provide further evidence of complicity between U.S. intelligence agencies and the putschists. Likewise, we witnessed the frustration of Haitians upon learning in mid-June that U.S. authorities had released FRAPH

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leader Emmanuel Constant from detention in a Maryland jail, rather than returning him to Haiti for trial. The New York Times later revealed that Constant was released in return for agreeing to reveal no more than he already has about his collaboration with his CIA bosses under the coup. Responding to the FRAPH documents and Constant's release, the CPT delegation marched from the U.S. Embassy to the Haitian Ministry of Justice, singing and carrying a dozen boxes marked FRAPH DOKIMAN ANN ANTYE ("FRAPH documents in full").

Between failed disarmament and obstruction of Haiti's judicial efforts against FRAPH, the invading forces seem to have done considerably more to protect the coup leaders and their hired guns than to pursue them for human rights abuses. I attended the hearing of three ex-military who, having been convicted and jailed by Haitian courts for torture carried out under the coup, had been released from jail extrajudicially at two in the morning by U.N. forces.

4) Préval's government, though propelled to power by its identification with popular organizations, has embraced the "Structural Adjustment Program" (SAP), demanded by the U.S. as a precondition for assistance from the World Bank and IMF, dubbed the "Death Plan" by many popular organizations. In October, the IMF released \$131 million of loans, rewarding Préval for pushing a bill for privatization of state-owned industries (including the flour mill, Port-au-Prince port and airport, the electric company, and the

telephone company) through a reluctant parliament. Under the SAP, state employment, already small at around 46,000, would be slashed by another 12-15,000. These policies are promoted as increasing "efficiency", but disproportionately affect low-paid government functionaries and the poor majority receiving reduced services. In the "free market" model promoted under the SAP, Haiti's economic growth should be propelled by the export assembly sector, dominated by U.S. companies such as Walt Disney. Notably lacking from the model is state promotion of production for Haiti's internal food needs or attention to the welfare of Haiti's peasant majorities. The Bank's own analyses suggest that 2/3 of Haiti's rural workers would be unlikely to survive as rural workers under the free-market measures it would impose. The unstated alternatives for these workers are emigration by boat and competition in the cities for scarce and exploitative sweatshop jobs.

The life and death struggles of Haiti's poor majorities for justice and dignity continue. Tragically, these struggles take place in the shadow of the U.S., which dishonestly cloaks itself in the mantle of democracy, while continuing to defend the interests of its corporations and of Haitian elites, to the detriment of Haiti's poor. CPT's work is part of a broader movement to expose and resist the often destructive role of the U.S. government in Haiti.

For more information on CPT and other groups working in Haiti, please contact Pierre at dpg3@cornell.edu or 254-4251 or contact the CUSLAR office.

Pierre Gingerich is a graduate student at Cornell in Ecology and a member of Ithaca's Catholic Worker group.

Guatemala:

by Sandra Moran

For Guatemalan society, the end of 1996 may mean the end of more than 35 years of civil war. Today we are close to the final signing of peace accords which, according to the initial accord of January 1994, "not only seek the end of the war in Guatemala, but fundamentally propose to establish the basis for the solution of the problems that gave origin to that war."

Much has been written about the long suffering of the Guatemalan people, suffering from repression and killings, hunger, lack of basic public services, lack of access to decent farmland, the outrageous exploitation of agricultural and industrial workers and the lack of a space for political expression. All these sufferings, added to the negative effects of the CIA intervention in Guatemala in 1954, led to armed combat initiated in 1962. That civil war has been cited to justify policies of political assassination and intimidation and rural massacre and dislocation that peaked in the early 1980s. Today, continuing threats and incidents of violence continue to limit the ability of Guatemalans to organize to improve their lives.

Through all these years of death and repression, Guatemalans have developed new forms of survival, struggle and resistance. The campaigns designed to destroy organizations dedicated to struggle for social justice - from urban labor unions to rural marketing cooperatives - led to the formation of new types of organizations. The latter 1980s saw the development of strong

weaving a future with dialogue and consultation

grassroots organizations of families of the disappeared, widows, resisters to forced paramilitary service, refugees, and internally displaced people. In the early 1990s, these human rights organizations took a leadership position in Guatemalan society that was reflected in their prominence in the national media. The prominent presence of women in these organizations is paralleled by a growing importance of women's leadership in organized labor and in rural communities. Maya indigenous leadership in these organizations has influenced the terms and processes of dialogue, decision-making, and organizational structure. A number of different pan-Maya coalitions are among the most dynamic national level organizations. All these types of grassroots organizations are linked to membership in rural and urban areas throughout the country, and have developed mechanisms to represent the interests and serve the needs of that membership.

This recent organizational history of the Guatemalan people is the basis for hope that the peace talks can actually be a first step towards resolution of the many forms of social injustice that have existed in the country. In January 1994 the accord that established the basis for reengaging in the peace talks was signed by representatives of the URNG (Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity), the government, and the army. At that time the Assembly of Civil Society (ASC) was formed. This assembly was developed as an instrument through which organizations representative of



Guatemalan civil society could participate actively in the negotiation sessions without being directly present at the discussion table.

The assembly was originally formed in 1994 by 10 delegates representing 10 sectors; it currently is formed by 12 delegates from 14 sectors that represent organized civil society of Guatemala. These sectors in turn are formed by different organizations which give life to the sectoral work. The participating sectors are: Labor Unions and Students, Maya Organizations, NGOs, Research Centers, Women's Organizations, Human Rights Groups, Journalists, Academic, Small and Medium Business, Cooperatives, Religious Workers, Political Parties, Refugees/ Displaced People, and Farmers/ Farmworkers

Since 1994, organizations in each sector work together to contribute proposals to each topic of negotiation. Through consensus they develop common proposals for solutions to the political, economic and social problems of Guatemala. Sectors and organizations that had kept their distanced or were unaware

of each other's existence now have to maintain dialogue and work together. A reencuentro and the preparation for the construction of a new peacetime Guatemala is happening through the concrete practice of this forum.

The peace process has already born fruit: seven signed accords. And though until the final accord is signed the accords do not all take effect, the accords have acted as the motor for new energy for the work of popular organizations and civil society.

The accords signed since the resumption of talks in January 1994 until October 1996 are:

- The Global Accord on Human Rights (March 29, 1994) states the necessity for respect for the life of Guatemalan men and women and the right to organize and to participate in the peace process. This accord also treats the creation of MINUGUA (the office that represents the United Nations in Guatemala and works to verify the fulfillment of this accord, installed in Guatemala in September 1995)

- The Accord establishing "the commission for historical clarification of the violations of human rights and the incidents of the Acts of Violence which have caused suffering to the Guatemalan population", throughout the civil war is known as the accord of the Truth Commission (June 1994). The investigation will be carried out in a period of only six months to a year. Although this accord talks about investigation of acts of violence, it does not mention the possibility of mentioning the names of those responsible, a situation which was not very well

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received by the Guatemalan people and the human rights organizations.

- The accord on "Resettlement of the populations uprooted by the Armed Conflict", (June 1994). This accord recognizes the existence of the refugees, the returned, the communities of population in resistance and the internally displaced, recognizes their right to return to Guatemala to the regions where they wish to reside, to live and freely travel within the country, to organize their own return without an army presence in the regions to which they return, and to have their organizations (promoters of health, education and production) legally recognized in Guatemala.

- The accord "on Identity and Rights of the Indigenous Peoples" (March 1995) recognizes the political and cultural rights of the indigenous peoples of Guatemala and the existence of a nation which is multiethnic, multilingual and multicultural. The Maya, Garifuna and Xinka peoples are recognized, and their right to maintain, develop, and revalue their own culture, religion, cosmovision and identity. Their forms of organization will be recognized as part of the legal social forms of organization and their customary law will be incorporated into the civil law of the country. This accord for the Maya people and for the indigenous people of Guatemala may represent an instrument for the beginning of the Maya calendric era, which began in February 1995.

- The accord on Socioeconomic Aspects and the Agrarian Situation (May 6 1996)

recognizes that the State must offer minimal services to the population (education, housing, health, water, light, etc.), reconstruct the taxation system, form a land bank where farmers can acquire land through credit, settle land claims, enforce labor laws and verify their fulfillment, strengthen the "Seguridad Social" health services to workers in the public and private sectors. This accord confronts The policies of "structural adjustment" but received much criticism, especially from farmer's and farmworker's organizations hoping for a more concrete solution to their problems.

- The accord on "Civil Society and the role of the Army in a Democratic Society" (September 19, 1996) calls for a demilitarized Guatemalan society, to make possible the fulfillment of the other accords and the effective participation of the population in their

implementation. It emphasizes the need for participation of local organizations and of women in implementing the accords and in all the processes of defining "macro" policies which will make possible the solution of local, regional, y nacional problems. It mentions reorganizing and strengthening judicial, executive and legislative bodies, the creation of a national civil police, the demobilization of the "civil self-defense patrols (PACs), the demobilization of the mobile military police and presidential guard (linked to human rights abuses), the diminishing of the army by 33%, and the creation of retraining programs and job training programs for their members. This accord lays the basis to support the strengthen a civil society which has been totally weakened during these war years.

The accords that remain to be signed are those referring to the demobilization and reincorporation of the URNG in civil life, the constitutional reforms which will reaffirm the accords now signed, the calendar of fulfillment of the accords and finally the final peace accord, which will give validity to all which has been signed up to this time.

Many tasks and challenges are faced by the organizations of civil society, but hope and strength exist in the women and men who have come this far. North americans must now define the role of solidarity in a post-war Guatemala, and perhaps finally contribute to Guatemala becoming once again the country of the Eternal Spring....

Sandra Moran is a representative to the Women's Sector in the Assembly of Civil Society and a researcher with CIEP in Guatemala..



El Salvador

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platform. This is measured through the high levels of unemployment and immigration registered during the last four years, the corruption scandals in the police forces, the incapacity or unwillingness of the government to put an end to the problem of common and organized crime, and the worsening of the situation of poverty in which the majority of the population still lives. Also, ARENA has shown little or no interest at all in dealing with the problem of low wages and labor rights abuses in the so-called "free trade zones" where the national and international Maquila sector exploits Salvadoran workers.

All these problems have caused a great deal of discontent among Salvadorans. This discontent has been especially noticeable in the results of the most recent Gallup polls which show that popular support for ARENA has decreased tremendously. In the city of San Salvador, where the biggest concentration of urban votes lies, the FMLN is three points ahead of the ruling party, and only a few points behind nationally. One of the biggest predictions for this years elections, is that the FMLN will gain many more candidates for congress and a good number of municipalities. The strength of the FMLN is due to the aggressive campaign launched by the FMLN to capitalize and take advantage of the internal disunity of ARENA. As stated earlier, ARENA is now more than ever struggling to maintain its historical base of support. This is becoming even more difficult now that the division within its ranks is more evident and public. Besides that, ARENA's links to organized crime has jeopardized

its reputation among new possible members. Apparently, few people want to be associated with a political party in which the death squads and the mafia are operating hand in hand. The FMLN, on the other hand, has managed to maintain its historical social base and has launched a very ambitious campaign to expand it; so far they have been very successful. The number of affiliations has increased twofold since the convention took place in 1995. Additionally, a great deal of attention and recognition was given to the party by the national and international community this past summer when the FMLN organized and participated in El Foro de Sao Paulo. El Foro de Sao Paulo is an annual event that began in 1990 in Sao Paulo, Brazil, in which the parties of the Latin American left meet to formulate a common plan to address the new economic and social problems of Latin America.

It is my opinion, as a Salvadoran, that El Salvador deserves a better future. We need to move forward and leave behind the obsolete forms of political thought and reasoning that has kept our country in misery. We need to raise our standards of economic competitiveness in the face of a new century that brings with it a new set of challenges for our people. Ignoring the needs of the masses of people can only lead backwards, and our people only want to go forward. But we cannot do it alone, we need your support. We ask you to participate in our efforts to construct a truly democratic country capable of overcoming all the economic and political barriers that have been long present in our country's history and the ones created by the new economic order. That is why I would like to invite you to join the

campaign in support of the workers of El Salvador that CISPES, the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador, has launched. It has been proven, historically, that only those who seek support are capable of changing all those things that for them seemed unchangeable.

We have seen some progress since the peace accords were signed; some political spaces have been opened to us; changes that before we only foresaw in our dreams have now become a reality for our people. However, El Salvador is still a country that needs to be looked at as a place where changes happen only when they are impelled by the vast majority of people who constantly lap against the biggest of the walls in our history; the nihilism of those who have governed us for such a long time. That is why the coming elections are so important. We need to elect people who know that the governing of a country is not merely a game but a real challenge and responsibility that can only be matched with commitment. I am hopeful that next March we will make the right choices and we will elect those individuals that will work to build a better future for El Salvador.

NOTE: If you are interested in helping Salvadorans secure that the March 1997 elections are fair and clean, you can attend the elections as an official International Observer. For more information contact:

Guillermo Chacon
FMLN-U.S. Representative
Ph# (718) 933-8383

Ario Salazar is a student at Marymount University and an activist with CISPES.

Maquilas

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the United States government (through USAID) as a measure to industrialize the country and create jobs to combat the "communist" tendencies of the population. Once the war began, however, the program was abandoned due to the inability to attract foreign investment to a war-torn country.

Once the peace accords were signed in 1992, the industrialization plan was revived. USAID used over \$100 million dollars in U.S. taxpayers' money to build and promote El Salvador's free export zones. There are now about 30 maquilas in the free trade zones, plus 207 maquilas in the fiscal zones or "recintos fiscales" (Fiscal Zones are maquilas that are not located in the Free Trade Zones, but rather in different parts of the country. They also must produce for exports only.) Together, this 237 maquilas create about 65,000 direct jobs, and about 20,000 indirect jobs in the transportation, and food services sector.

Currently, the sector that is generating the most jobs is the maquila sector. However, the reality is that those jobs do not provide workers with the economic power to sustain themselves and their families. Workers in the maquilas earn less than the national minimum

wage of 35 colones a day (\$4.00 U.S.), thus making a weekly salary of about 200 colones. However, "la canasta basica," or the basic food basket for a family of four for one week cost about 500 colones. A worker can barely make a living with such wages. Violations to workers rights are commonplace in El Salvador. Some of the most common violations are:

- workers are forced to work overtime without overtime pay
- women are fired for being pregnant (owners do not want to pay pregnancy leave)
- women suffer physical and sexual abuse
- workers are cheated out of back pay, vacation pay, and Christmas bonuses.
- owners close factories without the legally required notice
- factory managers deduct social security fees from workers' paychecks, but pocket the money instead of forwarding it to the government.
- universal firing of union organizers
- illnesses due to horrible working conditions (last march a woman died on one of the maquilas because the supervisor refused to give her time off to go to the hospital)

Perhaps the most blatant violation to the Labor Code of El Salvador is the firing of union organizers and sympathizers. The moment workers try to organize to protest their

horrendous working conditions, they are fired and put on a black list labeling them as trouble makers. This prevents them from being hired again in any other maquilas.

According to the Comité de Desempleados de El Salvador (Committee for the Unemployed), a non-profit organization, since 1992 about 3000 maquila workers have been fired for trying to organize unions in the maquilas.

Most of the organizing attempts are often chattered by the bosses' determination to keep unions out, and the government unwillingness to enforce the labor code. Of the numerous union organizing campaigns only a few have been successful; there are only 6 recognized maquila labor unions, but of those none have the right to negotiate with the employers yet. One of the maquilas that was unionized, GABO International, closed its doors August 27, 1996 without prior notice leaving 400 workers without a job and without their last months earnings or legally required severance pay. GABO owners claimed that the shut down resulted from lack of contracts received -because of the existence of the union the transnational send their orders to another non-unionized maquila. Additionally, before closing, the owner of GABO, a Korean national, sold the plant's machinery to another maquila to avoid having it confiscated by the government (a new law passed by the Salvadoran legislature last year states that if employers close the factory without prior notice, the machinery will be sold and the money used to pay for the salaries of the employees.) Since, the company did not own any machinery, the workers were left with no compensation.

How can we help the thousands of workers who toil like slaves in the free trade zones of El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Dominican Republic, and the U.S., to make the clothes that Americans wear? How can

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Immigration

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traditionally the target of exploitative labor practices, the incentive is high for many manufacturers to hire these people at slave wages. Given also the minimal patrol of sweatshop labor, the cost of being exposed is fairly low and has little impact upon the consumer market, generally. Certainly, this has had some effect but it can hardly be considered the root cause of american financial woes. Changes in the methods of production as well as the radical advances in technology is far more accountable for the massive shift in american labor. Bearing down on immigration will not solve the problem.

Bart Laws, writing in the latest issue of Z Magazine, noted, "[T]he border between the U.S. and Mexico represents the sharpest divide in average incomes than any place on earth. Mexico will need to generate a million jobs a year to maintain its current level of employment, as its young population grows and as millions of peasants are forced off the land by the industrialization of agriculture - thanks, by the way, in no small measure to NAFTA." In the rapid contraction of the Mexican labor market, what other choice is there if one is to survive?

We can not imagine that anyone would decide to quietly submit to those conditions. The choice to immigrate to the U.S. is not often a decision easily made. It means leaving behind not just family but an entire cultural nexus for a slim promise of cheap labor and much discrimination and anti-immigrant hatred. As the United States decries immigration as the great detriment to the fabric of

Maquilas

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we affect change in the global market?

We can use our power as consumers to pressure transnational corporations to secure a acceptable working conditions for the workers that make the clothes we buy. Also, we must hold the United States government responsible for their actions promoting free trade in Central America and then refusing to secure the compliance of international labor rights agreements. Workers are not commodities, they are human beings who deserve to be treated with respect by those who use their "sweat and hard work" to increase their margin of profits.

The most effective way to help workers all over the world gain better working conditions, is by educating ourselves about what we buy and demand that the transnational corporations change their production practices. The most practical way to do it is by joining and supporting local campaigns against labor abuses. Let us

remember that the maquilas is not only a problem of the developing world, is also a problem for thousands of immigrants workers here in the U.S. Thus, it is imperative that we begin to become active and oppose this new form of exploitation. The *Stop Sweatshops* campaign launched by UNITE this year, or the *"Educate and Agitate for Working People's Rights"* campaign launched by CISPE last summer, offer a good opportunity for all of us to become involved in this new struggle.

If you would like more information about the CISPE campaign contact the CISPE national office at: 19 W 21st St., Rm. 502, New York, NY 10010 Ph# 212-229-1290/e-mail: cispeatl@igc.apc.org. Or visit CISPE web page at: <http://www.blank.org/sweatgear/>

For information on the *Stop Sweatshops* Campaign call UNITE at 202-347-7414

Patricia Campos is a graduate student at the Cornell Institute for Public Affairs.

american life, we must look closely at Mexico and Latin America generally to realize the effect of U.S. policy abroad.

Again, Mr. Laws comments, "At the same time, although we restrict the flow of people across the border, capital flows as freely as the wind. Thanks again to NAFTA, North American industrialists can now export jobs instead of importing workers, and that's exactly what they are doing, setting up maquiladora factories along the border." This phenomenon is not unique to Mexico. Such "Free Zones" are found in Nicaragua,

Guatemala, El Salvador to name a few. The maquiladora is devised to maximize labor hours while paying as little as possible for it. Common wages translate to only a few dollars for a long and gruelling work day. Not only is the individual at a loss but the community, by design, is denied the tax revenue such massive production would usually generate. U.S. corporations receive a double share of profitability by minimizing overhead and payroll to the

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Relief for the Victims of Hurricane Lili

by Erin Sheehan

On October 18, Hurricane Lili struck the island of Cuba. This storm was the worst to hit Cuba in 10 years and the second worst this century. Between 12 and 18 inches of rain fell within 48 hours throughout the country, accompanied by very strong winds of up to 80mph and gusts over 115mph. Thanks to a massive mobilization by the Civil Defense as the storm approached, no human life was lost and only a few dozen people were injured. However, preliminary property damage assessments currently approach the 500 million dollar range. Cuba desperately needs our help in recovering from this terrible catastrophe.

The damage from the storm is massive. 200,000 houses were severely damaged or destroyed. Many people lost everything, including their lifelong homes as well as all of their household possessions. Thousands of families have been without electricity after the storm. Hundreds of schools, hospitals, and warehouses were damaged. As the long rebuilding process begins, donations of construction materials for rebuilding and

refoofing are in great demand.

Almost all Cuba's food crops have been ravaged. The damage included 1.5 million acres of sugar fields, 21,625 acres of rice, and vast crops of coffee, tomato, cabbage, onion, banana, citrus fruit, and sweet potato. This tremendous loss greatly compromises Cuba's ability to feed her people, and extreme scarcity of staples is predicted for many months to come. Donations of food supplies are desperately needed.

In addition to the immediate physical damage caused by the hurricane, severe flooding has created a serious health threat. Water purification systems have been compromised, creating the potential for massive outbreaks of typhoid fever, cholera, and parasites. The current shortage of medicines and supplies such as water chlorination treatments means that lives are at risk. Medical supplies such as vaccinations, antibiotics, cholera treatments and disinfectants are urgently required.

Although undeniably tragic, the impact of the storm would have been considerably worse if it were not for the preparedness of the Cuban government and the

dedication of the Cuban people. As the storm approached, volunteers went door-to-door throughout Cuba evacuating residents of vulnerable buildings. 270,000 citizens sought refuge in public shelters or with friends, including two hundred who found protection in the Presidential Palace. In addition, more than 250,000 livestock was brought to safe areas.

The Cubans have used their remarkable strength and resiliency in their struggle to combat the crippling effects of this natural disaster. However, they cannot do it alone: they need our help NOW. Monetary donations to fund purchases of food, medicine and building supplies are desperately needed. We can make a difference in their ability to survive this tragedy. Please give as much as you are able to this relief effort.

Make checks payable to:
US + Cuba Medical Project
198 Broadway Suite 800
New York, NY 10038

Erin Sheehan is a local activist and a member of CUSLAR.

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vanishing point while selling products in the United State at many times the cost. Other fringe benefits include the evasion of environmental, health and labor regulations common to american corporations.

The problem is not immigration but rather corporate imperialism of Latin America. Since the days of United Fruit Company, corporations have negotiated increasingly damaging trade agreements with Latin American and later wonder why there exists such an influx of immigration to the U.S. Building

a wall across our southern border is clearly not the answer. Re-evaluating our domestic and foreign labor and trade policy is.

Jeff Vogt is a student of International Law at the Cornell Law School.

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