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Friendship VII Underway

Our last newsletter reported on Hurricane Lili, a destructive storm which hit Cuba in October, causing extensive damage. The Ithaca community met this article with widespread sympathy and generosity. Here at CUSLAR, we are proud to have contributed to the $500,000 of material aid which the New York City-based U.S.-Cuba Medical Project delivered to Cuba in November and December.

Although the hurricane dealt a severe blow to the island, the Cuban economy grew 7.8 percent in 1996, thanks to endless hard work and efficient planning. We are also happy to report that Cuba, despite the restrictive U.S. blockade, is now among the top twenty countries worldwide with the lowest infant mortality rate: approximately 7.9 per 1,000 live births. (The U.S. is not among the top twenty.) Cuba is far ahead of the closest Latin American country, Chile, which reports a rate of 13 per 1,000 live births. Further evidence of the strength of Cuba’s medical system is its heart transplant program, the only one in the “developing world.” However, the criminal U.S. embargo on Cuba is making it difficult for the small nation to maintain its health care achievements. Cuban officials estimate that the embargo has cost the Cuban economy over $62 billion during the last 35 years.

On May 14, 1997, Friendship VII, a caravan of about 100 trucks, cars, and buses coordinated by the international organization IFCO/Pastors for Peace, will cross the bridge in Buffalo filled with supplies for the children of Cuba. The caravan’s destination is a Cuban freighter and planes in Montreal. A similar caravan will be at the Mexican border south of San Diego. Together the caravans will attempt to carry 350 tons of humanitarian aid, specifically targeted to help children in Cuba.

U.S. Customs initially refused to allow previous caravans to cross the border, and then backed down. The six preceding unlicensed caravans were eventually allowed to proceed. The Pastors for Peace Caravan’s refusal to apply for a license to send aid to Cuba defies the illegal U.S. blockade and draws attention to the inhumane nature of a policy that prevents innocent children from receiving badly needed medical and humanitarian aid.

The Ithaca community has been very generous during past Caravan campaigns, sending thousands of dollars worth of aid to Cuba. We are hoping for another successful campaign this year. Please help support the local effort by calling the CUSLAR office at 255-7293 to find out how you can get involved!

- Erin Sheehan
Guatemala In Transition

By Daniel Fireside

To long-time observers of Guatemala, it often seems like years can pass without fundamental changes. Civilians have occupied the Presidential Palace since 1986, yet few would dispute that the notoriously brutal military has maintained its iron grip on political power since the CIA-sponsored coup in 1954. Thanks to a military that is credited with inventing the death squad and the practice of disappearing enemies (real or imagined), Guatemala has been described as the 'land of eternal tyranny.' Short of a revolution, many wondered if meaningful change was really possible.

With the ink barely dry on the December 29, 1996 peace accord signed by the government and the rebel Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG), I traveled to Guatemala in mid-February with a small delegation organized by the Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala (NISGUA) to talk with the Guatemalan "popular movement," (the local shorthand for a broad array of indigenous, peasant, women's, labor, and human rights organizations). I tried to answer two fundamental questions: what are the prospects and challenges for building a just peace; and, how should U.S. solidarity activists refocus our efforts in light of the new context?

From our first day in Guatemala, it was clear that although many of the issues that gave rise to nearly four decades of civil war remain unresolved, the political climate has changed. Not only was there regular press coverage of URNG activities and spokespeople, we were able to meet openly with several high-level URNG officials in the downtown Guatemala City - an unthinkable act two months ago, let alone during the last 36 years. Guatemala has experienced an unprecedented opening of political space. Throughout the "popular movement" there is an intense excitement and flurry of activity around the implementation of the peace accords.

Negotiated over a six-year period (with three Guatemalan presidents), the accords contain six "substantive" agreements (as opposed to the technical details of guerrilla reintegration), dealing with human rights, a "truth commission", indigenous rights, refugees, socio-economic and land issues, and a reform of the military. Most of the broad changes called for in the accords leave the details to be worked out by commissions made up of government representatives, coalitions of indigenous people, peasants, refugees, and human rights groups, URNG members, and European delegates.

During the first three months of 1997, popular movement groups have been working through different broad coordinating bodies to hammer out consensus negotiating positions, and select delegates to the commissions. From April to the end of the year, the commissions will be negotiating the details of each accord. The next three years are set aside for implementation. All of the groups we met with agreed that one of the toughest challenges facing them will be to move from protesting abuses to putting forth proposals.

Perhaps the greatest test will be the URNG's ability to make the transition from a clandestine military organization to a political party. The URNG leadership has already dissolved the four separate military organizations that made up the guerrilla front, and are determined to avoid the internecine battles that have marked the Nicaraguan and Salvadoran left after the end of their civil wars. Forging unity within a URNG political party may actually be an easier feat than maintaining its traditionally strong ties to the popular movement groups, especially among the newly revitalized Mayan organizations. A weak accord dealing with land issues and a very disappointing amnesty agreement has already provoked some murmurings of discontent, although for now, most groups are focussing on taking advantage of the opportunities presented in the peace accords, rather than complaining about its shortcomings.

Giving substance to the signed accords will not be easy. President Alvaro Arzu and his ruling National Action Party (PAN) represent a powerful...
Crisis Looms in Colombia

By Lorena Terando

Colombia, a nation notorious for drug-related violence, is now enduring rampant political violence as well. Although the Colombian government denies involvement, several civil and human rights organizations agree that through state terrorism, the Colombian government systematically violates fundamental human rights and murders its own people.

In 1996 more than 17,000 people were killed in Colombia as a result of the quietly raging war between the people and the government. The Colombian Permanent Committee for the Defense of Human Rights indicates that the Colombian armed forces and paramilitary groups are responsible for 70 percent of the deaths. According to a recent report from the Human Rights Watch Americas, the Colombian military promotes, encourages and protects paramilitary groups, using them to massacre Colombians accused of being guerrillas.

On January 12, the CREHOS (Comité Regional de Derechos Humanos/Regional Committee for Human Rights) reported the recent participation of the "Hereros del Majagual" Battalion (part of the Colombian army's 5th Brigade) in the burning of 26 homes, the murder of 19 peasants, and the disappearance of 11 more. In addition, more than 450 peasants were displaced as a result of a paramilitary attack in Yondo, Antioquia. The paramilitary group arrived with voter registration lists in hand, called out those who had voted for the Patriotic Union, (a left-leaning party), and executed them before the other townpeople. They justified the killings by stating that the victims had aided the guerrillas.

In the report, Oesias Bayther, the CREHOS Coordinator, also stated that two villages, La Congoja and Ye, had practically disappeared as a result of paramilitary terror.

More than 750,000 Colombian have been displaced by political violence. Most are civilians: peasants and farmers. Paramilitary groups use displacement to gain territory and influence by eliminating those whom they suspect of sympathizing with the guerrillas.

The largest guerrilla group in Colombia is the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Some of the popularity of FARC lies in

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Lorena Terando is a graduate student at SUNY Binghamton and a member of Paz Por Colombia
Tupac Amaru: A Revolutionary Struggle

By Jeff Vogt

Since the Lima uprising, during which the Japanese ambassador’s residence was besieged and over 300 occupants held hostage, people around the world have labored severally to characterize the members of the guerilla organization known as Tupac Amaru (MRTA). In a recent panel discussion with one of the 24 executive directors of the World Bank, he described Tupac Amaru as a band of disenchanted capitalists who demand that the free market pie be divided more equitably. Meanwhile, the American media has foregone an analysis of the MRTA or the Fujimori presidency, instead relying on the assumption that anti-government resistance displays an affront to the democratic discourse which underlies the basic tenets of American political thought. The press of the left is evoking romantic images of Robin Hood to describe Tupac Amaru’s tactic of stealing and redistributing food from heavily loaded transport trucks heading to market.

The MRTA message, however, is unambiguous. “We (South America) are the weak link in the imperialist chain. Our continent has passed through many ways, we have made many mistakes from which we believe we have learned and we now propose to construct a socialist alternative, because otherwise, if we stay in the realms of imperialist globalization, we are condemned to unemployment, misery, and extermination.”

While many debate the justice of the action in Lima, we must recognize that such measures are rarely the result of careful forethought, but of last resort. Tupac Amaru, emerging from beneath the shadow of their brutal predecessor, the Maoist-influenced Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso), has developed an articulate political position closely aligned with the philosophical tenets of Che Guevara and the strategies of the Cuban Revolution. The guerrillas seek to enter the debate as a political force in which the voice of the largely impoverished population can articulate their desires concerning the development of Peru.

Since the inauguration of President Fujimori, chosen for his promise to turn around the failing Peruvian economy by attracting foreign investors, the domestic population has suffered under the emerging laissez-faire economic market. Implementing the austerity measures and growth policies designed by the International Monetary Fund and backed by the World Bank has had a regressive effect on the 50 percent of the population living in utter poverty. The privatization of national industries such as utilities, the increased exportation of domestic resources and a rise in international investment have conferred benefits to the upper echelon of Peru, but have failed to "trickle down" to the 80 percent of the population that is unemployed or severely underemployed. These measures not only affect those workers who are engaged with the modern system of commerce, but have caused great hardship in the already struggling traditional agrarian economic sector which exists outside the urban sphere. Those who have stepped forward in protest, including farm workers, trade unionists, students and others, are now imprisoned in facilities which fall far below all international standards of human decency.

Beyond the economic demands of Tupac Amaru, a number of substantive human rights violations demand attention, including the inhumane prison conditions and a run-away justice system which has sent at least 800 wrongly accused citizens to jail. The typical terrorism case is heard before a panel of faceless judges with distorted voices, a measure instituted by Fujimori in 1992. The judges do allow counsel for the defense to present evidence.

Continued on page 12

Jeff Vogt is a Cornell Law Student

SPRING 1997
The People of the Corn

By Tim King

Along the winding, mountainous highway, there is corn and forest, corn and people, corn and corn and more corn. There are dusty green leaves and lemon-drop flowers. There is tropical sun and more corn. From Tuxtla Gutiérrez, the capital of the southern Mexican state of Chiapas, to the city of Comitán on the Guatemalan border, people grow their corn on hillsides where most people would not dare to walk. They wedge it into 100-foot square plots ending in the mountain wall. They plant it along the road under orange, flowering trees. They grow it in their front yards. Back yards. They drink it, eat it, make fences with its 15-foot stalks, and build shelters from it.

They are the people of the corn. Many are Mayan Indians, the Tzeltal and Tzotzil. For thousands of years, corn has been sacred and central to their lives.

In Comitán, I stand with impoverished and hungry people in the zócalo, the huge public square of this nearly 500-year old city of 90,000 people. Our always open free kitchen feeds beans, tortillas and corn drinks to more than 500 people. As usual, the people of the corn smell of smoke from wood. They cook and heat with little else. Nearby stands the palacio municipal, the town hall surrounded by city police officers who are poorly paid, poorly armed and, therefore, dangerous. Inside the palacio is a Manuel Suasnnavar mural depicting the creation of people from corn.

The people of the corn have peacefully occupied the zócalo for three weeks. They are here to honor the dead of the Zapatista uprising, which began January 1, 1994. They are here to carry forward the struggle they died for. They call themselves the Zapatista Civil Society.

Besides the hungry people from nearby rural areas, the society consists of middle-class and poor people from cities. The urban folks came because their vote was stolen in the 1994 election. They came because the government has pushed utility rates beyond their capacity to pay. They came because Comitán and the rest of Chiapas are occupied by the military. They watch well-paid soldiers get sliny and fat while their younger children starve and their daughters turn to prostitution for soldiers.

They are here because a middle-class family, with three teachers' salaries, doesn't have enough pesos to repair a car. While their children scrounge for paper and pencils in public schools, wealthy children refine their excellent English at exclusive, private academies.

A small, frail and quiet

Continued on next page

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Con't from previous pg.

boy of six or so years sits next to me in the zocalo under the hot sun. His skin and eyes are dull. He is a student of one of the city's public schools, but he can barely write his name. We work on that for awhile. "Ohhh-Easa. Yes, that's good," I say. The letters O-S-C-A-R slide down my tablet like a waterfall in the dry season. Oscar's mother, standing just over four feet and frightfully thin, looks on with pride.

"Some of the children are too hungry to remember what they learn," warns my friend Yesenia, a teacher whose students kiss and hug her when she arrives at her barren, little classroom. In a few weeks, the government will lay her off. She will have no more use for the chalkboard eraser which she carries to school each day. She will leave her chalk in the school room for the teacher who will combine her third graders with his fourth graders.

The Mexican government has taken much from Mexicans. It has even taken Emiliano Zapata and put him on the ten-peso bill. Zapata stars fearlessly from this currency, nearly worthless because of government corruption and ruling-class greed. His strong hands hold ears of corn. In the last revolution, he stood with the people of the corn. The people of the corn are taking him back.

Colombia continued from pg. 4

Colombia's abysmal social and economic conditions: 43 percent of the population are very poor, while 25 percent live in absolute poverty. FARC is quite active in Southern Colombia, and has held 60 Colombian soldiers hostage since August, when the rebels overran the Las Delicias military outpost near the Ecuadoran border. President Ernesto Samper has negotiated for the release of the soldiers, but FARC is holding out for a full military withdrawal from a 14,000 square mile area. This would mean FARC could fully control that portion of the country. Even given the support of the United States, a concession of this magnitude would weaken the position of the Colombian government.

The US plays a crucial role in Colombia. Documents leaked to Amnesty International USA (AIUSA), confirm that almost every military unit AIUSA identifies as known to be killing civilians is using US-supplied weapons. However, the US continues to ship weapons to Colombia, under the guise of the war on drugs, including a recent shipment of $40 million of "excess" military equipment. Colombian soldiers and army commanders are trained at the US Army School of the Americas (SOA), where they are taught tactics in oppression, torture, executions and blackmail. The aim is to eliminate the guerrilla movement, and anyone who challenges the fundamental order of society. This includes peasant farmers, community leaders, trade unionists and human rights activists.

Over 2,000 Colombian soldiers attended the SOA between 1990 and 1992, as abuses within Colombia steadily rose. From 1988 to 1995 the US spent over $13 million to sponsor Colombians in the program, even honoring notorious torturers such as Generals Juan José Alfonso Vacca Perilla and Eduardo Plata Quiniones. These generals, among others, have been implicated in several massacres. Yet they have been praised by the US government, and even invited as special guest speakers to the SOA.

The United States must be held accountable for the shocking human rights violations in Colombia that are committed with our weapons and by men trained on our soil. As Amnesty International USA Executive Director William Schulz recently commented, "It is bad enough that the Colombian military is killing its own men, women and children. But it is unconscionable that, under the guise of fighting the drug wars, the United States has...become party to thugs and is using US tax dollars to do it."

A representative of FARC will visit the Ithaca area in early April. Please call the CUSLAR office at 255-7293 for more details.
The Dirty Truth About NAFTA

U.S. trade surplus with Mexico in 1993 (the year before NAFTA): $1.7 billion

U.S. trade deficit with Mexico in 1996 (three years after NAFTA): $16 billion

Estimated number of U.S. jobs lost due to NAFTA as of October 1996: 625,000

Number of U.S. workers certified by the U.S. Department of Labor as having been laid off due to NAFTA in one narrow NAFTA re-training program: 98,645

Approximate chances a laidoff U.S. worker will not find an equal or higher paying job: 2 to 1

Median annual pay drop of a worker who is hired after being laid off in the early 1990's: $4,420

Number of jobs lost in Mexico in 1995: 1,850,000

Number of Mexican maquiladora workers in July 1996 (thirty months into NAFTA): 761,705

Increase in Mexican maquiladora jobs since NAFTA's passage: 215,117

Number of jobs Allied Signal Chair Lawrence Bossidy predicted in 1993 his company would relocate to Mexico under NAFTA: 0

Number of Allied Signal workers laid off since NAFTA's passage due to "shift in production to Mexico," according to the U.S. Department of Labor: 708

Number of U.S. jobs created by Mattel due to NAFTA: 0

Number of U.S. workers Mattel laid off due to NAFTA, according to the U.S. Department of Labor: 520

Year Pendleton Woolen Mills was founded in Portland, Oregon: 1909

Year Pendleton Woolen Mills closed that plant and moved production to Mexico: 1996

Number of U.S. workers laid off by Pendleton Woolen Mills because of NAFTA, according to the U.S. Department of Labor: 150

Number of workers laid off in a Pocohantas, Arkansas Brown Group shoe manufacturer because of "increased imports from Canada" due to NAFTA, according to the U.S. Department of Labor: 2,400

Population of Pocohantas, Arkansas: 6,151

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Approximate weekly earnings of television production workers in JVC's Elmwood Park, New Jersey, plant: $360

Approximate weekly earnings of television production workers in JVC's Tijuana plant: $50

Number of U.S. JVC workers in Elmwood Park, New Jersey laid off by JVC's shift in production to Tijuana: 198

Number of U.S. Zenith employees laid off due to a "shift in production to Mexico," according to the U.S. Department of Labor: 510

Expected increase in the number of electronics plants in Mexico in the next four years: 400%

Change in buying power of Mexicans since Mexico joined GATT: -70%

Number of children in Mexico living in "extreme poverty", according to UNICEF: 9,000,000

Number of child laborers age 6 to 14 living in Mexico, according to UNICEF: 800,000

Percentage of Americans under the age of 18 who live below the poverty line: 20.8

Rank of the United States among all industrialized nations in the percentage of children living below the poverty line, according to UNICEF: 1

Number of American children who are hungry or on the very edge of hunger: 14,000,000

Predicted ranking of occupation of cashier, among the top 20 occupations having the largest numerical increase over the next decade in the US, according to the Department of Labor: 1

Percentage of Mexicans accounting for 70% of all Mexican consumer spending in 1996: 10

Mexico's 1996 global ranking in numbers of billionaires per country, according to Forbes: 5

Estimated number of Mexico's 92 million people who live on less than $5 a day: 40,000,000

Percentage of Mexicans polled in 1995 who said Mexican President Salinas (co-creator of NAPTA) should be tried for treason: 90

Number of Mexican trucks crossing into Texas each day that carry corrosives, chemicals, explosives, jet fuel, poisons, toxic waste and pesticides: 1,250

Estimated number of U.S. jobs in motor vehicle related industries lost due to trade with Mexico in 1995: 69,048

Amount invested by Chrysler in facilities in Coahuila, Mexico since 1994 (in U.S. dollars): $300,000,000

Number of pregnancy tests female workers in Maquiladoras in the Mexican state of Coahuila must take each year: 12

Percentage increase in Mexican factory workers' wages over the last two years: 50

Inflation rate over that same period: 100%+

Estimated dollar amount to fund essential border cleanup and infrastructure improvement, according to the Sierra Club in 1993: $20 billion

Sources listed in March 1997 issue of the Multinational Monitor

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SPRING 1997
Elections in Nicaragua!

By Nohemy Solorzano

As expected, the October 1996 Nicaraguan Presidential elections spelled out a victory for Arnoldo Alemán and his Liberal Constitutional Party (PLC). Not only did Alemán win the presidency, but his party will control 42 of the National Assembly’s seats, while the FSLN has 36 and other parties share 15. The Liberal Constitutional Party also won 95 out of 145 municipal governments, ensuring Alemán’s national power.

Alemán has support from a wide range of groups, including Cuban exiles from Miami, (who have provided substantial campaign contributions), the business class, and the masses. Alemán won the support of business through his work with the coffee growers association and later as mayor of Managua, by catering to business interests of the High Council of Business Enterprise, a group of elite Nicaraguan business men.

On the popular front, Alemán amassed a great deal of support by taking advantage of the Chamorro government’s economic turmoil. By using state funds to build up his party and promote state works, Alemán presented himself as a populist. While many workers were unemployed, Alemán made a show of providing benefits for the community, through large public works projects such as rebuilding the Malecon park along Managua’s lake front. To the impoverished Nicaraguan people, Alemán was providing services during a time of need.

Through his running mate, businessman Enrique Bolaños, Alemán secured campaign donations and support from elite Cuban exiles, primarily Jorge Mas Canosa and the Cuban-American Foundation (CAF). Unconfirmed sources claim that Alemán promised the CAF the opportunity to set up an anti-Castro radio station in Nicaragua after his victory. Alemán also visited Miami several times and was applauded for his anti-Castro stance.

Given these factors, combined with the growing popular distrust of and disappointment in the Sandinistas, it was no surprise that Alemán won the elections. His party had 36 percent of popular support prior to October, while the Sandinistas had 26 percent. Although only time will tell what Alemán’s government will do, it appears that a full-fledged return to a Somocista-style dictatorship is unlikely. Despite his recent protests to the contrary, Alemán cannot ignore the IMF and World Bank’s demand of stability. He will likely continue down the road of economic liberalism and rampant capitalism that Chamorro’s government began paving. Judging by the results of this path in other Latin American countries, we can conclude that Nicaragua is headed for difficult times indeed.

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Border Problems Persist

By Harvey Fireside

Conditions continue to deteriorate along the border with no end in sight, according to recent reports received by the Ithaca-based Border Fund.

Ruben Garcia, the director of a shelter for immigrant refugees in El Paso, reports that the U.S. enforcement of the Mexican border has made it very difficult for people to get across. Of course, people still do so, and in numbers large enough that the Border Patrol has opened a new detention facility for unaccompanied children under the age of seventeen. In addition, they are building another adult detention facility that will double the capacity of their present one. They are also building a new detention center for single women and those accompanied by their children.

Mr. Garcia's report coincided with the February 7, 1997, estimate of the INS that, despite record sums spent on patrolling the border, the number of "illegal immigrants" has reached a new high of five million. If these official estimates are accurate, it seems puzzling that so many refugees manage to elude the Border patrol forces, which are being doubled. One answer may be that nearly half the refugees have found ways of circumventing the border. Millions simply overstay student or tourist visas. Others evade the system.

La Frontera, the U.S.-Mexico border, has been termed the world frontier that divides the First World from the Third World. It has been made more permeable to goods, thanks to NAFTA, at the same time that U.S. patrols try to seal it off to people heading north. When they catch border crossers, the patrols keep them in prison camps until they are deported.

One of the many paradoxes of the current war on refugees is that the undocumented residents have become mainstays of the US economy. They fill the unskilled jobs in farming, health care, restaurants and construction that U.S. citizens refuse to take. Furthermore, the workers pay taxes that offset health, welfare and educational costs to state and local government.

Yet the mood in Congress and the White House is to demonize the refugees and to deprive them—even legal immigrants—of all public benefits. There is scant evidence that the new militant policy has been able to stem the tide of Latin Americans drawn to seek a better life in the U.S. Even Republican Representative Lamar Smith of Texas, who authored the 1996 immigration bill in the house, told the New York Times, "Congress doubled the INS budget, but I'm not sure we're getting double our money's worth."

The Border Fund raises funds to help support ten shelters that give food, clothes, temporary housing, medical aid and legal advice to Central American refugees. Readers who want to become involved in this project should write to the Border Fund, 102 The Commons, Room 8, Ithaca, N.Y. 14850.

Harvey Fireside is a founder of the Borderfund and a CUSLAR member.

 SPRING 1997
or speak unless the panel finds it absolutely necessary. While one Peruvian news source claims that the normal criminal process is resolved in about two months from arrest to sentencing, Norma Velazco, an MRTA member, claims that some have been arrested, tried and sentenced within 24 hours.

Once convicted, Peruvians endure almost unspeakable conditions. Ms. Velazco describes Yanamayo, perched in the Andes at an altitude of 4,000 feet. "The climate there makes life hard for the prisoners. The wind blows through the bars and it is always cold." She also reports that prisoners spend their entire first year in isolation and are allowed only one 30 minute visit each month afterwards. They are provided no medical care and receive food which is often rotten or mixed with broken glass or cockroaches. Prisoners receive only two liters of water a day for drinking and bathing. Female prisoners often undergo sexual assaults and abuse.

The MRTA has determined not to follow the road of other Latin American guerrilla movements such as the URNG in Guatemala or the FMLN in El Salvador, both of which have signed conciliatory peace accords with the military government responsible for the slaughter of civilian and armed populations by the thousands. Guatemala lost an estimated 200,000 citizens, and El Salvador more than 70,000 over the course of the wars in their countries. Tupac Amaru rejects peace negotiations with the government and is prepared to hold out until basic demands are met. The MRTA hopes to create a revolutionary consciousness among the progressive elements of Peruvian society, which will further pressure the government to reverse its neo-liberal policies. "We hope to build socialism... We don't want state centralism or the bureaucratization of Peruvian society... We should have a democratic, very participatory society, not an electoral democracy every five years, but a democracy where men and women get involved in their workplace, their community, and their neighborhood and decide their own destiny." As the hostage situation drags on, the MRTA has acknowledged the possibility of a military solution by the Fujimori government and has resolved "to see this through to the end," as anything else could mean death or imprisonment of the guerrillas and continuing misery for the people of Peru.

The U.S. government states that it will refuse any negotiation with terrorists, while continuing to back the Fujimori administration. While the MRTA is certainly not free of blame in committing acts of violence against the peasant population, the atrocities enacted in the name of the state of Peru seemingly outweigh any acts initiated by the MRTA. A report from Amnesty International states that of all documented human rights abuses in Peru, the Peruvian government is responsible for about 53 percent of those crimes, the Shining Path for about 45 percent, and the remaining were committed by Tupac Amaru. It is not surprising that more than half the hostages freed from the ambassadors compound shook the hand of Nestor Corpa Cartolini, the leader of the takeover, and wished him well as they were set free. Some even asked for autographs.

Tupac Amaru has taken bold action to capture the attention of the world as well as their own government. However, if the MRTA guerrillas are to avoid the fate of their namesake, the Incan leader who led an anti-colonial uprising against the Spanish, and was later captured, drawn and quartered, they must persist in their goal to establish a viable political revolutionary party which can address the needs of the greater population of Peru and reach out to the international workers movement.

Lori Berenson Update:

In January 1996, US citizen Lori Berenson was convicted in a closed military court in Peru on charges of treason for her activities in the MRTA. During her trial, she was not allowed to challenge evidence or cross-examine witnesses. Lori was sentenced to life in prison with no possibility of parole. The MRTA has included her among the prisoners whose release it demands.

At a news conference, Berenson shouted in Spanish, "I love this country...I have been condemned because of my concern for the hunger and misery that exists here...if it is a crime to be concerned with the inhuman situation of the majority of the people of this country, I accept my sentence." Berenson is being held in isolation, as the Peruvian government has placed a total ban on visits to jailed MRTA members.

Please join the campaign to write to President Clinton asking him to demand a fair trial for Lori Berenson and all Peruvian political prisoners. Your letters make a difference.
Guatemala continued from pg. 3

alliance between the export sector of the elite (made up of about a half-dozen of the countries richest families) and the "institutionalist" faction of the military. For the elite, the peace process has been a means to create a stable investor climate, paving the way for eventual inclusion in NAFTA-like trade alliances and an even greater concentration of wealth. The PAN, which holds a majority in Congress, has already passed a law banning strikes by government employees and is planning to privatize about 80 state-owned industries, reportedly at fire-sale prices. The Army, meanwhile, is working hard to reshape itself for a post-war era while maintaining its share of national power. Demobilized troops appear to be the first in line to fill the ranks of a newly reorganized national police force, without any screening for human rights violators.

In the countryside, large landowners have been hiring former army soldiers as private security guards. As the government gears up for a mammoth land title registration project, large landowners are using these former soldiers to forcibly remove peasant farmers from desirable lands. Although the accords call for the military to relinquish any role in internal security, the agreement does not set out any deadlines for this process. Apparently some of the most notorious security agencies have simply changed their names and continued working. Ominous reports have also surfaced in the press about boxes of files from the secret police winding up in the houses of generals and colonels.

One encouraging discovery we made on our trip was a vibrant union in a maquiladora assembly plant owned by US-apparel maker Phillips Van Heusen. The union, working in conjunction with US solidarity groups, is trying to force the company to negotiate a contract and pay its workers a living wage. These cross-border organizing campaigns hold much promise for international solidarity as we work to build the same sense of urgency around economic rights as we did for human rights.

The challenges ahead are great for US citizens who have worked for peace in Guatemala and for greater accountability from our own government. The Guatemalan government's own human rights office reported that there were nearly 20,000 human rights violations committed during 1996, including murder, torture, and forced disappearance. Peasant organizations repeatedly told us how much they value NISGUA's Rapid Response Telex Network, and that they consider international pressure an indispensable tool in their fights for human rights. US activists have an important role to play in the fight against impunity for human rights abusers. A national campaign is underway to pressure Congress and President Clinton to order the declassification of thousands of documents from the CIA and other agencies that could shed light on human rights crimes committed by Guatemalans on the CIA payroll.

"Many of you have been with us for so long working to end a war," activist Sandra Moran told us before we left. "Now we need you to join us as we finally have a chance to build peace."

To find out more about NISGUA's Rapid Response Network or about a national conference for US-Guatemala solidarity activists to be held in June, call (202) 223-0474

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