

Committee  
On  
US  
Latin  
American  
Relations

# CUSLAR NEWSLETTER

## Environmental Peril



In This Issue:

Costa Rica: Ecological Paradise? \* Pesticide Use and Abuse  
Damming up Chile \* Oil vs. People of Ecuador



# QUICK \$ VS. SURVIVAL?

While violent human conflicts continue in Colombia and Chiapas, another form of violence rages throughout every nation in Latin America: a war on the environment. This war against the earth is being waged by multinational corporations and governments desperate to raise cash. With few soldiers or outside interests interfering on behalf of the environment, it's not hard to guess who's winning the fight.

The pressures of competition in the global marketplace combined with the need to repay crushing national debt are driving Latin American nations to raise dollars in any way possible. Governments are employing several strategies, including exploiting the labor force by lowering labor standards to rock bottom levels; carrying out a massive sell-off of state owned enterprises, such as telephone and utility companies; and liquidating all available natural resources. In past issues of the CUSLAR Newsletter we've explored the consequences of reduced labor standards and rampant privatization. In this issue we turn to the hazards of wholesale natural resource exploitation.

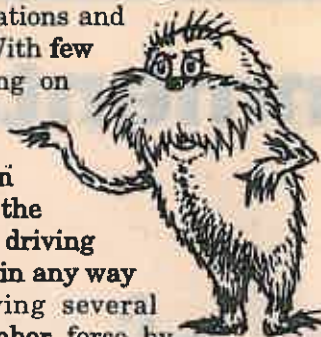
In every area: logging, mining, oil drilling, farming, massive hydroelectric projects and ranching, natural resources are being depleted. In Panama, copper and gold mining concessions have been granted on Kuna Indian territory. In Guatemala, a Canadian company has announced plans to explore for oil in the Maya Biosphere Reserve. A Malaysian timber company is in the Mayan forest of Belize. In Honduras, a Dallas oilman is building a giant sawmill amid the pine forests. You'll read about more cases in the pages that follow.

As U.S. citizens, we are deeply affected by the global "race to the bottom" of labor standards, but the consequences of the environmental destruction may be even more far reaching. A Congressional commission this year estimated that 22,393 square miles are destroyed in the Amazon each year. In the time it takes you to read this sentence, more than two acres of rain forest will disappear.

The value of the rainforest as a counter to global warming trends is immeasurable, to say nothing of the rich biodiversity in these ecosystems. We do not know for certain what we lose as massive species die-offs continue in rainforests due to human activities. And what about the indigenous communities of the region? In many cases indigenous people bear the brunt of resource exploitation through relocation, pollution and ecosystem destruction.

I often hear from CUSLAR Newsletter readers "But, what can we do?" In this case, a lot. Pick up a pen or get on the computer and write letters demanding that corporations take more responsibility for their actions that impact the environment. Examine your own consumption patterns and set an example for others. Come to a CUSLAR meeting and find out how you can do more. We meet every other Monday at 5pm in the Café in Anabel Taylor Hall starting September 7. I hope to see you there.

- Erin Sheehan



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](mailto:cuslar@cornell.edu) The CUSLAR Newsletter is published three times a year.

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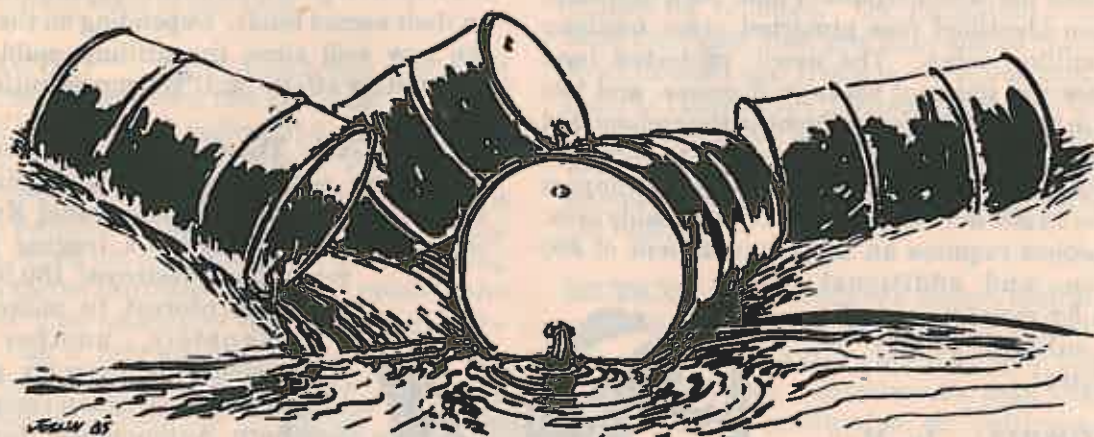
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Focus on Ecuador

# Black Gold!

***The insatiable appetite for oil in developed nations leads to global environmental and cultural destruction***



**D**espite the world's growing preoccupation about the burning of fossil fuels and resulting climate change, the Ecuadoran government is pressing ahead with plans to develop a field of heavy crude in a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in the country's Amazon

region. Of course, Ecuador is not alone in its rush to pump more oil. Most Latin American countries plan to increase production in the near future.

One major new project is the Ishpingo Tambococha Tiputini (ITT) field located

within Ecuador's Yasuni National Park, a UNESCO biosphere reserve. The 900,000 hectare park, located in the far northwest region of the country and close to the border with Peru and Colombia, is renowned worldwide for its high levels of biodiversity. Over 200 species of trees have been identified inside Yasuni and a recent scientific expedition has identified over

825 species of woody plants in only a two hectare area. The park also contains over 500 species of fish, 500 species of birds, and more than 100 species of mammals.

While the park is legally protected from exploitation of any kind, Perez Compac Company of Argentina and Elf Company of France are already drilling for and/or producing oil and impacting the ecosystem within park boundaries. The Argentinean company YPF is also producing oil in an area which was originally within the park before park boundaries were changed in order to

**Continued on pg. 21**

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# Eco-News Updates



**BRAZIL:** On April 29, President Fernando Henrique Cardoso vowed to set aside 62 million acres of Amazon rainforest by the year 2000, with the financial and technical assistance of the World Bank and the World Wildlife Fund. As a first step, Cardoso identified four protected areas totalling four million acres. The newly protected land includes two national parks in Roraima, and two areas in the Atlantic forest, home to the endangered golden lion tamarin. Cardoso pledged to introduce sustainable management, including low-impact logging on 200 million hectares of the set aside area. The project requires an initial investment of \$90 million, and additional funds for maintenance. So far only \$720,000 is committed.

**COLOMBIA:** In May, Occidental Petroleum announced that it would renounce its contract to exploit the Samoré block in return for new rights to a smaller portion of the area under more favorable contract terms. The deal is an attempt by Occidental to end a conflict with the indigenous U'Wa, who have threatened to commit mass suicide



if Occidental goes ahead with its plans to drill for oil on their sacred lands. Depending on the location of the new well sites, the drilling could still have devastating effects on U'Wa communities.

**NICARAGUA:** The Aleman government canceled the timber concession previously granted to a subsidiary of Korean multinational Kum Kyung, SOLCARSA. SOLCARSA's logging concession would have destroyed 150,000 acres of virgin rainforest to make plywood. Unfortunately, another forestry concession was recently granted to PLYNIC, a Nicaraguan company in the Southern Autonomous Region. The concession was granted without local approval. The land is claimed by indigenous groups and is in the protected area of Wawashan. President Aleman has imposed a five-year ban on the logging of mahogany and cedar due to the alarming deforestation rates of the past several years. Few resources or personnel, however, have been allocated to enforce the ban.

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**SURINAME:** In June the government of Suriname created the Central Suriname Wilderness Nature Reserve to protect more than 6,000 square miles of rainforest, almost ten percent of the nation's territory. Malaysian and Indonesian logging companies had been bidding to exploit the virgin forest, one of the few in the world still totally uninhabited. Private funding secured by Conservation International established a \$1 million trust to cover management costs of the newly protected area.

**CARRIBEAN:** According to a recent report by the World Resources Institute, almost two-thirds of the reefs in the Carribean are at risk, with about one-third at high risk. Sedimentation from upland deforestation, poor agricultural practices, coastal development, pollution and overfishing are major threats to many reefs in the area.

**NICARAGUA:** The Canadian mining conglomerate Greenstone has obtained a 15 year renewable concession to explore and extract gold in Chontales, as well as a vast area in the North Atlantic Autonomous Region. The concession spans 100 square kilometers. Greenstone's mining technique, open pit extraction, has a devastating impact on the environment because it involves the removal of vast quantities of surface soil. The company has a reforestation plan, but local residents claim the company is planting the quickest growing tree species without considering the native vegetation. The mine uses up to two tons of cyanide on a daily basis to process the gold. Past tests have shown leakage in the waterways and, despite Greenstone's assurances that high-tech chemical retention systems are in place, local residents fear leaks may reappear.



**PANAMA:** Panama's Legislative Assembly passed comprehensive environmental legislation on June 9, requiring environmental impact statements for all major projects such as mines and



road construction, and authorizing fines up to \$10 million for violators. The legislation comes just after the Santa Rosa gold mine spilled cyanide into local streams and rivers in Veraguas province on June 6. This was the third such spill from the mine. Thousands of fish were killed by the cyanide in an area where Ngobe indigenous and environmental groups have called for an end to mining activity in the region.

**MEXICO:** One of Mexico's largest multinational corporations, Grupo Pulsar, and the United States' International Paper Co. are planning eucalyptus plantations for pulp, paper and lumber production on indigenous and campesino lands in Chiapas. The venture will cover 100,000 acres with eucalyptus. Eucalyptus is notoriously greedy for water and soil nutrients. Residents fear that water resources and land fertility in the areas selected will be rapidly depleted.

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## Spotlight on Costa Rica

# An Ecological Haven?

***Costa Rica's reputation as an environmental paradise is endangered***

BY JOHN BURNETT

**R**icardo Rodriguez sits at a picnic table inside the national park he manages and watches the blue Pacific pounding the sickle-shaped beach. Nearby, a white-faced monkey searches for food scraps while an iguana lolls in the sun. Visitors awed by the natural

beauty of Manuel Antonio National Park and Costa Rica's other spectacular wilderness areas don't understand how much trouble the parks are in. Ricardo Rodriguez does.

Twenty-five years after Manuel Antonio was created, it is still only half paid for. Moreover, 17 percent of Costa Rica's national parks still belong to private landowners, who legally have the right to cut timber on their holdings.

Internal economic problems and government indifference have put the parks in peril, say critics. Costa Rica's national debt is devouring 25 cents of every dollar in the treasury. Foreign donations have begun to dry up as

international donors are taking their projects elsewhere. Interviews with more than two dozen conservationists, biologists and government officials reveal serious concerns that this nation is not living up to its own environmental rhetoric - either in supporting its famous park system or in halting deforestation.

"The government talks a lot about protected areas, biodiversity and

father of the Costa Rican park system after he helped create it in the 1970s. "I think politicians have overestimated what we are doing in conservation," says Julio Calvo, director of the respected Tropical Science Center in San Jose. "It's true we're preserving natural forest, but it's also true that we have not been able to stop deforestation or the pollution of our rivers."

Even the nation's chief administrator of the protected areas system complains that most of the time he feels like just another special interest begging for attention from the Costa Rican legislature. "The politicians have recognized

that national parks have attracted a lot of foreign currency because of ecotourism, and they use the environmental issue in every political campaign," says Carlos Manuel Rodriguez, who oversees the nation's

1.5 million acres of nature reserves. "But there is not the political will to really work to



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sustainable development, but the practice is not so good," says Mario Boza, considered the



resolve our problems."

Conservationists inside Costa Rica say that the lack of funding for national parks has reached crisis levels. "In some areas in those parks we find what we call empty forest,"



says Mario Boza. "You see the forest, but there are no animals. They were hunted. We cannot protect the area."

The lack of funding for park protection has caused a serious decline in patrols and guards to prevent poaching. "In Tortuguero, maybe one percent of the coastline is guarded," says Leslie du Tout, a South African sea turtle activist who lives in Costa Rica. "We walked about a mile and a half of the beach and found seven [endangered] leatherback [sea turtle] nests, and all of them had been robbed."

It's not that the parks cannot pay for themselves: they earned four million dollars last year in entrance and research fees. But Costa Rica's cash-poor central government has to raid these earnings in order to pay for other urgent national needs.

"There's not enough money for the roads, so the roads have potholes," says Amos Bien, director of the Association of Costa Rican Private Nature Preserves. "Everybody is protesting, so the government takes money from some things and puts it into



potholes. The schools are having problems, so the government makes a big effort there. Then the hospitals are having problems. Well, some of the national parks haven't been paid for. You can pay for the parks, but you have to take it from something else. And it goes around and around and around."

Costa Rica - a country smaller than West Virginia - has more bird species than the U.S. and Canada combined. To its credit, this nation has taken advantage of this extraordinary biodiversity by creating one of the most extensive protected-areas systems in the world. Eleven percent of its territory has been set aside for national parks; that is the equivalent of the U.S. declaring all of Texas and Oklahoma as nature preserves. Costa Rica accomplished this in the 1970s and 1980s, when coffee and cattle prices were good, international aid was generous, and the country could afford to buy up undeveloped wilderness.

Nature tourism has now become Costa Rica's richest industry, earning \$700 million last year, even surpassing bananas and coffee exports. Costa Rican conservationists hope the country realizes it will have to take better care of its renowned wilderness areas if it wants the tourists to keep coming.

In the 12 years he has been crisscrossing the Osa Peninsula as an air-taxi pilot and environmentalist, Alvaro Ramirez has noticed a dramatic change in the densely forested hills below. "Look!" he says, pointing to a brown stream bisecting the velvet green landscape. "This is one of the tributaries to the Rio

Tigre. This road is where the tractor goes up to cut wood. See it? It's a new road. Look there,

**The hilltops are checkered with clear-cuts that look like soccer fields...**

where they take out the wood. They're not supposed to cut there, it is too close to the river."

Through the windshield of his Cessna, we can see ahead of us the sumptuous forest canopy of Corcovado National Park, which is still protected from timber cutting. But directly below, loggers have been looting the forest reserve surrounding the park, which provides critical additional habitat.

The hilltops are checkered with clear-cuts that look like soccer fields; from them lead logging roads and "trails," as Ramirez calls them. We turn around and head for the airstrip in the trading center of Puerto Jimenez. Ramirez stares ahead, a look of resignation on his face. "They are clear-cutting the watersheds," he says.

The Osa Peninsula is one of the largest expanses of lowland tropical forest left in Central America. Jutting off the Pacific Coast just above Panama, the Osa is Costa Rica's poorest, most



Continued on Pg. 20



## Spotlight on Chile

# Indigenous, Environmentalists Vow Rough Water for Chile Dam



BY HOWARD LAFRANCHI

**T**he Bío-Bío River in central Chile runs through a breathtaking valley of jagged canyons, dense forests, fertile meadows, and snow-capped volcanoes. It also runs through

the ancestral lands of Nicolasa Quintreman, a Pehuenche Indian. Therein lies the final rub for engineers who for decades have felt their hearts quicken at the thrilling thought of damming up the Bío-Bío.

Next year, the Chilean energy company, Endesa, plans to begin construction of a huge, 570-megawatt hydroelectric dam just a few miles downstream from the land Ms. Quintreman says her family has owned for 500 years. The dam's reservoir is to flood the lands of 100 Pehuenche families, so Endesa is seeking to buy them out.

Nicolasa Quintreman has vowed to stop the proposed dam that would flood her ancestral lands. As she boils pine nuts and readies bread dough in

her traditional smoke-filled cooking hut, Quintreman says, "This is my land. They can offer me all the cows and other goodies they want for it. The only way I'll leave here is dead."

The standoff between Endesa and a handful of Pehuenche Indians like Quintreman is feeding a boiling controversy pitting Indian rights activists, environmentalists, alternative-energy advocates, and ecotourism promoters against the giant Endesa. On Endesa's side are government officials - including Chilean President Eduardo Frei, himself a hydraulic engineer - and businessmen who see projects like the Bío-Bío dam as indispensable elements in Chile's economic growth.

Plans to harness the Bío-Bío with as many as six dams have been on energy maps for many years. One dam was

completed in 1996 and is operating downstream from where the much larger Ralco dam is set to be running by 2002. Upon completion, Ralco will supply almost one-fifth of the energy needs for central Chile, including Santiago, where energy demand is doubling every decade.

"The energy generating power of water is the cheapest way for Chile to go," says Adolfo Ochoa, assistant manager of construction for Endesa in Pangué. In response to critics who say the dam is unnecessary since Chile began importing natural gas from Argentina, Mr. Ochoa says, "gas is an important part of [Chile's] energy mix, but that doesn't change the need for Ralco. This dam figures in all the energy supply calculations for the next ten years."

The political waters that Endesa is navigating are much more troubled than when it built the first dam. Since then, Chile has approved stricter environmental laws and new Indian rights legislation.

Environmentalists say

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the Ralco dam would not only silence a river but also a number of plant and animal species, including six species of fish unique to the Bío-Bío. They also insist that electricity from the Ralco dam, located about four hours by car from the Bío-Bío's mouth in Concepción, could be replaced by other, less-damaging sources of energy.

"I am interested in the environmental impact of this project, but it is also a fact that Ralco is anti-economic for Chile," says Juan Pablo Orrego, head of the Bío-Bío Action Group in Santiago. "Natural gas is just coming on, and thermal and solar power generation have hardly been touched."

Mr. Orrego has been battling the damming of the Bío-Bío since 1991, when he accompanied an ESPN TV rafting crew down the river. "We were just maneuvering through the area where the Pangue reservoir now sits when someone from ESPN in the raft said, 'And to think all this will soon be lost.' I didn't even know," he says - but he went back to Santiago and formed the action group. Last year, his efforts won him the prestigious Goldman Prize for international environmental action.



To those who say he would stop Chile's recent economic and social progress, Orrego says his battle is about giving Chile a more sustainable economic plan than the current model, based on exploiting natural resources. "Instead of using up our trees and fish and rivers, we need to think about growing through education, information, and services like ecotourism," he says.

Last March, a technical review board of Chile's National Environmental Commission recommended against the Ralco project. But then the commission's director was fired, and in June the board's negative decision was reversed.

Now the only thing standing in the way of the dam is Chile's Indigenous Law and the dozen Pehuenche families that remain opposed to the project. The law prohibits the selling of Indian lands, but does allow them to be traded for other land with the owner's consent.

Endesa has been working for two years on the relocation, spending more than \$20 million along the way. "We knew this would be a long process," says Endesa's Ochoa. "These Indians have lived with hundreds of years of deception and we have to pay the consequences of that history."

So far, about 80 families have accepted the offer - and many have also accepted company jobs building access roads for the new Indian communities. But along the Bío-Bío, some families who have accepted Endesa's offers are now rethinking. Promised tools and farm animals aren't showing up, they say, while others worry that the lands they

accepted higher up the river are snowed under much of the year.

Ochoa says Endesa has plenty of time - until Ralco's reservoir starts filling in 2001 - to persuade families of the

***"This is my land. They can offer me all the cows and other goodies they want for it. The only way I'll leave here is dead."***

company's good intentions. In the meantime, Ralco's holdouts are likely to force a Supreme Court showdown pitting Chile's Indigenous Law against the country's general electric service legislation, which permits expropriation in the interest of providing electricity for the general good.

Noting the importance of ancestral lands in Pehuenche culture, Orrego says the case "will be the final test. If the [electricity] law prevails, the Indian law is dead."

In any case, Endesa seems unlikely to persuade the Quintremans that flooding their lands is in their interest. Standing on a bluff above the foaming Bío-Bío, Quintreman's brother, Juan Henríque, says he remembers when only Pehuenches roamed the lands along the Bío-Bío, and his parents warned him that some day strangers would try to take their land. "They told me then not to give in," he says, "and I plan to follow their advice."

*Howard LaFranchi is a staff writer for Christian Science Monitor*



# Poisoning the People

***U.S. pesticide exports to Latin America reap huge corporate profits while sowing biological destruction***

BY JONATHAN MAWDSLEY

In 1962, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* brought to the attention of the American public the serious risks to human and environmental health posed by the indiscriminate and widespread use of pesticides. 36 years later, U.S. chemical companies continue to produce toxic pesticides for export.

Of the 2.3 billion pounds of pesticides exported by United States chemical companies from 1992 to 1996, over 46 million pounds were compounds currently banned by law in the United States. Over 33 million pounds of pesticides classified as "severely restricted" in the U.S. by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) were also exported during this period, as well as 12.7 million pounds of pesticides which have never been registered for use in the United States.

These chemicals are produced by chemical manufacturers solely for the export market, and most have never been subjected to testing by the EPA to determine whether

they pose health or environmental risks. Studies by the Food and Agriculture

Organization (FAO) of the United Nations have shown that the countries which use these chemicals have also neglected to perform adequate safety tests. These pesticides are regularly applied with little or no understanding of their effects on environmental or human health.

Between 1992 and 1994, 108.5 million pounds of hazardous pesticides were shipped directly to countries in Latin America - almost one

third of the United States' total exports of hazardous pesticides during that time. Countries receiving the largest quantities of hazardous pesticides worldwide included Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica and Guatemala.

Economic liberalization and structural adjustment policies imposed on Latin American countries by the World Bank and other lenders encourage the





spread of multinational agribusiness throughout the region. With agribusiness comes chemical fertilizers, giant monoculture plantations, and chemical pesticides. These pesticides are subject to fewer regulations and legal controls in Latin America than in the United States. Pesticides which are considered "restricted use" by the U.S. EPA are advertised to the general public in nearly two-thirds of Latin American countries.

The banana-growing industry is just one of many examples of the pesticide-intensive agriculture currently practiced in Latin America. The perfect yellow bananas appearing in U.S. super-markets have spent most of their lives surrounded by toxic, synthetic chemicals. Herbicides are used to kill competing vegetation in banana plantations, liberal doses of insecticides and nematicides kill insects and nematode worms which feed on banana plants, and



fungicides are pumped into plastic bags surrounding the developing bananas to prevent mold. Although plantations provide their workers with special clothing for applying pesticides, the clothing is hot and uncomfortable in tropical conditions and is frequently not worn.

Official statistics from Costa Rica's banana-growing regions indicate that an average of two workers per day are diagnosed with acute pesticide poisoning. Independent

research suggests that the toll may be much higher, especially when the long-term health problems caused by pesticide exposure are considered. Aerial spraying of pesticides in Costa Rica has also led to a sharp increase in the chemical contamination of the country's ground water sources.

These toxins come back to U.S. consumers who eat agricultural products grown using exported pesticides. In 1991, dangerous levels of the pesticide Aldicarb were found on bananas imported into the U.S.

**With agri-business comes chemical fertilizers, giant monoculture plantations, and chemical pesticides.**

from Latin America. Aldicarb is one of the most acutely toxic pesticides ever manufactured; ingestion of less than one milligram of Aldicarb per kilogram of adult body weight can lead to death in humans. After Aldicarb residues were discovered on bananas, chemical and fruit companies promised the EPA that they would cease the use of Aldicarb on bananas and voluntarily monitor levels of this toxic pesticide. Since then, however, Aldicarb exports by U.S. companies have exploded from 3,615 pounds in 1992 to 2,583,314 pounds in 1996.

*Jonathan Mawdsley is a graduate student in Entomology and the coordinator of the NY Student Environmental Action Coalition.*

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## Report from Chiapas

# The Bees Attempt to Return

BY PIERRE GINGERICH

**T**he southern Mexican state of Chiapas returned to the limelight last December 22 with the massacre of 45 unarmed indigenous refugees, mainly women and children,

camping in Acteal, a small highland town about 35 miles north of San Cristóbal de las Casas. Human rights groups laid the blame with paramilitary groups connected with the PRI (Mexico's ruling party), but also with the Public Security Police who stood by and refused to intervene.

Most media reports did not mention that the victims were members of The Bees (Las Abejas), a group of 4500 Tzotzil-speaking indigenous in Chenalhó Municipality with a radical Christian commitment to nonviolence. Though in agreement with Zapatista demands for democracy and indigenous rights, they believe Christ calls them categorically to reject violence in their struggle for justice.

I'm writing from Chiapas, where for the last seven weeks, I've been working with

Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) as we draw up a long-term project and develop ties with locally existing justice and peace groups (the term "Peace & Justice" has been out of vogue here ever since a paramilitary squad in the north of



the state took that name).

On June 25, five CPTers accompanied over 2000 Bees and supporters on what was supposed to be a pilgrimage of return for 850 of The Bees to two of their home communities - Yibeljoj and Los

Chorros. Los Chorros is the home of many of the paramilitary members involved in the massacre at Acteal, some of whom remain at large and armed. The Bees hoped that by relying on the strength of their openly disarmed status and on national and international accompaniment, the 850 could go home before the planting season ended.

Just hours before their scheduled departure, The Bees received new threats, including rumors that paramilitaries would try to capture Bishop Samuel Ruíz, who was scheduled to greet The Bees in Los Chorros. The paramilitaries hoped to use the Bishop as a hostage to be traded for the release of those paramilitary members imprisoned for the Acteal massacre.

Though the return was canceled, The Bees still staged a celebrative pilgrimage which took them halfway back to their homes. Hundreds of singing children led the way. Women and men walked in three lines stretching about half a mile. The group waved their white peace flags together while a truck full of musicians sang to an accordion and guitars. Dozens of



journalists, priests, nuns, and internationals went with them. The Bees were also supported by people world-wide praying and fasting for their return. At noon, the marchers prayed and protested in a rally by the turnoff to the two towns, beside the largest of the region's many military bases. The army and police were almost absent, except for a few officers taking photos of the foreigners in the crowd.

While the non-return was a disappointment for The Bees, it was also a public relations failure for the PRI government. They tried to take credit for arranging the return and had claimed that it represented the resolution of the refugee problem in Chiapas.

Zapatista-identified civilian refugees, unlike many Bees, are not eager to return, in part because they have access to greater material aid to make their refugee status tolerable. They face the same dangers from paramilitaries as The Bees, and have insisted that their return must be preceded by demilitarization and disarmament of paramilitaries, as well as by restitution for the houses, crops, and belongings which the military and paramilitaries have destroyed or stolen.

When the return fell through, the governor decried



## JUST IN...AUTHOR DETAINED!!!

On July 22, Pierre Gingerich, Cliff Kindy and Lynn Stoltzfuch were returning from a worship service in Acteal when they were stopped by the military at a checkpoint. Immigration authorities issued Kindy and Gingerich citations commanding them to appear at a hearing on July 27. These citation hearings have often been a step toward outright expulsion of foreigners or toward visas allowing the recipients a very limited amount of time (sometimes only one day) to leave the country.

On July 28, Gingerich and Kindy appeared before the immigration authorities at San Cristobal de Las Casas in Chiapas. They had been grilled for three hours the previous day by the authorities to determine whether their presence in Chiapas fell within the boundaries of activities permitted on a tourist visa and told to return for the verdict on the following day. When Kindy and Gingerich arrived at the Immigration office in San Cristobal, they noticed that the officer in charge had a stack of faxes on his desk, to which he referred frequently in the course of the conversation. According to Kindy, the officer told them, "You have some pretty good friends," (referring to CPT and CUSLAR supporters as well as government representatives who sent faxes or inquired into the case.)

Kindy and Gingerich left the meeting with no new restrictions on their visas. Gingerich attributes the "kid glove" treatment they received to several factors, citing the faxes sent by supporters and the interest of several Members of Congress. Gingerich also noted the presence at the hearing of an Associated Press reporter, and the negative publicity surrounding the recent expulsion of Peter Brown, a school teacher involved in a school construction project in Zapatista territory.

The Bees' decision as a political maneuver that ignored the "open arms" of their comrades in Los Chorros welcoming them to return. The Bees on the other hand, moved toward the Zapatista position that the conditions for a return simply do not exist, and that it is time to dedicate more energy toward improving the conditions in their refugee camps, where many shelters have only felt paper for roofs and walls.

No new date has been set for the return of The Bees. Returning or not, the determination of these pacifists is anything but passive: "[W]e will continue to resist," they write. "If the government of Zedillo and Albores wants to help us, then let them halt their military offensives, let them respect the indigenous people, because we're fed up with the death and repression unleashed against us."

*Pierre Gingerich is a member of the Ithaca Catholic Worker Community and CUSLAR*



# Bishop Juan Jose Gerardi:



## Martyr for Truth

BY DAN FIRESIDE

**O**n April 24, before a crowd of 30,000 supporters gathered in Guatemala City's colonial cathedral, Bishop Juan Jose Gerardi ceremonially presented copies of a church report on Guatemala's civil war to representatives of victims of human rights abuses.

"It is painful to recognize the truth," said Bishop Gerardi, "but it is without a doubt a highly liberating act." Less than 48 hours after the ceremony, Bishop Gerardi was found brutally murdered in his garage. Gerardi's eyes, ears and mouth had been smashed over thirty times with a cement block. This pattern of wounds darkly echoes the imagery on the report's publicity materials, representing the struggle of the

Guatemalan people to overcome their fear to see, hear and speak the truth of human rights abuses.

"The message is very clear," said one prominent human rights activist. "If they can kill a Bishop, no one is safe in this country."

The Church report was the result of an unprecedented four year human rights undertaking by the Guatemalan Archbishop's office known as the

Project for the Recovery of the Historic Memory. The REMHI project, as it is known in Spanish, is a ground breaking non-governmental effort to document the horrific nature of Guatemala's 36-year civil war in an effort to bring the country to the point of reconciliation and healing. The report is the culmination of over 6,000 testimonies given by victims of human rights abuses and massacres, as well as several hundred given by soldiers and paramilitary groups that committed abuses.

The 1,600 page final report documents not only specific cases of abuse, including over 400 massacres and the deaths of over 150,000 civilians, but also focuses on the long-



range political, social and psychological effects that the army's terror campaign had on Guatemala's traditionally close-knit indigenous communities.

When the police arrived at the Bishop's residence, they instructed the priests to wash the crime scene with water hoses, destroying most of the forensic evidence. The fact that the Bishop's watch and other valuables were not stolen ruled out robbery as a motive. Neighbors reported that suspicious black cars with darkened windows had been circling the neighborhood in the days before the murder. Jaguar Justiciero (Avenging Jaguar) a notorious paramilitary group responsible for a series of recent political assassinations, issued a communique claiming responsibility for the Bishop's murder and warned other human rights workers to flee the country or face a similar fate.

Despite signs pointing to the involvement of active or retired military officers in the murder, the police are pursuing the crime as a simple robbery gone awry. Shortly after the murder, police detained a homeless man on suspicion of involvement in the murder. Although Carlos Veilman has an alibi, is fully a foot shorter than Bishop Gerardi and has a deformed arm that would make it impossible for him to lift the murder weapon, he remains the government's prime suspect.

In recent weeks several high-ranking army officials and spokesmen have publicly stated their belief that Gerardi's murder was the result of a homosexual affair between the bishop and a priest. As REMHI director Edgar Gutierrez wrote in a recent newspaper editorial, military murders and abuses are often accompanied by an attempt to destroy the victim's reputation within the community.

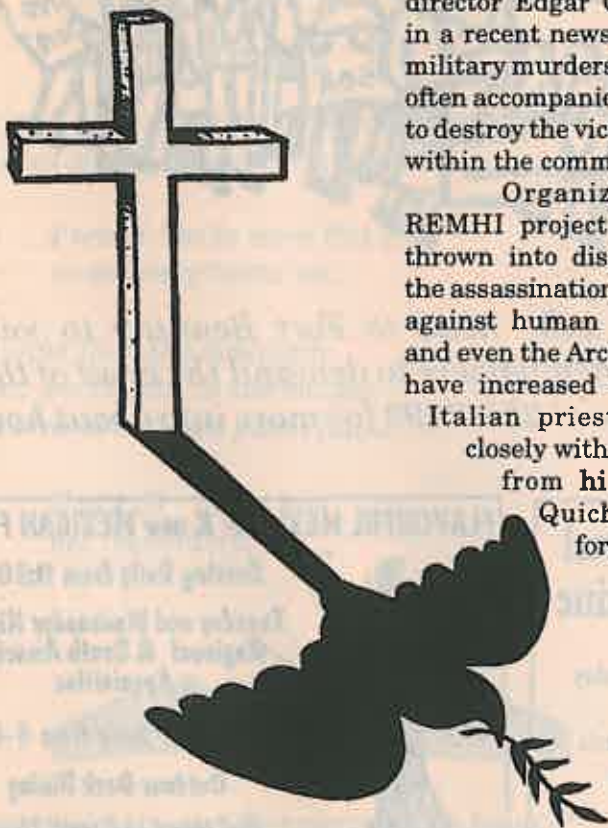
Organizers at the REMHI project were initially thrown into disarray following the assassination. Death threats against human rights workers and even the Archbishop himself have increased markedly. An Italian priest who worked closely with Bishop Gerardi from his base in the Quiche region was forced to flee the

***"The message is very clear... If they can kill a Bishop, no one is safe in this country."***

country after being followed for several days by men in cars with darkened windows.

Despite the climate of fear in the wake of Gerardi's murder, REMHI organizers are moving forward with the final stage of the project - giving back to the people of Guatemala a sense of their own history during their country's darkest moments. In addition to publishing copies of the complete report, REMHI has given away over 50,000 copies of a shorter summary as a newspaper insert. Organizers are also preparing a series of radio, television and theater programs to reach the 50 percent of the population that cannot read. Permanent memorials and monuments to victims of the war have been erected in front of the National Cathedral and throughout the countryside at massacre sites.

"To the victims of the war we are working to give back their history and their dignity," said REMHI staffer Graciela Azmitia. "To the victimizers our hope is to bring them to the point where they can accept responsibility for the acts they have committed and ask their victims for forgiveness. Only then will Guatemalans truly break from our past and build peace."



*Dan Fireside currently lives and works in Guatemala with a US based funding agency, Guatemala Partners. He was Coordinator of CUSLAR from 1992-1996.*





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# CUSLAR's Poetry Page

## THE SWALLOW

*The enormous relief we feel  
as we look at the distant mountains,  
watch the flight of a swallow  
or listen to the talk  
of the wind in the ash trees,  
comes of touching - for a moment -  
as though we were of the same family,  
beings beyond number  
that are nothing but what they are  
and have no wish - whatever -  
to be any different.*



## GOOD WISHES

*The grey smoke rises from beyond the window:  
a rusted sun dissipates the last doubts.*

*I would like to leave this city  
in search of better air.*

*The wind from the mountain  
closes the flowers on the boughs  
and several withered petals fall...*

*That's all - better air -  
not immorality.*



All poems and translations excerpted from *Dawn of the Senses: Selected Poems of Alberto Blanco*, edited by Juvenal Acosta, City Lights Books, 1995.

FALL 1998

## LA GOLONDRINA

*El enorme alivio que sentimos  
al contemplar los montes a lo lejos,  
al ver el vuelo de una golondrina  
o al escuchar la conversación  
del viento con los fresnos,  
es el de estar - por un instante -  
en contacto real, hermanados  
con una Infinidad de seres  
que no son otra cosa que lo que son  
y que no desean - en lo absoluto -  
ser de ninguna otra manera.*

*-Alberto Blanco*

## BUENOS DESEOS

*Se levanta el humo gris tras la ventana:  
un sol oxidado disipa las últimas dudas.*

*Quisiera dejar esta ciudad  
en busca de mejores aires.*

*El viento de la montaña  
cierra las flores en las ramas  
y algunos pétalos marchitos caen...*

*Sólo eso - mejor aire -  
no la Inmoralidad.*

*-Alberto Blanco*



## Colombia Update

# War On Drugs Or War On The Earth?

BY JEFF VOGT

**T**he war on drugs in Colombia continues to take the form of a war on the Colombian people and on the environment. After years of threats of decertification and economic

sanctions, the United States has convinced Colombia to use the powerful defoliant tebuthiuron in aerial spraying operations aimed at coca leaf eradication.

Tebuthiuron, marketed as "Spike," is an extremely potent and highly water soluble herbicide. It is so strong that just a few granules placed in one area can kill large trees several yards away. **Spike** not only destroys the coca plant, but also contaminates the ground-water and destroys legal subsistence crops.

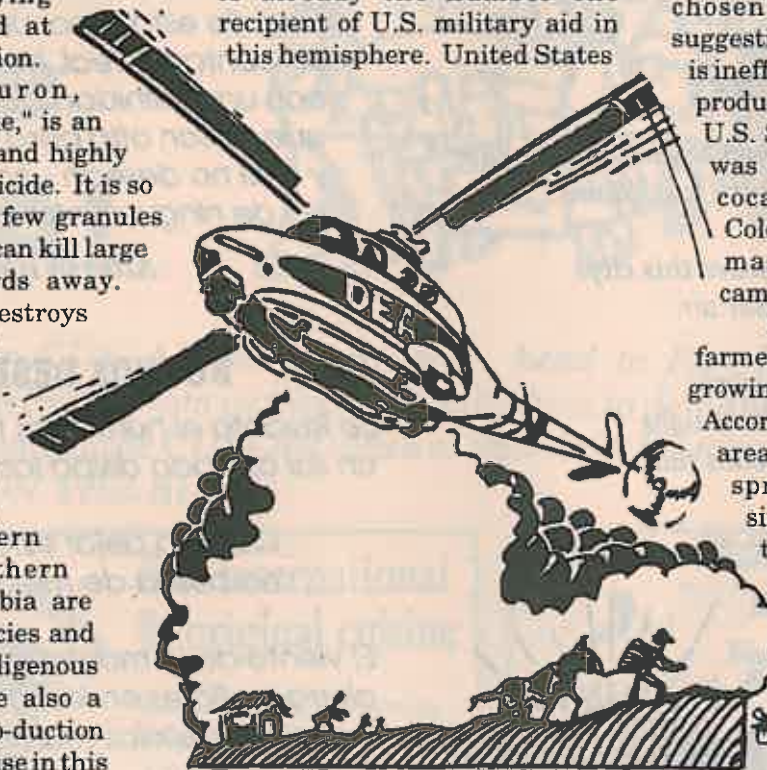
The eastern plains and northern Amazon of Colombia are rich in unique species and inhabited by 27 indigenous groups. They are also a main coca leaf production center. Herbicide use in this area will pollute rivers and render the land useless.

The Clinton administration claims that with Colombia's

election of a new President, U.S. military support to Colombia may rise indefinitely. Colombia is already the number one recipient of U.S. military aid in this hemisphere. United States

Among other things, these funds will purchase helicopters and herbicides, including Spike, which will be sprayed on thousands of peasant coca producers, regardless of the consequences on human health and the environment. Mr. McCaffrey has apparently chosen to ignore evidence suggesting that aerial spraying is ineffective in combatting coca production. According to the U.S. State Department, there was a 32 percent increase in coca leaf production in Colombia last year, despite massive spraying campaigns.

Many Colombian farmers rely on income from growing coca for their survival. According to residents of the area, when their crops are sprayed small growers simply retreat further into the Amazon to cultivate new fields rather than taking up a new crop. This contributes to further destruction of the fragile Amazon ecosystem.



drug czar Barry McCaffrey plans to send \$150 million of military assistance to Colombia this year.

*Jeff Vogt is a CUSLAR member and a Cornell Law Student.*



# The Second Cuban Revolution: Sustainable Agriculture

BY CHRISTINE LARKIN

**W**ith the collapse of the socialist block in 1989-90, Cuba lost over 75 percent of its supply of fertilizers and pesticides and suffered massive fuel and machinery part shortages. In response, Cuba devoted research to devising new ways to reduce the use of heavy machinery, chemical fertilizers and pesticides while maintaining productivity. This quest has resulted in an exciting new alliance between upstate NY farmers and Cuban farmers.

Northland Sheep Dairy in Marathon, NY has been working closely with Cuban farmers to find new methods of organic food cultivation. One particularly hopeful method involves a project which will introduce dairy sheep to the island. Karl North, the project's founder, was inspired by a Spring 1996 visit to Cuba sponsored by the Institute for Food and Development and Policy: FOOD FIRST. North hopes to improve Cuban self sufficiency in fertilizer, increase Cuban production of protein foods and create products saleable in tourist markets to provide foreign exchange.

Because two-thirds of Cuban soil is classified as having low or very low productive

capacity, increasing soil productivity is a top priority.

Cuba has experimented with the use of cattle as part of a soil building regime. As part of FOOD FIRST's tour of the Cuban



agricultural revolution, North observed an innovative project which demonstrated the efficiency of a cattle-based system. The use of intensive grazing and manure management paralleled North's

work at his sheep dairy.

The goal of the project is to create an experimental model of a small-scale integrated farm in Cuba. The model farm will use practices such as plant and animal rotations to make better use of soil nutrients and provide pest control, and innovative fertilizer production and usage techniques.

North's plan includes an annual farmer internship exchange between Northland Sheep Dairy and the Estacion Experimental Ovino-Caprino in Cuba. The exchange is sponsored by the Asociacion Cubana de Agricultura Organica in Cuba and FOOD FIRST in the U.S.

North is excited about the prospect of combining the experience of Cuban farmers with holistic, grass-based agroecosystems involving cows, together with his own experience with sheep and draft horses. If the model farm and the farmer exchange are successful, North and his counterparts in Cuba plan to lay the groundwork for more sheep dairy farms throughout Cuba.

*Christine Larkin is a CUSLAR member and an intern on an organic farm.*



# Costa Rica...

*Continued from page 7*

remote - and in biological terms - its wildest province. Down here, jaguars still come out on the beach to hunt. Scarlet macaws and toucans are as common as sparrows. It is home to the world's largest pit viper, the bushmaster - an eight-foot monster they call *matabuey*, ox killer in Spanish. On the Osa, the forest canopy rises taller than anywhere else in Costa Rica owing to the abundant rainfall.

Consumers certainly benefit from the giant hardwoods waiting their turn at the sawmill. In the aisles of Home Depot we find them as inexpensive doors, banisters, and floor boards. But environmentalists on the Osa rarely see the end product. They see what is left behind.

"We are standing right here by the banks of this river right now looking at the erosion. This water is chocolate brown," says a Greenpeace activist named Joel Stewart, who lives on the Osa when he is not at sea working as captain of the organization's ship, the Rainbow Warrior. He is looking at a muddy torrent that drains an upland region that has been heavily logged recently.

"One thing that bothers me a lot is the last coral reef in the

Golfo Dulce region," says Stewart, referring to the body of water that separates the Osa Peninsula from the mainland. "It is dying because of the sedimentation. You go out and dive on this reef and it is covered with silt, which is choking it to death. Other reefs around the gulf have already died because of sedimentation."

Stewart says Costa Rica is hypocritical if it continues to promote itself internationally as an environmental haven. It is "only going to preserve what is in the parks as a type of biological zoo and allow everything else to be cut." While conservationists were setting aside some forestland, cattle ranchers were mowing it down elsewhere, giving Costa Rica one of the highest rates of deforestation in the Americas. Here, as elsewhere in the region, government policies rewarded landowners for converting forest into what was considered "productive" land - namely, cattle ranches. Today, almost all the virgin forest outside national parks is gone, or going fast.

A new forestry law passed last year by the Costa Rican parliament includes innovative economic incentives

for landowners to preserve these fast-disappearing woodlands. But another section of the same law, reportedly crafted by the timber industry, encourages deforestation.

"Unfortunately, we have a new forestry law that does not benefit us. On the contrary, it has made the problem worse," says Cecelia Solano of the Association for the Defense of Natural Resources of the Osa. "The new law has been a disgrace for this country, for the forests, and for those of us responsible for conserving for the next generation."

**U**nder the old law, landowners had to request timber-cutting permits from federal forestry engineers in San Jose. But the procedure was slow and riddled with corruption. To decentralize the permit process, lawmakers took away the federal authority and split it between the municipalities and private forestry engineers. Critics say the result has been chaos: the municipalities are handing out permits, though they have no experience in forest management, and the private foresters, known in Spanish as *regentes*, are just as corrupt as the federal foresters were.

A former national park guard, who requested his name not be used, has come to a riverbank deep in the Osa, to show what he considers proof of how *regentes* abuse their

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authority. "In the Osa, the permits appear to be legal. But they are done under the table," he says. "We are standing within 10 meters of the Rio Tigre, where it is illegal to cut trees, and we can see the stumps of a Guanacaste tree and a Guallabon tree that have been cut. These *regentes* sell these management plans for bribes, and they allow the illegal extraction of wood."

The government acknowledges the new forestry law has caused problems. Environmental Minister Rene Castro says his office has filed charges against several private foresters. "We know there are abuses and we have sent the accused *regentes* to the tribunals," he says, in an interview in his office in San

Jose. "But part of the complaints about illegal tree felling is simply ignorance. There will always be trucks carrying logs out of the Osa, because some have permits. There is a mixture of valid and invalid complaints."

While the government defends itself and environmentalists fume, small landowners in the Osa applaud the new rules, which have made it easier for them to cut and sell timber.

"There is a lot of poverty here. Old friends I grew up with have left their farms because they couldn't make it, because of conservation," says Freddy Gonzalez, who lives near the community of Rio Nuevo, in the heart of the Osa Peninsula. "We have to sell a little wood to

survive. Let me tell you something, mister. The monkeys can eat fruit but human beings cannot. We have more needs."

The situation has quieted for the moment on the Osa Peninsula. Last year, as public outcry and international attention intensified, Environment Minister Rene Castro imposed a temporary timber-cutting ban in the Osa and created a commission to investigate reports of illegal logging. Environmentalists have cautiously praised the moratorium, although they are worried what will happen when it expires.

*John Burnett is a correspondent for National Public Radio*

## Black Gold...

*Continued from page 3*

facilitate oil production. Meanwhile, the new project is expected to bring in another large oil company (possibly Shell) together with Petroecuador.

Pressure to develop the field is high. Ecuador's overwhelming external debt, (45 percent of the state budget goes to debt interest payments,) plus pressure from international organizations such as the Multilateral Development Bank and the International Monetary Fund means that politicians are not receptive to calls to protect the environment at the expense of the economy. In fact, the ITT project, which would also be linked to a smaller field in the neighboring Cuyabeno animal reserve, is being hailed as a way to save Petroecuador. The state

oil company is virtually bankrupt due to use of its internal resources for other government priorities.

Drilling in the middle of the park will undoubtedly cause extensive damage in all phases of exploration and production. Apart from the almost inevitable spills and other types of accidents, even the most "ecologically sound" production methods still produce a barrel of liquid toxic waste for every barrel of oil produced. Other impacts include the deforestation associated with construction of pipelines, heliports and drilling platforms, not to mention roads.

Damage to the flora and fauna is not the only issue in Yasuni. The park is also home to the Huaorani, an ethnic



minority, who have already fallen victim to the impacts of prior intrusion into their lands. Huaorani population has fallen from over 25,000 when contact was first made, to around 3,000 today. The ITT field has already undergone approximately 1,750 kms of seismic exploration. If it is developed, the Huaorani will suffer further intrusions and damage to their already threatened culture.



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