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A. Rostgaard, Christ Guerrillero
Cuban Poster Project 1969

Pope John Paul II in Cuba, January, 1998

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The Island Paradise...

With Cuba in the news nearly every day, I decided to slip in some Cuba stories that may not have made it into your daily paper or the nightly news...

- According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Cuba is the top country in the world with regard to vaccinations. WHO analyzed the health situation of 214 countries and territories in 1997, finding that Cuba is number one in vaccinations against polio, diphtheria, neonatal tetanus, and measles.

- Supermodel Naomi Campbell spent 90 minutes with Fidel Castro while visiting Cuba for a photo shoot in Havana. According to the Gramma International, Naomi Campbell compared Castro to Nelson Mandela, saying, "Fidel Castro and Nelson Mandela are two sources of inspiration for me. Two men who fought for the same cause, a just cause. Two intelligent, impressive men... It is a great pleasure to be in Cuba. I've enjoyed myself and I plan to come back." Campbell described the Cuban people as warm, welcoming and hospitable.

- According to People Magazine, Martha Stewart visited Cuba during the Pope's visit and came away with a somewhat different perspective. "I don't think Castro really spoke to anybody other than the Pope. I was very disappointed. There were no receptions and very little in the way of personal contact... It was more depressing than I thought it would be, and the people were more unhappy than I thought they would be. I can't believe that one person could destroy an island paradise. Castro has done a terrible disservice to an entire country."

- More than half of the Cuban scholars and professionals invited to attend a conference at the University of California in Berkeley in March were denied visas by the U.S. State Department. The conference, entitled "Dialogue with Cuba," had scheduled panels on health care, economic development, religion, education, biotechnology and filmmaking. Among the Cubans denied visas were former Olympic track star Alberto Juantorena, who now serves as the Vice President of the National Sports Institute and Cuban Olympic Committee; and Sergio Arce, a Presbyterian theologian and Secretary General of the Latin American and Caribbean Christian Conference on Peace.

- A group of ten Cuban doctors will provide advisory services in Ukraine for the treatment of children affected by the Chernobyl nuclear accident. Cuba has provided free medical care on the island for nearly 18,000 Chernobyl victims, mostly children. The doctors in Ukraine examine and select children to be sent to Cuba. There are still several hundred children receiving treatment in Cuba at this time.

- Erin Sheehan

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The Committee on U.S.-Latin American Relations (CUSLR) 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 CUSLR 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.

CUSLR 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 CUSLR office at (607) 255-7293. Articles and letters to the editor should be sent to: CUSLR, G-29 Anabel Taylor Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853. You can also email us at: cusrar@cornell.edu

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"Eyes of the World"

BY JIM VEEDEER

In response to the December 22 massacre of 45 unarmed Indians in the village of Acteal, the Mexican government has launched a public relations campaign against international human rights observers who come to Chiapas to be “the eyes of the world.”

Over the last two months, various government officials, including President Zedillo, have warned about the violation of Mexico’s sovereignty by foreigners implanting “foreign ideologies” into “our Indians.” Relief workers fear that the government’s campaign could be giving a green light to acts of violence against foreigners.

Massive Deportations

The Mexican government deported three U.S. citizens in February: Mary Darlington, Robert Schweitzer, and Tom Hansen. In a statement to the N.Y. Times after his return to the U.S., Schweitzer said that the Mexican government wants to blame foreigners for the failures of peace policies in Chiapas because foreigners are the only ones left to blame.

According to Tom Hansen, a former director of Pastors for Peace, high-level Mexican government officials have said that he was expelled because he had been an unauthorized observer in the peace talks in 1996 between the government and the Zapatistas, and because he participated in August of 1996 Intercontinental Meeting against Neoliberalism. Hansen pointed out that on both occasions he had been accredited as an international observer from the Mexican group CONAI. The system of accreditation used for hundreds of international observers at these two events was agreed upon at the San Andres peace negotiations by both the Zapatistas and the Mexican government.

Hansen has charged that while in custody his requests to be allowed to phone the US embassy were repeatedly denied. Hansen was in Chiapas as director of the Youth Media Project, which donates video equipment to poor indigenous communities and teaches young people how to use the equipment to document human rights violations.

The U.S. Army School of the Americas graduated 315 Mexican officers in 1997, one third of the graduating class.

Hundreds of volunteers from various countries who maintain a human rights watch in “Civilian Peace Camps” in pro-

Continued on pg. 20
ARGENTINA: President Carlos Saul Menem fired Navy Captain Alfredo Astiz on January 23. According to Menem, "his [Astiz] irresponsible attitude provoked a very serious situation that affected the Navy and other institutions." The move came amid outrage caused by an interview with Astiz published in January by the weekly Tres Puntos. In the interview, Astiz commented on the repression by the nation's 1976-1983 military dictatorship, saying that he was unrepentant about his role and that he would have tortured if asked to do so. He added that he was best prepared to kill a politician or a journalist.

Astiz was charged for human rights violations but had enjoyed protection under 1987 amnesty laws which cleared more than 1,000 members of the military. Astiz can be charged with abducting children, which the amnesty does not cover. He has admitted that newborn babies were kidnapped.

Human-rights leaders are urging a repeal of the amnesty laws so that "Dirty War" criminals can be prosecuted. Some legislators have backed the proposed repeal, but the government has ruled it out. Representative Graciela Fernandez Meijide, who lost a son during the dictatorship, said that revoking the laws was not feasible, while Interior Minister Carlos Corach warned that such an action would amount to a coup against the rule of law.

NICAGUAGUA: An estimated 30 members of the Andres Castro United Front (FUAC), an armed band of former Sandanista soldiers, (rearmados), broke off negotiations with the government and attacked three farms in the city of Matagalpa in early January. FUAC signed an accord in December with the Arnoldo Aleman government that promised land, credit and government help in exchange for the surrender of arms. After the signing, 82 FUAC members disarmed in designated free zones and arrested 30 who had been occupying the mill since December 18. The mill workers had demanded the rehiring of 19 workers fired in 1996, claiming that administrators have refused to respect a no-layoff provision of the mill's 1995 privatization.
zones. The government says it then began giving farmland and assistance to demobilized FUAC members following a December 19 deadline for full demobilization. FUAC says, however, that the government has not kept its end of the bargain. Demonstrating internal dispute, 150 rearmados refused to disarm in the designated community of Labu, Zelaya. On the accord deadline, the FUAC factions confronted one another.

PANAMA: On January 15, 300 unemployed Colon residents staged a protest at the main gates of the Colon Free Zone, a tariff-free international manufacturing and business zone. Police stood guard to prevent the protesters from entering the zone, which is protected by barbed-wire fences. The protesters demanded that zone officials fulfill a promise to generate 5,000 jobs for Colon residents.

On January 20, anti-riot police arrested 13 participants in protests led by construction workers and the Union of Construction and Similar Workers (SUNTRACS). The workers were protesting unfair firings and contract violations by a construction company. The next day, 100 SUNTRACS members, supported by Colon teachers and Colon Unemployed Movement leaders, protested in a march ending in front of the Colon municipal building. While there were no incidents or arrests at the protest, National Police agents raided SUNTRACS headquarters a half hour later, arresting 12 union leaders and confiscating three SUNTRACS vehicles. A judge found the SUNTRACS detainees guilty of disrespecting authority and obstructing a public thoroughfare, sentencing them to five days in prison.

BOLIVIA: Promising economic alternatives to some 40,000 families who depend on coca production for their livelihood, the government has launched an ambitious plan to eradicate all coca plantations by 2002. The plan will gradually eliminate monetary compensation to individual farmers for voluntary eradication, substituting instead incrementally decreasing community development payments that will decrease until 2002. At that time all remaining plantations will be forcefully destroyed without compensation. Leaders of the coca-growing campesinos, the country's most active and militant political force, immediately rejected the plan.

ECUADOR: Student and labor protests against hikes in gasoline prices and public transportation fares implemented on January 1 have intensified. At least two officers were injured when anti-riot police confronted some 500 demonstrators with tear gas on January 8 during a Unitary Workers Front and Popular Front protest. Numerous protests occurred simultaneously in several major cities and provinces.

Briefs compiled by Guillermo Proano from Connection to the Americas, Latin America Press and PeaceNet. Guillermo is a CUSLAR member.
An Historic Visit

Pope John Paul II conducts the first Papal visit since the Revolution

BY CRIS MCCONKEY

For five days in January, people of all faiths focused attention on Cuba, as Pope John Paul II made the first papal voyage to the island since the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959.

An Associated Press quote about Fidel Castro and the Pope as "ideological opponents" notwithstanding, the social concerns of the Pope are embodied in the successes of the Cuban revolution, particularly in the areas of health care, education and social services for the poor. The Church, however, has not always recognized the revolution's social reforms.

Prior to 1959, the clergy paid little or no attention to the Cuban poor. The Church instead catered to the wealthy, the landowners and the upper class of Cuban society. In pre-revolutionary Cuba, 48 percent of rural dwellers were illiterate, 53 percent had no electricity and 97 percent had no running water. Was the Church performing charitable operations for the rural dwellers at this time? No. Was it offering Mass for poor people in the rural areas? No. 88 percent of the rural population claimed not to attend Mass, and 53 percent claimed never to have seen a priest. The church kept busy by operating 200 elite, primarily private, Catholic schools. Social justice did not concern most Cuban priests at the time; a majority were Spanish supporters of the fascist Franco regime.

After Castro gained power in 1959, the Church initially backed the new regime, as the Church had supported the regimes of Batista, Grau and Machado in the past. As the revolutionary government in Cuba implemented reforms directed at alleviating the plight of the poor, including sweeping land redistribution, wealthy landowners expressed disapproval for such reforms. The Church quickly followed the lead of the rich, and in 1959, Cuban bishops issued an anti-revolution, anti-communist pastoral.

By 1960, some Cuban Church officials openly encouraged armed counterrevolution and advocated a U.S. military invasion of the island. When the Bay of Pigs Invasion took place on April 17, 1961, three Spanish priests were among the U.S.-sponsored forces.
From the horse's mouth...

Castro's Welcoming Speech:

"...Your Holiness, we think like you on many important contemporary world issues, and that is a source of great satisfaction to us. On other matters, our opinions differ, but we pay respectful homage to the deep conviction with which you defend your ideas.

What can we offer you in Cuba, Your Holiness? A people with fewer inequalities, fewer unprotected citizens, fewer children without schools, fewer sick people without hospitals, more teachers and more doctors per inhabitant than any other country in the world visited by Your Holiness; an educated people to whom you can speak with all the liberty you wish, and with the security that these people possess talent, a high political culture, deep convictions, absolute confidence in its ideas and all the awareness and respect in the world to listen to you. There is no country better equipped to understand your felicitous idea, such as we understand it and so similar to what we preach, that the equitable distribution of wealth and solidarity among human beings and peoples must be globalized. Welcome to Cuba."

Castro's Farewell Speech:

It was cruelly unjust that your pastoral journey should have been associated with the poor-spirited hope of destroying the noble objectives and the independence of a small country, blockaded and subjected to a veritable economic war for almost 40 years. Your Holiness, Cuba, like a new and one thousand times smaller David, is currently confronting the greatest power in history, and, with the same sling of Biblical times, is fighting for its survival against a mammoth Goliath of the nuclear age who is trying to prevent our development and bring us to our knees through hunger and through disease.

I am moved by Your Holiness' efforts on behalf of a more just world. States will disappear; peoples will come to constitute one single human family. If the globalization of that solidarity you proclaim is extended throughout the Earth, and the abundance of wealth that humans are able to produce with their skills and their work are equitably shared among all human beings currently inhabiting the planet, a world without hunger or poverty could really be created for them; a world without oppression or exploitation, without humiliation or contempt, without injustice or inequalities, where they could live with full moral and material dignity, in genuine liberty. That would be the most just world! Your ideas on evangelization and ecumenism would not be in contradiction with such a world.

For the honor of your visit, for all your expressions of affection for Cubans, for all your words, even those with which I might disagree, in the name of all the people of Cuba, Your Holiness, I thank you.

*Excerpted from the Granma International*

A final highlight:

As CNN concluded their coverage of the mass in Havana, they had time to interview one Cuban from the crowd. Choosing a man who was very enthusiastic about the Pope, the anchor's questions moved in a direction that assumed the man would not be equally enthusiastic about the Cuban Revolution. The man responded, "I love communism! I love socialism!" and went on to describe his version of the church and communism side-by-side.
Healing the Wounds

The quest for truth and justice in Guatemala continues more than a year after the peace accords were signed

BY HARVEY FIRESIDE

In December, 1996, the government of Alvaro Arzu and the armed rebels of the URNG (Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca) signed the Acuerdo de Paz Firmey Duradera (Agreement for a Firm and Lasting Peace).

The accord signaled the elite's decision that an end to the war would facilitate foreign trade and aid. The army agreed to reduce its forces by one third and to shift them from internal security to defense of the country's borders. The rebels wanted to put an end to casualties that, in a country of ten million, totalled over 100,000 killed, 40,000 missing, 250,000 forced into exile abroad, and a million displaced domestically.

The URNG leaders were aware that they lacked the unity and strength to win the war. They had, in fact, been defeated. Thus, they ignored the advice of Amnesty International and other human rights organizations, which had called for a full investigation of war crimes. The rebels settled for an ambiguous agreement that did not revoke the amnesty laws and pardons granted by the government to its security forces in 1984, but left in place a group created by the June 1994 accord. However, this Commission to Clarify the Violation of Human Rights has no means to prosecute individuals it finds responsible for human rights abuses during its one year term.

The concrete results of the peace accords are not yet fully in evidence, according to Edgar Gutierrez, the Coordinator of the Guatemalan Project for the Recovery of Historical Memory (REMHI). He says, "What is apparent, however, is that the people have been given a political space, which they can use to recover their dignity... In the 36 years of war in Guatemala, about five hundred mass graves appeared, most of them used by the army to dump the corpses of villagers." The so-called civil war pitted the ruling elites of ladinos against the 70 percent of the population consisting of Mayans. The war was so brutal, Mr. Gutierrez says that a recurrent theme he has found at public meetings is people saying that the army "ran after us as if we were dogs." The survivors then ask themselves, "What sin did we commit?"

"We went to the Catholic hierarchy... The bishops agreed to set up REMHI, and it has succeeded in making people who give their testimony feel as if they were undergoing a kind of resurrection," says Gutierrez. "A nun in the Peten region told us that we were dealing with an issue that still divides communities, where families were pitted against each other, and victims are living alongside victimizers. First we have to overcome the community's fear of speaking out. Then we have to reduce the general level of pain, not just take the testimony and leave."

The staff of six hundred REMHI interviewers was carefully chosen for its sensitivity in talking to local communities in their vernacular. The testimonies are being transcribed and translated at fourteen regional offices. "What we have built up," says Gutierrez, "is a chain based on trust. The animators were trained not to comment on what they were told, and each of them had to take a vow of..."
confidentiality." The seven thousand individual statements are being compiled into reports, and REMHII plans to issue the first this Spring.

"Our testimony is generally given by relatives of rural victims," says Gutierrez, "but there are cases where soldiers have also come forward. When one of the few Mayan officers in the army testified about a massacre committed by his troops, he was asked if he would repeat that statement publicly in a court. He said he was ready to do that. His motive was that, while he was serving in one corner of the country, another unit had come to his own village and killed most members of his family. We agreed that we had to protect this witness from forces that would silence him, so we helped him leave the country."

At this date, there is still not a single case in which anyone in the government or military elements of Guatemalan elite families are sharpening their concentration of wealth, and the army still uses extralegal and covert methods to define political problems. Although his professional training as an economist enables Gutierrez to gauge the seriousness of Guatemala's predicament, he remains guardedly optimistic. "As people recount their suffering," he says, "they have a chance to recuperate and to realize they have certain basic rights. A new generation will then be able to learn from them and to say, 'Never again' to future holocausts."

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*CUSLAR member Harvey Fireside attended the 1997 annual meeting of NISGUA, the Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala.*
Spotlight on Bolivia

Debt, Drugs, and the IMF

BY MARIE DENNIS

Maria and Rodriguez Pérez live with their six children in two small rooms on the outskirts of Cochabamba, one of Bolivia's larger cities. A small stream carries a trickle of water and sewage. The fields and roads of their barrio, once part of a lush agricultural area, are perpetually dusty. María sews pleats on traditional indigenous skirts by hand. She earns two bolivianos (about 40 cents) per skirt for a job that takes about 12 hours of uninterrupted sewing. She has been getting the same wage for three years from a contractor in the informal sector and says that if she doesn't do the sewing, there are many others who are willing to take her place. Last year Rodriguez, who has been unemployed for two years, went to Argentina on an unsuccessful search for work.

According to the International Fund for Agricultural Development, more than 90 percent of Bolivia's rural population lives in conditions of poverty—60 percent at a level of critical poverty. In the highlands and inter-American valleys, only seven percent of the dwellings have electricity; only ten percent have access to drinking water in or near the house; and 93 percent lack any basic sanitation. In rural areas illiteracy is still predominant. In the country as a whole, according to recent World Bank reports, nearly 70 percent of the population lives beneath the poverty line. The indigenous population, especially the women, bear the brunt of the social burden.

Bolivia's vulnerability as a heavily indebted country has narrowed its opportunity to choose policy options that would improve the quality of life of its poorest and most vulnerable communities. Once the decision was made that payments on the debt were a priority, Bolivia's ability to eliminate the misery endured by so many of its people was seriously hampered. When 30 percent or more of export income is committed to servicing the debt, resources left to address issues of endemic poverty are desperately limited.

From 1971 to 1981, during the Banzer regime, Bolivia's debt mushroomed from $700 million to almost $4 billion. According to Father Gregorio Iriarte, a Bolivian economist, nearly 72 percent of the loans

made to Bolivia during this time were redepósited in U.S. banks, often in personal accounts, and never used to benefit the Bolivian people. Debt has remained a problem for Bolivians ever since, despite repeated attempts to resolve it and despite over a decade of regular payments.

From 1982 to 1985, the democratically elected government of Hernán Siles Zuazo sought to preserve social services and food subsidies rather than make payments on debt to foreign creditors. These creditors, including the United States, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and commercial banks, reacted quickly, cutting Bolivia off from any new loans. The Siles government responded to the crisis by printing new money, and inflation skyrocketed to a rate of 23,560 percent a year—the highest in the world.

In 1985, the newly elected president, Víctor Paz Estenssoro, inherited a rapidly deteriorating economy. Shortages were widespread and huge arrears in debt service owed to international creditors had accumulated. In addition, Bolivian social indicators, which already were the worst in South America, continued to deteriorate.

Estenssoro removed restrictions on imports and exports; established a single, flexible exchange rate; froze public-sector wages for three months; removed fixed prices for most goods and services; gave state companies one month to present programs for downsizing staff; virtually eliminated workers’ benefits; and introduced “free contracting” to all firms, allowing management to hire and fire at will. Subsequent market-oriented economic reforms were designed to stimulate exports and encourage foreign and local investment. No apparent effort was made in the early days of adjustment to build a popular consensus on the shaping or timing of the reform. By 1988, inflation was reduced to 20 percent and payments made on the public debt had accumulated to almost $5 billion.

For the poorest Bolivians, this was a frustrating and largely painful process. Food and transportation subsidies were ended, social service and health care expenditures were drastically cut. Doctors, teachers, nurses, and other civil servants were laid off as government services were cut or eliminated. Thousands of miners, oil workers, and other professionals in nationalized state companies were fired to pave the way for privatization. The informal sector of the economy expanded and the cocaine-cocaine economy grew in significance.

Since 1988, Bolivia has made a concerted effort to address its unbearable debt burden, reaching accords, for example, in 1988 and 1992 for commercial debt reduction of about $600 million. In addition, the country has obtained debt relief stretching into 2004 of about $620 million through the Paris Club of bilateral creditors, and procured cancellations of debt totalling about $590 million. Despite these agreements, external public and publicly guaranteed debt burdens have remained high. Every Bolivian now owes foreign creditors about $600—almost as much as the average Bolivian earns in an entire year.

Since 1980, unemployment and underemployment have increased. By 1988, according to CLAR, the Bolivian Conference of Catholic Religious, 25 percent of the Bolivian workforce was unemployed and 42 percent had moved into the informal sector.

The cocaine-cocaine market has now become the key to the Bolivian economy. While coca is a native plant traditionally used for medicinal and nutritional purposes in the Andean region, its rapid commercialization coincides with the increase of rural poverty and the disappearance of jobs in mines and factories. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) estimates that the 40,000 families engaged in coca farming in 1992 produced 30,300 metric tons of coca leaf. After processing, this amount of coca would have a street value of $22.9 billion, over three times Bolivia’s GDP for that year.

The drug economy in Bolivia now employs about 500,000 people, about 20 percent of the workforce. When President Jaime Paz Zamora met President Bush at the Cartagena drug summit in February, 1990, he pointed out that more than half of his country’s imports were financed by coca-cocaine traffic and that 70 percent of its GDP was cocaine-related. "If narcotics

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Half of these images were taken at the November 16 protest against the School of the Americas (SOA) at Ft. Benning, Georgia. The other half were taken in Guatemala and El Salvador, two countries that have suffered intensely under the abuse of SOA graduates. The accompanying text is taken from a "Reflection on Repentance" read at the Nov. 16 vigil. It asks for healing for atrocities like the massacre at El Mozote (below, right), in which over 1,000 men, women and children were killed by the Salvadoran Army with U.S. arms and training. Through these representations I hope to impart a sense of solidarity between those living and struggling in Latin America and those activists working on their behalf in the United States.

We confess our guilt to God and all the peoples of Latin America and firmly resolve with the help of God's grace to take action in non-violent ways to close the School of the Americas as a step in our ongoing resistance to the death dealing policies of the United States.

For the slaughter of 75,000 Salvadorans by a military regime that was supplied and trained by the United States

God forgive us

For the deaths of those who stood by the poor: the ministers and priests, religious women, labor organizers and, especially today, we remember the six Jesuits and their housekeeper and her daughter

God forgive us

For the ongoing destruction in that land

God forgive us
For the massacre of over 200,000 Mayan people whose deaths were plotted by SOA graduates

God forgive us

For the destruction of over 500 Mayan villages

God forgive us

For the ongoing cover-ups and lies and refusal of our government to release documents detailing CIA, U.S. military and State Department involvement with the Guatemalan military

God forgive us

We are outraged and grieved at our country's complicity in the murder of hundreds of thousands of the indigenous and poor of Latin America, and at our country's ongoing control of their lives and their lands. We take upon ourselves the responsibility, which our government has refused to take, to try to stop the death and work for life for Latin America.

Ryan Beiler is a member of the Ithaca Catholic Worker Community. Estella and CUSLAR.

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to disappear overnight," says Flavio Machicado, a former finance minister, "we would have rampant unemployment. There would be open protest and violence."

Bolivia's need for new loans to alleviate the pressure created by its foreign debt gave the United States the opportunity to demand Bolivian participation in the U.S. counternarcotics strategies. The drug war "certification" process, used as leverage since 1986, threatens a loss of U.S. foreign assistance, U.S. opposition to new loans from multilateral development banks and possible trade sanctions if Bolivia fails to comply or to meet eradication quotas. In the early 1990s, the required involvement of Bolivian military - not just civilian law enforcement agencies - in the drug war met with tremendous opposition in Bolivia.

Overall poverty persists as a grave problem. The annual per-capita income is about $770. Although the infant mortality rate has significantly declined, at 74 per 1,000 live births, it is still nearly double the average for Latin America. Maternal mortality rates are comparatively high at 650 per 100,000 live births. 16 percent of all Bolivian children under five are malnourished. Only 55 percent of the people have access to safe water and only 67 percent to health services.

Yet the macroeconomic indicators are impressive. Inflation has stabilized at eight percent or lower; national savings and domestic investment have improved; and foreign direct investment has increased. The IMF reports that Bolivia is spending more now on health and education per capita than it was in 1985, though other sources note that Bolivia's per-capita public spending on health and education is a third lower today than in 1980. Most officials of the U.S. treasury and the international financial institutions seem satisfied with the reality described by these indicators and do not acknowledge a connection between poverty, unemployment, human rights violations, coca-cocaine traffic and the debt or shape of adjustment.

The changes described have been significant, and the evaluation of all the reforms and adjustments differs dramatically from one account to another, from one perspective to another. The IMF, the World Bank, U.S. Treasury and other international creditors and investors call what has happened the "Bolivian miracle." Others who live and work close to the still-impoverished, mostly indigenous Bolivian majority claim it is a human and environmental disaster. The sparseness and unreliability of statistical data collected in the Bolivian countryside give considerable weight to first-hand reports from the lived experience of the largely rural population, which insist that life is not getting better.

Bolivia's debt continues at high levels, limiting the country's growth and its ability to reduce poverty levels, especially in rural areas. Bolivian economist Pablo Ramos notes that in 1989 Bolivia used 9.8 percent of federal budget to service public debt; by 1992 the figure rose to 18 percent and is now approaching 30 percent, an estimated $350 to $400 million per year.

To be just, economic reform measures must be accompanied by a definitive cancellation of the crushing international debt of poor countries. Debt relief must not be rigidly conditioned on adjustments that further burden people living in poverty, and it must be implemented in ways that primarily benefit the ordinary people who have borne the major burden of their countries' indebtedness.

Marie Dennis is Associate for Latin America, Maryknoll Society Justice and Peace Office, Washington DC, and the chair of the Religious Working Group on the World Bank and IMF.
Shell Drains Colombia

Oxy and Shell threaten the U'wa people while the tribe contemplates mass suicide

BY JEFF VOCT

"I sing the traditional songs to my children. I teach them that everything is sacred and linked. How can I tell Shell and Oxy that to take the oil is worse for us than killing your own mother? If you kill the Earth, then no one will live." U'wa woman, August, 1997

The U'wa people have lived peacefully in the cloud forests of the Colombian Andes for as long as anyone can remember. The last great tragedy to befall these people happened 400 years ago, when, according to their oral history, a portion of the tribe committed mass ritual suicide rather than submit themselves to Spanish rule. Today, the U'wa, who number 5,000, are once again talking about invaders—Occidental Petroleum ("Oxy") and Shell—moving onto their land. As the project proceeds forward one thing becomes very clear: Whether it is through the pollution of the land they consider sacred, the increased violence that the project will inevitably bring, or by their own hand, oil exploration means the death of the U'wa.

In April of 1992, Los Angeles based Occidental Petroleum was granted exploration rights to much of traditional U'wa territory-known to the oil companies as the "Samori block." The territory is located in the Bocaya region of northeastern Colombia. Royal Dutch Shell, Shell Oil's parent company, owns a 37.5 percent investment share in the project operated by Occidental Petroleum. Ecopetrol, the Colombian national oil company, has 25 percent. Oxy, the operator of the joint venture, believes the field holds approximately 1.5 billion barrels of oil, slightly less than three months worth of oil for the United States.

Colombia is the fourth-largest and fastest growing major exporter of oil in South America, increasing its output by nearly 30 percent in 1995, and expecting to double its production in 1998. Under pressure from the United States and international financial institutions, the Colombian government has turned to increased oil production as a way to pay off its debt. For the people living in the oil regions of northeastern Colombia, multinational oil exploitation has brought pollution and conflict.

Considering that Colombian guerrillas opposing the government view oil facilities as military targets, U'wa territory is certain to become a battleground. In the past 11 years, guerrillas have attacked Oxy's Cano Limon pumpstation and pipeline in Arauca 473 times. About 1.4 million barrels of crude oil have spilled because of pipeline sabotage in Colombia (the Exxon Valdez spill was only 36,000 barrels). The Colombian military—having one of the worst human rights history's in the world, and heavily armed with U.S. weapons—have moved into the area to counter insurgences.

Opposition to the desecration of U'wa territory has come at a steep cost. Roberto

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for health, education, as well as the implementation of an economic model not based on profit," the Archbishop told the 11th World Festival of Youth in Havana.

In 1986, an ecumenical conference composed of a significant number of Catholic Church officials as well as other Christian denominations wrote, "Cuban society has made serious efforts at promoting social rights. Those being: life, food, medical assistance, education, proper renumeration for work and so on. We consider this an achievement of primary importance. We know that the total availability of these rights constitutes not only a condition for authentic freedom, but a tangible way of being free. The socialist society has helped

"We see a small number of countries growing exceedingly rich at the cost of the increasing impoverishment of a great number of other countries."

Christians to have greater appreciation of the human person..."

Since the 1980's, the Church in Cuba has maintained a critical support for the government. The Church openly criticizes the limitations on freedom of speech and assembly, the perceived lack of freedom of the press, and human rights violations of political dissidents, while applauding social welfare gains.

In recent years, the government has responded to the Church's overtures. Although it was never illegal to claim Church membership, the government legalized Christian participation in the Cuban Communist Party in 1991.

One possible reason for reforms relating to religious freedom could be Castro's recognition of the possibility for an alliance with the Pope against neoliberalism and global capitalism. Castro has watched his allies in the fight against U.S. cultural and economic hegemony shrink over the last decade. The Pope now stands as one of few world leaders willing to state public opposition to these forces.

A

fter nearly forty years, the Church's highest official has come to some reconciliation with the Cuban government. Although much of the Pope's message sounded new in Cuba, some parts sounded familiar. In Havana's Revolution Square, Pope John Paul II proclaimed, "... Various places are witnessing the resurgence of a certain capitalist neoliberalism that subordinates the human person to blind market forces and conditions the development of peoples on those forces... In the international community, we thus see a small number of countries growing exceedingly rich at the cost of the increasing impoverishment of a great number of other countries; as a result, the wealthy grow ever wealthier, while the poor grow even poorer... At times, unsustainable economic programs are imposed on nations as a condition for further assistance."

Later, the Pope spoke out against the U.S. embargo, saying, "The Cuban people cannot be deprived of ties with other peoples, which are necessary for economic, social and cultural development, particularly when the isolation indiscriminately affects the population, aggravating the difficulties of the weakest with regard to basic aspects like nutrition, health or education." To this we can only say, "Amen."

CUSLAR member Cris McConkey is a long-time Cuba activist.

COMMITTEE ON US-LATIN AMERICAN RELATIONS
Selected works presented by CUSLAR

Che
On one momentous day in the middle of the 20th century,
As the rusted sword of imperialism thrust itself deep into Che,
A cry of immeasurable magnitude erupted
from the scene of the murder,
This very same cry resounds throughout the world to this day,
For it was the expression of the manifest horror
And the incredible shock felt by the employers of the weapon,
As they saw Che standing in front of them,
The same sparkle of resolution glowing as brightly as ever,
As his dead body lay in front of them.
by Jonathan Surovell

Hablaring in español is hard
palabras débiles
when spoken by
Gordo Gringo
craved connection
Posible pero difícil
¿ah? complexion and profession
hay paredes y
parades and parties
divertirme
divert me from the dirt me
del camp del pueblo pueño?
give while talking
fotos todos
seeing not stealing
en mi mente
plenty of facts but
actos quieren escapar, dar
to overcome pure
miedo, pura mierda
deep and rich
en diversidad de la universidad
invaded or invited
tal vez tiene razón
raised on hints half
verdad o incompleto necesito
marriage of mente y manocantos y cuadros
and photos are empty not
fuerte si sin sudor y amor

by Ryan Beiler
Continued from pg. 15

Cobarfa, the U’wa’s selected leader, has joined with an international coalition of environmental and human rights organizations to halt the Shell/Oxy development. In July, 1997, Cobarfa was attacked, threatened with death, and his attackers demanded that he sign an authorization agreement. When he refused, he was thrown into a river, and almost drowned.

I n early 1997, the Colombian Courts handed down a ruling on the U’wa case. The Court found that the State’s right to develop its natural resources superseded the U’wa’s constitutional right to consultation and defense of its cultural identity. The U’wa have petitioned the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States (OAS) to call for the project’s cancellation in defense of the U’wa’s human rights.

Responding to a request from the Colombian government, the OAS issued a series of recommendations for conflict resolution between the Uwa and oil interests. The recommendations include a legal recognition of the Uwa’s full traditional territory. However, the OAS also recommends a process of consultation with the U’wa which is based on recognizing the Colombian State’s right to exploit oil over the U’wa’s right to halt it.

Commercial drilling is scheduled to begin this Spring. Unless public outrage forces Shell and Occidental to reconsider their plans, the U’wa people and their homeland are both in danger of destruction.

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

What you can do

Write to Shell Oil’s CEO and let him know that you oppose the proposed oil operations on the land of the U’wa people. Here is a sample letter:

Philip J. Carroll, CEO
Shell Oil
PO Box 2463
Houston, TX 77252

Dear Mr. Carroll,

I recently learned that Shell Oil’s parent company, Royal Dutch Shell, has invested with Occidental Petroleum in a drilling operation in Colombia’s cloud forest. This land is considered sacred by its occupants, the Uwa people. Oil development in this region would be devastating to the traditional culture and physical well-being of the Uwa.

Please urge Royal Dutch Shell to end its investment in Occidental. I won’t be able to support Shell until it takes a strong position against this potentially genocidal oil project.

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A Project of CRESP
La Víctima Es El Campesino:
A Voice From Colombia

BY VICTORIA STONE

In Colombia, effects of the drug trade infiltrate the entire society, from rural farmers struggling to survive to politicians fattening their campaign coffers.

Influence of the drug trade extends into governmental buildings and the Presidential office. In 1996, Colombian President Ernesto Samper came under international scrutiny when newspaper reports revealed that he accepted more than six million dollars in campaign contributions from a major Cali drug cartel in 1995.

In February, Colombian historian and economist Alvaro Tirado Mejía visited Cornell. In an interview with CUSLAR, Mejía articulated the Colombian perspective on the "War on Drugs" and the detrimental repercussions of this war on both the campesino and the environment.

According to Señor Mejía, Colombians traditionally place little moral stigma on contraband. The Drug War stems from U.S. pressure, and forces politicians to resort to extreme measures that only serve as international tokens of national responsibility.

In 1997, the United States donated roughly $115 million in anti-drug aid to Colombia, including $30 million from the foreign aid budget, $50 million of military aid equipment and training, and $30 million in military assistance. However, according to Señor Mejía, United States intervention has scarcely impacted drug production, but rather has caused extensive environmental pollution and dislocation of peasants in rural Colombia. As he stated, "the victim is the campesino."

Colombia's anti-narcotics forces rely heavily on fumigation flights to wipe out coca plants. Airplanes dump powerful herbicides onto suspected coca crops below. Although reports indicate that the daily flights destroy more than 15,000 hectares of coca fields annually, Señor Mejía stressed that fumigation flights merely displace people. Forced by the need to support themselves, campesinos relocate to jungle regions and cultivate coca there. The planes follow the campesinos to the jungle and again dump toxins onto the land, causing illnesses and environmentally compromising the area for future generations. The campesinos move again and again, further penetrating the rapidly shrinking regions called "la tierra de nadie" (the land of no one).

The Colombian drug trade shows no signs of abating. United States policy-makers choose to ignore this as they request ever-increasing sums to fight the "War on Drugs" in Colombia, flying in the face of the cautions of men like Señor Mejía.

Victoria Stone is a student at SUNY Cortland and an intern at CUSLAR.
Continued from Page 3

Zapatista communities have been deported by the Mexican government. Peace Camp participants are there to witness human rights violations carried out against civilians by the Army or the government backed paramilitaries, and to deter such acts from happening through their presence. According to Hansen, “If the Mexican authorities dedicated their energy towards putting in practice the San Andres Accords and into identifying, detaining, and processing those responsible for the massacre in Chiapas, they wouldn’t have to expel foreigners.”

The Acteal massacre served as an excuse to bring in thousands of Army troops...

U.S. Involvement
The United States trains an increasing number of Mexican military personnel each year. The infamous Army School of the Americas (SOA) graduated 315 Mexican officers in 1997, one-third of the graduating class, making Mexico the country with the most officers being trained at the SOA.

A February 26 article in the Washington Post revealed that the CIA gave extensive courses in intelligence to 90 Mexican military officials as well as annual courses to more than a thousand officials as part of a training program to create a new anti-narcotics force. The Post said that the training program intends to create an elite anti-narcotics unit. The Post also noted that the type of training given in narcotics tactics is very similar to counterinsurgency training. A U.S. government spokesperson, Randy Beers, told the Mexican newspaper La Jornada that the “final use” of the narcotics units receiving U.S. training would be monitored by the U.S. Meanwhile, unidentified Mexican officials have insisted that any attempts to monitor “final use” of these units would be a “totally unacceptable condition.”

The Paramilitary Role
Contrary to Mexican government propaganda, the paramilitaries are not spontaneous citizen groups. Fort Bragg-trained Mexican General Mario Renan Castillo Fernandez created several paramilitary forces operating in the area today. They function as part of a counter-insurgency campaign to stop the spread of Zapatista support in indigenous communities, giving the appearance of a civil conflict between two armed groups. This gives the Army the opportunity to come in as the mediator of “internal conflicts.”

The Acteal massacre served as an excuse to bring in thousands of Army troops, ostensibly to defend civilians caught between armed paramilitary groups. Rather than disarming the paramilitaries, however, troops are harassing Zapatista-supporting communities and looking for sub-Comandante Marcos.

The presence of non-Mexican observers adds a measure of safety for the people of Chiapas. The Mexican government’s decision to harrass and deport international human rights workers and observers is an ominous sign of what future actions the government plans to undertake.

Jim Veeder is a member of CLASP, the Caribbean & Latin America Support Project in New Paltz, NY. He recently returned from a trip to Chiapas.

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