



Fall 2000

ELECTIONS IN LATIN AMERICA

- Mexico
- Venezuela
- Peru



THE COMMITTEE ON U.S.-LATIN
AMERICAN RELATIONS

a project of the Center for Religion, Ethics,
and Social Policy

CUSLAR Newsletter



ALSO:

- PROTESTS IN
LIMA
- HERBICIDES IN
COLOMBIA

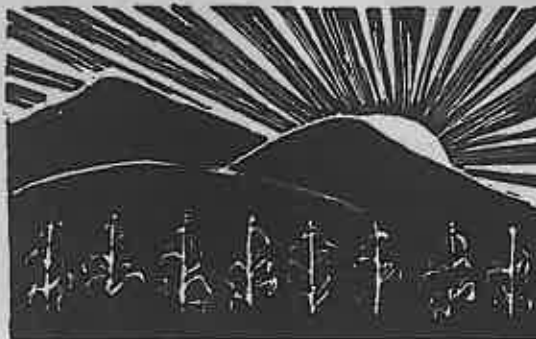


Given the electoral upsets of the past several months it appears upon first glance that the seeds of change have begun to flower in Latin America. In Mexico, the decades long domination of national politics by the ruling party was reversed when a "Coca-cola Cowboy" seduced the nation. In Venezuela, a career military officer retained power largely due to the belief that he stood opposed to the deeply entrenched corruption of the governing elite. In Peru, protests erupted when it became obvious that an increasingly authoritarian leader refused to accept his electoral defeat and relinquish power. Democratic rumblings could be felt throughout the hemisphere.

Yet, in the few short weeks following each of these elections what is not so obvious is whether the changes that have taken place implicate a clear path to democracy. Or at least a democracy that guarantees a greater voice and power to those most desperately in need of it. Mexico's new president, Vincente Fox, has already proposed tax changes (on medicines and food) that virtually target the poor. This comes from a candidate whose expressed concern for the poverty and suffering of his people was one of the reasons for his popularity. And although Hugo Chavez also portrays himself as an ally of the disenfranchised, his solutions to societal inequities faced by the majority of Venezuelans are entirely dependent upon military involvement in domestic affairs. Given Latin America's long, sad history of intervention by the armed forces one questions whether Chavez's faith in such an institution is warranted.

As we go to press, Peru's precarious political situation continues to make headlines. First, a fraudulent election that was condemned by the world, followed by protests that demonstrated the unpopularity of Alberto Fujimori's hold on power. The last few weeks have brought to light a bribery scandal involving the head of the National Intelligence Service, and Fujimori's subsequent announcement that he will step down in order to stabilize growing unrest. One wonders, however, how much impact the scandal has actually had on the political decisions being made. The involvement of the CIA and accusations of arms sales to Colombian guerrillas should send up red flags to anyone remotely knowledgeable about the historical involvement of the U.S. in the Latin American political arena.

Democracy cannot coexist with authoritarianism and militarization. Nor can it reign when sovereignty and transparency are compromised. Democracy, in the truly empowering sense of the word, will only come about when leaders realize that they are granted the privilege of power so that they can act as representatives of the people, instituting change favored by those who need it most to improve their lives rather than those with greater access. Latin Americans are fortunate to have greater opportunities to take part in democratic processes than they did decades ago. They also have increased opportunities to express dissatisfaction as is obvious from recent protest movements. It is no doubt simply a matter of time before the sun shines upon the face of popular content.



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 American 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, 316 Anabel Taylor Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853, or via e-mail at cuslar@cornell.edu. The CUSLAR Newsletter is published three times a year.

The CUSLAR Newsletter is funded by the SAFC and Cornell University. The content does not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the SAFC or Cornell University. CUSLAR is a project of CRESPP the Center for Religion, Ethics, and Social Policy.

editor-in-chief Marcie Ley
editing/layout Elena Perez, Abby Bertumen, Hannah Wittman, Matt Hogan, Anne Bacon, Chinazor Okasi, Marcie Ley

Copyright CUSLAR © 2000

In Brief...



compiled by Helen Franks

Mexican President Calls for Open Border

Newly elected Mexican President Vicente Fox Quesada, whose National Action Party (PAN) in June unseated the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the party that had ruled the country for 71 years, is calling for an open border with the United States. Fox contends that expanding labor ties between the United States, Mexico, and Canada will be of great benefit to those living both north and south of the border. To this end, he is urging U.S. officials to face up to its need for Mexican workers. He is calling for the implementation of a common market, similar to that of the European Union, which would promote cooperation rather than competition, allowing the free movement of services, goods and workers across the 2,000 mile long border. American officials have been less enthusiastic than the Mexican president. At meetings with Fox in late August, presidential hopefuls Vice President Al Gore and Texas Governor George W. Bush both expressed their concern over Fox's proposal, Gore deeming the notion of open borders "clearly problematic," Bush calling for greater enforcement at US borders. (NYT)

CIA Defends Decision to Block Declassification; Albright Supports Full Release

Just days after CIA Director George Tenet publicly defended his decision to withhold documents on covert actions in Chile, Madeline Albright reportedly pledged to push for a full declassification of documents while travelling through Argentina and Chile on five-country South America tour.

In an August 11th letter to several members of Congress, Tenet stated, "I believe the Agency can be proud of its Chile declassification efforts. We have devoted several thousand hours over a nine month period to this endeavor. The review was thorough, intensive, and dedicated to the release of as much relevant information as possible consistent with my statutory obligation to protect sources and methods." He emphasized that the hundreds of documents that the CIA will release on September 14, "fully meets the scope of the [Presidential directive]" and insisted that "we are in no way trying to withhold information embarrassing to the United States Government." (For the full text of this letter and other correspondence regarding the

CIA refusal to declassify, go to the National Security Archive site "History Held Hostage" at <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/news/20000817/index.html>)

A recent *Washington Post* editorial condemned Tenet's decision, explaining, "the CIA's reticence has harmed the perceived credibility of the declassification effort. Concealing intelligence methods may be an absolute interest for the agency, but not necessarily for the government as a whole. Particularly with regard to events decades ago, the American public's right to assess the historical conduct of its government weighs heavily...In this matter, disclosure would do more to bolster U.S. foreign policy than secrecy." A *New York Times* editorial echoed the same concerns early last week.

Shortly after Tenet announced his decision to withhold the files, Secretary of State Madeline Albright announced her hope for a full declassification while visiting Chile. "We at the State Department continue to work with other U.S. government agencies to ensure the fullest possible declassification and release of information. The whole enormity of the project reflects our commitment to

Continued on next page

clarify the historic record of a highly controversial period in our bilateral relations," Albright announced. The Secretary of State also commented on the recent Supreme Court decision to strip Pinochet's immunity, calling it, "a historic and important decision for the rule of law and the promotion and protection of human rights in Chile."

While in Argentina, Albright told human rights groups that the U.S. would do everything possible to support investigations into Operation Condor and cases of kidnapping of babies of political prisoners who were disappeared.

Vieques Arrests

Since the beginning of May more than 600 people have been detained while protesting the use of live ammunition at the US Navy's bombing range in Vieques, Puerto Rico.

The arrests follow on a 14-month-old dispute over the location of the base on Vieques, a 21-mile-long Puerto

Rican island of 9,400 people. Activists claim that bombing at the site destroys fishing grounds, wreaks environmental havoc and endangers residents.

Despite opposition in Puerto Rico to continued US Navy presence, Governor Pedro Rossello signed an agreement with the U.S. government approving continued use of inert weapons until May 1, 2003 when a referendum will be held to decide whether the Navy should leave (AP, NACLA, May/June)

JFK Foreign Policy Documents on Cuba and the Dominican Republic to be Released

Thousands of secret CIA and other foreign policy related documents dating from the Presidency of John F. Kennedy will be released August 23. Among them are documents pertaining to the intentions of the United States to bring down the Cuban government and about relations between the United

States and the Dominican Republic. There are also letters exchanged by Kennedy and his national security advisor McGeorge Bundy and dispatches sent from the American embassy in Laos to the State Department during the

early years of the Vietnam war. Hundreds of historians are expected to examine the 4500 pages, which will be released by the JFK library and museum. While some hope the papers (which cover the years 1960-63) will offer greater insight into Kennedy's foreign policy decisions, others believe that the documents will hold few surprises (AP)

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez appoints Three Women to Cabinet

Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez appointed three women to his majority male cabinet August 27. The women will become the labor, commerce and environment ministers. This while speculation continues over the actions of the Venezuelan premier, whom Colombian writer Gabriel Garcia Marquez has described as a man with two faces. After coming to power in December 1998 Chavez rewrote the constitution to extend the presidential term from five to six years. He also removed a provision prohibiting reelection. Hailed by supporters as a godsend, he is viewed by others as a threatening authoritarian. Over the last several years Venezuela has been the largest supplier of imported oil to the United States. (NACLA, NYT)

Opposition Victory in Paraguay

Opposition candidate Julio Cesar Franco of the Authentic Radical Liberal Party (PRLA) narrowly defeated ruling party vice presidential candidate Felix Argaña of the Colorado Party August 13 in

Paraguay. The defeat of Argaña, who is the son of the former vice president assassinated last year, is the first for the governing party at the national level since it came to power in 1947. The appointment is expected to have a significant impact on the position of the president, Luis Gonzalez Maachi, who was appointed after the assassination last year (LP, NYT).

Political Prisoner Berenson's Life Sentence Nullified

Lori Berenson, an activist and journalist who has been imprisoned in Peru since January 11, 1996 on questionable charges of terrorism, is due to receive another trial in Peru. A military tribunal originally sentenced Berenson to life imprisonment, claiming she was involved with the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA).

The Peruvian government now admits that it made a mistake. Acknowledging that Berenson was never a leader of a terrorist group, that she should not have been tried by a military tribunal, and that she had not committed any acts of treason against the fatherland, the government has nullified her life sentence. She will now be tried on a number of related charges in a civilian court.

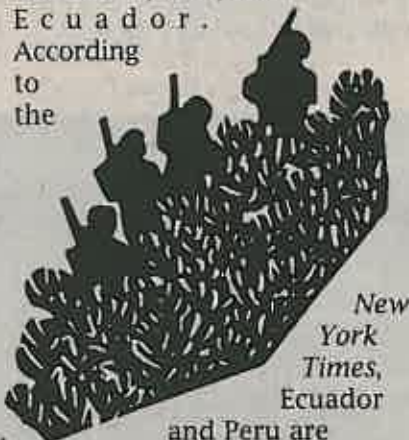
Berenson's parents, Rhoda and Mark, however, continue to advocate for Berenson's unconditional release from imprisonment in Peru. They say that under present conditions Berenson cannot receive a fair trial in the country. They and countless other activists continue to compel President

Clinton, as well as other national and international leaders, to advocate Berenson's freedom. (www.freelori.org)

Neighbors Fear Expansion of U.S. Drug War in Colombia Will Push Problems onto their Turf

President Clinton's visit to Colombia, scheduled for late August in connection with the \$1.3 billion aid package, is aimed at solving the country's drug problem. However, his trip is upsetting neighboring nations, including Panama, Venezuela, Peru, and Ecuador.

According to the



New York Times, Ecuador

and Peru are already experiencing problems related to the stepped-up war on drugs in Colombia, including guerilla incursions and a shift in coca cultivation.

Colombia's neighbors fear that the massive influx of firepower from the United States, including 60 helicopters, will lead to an intensification of the armed conflict within the country and might also result in fighting along the borders. US and Colombian officials have countered these concerns with claims that their aim is to push forward the peace process with the rebels who control the coca growing regions rather than defeat them in a war. Despite

continuing concerns over Colombia's human rights record and its failure to meet related conditions imposed by Congress, Clinton signed a waiver August 24 freeing up the money. Meanwhile Colombians are looking closely at the upcoming US presidential elections which may impact the administration of US aid to Colombia in the future (NYT/El Tiempo).

Police Evict Honduran Protesters

On September 7, police forcefully removed about 900 indigenous protesters who had occupied Copan, the country's best-known Maya archeological site, for four days. The ruins are located near the Guatemalan border, about 400 kilometers west of Tegucigalpa, the capital.

The demonstrators, members of the Chorti community, were supporting eight other Chortis who had declared a hunger strike to pressure the government to return land promised them in a 1994 agreement. Protesters also demanded the reinstatement of Gilberto Sanchez, who was removed from the post of ethnic rights officer early this year. Sanchez says the dismissal was political.

The protesters were evicted after the government announced it had earmarked US\$1.6 million to purchase land for the Chortis.

Indigenous groups also occupied Copan in October 1998, preventing tourists from visiting the site and demanding land reform and an investigation into the deaths of 43 indigenous leaders who had been killed in six years. (Latinamerica Press, <http://www.cnr.org.pe/na-lp>)

Mexican Elections: by Ulises Mejias

Between Euphoria and Skepticism

On July 2, the political system that most Mexicans had known for all of their lives collapsed in a single and swift motion. The Party of the Institutionalized Revolution (PRI), which had governed Mexico for more than seven decades, and which had become synonymous with power, corruption, and 'the perfect dictatorship,' lost to the candidate from the conservative, right party, National Action Party (PAN), Vicente Fox.

The results of this historical election left Mexicans in a state of euphoric disbelief. Of the 58.7 million registered voters (30.4 million women and 28.3 million men), 65 percent took to the polls, (a somewhat lower rate of participation compared to the 77 percent of the last presidential elections). Fox won with a 45 percent majority, followed by the PRI candidate, Francisco Labastida, with 33 percent. Veteran left-center candidate, Cuauhtemoc Cardenas of the Party of Democratic Revolution (PRD), finished a distant third, with 16 percent of the votes.

The Mexican people let

their desire for change be clearly known. Now, the question remains whether the candidate-elect will deliver.

Who is Fox?

Vicente Fox likes to think of himself as a rancher, but despite the boots, mustache, macho poise, and 'frank' (some say vulgar) language, he is by no means an ordinary cowboy.



As a former Coca-Cola executive, he acquired extensive business skills. As former Governor of the state of Guanajuato, one could say he knows his way around Mexican politics. He is certainly a populist, and some journalists have compared him, in terms of notoriety (and ego), to Subcomandante Marcos, the ski-masked "face" of the Zapatista National Liberation Army.

A good way for us to gauge where Fox is coming

from is to look at the people who support him. Besides the backing of the business establishment and middle-upper class in Mexico, Fox has received aid from some big-name U.S. organizations, including the Coca-Cola Company, which offered market research and campaign support, Microsoft, which offered software support to Fox when he was governor of Guanajuato, and the U.S.

Republican Party, which, through other international organizations, also offered campaign support. A sign of how comfortable global capital felt about Fox becoming president of Mexico is that even before the elections there were newspaper articles stating that Wall Street would view a Fox victory

favorably.

The Need For a New Left

Meanwhile, Mexico remains an impoverished nation. According to recent World Bank figures, 62 percent of the population is considered poor. The richest 10 percent collects 38 percent of the national income, whereas the poorest 10 percent receive only 1.5 percent. Poverty is mainly concentrated in rural areas, particularly among the

indigenous populations. It is estimated that four out of five indigenous people in Mexico live in poverty.

One could argue that the welfare of that 62 percent of Mexicans is probably not the central concern of a party representing the interests of the business class and multinational corporations. Those looking for an alternative within the political party system, however, are likely to be disappointed. Despite the PRD's continuing efforts to show that the PAN and the PRI are two sides of the same coin, Cuauhtemoc Cardenas and his left-center party did not manage to gain any significant increase in votes from the elections of six years ago. In fact, this year the PRD saw its share of the votes drop by 7 percent, while that of the PAN increased more than 10 percent (the difference between national PRD and PAN support in the 1997 midterm elections was less than one percent). More critically, the PRD saw its participation in the 500-member Chamber of Deputies drop from 126 seats to only 53.

The reasons why this happened are multiple and complex. Undoubtedly, the tenacity and vision of Cardenas have been widely recognized, even by Fox, as having a major impact on the democratization of Mexico. Cardenas supporters point out that the progress made by him in the last decade was in some ways snatched by Fox in the July 2 elections. After rejecting an invitation by Fox to become part of the new government, Cardenas' only option was to declare that the PRD would continue to fight the neoliberal policies of the PAN just as it did the neoliberal policies of the PRI.

However, it is important to point out that Cardenas and the PRD have failed to capture the imagination of voters and transform the dissatisfaction of Mexicans into an effective political movement. The left in Mexico needs to reinvent itself. This is made even more necessary by the fact that the public image of the PRD has been tarnished by its many internal crises, by its inability to change and adapt as quickly as required, and by the fact that, at its worst, the PRD has apparently been unable to abandon some vices of Mexican politics such as internal electoral fraud. In any event, the results of the July 2 elections are forcing many to think beyond Cardenas and 'cardenismo.' For both the PRD and the PRI, it is a time of crisis but also of reflection.

Towards Transition

For the moment, the task of envisioning Mexico's future lies with Vicente Fox, who stated that he intends to create a plural and diverse government, consisting of only the best people for the job. Headhunter firms were hired, and job openings were disseminated.

Indeed, Fox's 'transition team' so far does contain an interesting array of people with diverse backgrounds and interests, mostly from the business sector. Some selections are sources of concern, such as the Director of the hospital where the recent 'Paulina' case unfolded. Paulina is a young woman who was raped when she was 14 years old. Her family obtained permission from the local government to perform an abortion (abortion in Mexico is illegal except in cases like this), but the hospital authorities, supported by local conservative groups, refused to carry out the operation. Paulina was forced to give birth. The Director of that hospital, who clearly broke Mexican law, has recently been named part of the Fox transition team.

To get a sense of what Fox has in store for the country's economy, one need only look at the members of his economic cabinet, Luis Ernesto Derbez and Eduardo Sojo. Both are graduates of U.S. universities, and at least one has experience working for the CocWorld Bank and the Bank

continued on Page 19

Mad for Martinis? Intrigued by Euro-Asian Cuisine?

Madeline's
is the place.

offering complimentary appetizers at the bar.

On the Ithaca Commons

Lunch Mon-Sat • Dinner 7 Days • 277-2253

Peru's Battle for Democracy

an article by Jo-Marie Burt, reprinted from NACLA Report on the Americas

Editor's note:

As we go to press, President Fujimori has just announced that he will hold new elections in the wake of a bribery scandal of an opposition congressman. Although Fujimori has said that he will not be a candidate, he has refused to step down or set a date for the elections. For more information, visit www.nacla.org.

Peru's President Alberto Fujimori was scheduled to appear at a victory celebration on the evening of May 28, after electoral authorities announced that he "won" a presidential contest in which he was the only contender. Thousands of Peruvians had been bussed in from low-income districts to the main plaza in San Martín de Porres, a popular district in northern Lima. They waited and waited, but their President was a no-show. Meanwhile, the "losing" camp was celebrating a victory of another sort a few miles away in the Plaza San Martín, in the heart of downtown Lima. Alejandro Toledo, Fujimori's main opponent, who withdrew from the race ten days before the vote in protest of the government's gross manipulation of the electoral process and its refusal to make basic changes

to ensure a fair election, was greeted by the sounds of cheers from the thronging crowd. Though he had not won the elections, he had won a great deal. After Toledo withdrew from the race, international election observers followed suit, dealing a serious blow to Fujimori's credibility at home and abroad. He then successfully turned protests against fraudulent elections into a new civic movement demanding

an end to the manipulations and machinations of the Fujimori regime.

International observers principally the Carter Center/National Democratic Institute and the

Organization of American States (OAS) played an unusually active and forceful role in denouncing not only the fraud evident on the day of the vote, but the regime's manipulation of the entire electoral process. As international observers gave credence to the denunciations of fraud by local watchdog groups such as Transparencia, resignation over a seemingly inevitable Fujimori victory turned into indignation. And Toledo, an unlikely hero, rose to the occasion. Emboldened by massive popular support in the wake of outright fraud during the first-round vote on April 9, he began to attack Fujimori's authoritarianism, his manipulation, his political use of state funds, his antipopular economics measures, and his failure to provide a better life for the majority of Peruvians.

The battle for democracy in Peru has only just begun, and it will take place on multiple fronts. On the international front, there is widespread speculation that the OAS will declare the



Alberto Fujimori, center

Peruvian elections invalid and call for new ones. Sanctions may follow. The U.S. government, while it has said it will follow the OAS lead, clearly has an important role to play here. State Department officials have already called the vote "invalid" and Fujimori's presidency "illegitimate." Resolution 43, passed by both houses of the U.S. Congress before the April 9 vote and signed by President Clinton shortly after, calls for a thorough revision of U.S. relations with Peru if elections were shown to be fraudulent. Washington still likes Fujimori, a dutiful ally in the war against terrorism and drugs who eagerly opened Peru's economy to foreign investment, but an important segment of the U.S. foreign policy establishment now sees him as a liability.

The second front is within the realm of national politics in Peru. Other opposition leaders have thus far lined up neatly behind Toledo in a way that did not seem possible only a few months ago. Toledo has called on all opposition congresspeople who together hold 68 out of 120 seats in the new Congress to refuse to show up on the day they are to be sworn in. Without a simple quorum of 61 members, Congress cannot be convened, and Fujimori cannot then be sworn in as president. Reports that Peru 2000, Fujimori's party, is trying to bribe opposition candidates to join its forces suggest the government is worried.

The final and perhaps most important front is on the streets. There have been frequent and massive protests, some of which have turned violent, and some of which have been violently repressed

by police. Toledo has called for ongoing protests, and a civic strike has been called for July 26. This is the most vulnerable front, given the willingness of Fujimori and his cronies to use brutal means to retain power and assure their continued impunity. Yet it is the front Fujimori fears most, for he has always relied on the court of public opinion to exonerate him, even when he has clearly violated the law.

Fujimori may yet figure out a way to resist international pressure, as he did in the aftermath of his April 5, 1992 self-coup. The hard-liners within his regime seem to see little problem with the idea of hunkering down for a long battle even if it means economic sanctions that bleed

the economy dry. Their concern, after all, has never been the Peruvian people, but their own power. But domestic pressure is a new factor in the equation. The Shining Path has been defeated and is no longer a major threat. Peruvians still dread a return to the chaos of the late 1980s and early 1990s, but they are increasingly less willing to tolerate abuses and arbitrary rule. The opposition remains riddled with problems, but the diverse forces which compromise it are increasingly united around an anti-Fujimori platform. Fujimori once legitimized his rule with the argument that his methods, though questionable from a democratic perspective, were efficient and effective. But that was then.

Fujimori Inauguration Brings Protest

by Hannah Wittman, excerpted from *The Cobbler*

Fujimori's inauguration, exercised on July 28, provided a vivid imagery of the growing opposition to his continued rule. With the exception of some protesters who set various government buildings on fire, most of the tens of thousands participating in the demonstrations were peaceful. Familiar TV images showed that even those, however, faced tear gas, water cannons, and frequent scuffles with over 35,000 police in what appeared to be US-issue riot gear.

Thousands of indigenous peoples and campesinos flocked to the city in trucks and buses to join in a three-day March of the Four Suyos (the cardinal points of the Inca empire), terminating in the inauguration protests. Many reported repeated encounters with military police and roadblocks seeking to deny their entrance into Lima.

Images from inside the Congress during the inauguration showed that protest was not limited to the streets. Some lawmakers raised posters that read "new elections now" and others wore gas masks, and many opposition candidates rose in unison shouting "stop the repression" as they walked out of the ceremony.

Apparently, most Peruvian TV stations did not broadcast news of the protests, although international news agencies showed extensive footage. Alvaro Vargas Llosa reports that most newspapers, radio, and television stations in Peru operate under the control of Vladimiro Montesinos, head of the National Intelligence Service, often suffering surprise tax raids after publishing unfavorable reports about Fujimori.

HUGO CHAVEZ: Venezuela's Solution?

By Elena Perez and Abby Bertumen

On July 30, Venezuelans chose to keep their current president Hugo Chávez of the Patriotic Pole Movement in power by re-electing him with 59 percent of the vote over his main opponent, friend and former coup partner Francisco Arias Cárdenas. Elections were originally intended for May 30, but the National Legislative Commission set a new date due to technical problems. The court decided that the technical issues would prevent reliable, transparent elections and that they would infringe upon Venezuelans' right to vote and right to information about the candidates and the voting process. Although Chávez faced greater risks from the postponement of the election, his success in the polls proved his year and a half popularity as president with the majority of poor Venezuelans. Since his election, Chávez has met with Saddam Hussein, with whom no head of state has met since the Gulf War. He has also toured the ten countries of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), of which Venezuela is currently the president and only South

American member.

Who is Chávez?

Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías was born in the small town of Sabaneta de Barinas to relatively poor parents. When he moved to the capital to pursue his studies, he was first considered rather provincial, but he soon proved his abilities in speech and athletics, especially baseball.



His ambition for sports was halted, though, and instead he became involved in a series of military activities. Despite his duty to military posts, he was

determined to battle state corruption and protect the ordinary person's welfare. In 1992, convinced that the country's two political parties could not govern effectively and that the entire system was dysfunctional and inefficient, Chávez, Cárdenas and other officers attacked the presidential palace—resulting in a bloody failure and the deaths of several soldiers. His involvement in the clash

provided Venezuelans with their first glimpse of their future president. He spent his subsequent two-year prison term debating and reading the works of famous philosophers. Upon release, he was greatly influenced by Argentine sociologist Norberto Ceresole who viewed political leadership as a warm bond between the people and a dynamic figure. At that time Chávez also visited a very ideologically different figure, Fidel Castro; and to the present they continue close relations with each other.

The Legitimacy of Chávez's Words

Chávez's humble beginnings understandably identify him closely with the 80 percent of Venezuelans who live below the poverty


**At GreenStar,
"organic" isn't
an aisle, it's a
philosophy.**
 We stock hundreds of
organic products you can't get
anywhere else. So don't just think
about eating healthy -- stop by
GreenStar. Non-members are
always welcome.
You Belong Here

GreenStar Cooperative Market
 Corner of Seneca and Fulton
 Open Daily 7-11 273-9392

line. In contrast to the typical elite, Chávez has dark skin, partial Indian blood, and a strong sense of instinct, all which support his ties to the people. His supporters emphasize his success in reducing the strength of the government oil company, to which he referred as a "state within a state"; and in remembrance of the coup he led, although failed, they praise his rebellion and assaults on elitist groups, corporations, and one-sided media heads. In Chávez, his supporters find a valiant, fellow countryman who will finally bring them social justice and consolidate their power.

However, to some the coup itself reflects Chávez's inflexibility and impatience, qualities they deem detrimental for a stable democracy. Critics believe that his caustic verbal attacks, regardless of whom they are directed towards, are fuel for future conflict. Chávez's ability to maintain good relations with so many ideologically divergent political bodies of the world of course bodes well

for Venezuela; yet, at the same time this pleasant interface makes his real opinions and actions on major issues ambiguous, obscure, and unfulfilled. Furthermore, although he portrays a genuine dedication towards raising the status of the country's poorest citizens, the country's economy actually shrank by 7 percent in the past year, and over one half the work force is unemployed or works underground.

A Revolutionary?

Despite Chavez's identification with the socially-conscious left and the impoverished of Venezuela, the ambiguity of his stances on important issues has left the future of the country uncertain. While Chavez may declare himself a revolutionary who challenges the elitist political establishment and claims to sympathize with the poor—who have continued to suffer from foreign financial pressures imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank—his plan for reform is not necessarily based on civil societal changes; rather Chavez continues to favor the use of the military to bring about reform.

Such an approach has critics uttering the words "authoritarianism." And while the NACLA Report on Americas writes that this fear of Chavez has not quite been realized, it points out

that recent actions by Chavez's government legitimize these fears. For example, NACLA reports that Venezuela's new Constitution gives much greater power to the executive branch: extending the presidential term from five to six years and allowing the possibility for re-election, meaning that Chavez could be in power until 2012, at least. For some, the difference between the promises and the actions of Chavez are a cause for disillusion. As NACLA writes, "for those who threw their support behind Chavez not only because he promised a change in politics as usual but also because he promised to improve living standards for the more than 80 percent living in poverty, his promised revolution, has yet to come." The stalled revolution and Chavez's heavy reliance on the armed forces have critics drawing similarities between the Venezuelan president and Peru's controversial leader, Alberto Fujimori.

-Abby Bertumen is an intern at CUSLAR and a journalism major at Ithaca College. Elena Perez is a Science and Technology Studies major at Cornell and works at CUSLAR.


100 Drums in Stock
 • Drum Repairs on Premises
 • Hats & Hammocks too!
 DEWITT MALL, ITHACA
277-3780
 email: tokoinport@aol.com
Toko
 IMPORTS

The Colombian Aid Package: A Time Bomb in Waiting

by Elvira Sánchez-Blake

In an effort to control drug trafficking, the US Senate approved a \$1.3 billion aid package to Colombia this summer. Now the world stands in both expectation and anguish at the turn of events that might be summoned by this "aid."

The Colombian Students Association and CUSLAR in cooperation with the Latin American Studies Program, organized a Conference last April entitled "Colombia: Roots of Violence." The objectives were to discuss the issues

related to this bill, which passed into the Senate for its final approval on June 21.

A range of speakers from Colombia and the US shared their thoughts and reflections on topics from the historical roots of violence in Colombia and the situation of coca growers in Amazonas, to the US lobbying efforts and legal aspects involved in what has been called "Plan Colombia." Most of the analysis focused

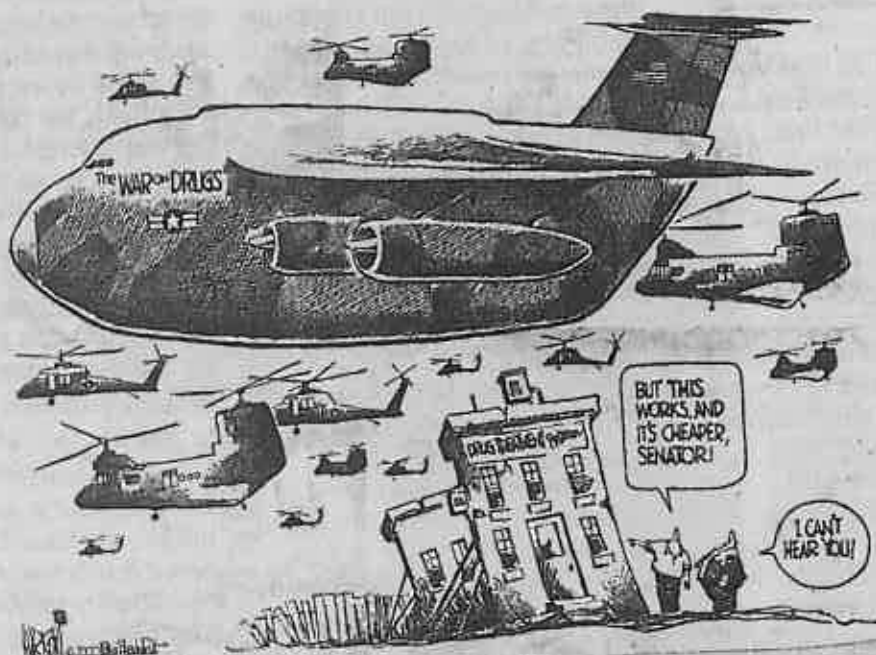
on the eventual beneficiaries of this assistance and on a plan to avoid the anticipated hazardous outcomes.

Maria Clemencia Ramirez, a Ph.D. candidate at Harvard University, who studies coca growers in the Putumayo region of southern Colombia,

growers and the Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Paramilitary groups operating in the region. Ramirez declared that to convince farmers to switch crops it would make more sense to

negotiate with leaders of the FARC than to engage in the US financed military operation that is currently underway.

Dianne Miller, legislative Director for NY Senator Maurice Hinchey, and Winfred Tate, Senior Fellow at Washington Office on



reported that about 20 percent of the profit from coca cultivation goes to Colombian traffickers, 80 percent to US dealers, and 1 percent to the cultivators. She pointed out that the "cocaleros," peasants that derive their sustenance from this crop, do not profit from this commercialization. Instead, they are faced with heavy artillery and military activity. She also talked about the relationship between coca

Latin America, pointed out that lobbying efforts are being made to direct some of the funds towards promoting and controlling the military's human rights practices and towards development programs in the affected areas.

The Most Vulnerable Country in the Region

Eduardo Pizarro Leongómez, a political scientist, made a sociological

analysis of Colombia and United States relations at the present conjuncture¹. Pizarro warned about the implications of the assistance to Colombia, remarking that US intervention in this historical moment "could come to the transformation of a national conflict into one with a much broader geopolitical significance." He explained that Colombia is presently the most vulnerable country in the region, due to long standing violence from multiple sources, including organized and common crime, guerrilla organizations, self-styled defense units, and drug financed paramilitaries.

For some this is nothing less than what Pizarro declared "a Latin American Vietnam," while for others, Colombia is another version of the war in Bosnia. "These labels do little to further our understanding of the situation in Colombia which cannot be likened either to a national war

of liberation in which the Cold War superpowers imposed their own agendas, nor to a confrontation based on long standing ethnic hatreds."

In Pizarro's opinion, the failure of the US to understand the complex Colombian

reprisals, the inability to implement legal norms, and a security apparatus operating as a "state within the state." Despite the presence of many of these factors in Colombia, however, there is one significant difference: in

Colombia there exists no linguistic, religious, or ethnic ideological confrontation, thus making a full-scale civil war unlikely. "The real risk," according to

...the failure of the United States to understand the complex Colombian situation could ultimately provoke an intensification of the problem rather than create a solution.

situation could ultimately provoke an intensification of the problem rather than create a solution. Voices in the US government and Colombia are increasingly in favor of a military solution.

Pizarro differentiated the Colombian crisis with other countries that have experienced "a collapse of the state." Countries such as Somalia, Afghanistan, and Bosnia-Herzegovina exhibited strong demographic pressures, a mass movement of refugees, a long tradition of revenge and

Pizarro, "is that the persistence and deepening of the grave social crisis, in the medium term, undermine the institutional stability of the country, both politically and economically." By letting the US intervene in this scenario with the purpose of fighting the drug problem, US officials are creating the analytical basis for tying the anti-drug war to the counterinsurgency war.

Pizarro concluded: "Colombia finds itself at a grave crossroads. It must either move quickly towards a negotiated solution to the armed conflict—the most desirable and least costly option— or will almost certainly experience a dramatic escalation of the internal conflict." Does Colombia need a US military intervention, or rather, humanitarian assistance?

The Package

Though the aid package totals \$1.321 billion, only 65 percent of that amount — \$862.3 million— is assistance



COLLEGETOWNS VEGAN ALTERNATIVE

(Featuring:) • A FULL
VEGETARIAN MENU
• TRADITIONAL AND
VEGAN PASTRIES &
DESSERTS
• NIGHTLY
INTERNATIONAL
DINNER SPECIALS

MAJOR CREDIT CARDS ACCEPTED

SERVING FOOD THAT ANYONE COULD LOVE,
FROM BRUNCH, TO LUNCH TO LATE NIGHT!

308 STEWART AVENUE • 277-4770

for Colombia. The other 35 percent is support for neighboring countries and for US agencies operating in the Andean region. Three-quarters of the Colombian package goes towards military and police aid, while the remainder is for alternative development, administration of justice, assistance for displaced persons, and human rights surveillance.²

The aid package will provide Colombia's army, navy, and air force with \$521.2 million. The National Police will receive an additional \$115.6 million to fund new spray aircraft, training, and ammunition. The single biggest item of the military and police assistance is the acquisition of UH-60 Blackhawk and UH-1H Huey Helicopters. The new equipment, training, and logistical support will reinforce the anti-narcotics operation in Southern Colombia.

The objective of the Anti-narcotics operation is to eradicate coca cultivation in the Southern Provinces of Putumayo and Caqueta (border of Ecuador and Peru). This region is strategically important not only for the guerrillas that operate in the area, but also for the paramilitary groups known as the Self-Defense Units of Colombia. Both of these

organizations depend upon and are linked with area coca trade for economic sustenance.

Colombia is in the midst of the worst economic crisis in 70 years, in addition to a longstanding civil war, which has claimed many

lives in the past decade alone. The military is known for human rights violations. The leftist guerillas and the rightist paramilitary participate in kidnappings and extortion to fund their activities, and civilians are consistently murdered and massacred over which 'side' they are presumed to support.

The US Administration claims that the aid package is to support the peace initiatives and the counter-narcotics fight in Colombia. In reality, there is small appropriation for peace initiatives. The main concern is that there is no discernable boundary between counter-narcotics and counter-insurgency. The aid is mostly allocated for the military, which continues to support the rightist paramilitaries known for their impunity and atrocity of actions. In 1999 the State Department reported that the Colombian military is aiding

right wing paramilitaries. It also declared that tacit arrangements exist between military commanders and paramilitary groups in some regions and that paramilitary groups operate freely in some areas under military control³.

The scenario in Colombia appears very grim, taking into account the political conflict between Guerrillas and the military-paramilitary link, amidst the worsening economic recession that the country has endured and the fragility of the state and the judicial apparatus. As Pizarro pointed out, Colombia is the most vulnerable country in the region, and US intervention of military aid will only intensify the conflict to unimaginable proportions.

¹Pizarro is the director of the Institute of Political and International Relations Studies at the National University of Colombia, and director of the magazine *Análisis Político*. He had to flee Colombia after an assassination attempt last December, and is currently a visiting scholar at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana.

²Source: Center for International Policy. "The Contents of the Colombia Aid package". Website: ciponline.org/colombia-aid/ Updated July 18, 2000

³"Country Reports on Human Rights Practices." (U.S. Department of State, February 1999). Report by the Criminal Justice Policy Foundation. "Colon Anti-Drug Aid Package Briefing Paper, July 29, 2000"



Viva!
TAQUERIA

Mexican Food

Serving Burritos, Tacos,
Quesadillas, Salads & More

Downtown at the corner of State & Aurora (across from Simeons)
Open 7-days till 10 p.m.
Call ahead for **TAKEOUT** ☎ **277-1752**



moosewood restaurant

fine international & original cuisine

- ♦ ethnic night on Sunday
- ♦ soup & salad
- ♦ fresh fish on weekends
- ♦ gourmet vegetarian

DeWitt Mall ♦ Seneca & Cayuga Sts. ♦ 273-9610

The Latest Weapon in the US War on Drugs in Colombia

by Helen Franks

The United States is hoping to experiment with its latest weapon in the war on drugs in Colombia: a special toxic fungus called *Fusarium Oxysporum* that kills coca plants, the raw material used in the manufacture of cocaine. A huge \$1.3 billion aid package from the US is being made contingent by some Congressional Republicans on Colombia's willingness to support development of the herbicide within its borders.

While State Department officials claim the myco-herbicides are more cost effective and more environmentally safe than chemical herbicides, opponents say that humans with weakened immune systems (a common condition in the poorer coca growing areas of the country) are at considerable risk from the fungus, which they claim has not passed the necessary environmental and human safety tests. This proposal also heightens fears over existing health-related problems resulting from aerial spraying already in operation.

According to Mother Jones, there is evidence to suggest that a similar product has already been used in



A government airplane sprays herbicide in southern Colombia in an ongoing U.S.-backed campaign to wipe out coca crops. (from Mother Jones magazine)

neighboring Peru.

Despite US government assurances of the safety of the product, use of the fungus has not been adopted in the United States. Florida opted not to use the a variant of the fungus in its own war on drugs after learning of possible detrimental effects on other crops and livestock. The capacity of the fungus to mutate is of great concern to farmers in the US and in

Colombia.

Congress is pressuring for UN involvement in the project despite assertions by Klaus Nyholm, UN special representative in Colombia, that Colombians oppose the use of the fungus. A number of Colombian scientists who have spoken out against use of the fungus have received threatening calls urging them to back away from the issue.

Critics have questioned the coercive methods being employed by the US government to force the usage of the fungus as they appear to violate a number of international treaties, including the

international conventions against the spread of biological weapons. Others have raised questions about the secrecy surrounding early research, into the fungus, undertaken by agencies such as the CIA.

Meanwhile Colombia, caught up in the turmoil of a civil war and failing peace process, has agreed to initial research into the presence of the fungus in the coca plant.

Mundo Gitano

20
INCENSE
FOR
\$1
WITH THIS AD



WORLD
GYPSY
IMPORT
SHOP

(607) 277-5462

(NEXT TO MAYER'S NEWSTAND)

320 E. STATE ST., ITHACA, NEW YORK 14850



NEW
USED

THE BOOKERY

NEW AND USED BOOKS

Area's Largest Selection of Fiction
Non-Fiction, Travel Books & Maps

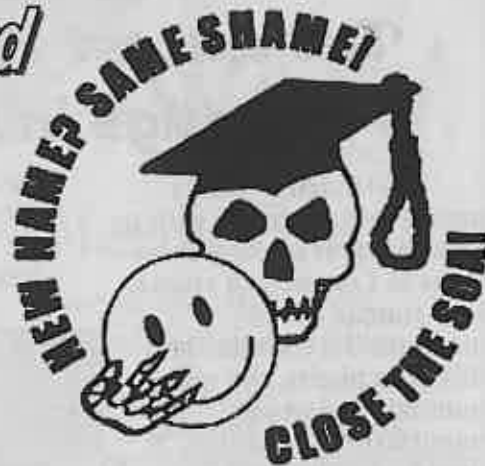
Mon-Sat 9:30 to 9:30 Sun 11:00 to 6:00
Mon-Sat 10:00 to 6:00 Sun Closed

Dewitt Mall, 215 North Cayuga St., Ithaca, NY 14850
Tel: (607) 273-5055 • E-mail: mail@thebookery.com
Fax: (607) 275-9221 • Web Site: www.thebookery.com

Keep on Walking Forward

Close the School of the Americas

**Vigil and Nonviolent Civil
Disobedience
November 17 - 19, 2000
Fort Benning, GA**



In November of 1989, six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her teenage daughter were assassinated in El Salvador. Nineteen of the 26 Salvadoran officers cited by a UN Truth Commission for this atrocity were trained at the US Army School of the Americas (SOA) located at Fort Benning, GA. The massacre of the Jesuits and two women is but one example of the "work" of SOA graduates. The SOA has trained over 60,000 Latin American Soldiers in civilian-targeted warfare techniques. Each November thousands gather at the gates of Fort Benning to commemorate the Jesuit massacre and call for the closure of the SOA. The Pentagon has responded to this pressure with a proposal to "reform" the SOA with a new name and a few cosmetic changes. The people are not taken in by this ruse and will return to Fort Benning again and again until this school of assassins is closed.

**Honor the memory of those who have died at
the hands of SOA graduates. Come to Fort
Benning to say No to the repression!**

Orientation and logistics for this year's new scenario

Friday Nov. 17th 6 - 7:30 pm or 8 - 9:30 pm

Saturday Nov. 18th 10 - 11:30 am, 6 - 7:30 pm or
8 - 9:30 pm

Bradley Theater ~ 1241 Broadway ~ Columbus, GA

Peacekeeper Orientation

Saturday Nov. 18th 8 - 9:30 am

Bradley Theater ~ 1241 Broadway ~ Columbus, GA

Vigil at the Gate

Saturday Nov. 18th 12 - 5 pm

Ft. Benning Main Gate ~ Ft. Benning Rd.

Vigil and Nonviolent Civil Disobedience

Sunday Nov. 19th 9 am - 5 pm

Ft. Benning Main Gate ~ Ft. Benning Rd.

All events will be sign interpreted.

SOA Watch is an independent organization that seeks to close the US Army SOA through vigils, fasts, demonstrations, nonviolent protest, media, and legislative work.

The US Army School of the Americas, based in Fort Benning, Georgia, trains Latin American soldiers in combat, counter-insurgency, and counter-narcotics. Graduates of the SOA have been responsible for some of the worst human rights abuses in Latin America. Religious leaders, veteran's organizations, student groups, and organized labor, including the AFL-CIO, have campaigned to close the school, noting that SOA graduates have been repeatedly linked to massacres, assassinations, and other atrocities in Latin America. Reports issued by the United Nations Truth Commission in El Salvador and other respected human rights documents have borne out this connection. Recently-released human rights reports on Colombia issued by the US State Department and Human Rights Watch cite SOA graduates for 1999 atrocities in that country.

Local contacts: Ellen (607) 277-6932 or Leslie (607) 272-6482

Non-violence Training and Affinity Group Formation
in preparation for
November 17-19 Vigil and Mass Civil Disobedience at Ft. Benning, GA to

Close the SOA!

The local SOA Watch is offering non-violence trainings, held locally, in preparation for the rally and mass civil disobedience to Close the SOA this November 17, 18, & 19 at Fort Benning, GA. As the November vigil has grown to such tremendous proportions, it has become more important than ever for participants to be well grounded in a nonviolent discipline. Unlike previous years, SOA Watch will not be offering NV training at the rally & mass CD in GA. (SOA Watch will provide orientation sessions in GA where the logistics for this year's new scenario will be presented.) Instead, the national SOA Watch is calling upon local communities to work together and prepare at home for the November event by offering NV trainings locally and promoting the formation of direct action affinity groups.

Our presence at Fort Benning this year will include varied and creative forms of resistance to SOA violence and the Pentagon's effort to cover it up. As always, a solemn funeral procession will cross the line onto Fort Benning. In addition, the scenario includes space for smaller groups to engage in other forms of nonviolent action that is not part of the solemn funeral procession. We ask that everyone joining the funeral procession or participating in another type of action attend local nonviolence trainings and one of the orientation sessions in Columbus.

Schedule of Non-violence Trainings and Affinity Group Formation:

Saturday, October 7, 1pm-5pm	Saturday, October 14, 1pm-5pm	Saturday, October 21, 1pm-5pm
Saturday, October 28, 1pm-5pm	Saturday, November 4, 1pm-5pm	Saturday, November 11, 1pm-5pm

These trainings will be held only if people have signed up ahead of time. The location for each training is to be determined, based on the number of people signed-up for each training. Please contact Leslie (ls30@cornell.edu / 607-272-6482) to sign-up. The deadline to sign-up for each training will be the Thursday before the training is to be held.

Affinity Groups

Everyone who plans to participate in this year's NV civil disobedience at Ft. Benning, funeral procession or other type of direct action, is encouraged to be part of an affinity group. Affinity groups are self-sufficient support systems of about 5 to 20 people. A number of affinity groups may work together toward a common goal in a large action, or one affinity group might conceive of and carry out an action on its own. Affinity groups for mass actions are often formed during nonviolence training sessions. It is a good idea to meet with your affinity group a few times before an action to get to know them and to build trust, clarify values, come to consensus on a plan of action by discussing issues such as non-cooperation, the role your group will play (in a large action), etc.

Affinity groups serve as a source of support and solidarity for their members. The affinity group includes both people risking arrest and support people who will not risk arrest. This structure provides a way to participate in a mass action while making decisions with a small, trusted group. Affinity groups will enhance the witness at Fort Benning by providing a vehicle for new and creative expressions of resistance. It will be very important for affinity groups to attend a local nonviolence training (see schedule below), as well as, an orientation session in Columbus.

No Más, No More...

SOA Watch Activists Arrested at Convention

As the Republican National Convention converged on Philadelphia, School of the Americas Watch (SOAW) activists were there to voice opposition to the Congressional refusal to acknowledge the horrific crimes against humanity that graduates of the SOA have perpetrated, and to declare shame on those who voted against the closure of the SOA and the establishment of a Truth Commission.

Monday, July 31st at 8:30 AM, in front of the Philadelphia City Hall, SOA Watch activists enacted a massacre of Latin American Campesinos at the hands of SOA graduates — directed by Uncle Sam. As Father Roy Bourgeois spoke about the atrocities committed in El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico and Colombia by SOA graduates (represented by 4 people wearing signs with the countries around their neck), Bill Brown, donned as Uncle Sam, shrugged his shoulders — initially denying any responsibility, but lost his participants surrounding the scenario began screaming and crying out, others solemnly sang "No Mas, No

More!"

All the while the police kept their distance... until the soldiers and Uncle Sam began carrying the bodies into the intersection. One by one, the peasants were laid out in the streets and outlined in chalk — in the middle of the bodies one of the soldiers inscribed "SOA." Hordes of Philadelphia police then surrounded the protesters, approximately 30 were poised with batons in hand, while the others, using their bikes, formed a tight perimeter around the bodies — 2 to 3 officers deep — blocking the view of the media and the observers and moved in to arrest the participants.

The nine were taken to the Philadelphia Police holding station, processed and released 11 hours later. They were charged with a range of two to five misdemeanors: obstructing justice, resisting arrest, disorderly conduct, obstructing a highway and conspiracy to obstruct a highway. The court date is scheduled for September 16th.

This action was the first with arrests during the Republican National Convention and drew a tremendous amount of media

attention from across the US to the struggle to close the School of the Americas. In addition to independent media coverage, other national television and radio coverage included: CNN, "Democracy Now," NPR, the New York Post, USA Today, New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, Atlanta Constitution, Philadelphia Daily News, the Columbus Ledger Enquirer, and many other media sources.

If there was coverage in your regional area, please let us know by sending an e-mail to

multisoaw@adom-soaw.adom or by sending us a copy of the article to SOA Watch/NE 6367 Overbrook Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19151.

We would like to especially thank the tremendous solidarity we received from the Independent Media Center, the R2K Media Collective, as well as the R2K Legal Team and the National Lawyers Guild. They did an incredible job of supporting our action, offering assistance while we were being detained, and directing media calls.

www.soaw.org

Mexican elections, cont'd from page 7

of InterAmerican Development.

Not surprisingly, one of their first proposals to 'revive' the economy consists of applying the national sales tax (currently at 15 percent) to previously exempt medicines

and foodstuffs. Concurrently, other taxes such as the new automobile tax, the Special Tax on Products and Services, taxes imposed on foreign commerce, and additional corporate taxes would disappear. Critics claim that in effect this was saying that the poor would pay for the reform, while the rich and the

multinationals continue to benefit. This proposal immediately caused an uproar which forced Fox to declare that nothing would be done without the majority's consent.

And why are such stringent measures being proposed in the first place? For one thing, there is the

FOBAPROA scandal. The FOBAPROA fund was used — legally and illegally — to “protect” the savings of thousands of wealthy Mexicans and their companies who accumulated unpayable debts in recent years (the details of which were kept secret by a joint PRI-PAN vote). Congress then passed resolutions to bail out those in debt, transforming their private debts into public debt at a cost of tens of billions of dollars to the Mexican people. By taxing medicines and food (but not new cars) to pay for this mess, one can clearly see the continuing trend of burdening the poor with the inefficiency and corruption of the rich.

Silence From the Jungle

Meanwhile, the PRI suffered another significant and historical defeat in the state of Chiapas, where a low-intensity civil war has been waged by the Mexican Army against the insurgent Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) since 1994. Despite increasing tensions in the area, on August 20 a coalition of all opposition parties (including the PAN and the PRD) headed by Pablo Salazar Mendiguchia defeated the PRI candidate, Sami David David, by about a 10 percent margin. It was a very low turn-out election, however, with less than 50 percent of registered voters showing up to cast their vote for one of the two candidates, both of whom, until last year, belonged to the PRI. Nonetheless, many see the fact that the PRI is out of the presidency and out of Chiapas as a factor that will contribute to the peaceful solution of the conflict in the southern region (It should be pointed out, however, that in other places,

the ousting of the PRI has generated outbursts of violence, as in the recent massacre of Chimalhuacán).

Despite the significance of the events happening



around them, the EZLN has remained silent since before the July 2 elections, and has not replied to Fox's overtures for an open dialogue. Their silence could be interpreted as a response to one of Fox's most notorious campaign declarations: that he would “solve” the Chiapas conflict in 15 minutes. Perhaps the EZLN is making the point that it will take more than a quarter of an hour to correct centuries of poverty and exploitation. But Fox is already trying to demonstrate his good intentions by announcing that he intends to honor an earlier set of peace treaties (which the PRI refused to do), reform the army and the police, and enlist the help of personalities such as Guatemalan Nobel Peace

Prize winner Rigoberta Menchú and former bishop of Chiapas, Samuel Ruiz, to achieve peace in the area.

Business as Usual?

Vicente Fox's preferred metaphor for governing is that of a Corporation/State that views citizens as “clients”, and correspondingly tries to provide them with good service. His promises of transparency and accountability sound like a welcome change. However, if we are to extend his metaphor, concerns would arise regarding those “clients” who have more and who can pay more — and thus be better represented — than those “clients” who have less and cannot pay for the government's services.

Whether euphoric or skeptical, Mexicans today feel a sense of anticipation and transformation. Most would like to see a transition to a more democratic Mexico. But as history shows, Fox's good intentions might not be sufficient. About a hundred years ago, another rich rancher from the north named Gustavo I. Madero also offered to honor the Zapatistas' claim to land and liberty. When he failed to deliver, the hope of transformation banished and the Mexican Revolution started anew.

Sources: *La Jornada*, *Proceso*, *Mexico News Summary*

For updates visit:
www.mexicosolidarity.org

CUSLAR'S

Poetry Page



El Fuego

El fuego,
otra vez fuego,
el fuego junto a la lumbre,
en el piso,
subiendo por los sillones,
cruzando las ventanas,
y tras él el fuego,
solamente el fuego.

El fuego otra vez.
¿No lo ven?
¡No lo ven! Es el fuego.
Les parezco una mujer sentada.

Quiero vestirme.
La ropa interior que yo traía puesta,
abrió sus tejidos,
los venció el calor,
la blusa abrió sus tejidos,
vencida también,
la falda cedió sus hilos,
ardiendo los dejó caer...

Quiero vestirme.

El fuego. No tengo más que el fuego:
Soy la desnuda, la que no tiene encantos.

Quiero vestirme.

* **Carmen Boullosa**, born in 1954, is a poet, playwright, novelist and author of short stories as well as children's books. She lives in Mexico City, where she is a cultural activist, producing, directing and supporting literary and art events. She received the Xavier Villaurrutia Prize for Poetry in 1989. Her six volumes of poetry are collected in a book entitled *La salvaja*.

Fire

Fire,
again the fire,
flames burning,
on the floor,
shooting up the armchairs,
out through the windows,
and next to that, fire
only fire.

Fire again.
Don't you see it?
You don't! It's fire.
To you, I look like a woman sitting.

I want to cover myself.
The underclothes I was wearing fell apart,
overcome by the heat,
my blouse unravelled,
vanquished as well,
my skirt surrendered its threads,
letting them fall, ablaze...

I want to cover myself.

Fire. I've nothing but fire:
I am exposed, the one with no charms.

I want to cover myself.

FEEDING MEXICO: THE POLITICAL USES OF FOOD SINCE 1910

By Enrique Ochoa

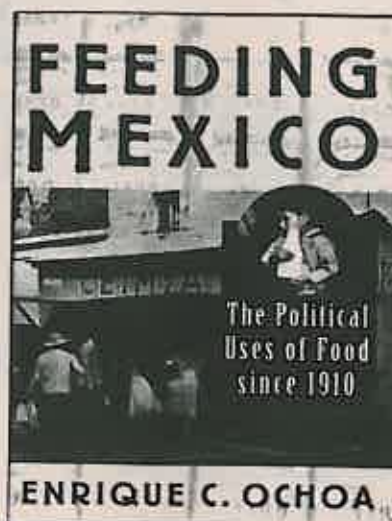
Reviewed by Nohemy Solórzano

Just days after his election as president of Mexico last July 1st, PAN candidate Vicente Fox announced that he would curtail food and medicine subsidies as soon as he assumed power in January 2001. The news immediately caused different reactions from his constituents. Those in favor of free trade applauded the move by the president-elect, while those directly affected by the cuts dreaded another crisis.

Enrique Ochoa's book *Feeding Mexico: The Political Uses of Food Since 1910* comes at an opportune time to provide a theory as to the government's policy towards subsidizing food in Mexico. Ochoa's central thesis is that subsidies were created and maintained in Mexico not to alleviate poverty, but to cater to the interest of urban labor. While the subsidies benefited the working classes, they failed to raise the standard of living of the rural masses throughout Mexico. Enrique Ochoa is associate professor of history and associate coordinator of Latin American Studies at California State University, Los Angeles.

Ochoa argues that many of the agencies monitoring and determining the amount of subsidies were set up hastily in order to react to specific political and economic classes that threatened the status quo. The State Food Agency, founded during the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas, became an important tool to incorporate food producers in the

countryside to a national and international market, while also ensuring that the urban classes had access to grains and other basic foods. While the Agency failed to meet the needs of rural producers, it was, however, instrumental in



placating urban protests and uprisings. The Agency also benefited urban employers by allowing them to freeze wages in times of crises, since the workers would be able to afford basic food needs thanks to the subsidies. Ochoa also points out that most importantly, the Agency became an important national symbol of the government's commitment to the poor and the needy, even if reality was otherwise.

In *Feeding Mexico*, Ochoa traces the relationship between the state and food policies in post-revolutionary Mexico throughout different crises and political plans. Paying close attention to the establishment of the State Food Agency during the Cárdenas government, Ochoa highlights the direct involvement between the ruling party and the Food Agency in controlling urban workers and assuring a

smooth transition from post-revolutionary revolt to a party dictatorship.

Ochoa further analyzes the relationship between food subsidies and later governments, finally detailing the crisis of the late 70's and 80's, which led to the dismantling of the State Food Agency in the 1990's under the presidency of Carlos Salinas. While the State Food Agency was unable to minimize rural poverty and malnutrition, it was successful in subsidizing working class diets and providing some urban stability. The elimination of the State Food Agency, according to Ochoa's book, was partially responsible for the social unrest in 1994. In 1994, a combination of high inflation, steep devaluation of the peso, and the dismantling of several state-owned enterprises and social programs caused an economic and social crisis that led to the uprising in Chiapas and other protests against the government's policies.

Ochoa concludes that while the State Food Agency was designed to resolve short-term crises and only benefit urban consumers and their employers, poverty continued rising in Mexico.

The next possible chapter in Ochoa's book is presently being written in Mexico. If Vicente Fox is successful in eliminating all food and medicine subsidies, more social unrest may develop among the working class. The July election, which ended the 71-year PRI dictatorship, was history in the making. We however do not know what exactly was made.

-Nohemy Solórzano is a graduate student in Romance Studies and a CUSLAR volunteer.

You're in good company when you support CUSLAR

CUSLAR supporters April - September 2000

Molly and Barry Adams
Therese Araneo
Barbara Barry
Karl and Alba Bernhard
Howard Conklin
Lena Entin
Linda Farthing
John and Martha Ferger
Harvey and Bryna Fireside
Kara Frostclapp
Bill Gibson
Mary Gilliland
Henry Goode
Teresa Grady
Michael Gulachok

Mark Hansen
Beth Harris
Gail Holst-Warhaft
Lee and Rochelle Johnson
Mary Kelsey
Ben Kohl
Jack and Mary Lewis
Andrea Looney
Erika Merschrod
Ben and Judith Nichols
Taylor Peck
Sara Pines
Kristin Poduska
Anna Posel and Jose Lobo
Bob Schindelbeck

Pamela Shade
Erin Sheehan
Emily Sillars
Leo Tohill and Irene Komor
Norman Uphoft
Theresa Vasquez
Jeff Vogt
Zellman Warhaft
Hilda Wilcox
Therese Yagy
Frank and Lorrie Young

<http://instruct1.cit.cornell.edu/courses/altlib>

books/videos/audiotapes/magazines/cds

philosophy
community
politics
culture
poetry
work



global issues
ecology
gender
media
health
etc.

DURLAND

ALTERNATIVES LIBRARY

Free and open to all

Anabel Taylor Hall • Cornell University • Ithaca, NY 14853 • 607-255-6486

OPEN: MONDAY - THURSDAY 11:00AM - 8:00PM
FRIDAY 11:00AM - 6:00PM SATURDAY 11:00AM - 5:00PM
SUNDAY 11:00AM - 11:00PM

Schedule varies during breaks, holidays & summer

Project of the Center for Religion, Ethics & Social Policy (CRESP)

**"All the News
That's Fit to Print"**

NOT!

**... What the mainstream media
can't fit in, you'll find in the**

CUSLAR NEWSLETTER

**Human Rights in
Central America**

**Rights of
Indigenous People
in the Americas**

**Women in Latin
America**

Peace and Justice

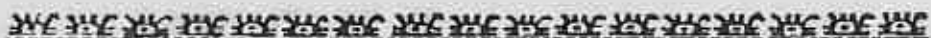
**Environmental
Destruction**

**If you like our views
please pay your dues....**

I'm enclosing \$10__ \$25__ \$50__ \$100__ Other__
to keep the CUSLAR Newsletters coming

NAME: _____
ADDRESS: _____

(All contributions are tax deductible and will be acknowledged in print)
Send your donation to: CUSLAR, 316 Anabel Taylor Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca,
NY 14853



Fall Classes:
**Conversational
Spanish and Portuguese!!**

**Need to learn Spanish or Portuguese for
Work, Travel, or Research?**

**Join CUSLAR's Fall Classes: Low fees,
native speakers, small groups, beginning
and intermediate, ongoing classes.**

Info & Registration: call CUSLAR
at 255-7293 or email cuslar@cornell.edu

<http://www.rso.cornell.edu/cuslar/classes.html>



CUSLAR/CRESP
Anabel Taylor Hall
Cornell University
Ithaca, NY 14850

Non-profit Organization
U.S. postage paid
Permit 448
Ithaca, NY 14850