



Spring 2000

CUSLAR Newsletter

Latin
America's
Environment:
What
Lies
Ahead?



The Committee on U.S.-Latin American Relations



A Globalization of the Environment?

To be sure, Latin America's natural resources have been trickling north for over 500 years. In what has come to light as the true definition of "globalization", the consolidation of natural resources through privatization and transfer of resources from the many to the few is trend which continues today.

This issue of the CUSLAR newsletter documents just a few cases in which economic & corporate globalization has contributed to environmental degradation in Latin America. Water, forests, farmland, and the people who live on them constantly struggle to maintain a level of subsistence in the face of increasing pressure from corporations and governments eager to cash in on the resources that remain.

Recent protests against international financial institutions like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund have highlighted the devastating environmental impacts of many World Bank funded large development projects. But even small programs that bear the seal of the World Bank are able to further marginalize the poor. Initiatives that fund participatory rural development programs are manipulated by politicians. Agricultural development programs are designed to facilitate the sale of chemical inputs and flood the market with foreign currency-earning export crops instead of improving rural livelihoods. Funds for reforestation make it into the hands of large scale land owners and corporations.

As rural outmigration adds to the pressure in urban slums, the 12,000 employees of the IMF and World Bank insist they are working to end poverty. While loans are made to string oil pipelines through the remnants of African rainforests, the institutions insist they promote environmental protection and sustainable development.

Privatization schemes are brokered by international institutions like the World Bank and IMF, in which tax breaks and concessions are given to foreign companies wishing to enter the Latin American market in natural resources, including water. We explore Mexico and Bolivian cases in this newsletter, but this is only the current hot spot, while similar programs continue to be implemented every day.

CUSLAR stands united with the people of Latin America, who seek self determination in the face of corporate interests. The recent protests in Washington, DC support a growing awareness of the mechanisms which continue to exploit the peoples and resources of the Global South, and an ever-louder cry for positive change and a sustainable future.

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.

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In Brief...

By Sam Costello

Prisoners Riot Across Peru

A rebellion mounted by over 1,500 prisoners in the San Pedro de Lurigancho prison in Lima was crushed by police and military troops using tear gas and helicopters on Feb. 29. In the process, at least one prisoner was killed and 47 injured. The protests, which began on Feb. 28, were also undertaken at San Antonio de Pocollay prison in Tacna, Cristo Rey prison in Ica, and the Miguel Castro Castro prison in Lima.

The strikers at all prisons are demanding improvements in prison conditions, acceleration of judicial processes, and changes to tough anti-crime laws which result in harsher prison regulations.

Despite the end of the San Pedro de Lurigancho protest, other prisons, including those in Piura, Hunaco, Sullana and Arequipa, saw new demonstrations begin on Feb. 29. Lima's *La Republica* reports that authorities are blaming a foiled strike at the Socabaya prison on imprisoned American activist Lori Berenson, despite her complete isolation from the general prison populace. (*Clarín*, Buenos Aires)

Ecuador Pushes Closer to "Dollarization"

The bill to change Ecuador's national currency from the *sucre* to the U.S. dollar, at an exchange rate of 25,000 *sucres* to one dollar, was passed by the Ecuadorian Congress on February 29. The bill was supported by a wide variety of political parties, including the Social Christian Party, Popular Democracy, Alfariista Radical Front, and many others. The voting session was not attended by representatives from the Democratic Left, the Ecuadorian Roldosista Party, Pachakutik and the Popular Democracy Movement parties.

The effects of this bill are not confined to "dollarizing" Ecuador's economy. The bill will also allow for the privatization of 51% of the country's public telecommunications and electric sectors, vest power in the presidency to build a new oil pipeline, and amend the Labor Code to allow workers to be hired by the hour at a minimum wage of \$0.50.

Despite the bill's passage, opposition to the plan remains strong in many sectors of the Ecuadorian union, NGOs, and indigenous communities. In the face of protests and work stoppages, President Noboa, whose popularity has dipped from March 2's 51% to a current 39%, has vowed not to



be swayed from his dollarization plan. (Agencia Informativa Pulsar; *La Republica*, Lima)

Drug War Certifications Renewed

On March 1, President Bill Clinton presented Congress with the list of countries which he wished to "certify" as partners in the U.S.'s war against illegal drugs. Under the terms of the 14-year-old law, the U.S. can impose economic sanctions against countries which fail to meet the standards for certification. Both Colombia and Mexico were certified, with Afghanistan and Burma being denied certification. Though not certified, Cambodia, Haiti, Nigeria, and Paraguay were spared economic sanction, due to national interest concerns.

In response to the White House's characterization of the recertification efforts of Venezuela as "effective," Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez Frias called U.S. methods "ineffective." He asked, "How do drugs get into the United States? They have to ask themselves this. Is Superman bringing them in? They have to come in by land or by sea or by air." (*La Republica*, Lima)

Elections Postponed in Haiti

Problems with a new voter registration system caused

Continued on next page

Haiti's Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) on March 3 to postpone long-awaited elections originally slated for March 29. CEP stated that only 2.9 million of the country's 4 million voters had been registered as of March 3, thereby forcing the cancellation.

CEP's opponents claimed that a lack of materials for the new voter registration system, based on national photo identification cards, had caused the problems. "We can say that 90% of the registration stations have been down for the past two or three weeks," stated Ben Dupuy of the leftist National Popular Party (PPN). "They have no film. The PPN conducted an investigation in the Port-au-Prince region...where we can say that 95% of the registration stations are not functioning. People have to turn around and go home because supposedly there are no materials."

It is believed that sitting president Jean Bertrande

Aristide would have won the elections had they been held, with his FL party carrying at least 34% of the vote, according to research conducted by the Haitian firm Ecosof-Ecodata. A total of 29,300 candidates were running for 10,000 positions. Elections have not been rescheduled. (*Miami Herald*, Miami, USA; *Haiti en Marche*, Haiti)

Social Security Strike Ends in El Salvador

Doctors and other employees of El Salvador's Social Security Institute (ISSS) ended their five-month-old strike on March 10, demanding pay increases and opposing what they call "a privatization plan." The 11,348 striking workers agreed to return to work after the right-wing government of president Francisco Flores pledged good-faith negotiations on the privatization issue and to rehire 211 fired strikers.

The agreement between the strikers and the government came just two days before National Assembly elections, in which nearly 400 seats were contested, including mayoralties, Assembly deputies, and Central America parliament representations. Polls project the Farabundo Front for National Liberation (FMLN), a guerrilla group until 1992, will win the mayoralty of the capital, San Salvador, and increase its number of seats in the National Assembly from 27 to 32, giving it a larger number than Flores's Republican Nationalist Alliance.

The accord came less than a week after dozens of strikers and patients were injured in a confrontation in front of the Surgical Medical Center in San Salvador. (*The New York Times*, USA; *El Nuevo Herald*)

Congressional Committee OKs Colombia Aid

The U.S. House of Representatives voted on March 30 to approve the 2000 Emergency Supply Aid Package, which provides, among other things, \$1.7 million in military assistance to Colombia to aid in the war on drugs.

On March 8, the package was modified at the behest of House International Relations Chair, Ben Gilman (R-NY), to add \$25 million and move two of the 30 requested Blackhawk helicopters to the Colombian police. Speaker of the House, Dennis Hastert (R-IL), pushed through additional funding to fight the drug war in Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador.

An amendment put forth by David Obey (D-WI) designed to withhold \$552 million from two Colombian counter-narcotics battalions was

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defeated 36-20.

The package also contains spending provisions for "peacekeeping" in Kosovo and

certified to the Director, Office of Management and Budget, that the integrity of the training range is



East Timor, disaster recovery for U.S. farmers, and subsidization of home fuel oil prices in the Northeast.

A *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* editorial on March 9 called the aid package "the making of another blunder in our beleaguered anti-drug policy." (SP-I, NYT, *Washington Post*, *Miami Herald*).

US to Puerto Rico: Move Protestors, Get Money

A bill worth \$9 billion dollars approved by the U.S. House Appropriations Committee on March 9 (the same one containing the \$1.7 billion earmarked for Colombia) contains \$40 million for economic development, a health study and environmental protection for Puerto Rico. There is one catch: in order to get the money, the Puerto Rican government must remove protestors who continue to occupy a Navy bombing range on the island of Vieques in an act of civil disobedience.

The bill states that the majority of the funding "shall not become available until the Secretary of the Navy has

uninterrupted, and trespassing and other intrusions on the range have ceased."

The only Puerto Rican on the Appropriations Committee, Rep. Jose Serrano (D-NY), voted against the bill, stating that "the Appropriations Committee should not be involved in making decisions as to when protestors should leave that site." (*El Nuevo Dia*)

Two Mexican Prosecutors Victims of Violence

The bodies of Mexico City human rights official Salvador Leglisce and his two sisters were found on March 9, in their home 35 miles southwest of Mexico City. Only the day before, the body of a top official in the federal Attorney

General's office, Izabal Villicana, was found in his car, one block from his home in Mexico City.

Leglisce had been the coordinator of advisers for the deputy attorney general's Human Rights Office at the Federal District Attorney General's Office. Forensic evidence suggested that both Leglisce and his sisters had been tortured before they died.

Villicana apparently shot himself with a 9mm pistol. A March 7 investigation of a safe deposit box in a Mexico City branch of the New York-based Citibank, turned up \$700,000 belonging to Villicana. A note addressed to his wife, found on his body, read "The money is difficult to explain. It is the product of the business I did, but in my position as public servant, it wouldn't be understood. It is not from narcos, far from it, but I didn't declare it and circumstances put me up against the wall." The Attorney General did not discount the possibility that, contrary to the note, the money was in fact tied to drugs.

These deaths are simply the latest in a series of law-enforcement-related deaths. Villicana's predecessor, Mario Ruiz Massieu, committed suicide in New Jersey on Sept. 15, 1999, while facing embezzlement and money laundering charges. The chief

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of the Tijuana police, Alfredo de la Torre, also was murdered by six men tied to drug gangs.

Bolivian Bus Drivers Strike

March 21 saw a near total halt to all bus service in Bolivia's capital La Paz and nearby El Alto as drivers staged a one day protest by blocking roads, marching and rallying. The drivers demanded an end to gas price increases and an increase in bus fares.

Most of the strikers were members of the indigenous Aymara. The Aymara bus drivers gathered into groups of 50 or more and attempted to forcibly stop buses which were breaking the strike and beating the strike-breaking bus drivers with traditional Aymara leather whips called "quimsacharani."

Protesters clashed with police several times during the course of the strike. (*La República*, Lima; AP)

Fisherpeople Fight Oil Company in Brazil

Hundreds of fisherpeople clashed with police on the streets of Rio de Janeiro on March 20 as they protested an oil spill which has destroyed their livelihoods. The protesters blocked the street in front of the offices of Petrobras, the oil company whose Jan. 18 spill of 1.2 million liters of crude oil into Guanabara Bay has contaminated the fish and crustaceans upon which the fisherpeople depend.

While the government of Brasil has already fined



Petrobras \$26.8 million, the fisherpeople are suing the company for for \$67 million in compensation for their lost livelihoods. Environmentalists estimate that the spill, which has spread to two swamps beyond the bay, will affect the area for at least the next 10 years. (AFP, AP)

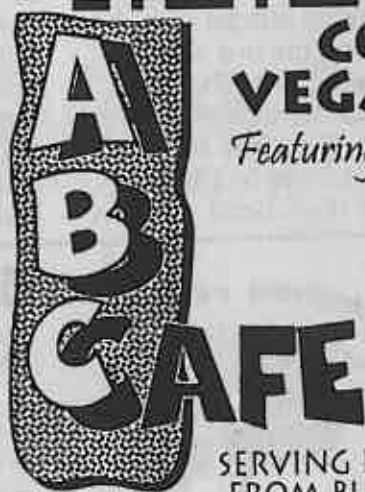
Cuban "Spy" is Not A Spy

Mariano Faget, the former INS officer who the FBI accused of spying for Cuba on Feb. 17, has been cleared of passing secrets to Cuba, according to the INS. Faget, the

son of a prominent Cuban anti-communist, is now said to have violated the U.S. Espionage Act through his unsupervised contacts with Cuban officials.

Faget, and his business partner Pedro Font, had met with Cuban officials to discuss possible business ventures in Cuba if the U.S. embargo is lifted in the future. Faget and Font's company has been named by Proctor and Gamble as its official Cuban representative.

FBI officials said that while Faget has not spied, he still passed classified information to his business partner and violated the Espionage Act by meeting with the Cubans. Faget's trial has been tentatively set for April 24.



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WATER

Human Right or Human Need?

By Laura Saldivar-Tanaka

"Many of the wars of this century were about oil — but the wars of the next century will be about water."

—Ismail Serageldin, vice president, The World Bank, 1995

Water, which sustains all forms of life on our planet, was the central topic on March 22, 2000 when the world's governments met in the Hague at a World Water Conference to adopt a ministerial Declaration on Water Security for the 21st century. Despite the urging of NGOs that the declaration should establish that access to water is a human right, the Global Water Council, established by the World Bank, declared that clean, safe, adequate water for all people is merely a basic human need. "Expanding the crippling tentacles of globalization, they further propose that water should be valued as an economic good".¹

Two weeks after the World Water Conference in Cochabamba, Bolivia, a national revolution almost began when residents of Cochabamba organized to protest the privatization of the public water system and the high prices that were established by the San Francisco-based Bechtel Corporation. Bechtel entered Bolivia following the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank mandate for the Bolivian government to privatize water and other natural resources.²

In Mexico the same program is being implemented, and the privatization of water

systems is already happening. At this moment, at least four cities have started the privatization of their water supply, including tourist centers like Cancun, Aguas Calientes, Nogales and Navoja. Different foreign companies entered into partnerships with Mexican companies and are able to acquire 49.9 percent of the shares. The foreign companies include U.S.-based water company Azurix, French-based Lyonnaise des Eaux and Vivendi—the world's largest water company—, and U.K.-based Severn Trent. Other cities such as Mexico City and Monterrey are going into private-public sector partnerships. Mexico City was forced to privatize in order to obtain a US\$365-million loan from the IADB.

Investors take advantage of the coming trend to privatize public water supplies and make individual fortunes from Earth's most precious resource without considering most of the population's opinion.

For more information please see:

1) "Thirsty planet: Will water trigger the next war?" <http://antiwar.com>. PARIS. March 5, 2000 (AFP).

2) Hindery, Derrick. "The Bolivian case to eradicate international financial institutions and support Global Justice."

3) "Corporations Threatening to Privatize Global Water Supply." <http://www.flora.org/flora.mai-not/18051>. March 9, 2000.

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FAX: 202-260-5711
parrish.reginald@epa.gov

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<http://www.gracelinks.org>

4) Adelson, Naomi. "Water Woes: Private investment plugs leak in water sector." *Business Mexico*. <http://www2.planeta.com/mader/headlines.html>

Privatization of Leads to Massive in Bolivia

WATER PROTESTS

by Marcie Ley

The government of Bolivia declared a state of siege on April 8 in response to a popular uprising against a plan to privatize water rights in Cochabamba. The announcement came after eight days of violent confrontations that killed

seven and wounded at least 100 others.

Thousands of campesinos and city residents blocked roads and staged demonstrations mainly in Cochabamba,

the country's third largest city, though the unrest could be felt throughout the rest of this Andean nation.

At issue is a proposal to increase water prices by 35 percent in order to fund a \$200 million waterworks project. Under pressure from the International Monetary Fund and World Bank to privatize city and state water operations, the government sold Cochabamba's water rights to a consortium led by the London-based

International Water Limited and the Bechtal Corporation of San Francisco. The increased cost for water would prove devastating to many in this impoverished nation of eight million. Under the plan struggling farmers would have to pay for water they currently receive for free. Already half of Cochabamba's residents

Under the plan struggling farmers would have to pay for water they currently receive for free. Already half of Cochabamba's residents cannot afford the \$30 per month cost to hook up to this arid city's water system.

cannot afford the \$30 per month cost to hook up to this arid city's water system.

The democratically elected President, Hugo Banzer, is a former dictator responsible for one of the country's many military coups which first brought him to power in the 1970's. In declaring a state of emergency he effectively removed all constitutional guarantees to citizens for a period of 90 days. Such a state allows for

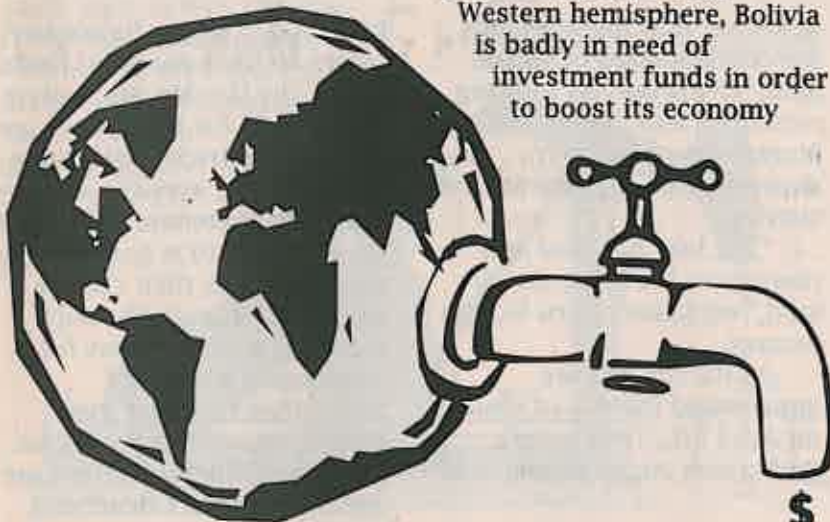
arrests and detentions without due cause, establishes a curfew, limits the freedom of the press, and restricts both travel and political activity within the county. The police shut down most national radio stations in order to prevent independent reporting of the events, according to the Associated Press.

During the height of the conflict, an army captain, a peasant protester, and a tailor observing the confrontation were killed as soldiers tried to remove a roadblock in Achacachi, a town 60 miles north of La Paz. A teacher died from bullet wounds at another road block near the city of Oruro. The body of a youth who was shot in the face during a demonstration in Cochabamba was carried through the streets and hailed as a martyr. Many of the protest leaders were arrested and held at a remote location in the Amazon, near the border of Brazil, and far away from the site of the demonstrations.

A local television crew took pictures that show Robinson (Roberto) Iriarte, a captain in the Bolivian army, firing live ammunition directly into a crowd of protesters from behind police lines during a demonstration. The police were in the process of shooting tear gas into the crowd to disperse the

protesters. The Cochabamba press reports that an individual who was directly 100 meters ahead of Iriarte at the exact time he was firing his rifle was shot and remains in a coma at press time. When

stability must be maintained in order to protect the interests of foreign investors and to ensure that "the great effort toward economic reactivation is not set back further." As the second poorest country in the Western hemisphere, Bolivia is badly in need of investment funds in order to boost its economy



questioned, the commander of the Armed Forces, Jorge Zabala, at first denied and later reluctantly admitted the obvious facts of the situation. In response, local organizations, including the press, demanded that the Minister of Defense, Jorge Crespo, step down.

Banzer maintains that the state of emergency is necessary to establish law and order. He also admitted that

and service its large international debt.

Hopefully, the economic interests of the country do not outweigh the concern for human rights. In a statement released by the Bolivian Episcopal Conference is a condemnation of Banzer's actions. "The state of siege, independent of the justifications it might have, signifies a step backward in the democratic life of the country... We trust that the limitations of democratic rights will last for the shortest possible time, because true democracy sustains itself in the respect and effectiveness of human rights."

Compiled from AP and Reuters releases, and Nizkor ational Human Rights Team reports.

A local television crew took pictures that show Robinson (Roberto) Iriarte, a captain in the Bolivian army, firing live amunition directly into a crowd of protesters from behind police lines during a demonstration.

Some Background on the Bolivian Situation by Diego Suarez Brito, a resident of Santa Cruz, Bolivia.

According to Suarez Brito, the Bolivian government went against existing law to give the Cochabamba water contract to a company specially formed in the Caymen Islands for the purpose of obtaining that contract. They also signed new laws giving unlimited rights and use of all water resources in the area to Aguas de Tunari, SA, including the water utilized by farming communities for generations.

"The injustices and the tremendous corruption, at all levels, that has total impunity and causes the poor people to grow poorer, has become a time bomb which could cause a tremendous social explosion of unpredictable consequences, if corruption is not halted and the culprits are not punished.

All foreign investments are very welcome in Bolivia, as long as they contribute to the improvement of the economic and social conditions of the people."

—Diego Suarez Brito



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Oil Spill Threatens Ancient Uru Moratos

by Tamara Stenn de Choque

ORURO, BOLIVIA, SOUTH AMERICA. An oil pipeline operated by Transredes erupted on February 4, 2000, in the Bolivian altiplano region of Oruro and for 18-32 hours pumped an estimated 10,000 barrels of refined crude oil and gasoline into the Desaguadero River. The Desaguadero feeds into Lakes Uru Uru and Poopo where many indigenous groups—including the 5,000 year old indigenous group, the Uru Moratos—live, farm, and hunt.

On April 4, two months after the oil spill, the ancient Uru Muratos were forced, by pending starvation from the loss of their life-sustaining waterfowl and fish, to leave their ancestral lands at the southern shores of Lake Poopo and march 135 kilometers to the city of Oruro. There they expected to meet with Transredes authorities and government officials to discuss the condition of the lake and secure a guarantee that the lake would be restored to its original state and that the community would be supplied with food.

German Choque, Representative of the Uru Morato bravely declared, "Until the ultimate consequences, we need to find a solution. We need a guarantee." Later Choque voiced his fear that his group was dying. Once a powerful numerous people, now the Uru Morato number just 600. They have fought hard to gain official recognition of their ancestral

lands but now these regions are contaminated by the oil spill. Living only by hunting waterfowl and fishing, the Uru Murato are completely dependent on the lake for their survival.

"The lake has died and there is no life since the oil spill," explained a Uru Morato woman.

As the Uru Morato approached the city of Oruro on April 5th, Transredes authorities stopped them and

"Several cases of negligence from Shell and Enron in Bolivia demonstrate that the IDB (Inter-American Development Bank) should not finance these irresponsible corporations."

—Patricia Molina, FOBOMADE.

offered money if they returned to their ancestral lands. The group refused the offer and continued on to the government offices where they were to meet with Transredes and Bolivian authorities. Transredes claimed that the remote parts of Lake Poopo where the Uru Morato live were not contaminated by the oil spill. The meeting ended without the Uru Morato receiving any type of help, food or guarantee from Transredes.

The group "with tears in their eyes" as reported by the national newspaper, *Presencia*,

left the city empty-handed to return to their ancestral lands. Today the Uru Morato wait on these lands for help. They are without electricity, telephone or post office service. The only way to communicate with the Uru Morato is to drive three hours to their remote lands. Surrounded by such isolation, it is very easy for Transredes and other authorities to forget their plight. Meanwhile the ducks, geese and other waterfowl are gone; the fish are dead; and the struggling community is facing the question of their own survival.

Two weeks ago, Bolivian journalist Manual Rojas reported a similar situation with the Uru of Irohito located at the north of Lake Poopo. They were also experiencing the same problems as their cousins to the south: no birds or fish to eat. They too are very fearful of losing their culture, land and history and only want their lake to be restored to "how it was before."

The Bolivian Environmental Deputy Neyza Roca charged Transredes, owned by the Royal Dutch/Shell Group and US Enron, with gross negligence in their pipeline operations. International and national environmental organizations such as the Bolivian Forum for Environment and Development (FOBOMADE), LIDEMA, Amazon Watch, and the Institute of Ecology from the San Andres University of

Amazon Watch, and the Institute of Ecology from the San Andres University of Bolivia traveled to the affected region to oversee the clean-up and report on environmental damages.

In a March 27 press conference in New Orleans, FOBOMADE and Amazon Watch requested that the Inter-American Development bank reevaluate its funding of future projects with Transredes.



"Several cases of negligence from Shell and Enron in Bolivia demonstrate that the IADB should not finance these irresponsible corporations," said Patricia Molina, a representative of FOBOMADE. The groups also noted the following:

Transredes only responded to the oil spill eight days after it began even though the company's extensive public relations campaign had begun to downplay this disaster immediately after the incident. Concurrently, the company is maintaining a campaign of disinformation, refusing to provide data about the spill volume and composition of the crude oil, which are necessary to evaluate the extent of contamination.

Although Transredes claimed to have brought 200 North American specialists to apply high technology, local monitoring groups report the cleaning process has consisted of manual collection in plastic

bags, using local people. The bags have been transferred to highly permeable soils in the Pumping Station in Sica Sica, risking leakage into this region's important aquifer.

SAVE THE URU MORATO

I met with the Uru Morato

and Bolivian authorities last week while in Bolivia investigating the impact of the oil spill on the rural indigenous of Poopo. Due to the Uru Morato's isolation, German Choque has given me the authority to represent the group in the US. I am a rural journalist, human rights advocate, and have family close to the affected region. I received a letter from Kelly L. Kimberly, Senior Vice President of Transredes on March 3 that stated that their "number one priority is seeing that the spill is cleaned up as quickly as possible, and mitigating any impact to the Bolivian environment and surrounding community." It seems that Transredes' priorities have shifted significantly.

Currently, I am planning a Civic Action Training to raise awareness of the Uru Morato and their plight. The event will take place May 1 in Brattleboro, VT, where I am a graduate student in Intercultural Development at

the School for International Training. I would like to invite anyone interested in participating in this cause through contributing ideas, materials, or any other form of assistance to please contact me ASAP at:

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The Damning of the Chixoy

In March 1982, under the guise of economic and humanitarian development, Guatemalan government forces, sanctioned by the World Bank, callously massacred the people of Rio Negro, Guatemala. The killing was a result of the Chixoy Dam construction, a project intended to provide hydro-electric "development" for the Rio Negro area. When the people refused to leave the land that rightfully belonged to them, however, the Guatemalan military killed more than 400 innocent civilians— one half of the village's population. Peter Lippman travelled to the site of the Chixoy Dam and spoke with survivors of the conflict and with representatives of INDE, the Guatemalan State electricity agency in charge of the project.

REPORTED BY PETER LIPPMAN • EDITED BY ELENA PEREZ

Rio Negro Activist Jesus Tecu recounted to me the story of how his home village was taken away from him and his people:

"People from the INDE came to us and said, 'One day this land will be under water. You will have to leave here, and we will look for a place for you.' People resisted leaving very much, but INDE used armed force to kill us or remove us; they came often to search our homes, accusing us of being with the guerillas. In the summer of 1981 they arrested two of our committee members who had gone to present evidence of land ownership. These two people were later found dead on a road. They had been tortured, and the book recording INDE's promises disappeared. Finally, in 1982, four massacres were committed against the community. The survivors of our people fled to hide in the mountains and eventually ended up in Pacux, near Rabinal."

The project that was supposed to solve Guatemala's energy problems was bid at \$270 million in the mid-1970s. By the time it was done, it cost somewhere between \$1 and \$2 billion. A journalist who has been paying attention to this case for 15 years told me, "This was a project where everyone at the top became rich." He spoke of an Italian engineer who was bringing home suitcases full of money.

Due to technical problems, the dam's functioning got off to a rough start. The lake was filled in 1983, soon after the massacres, but engineering difficulties delayed power production for another couple of years. At that, repairs have cost an average \$8 million a year, and the dam has never

operated at more than 70 percent of its projected capacity.

Tecu's colleague Cristobal Osorio arranged for me to visit the dam. We decided to try to get a pass to enter the dam. This involved driving/sliding back up the gravel road and going up to Santa Cruz Verapaz, where the regional INDE headquarters were located.

We passed through a guarded gate and entered the INDE headquarters. The INDE grounds are like a campus, or a military residence. This is the most orderly space I have seen in the country. The houses are prefabricated and look like cheap U.S. suburban homes, and the cars are clean and decent. To my amazement, getting the entry pass only took five minutes. I gave my signature to a clerk, didn't even have to show identification, and we were back on the road.

"We trudged back to the dam entrance and zigzagged up the back of the dam to the top. What we saw there was an immense

artificial lake, several kilometers wide and many kilometers long. Steep mountains rise directly out of the lake. The overwhelming

impression is that of a moonscape. The mountainsides are bare and brown, and they are eroding into the lake. It is unimaginable that some reforestation effort could fix this. The lake is silting up. Barely fifteen years old, the dam is predicted to last for

another 20 years. This is the project that will never pay for itself—not morally, and not economically.

We drove along a ridge over the lake and then descended to the lakeside. There were no other people in sight in any direction, on any side of the lake. A few fishing launches were tied up at the shore. Ten-odd cows lounged nearby. Several buzzards circled overhead. The taxi driver told me, "Here 54 people died in the course of building the dam. There is a monument to them over by the power plant." There is no monument to the others, who were not killed by accident.

Upon returning to Guatemala City, I visited the INDE office. I met with Raul Martinez, director of the Electrical Energy Generation Division of INDE, to discuss the impact of the dam in Guatemala's energy supply system.

Mr. Martinez explained to me that the Chixoy Dam is a fundamental part of the INDE system of energy production,

dam and lake has generated a large amount of work for people, and changed the economy and way of life of the region. For example, it is a source of fish. People are fishing in the lake, and drying various species of fish. This has become a commercial product. The lake serves as a mode of transportation between communities.

When I asked whether INDE still owes on the loans for the dam, Mr. Martinez responded, "No, I think that the government has paid off those loans."

I asked Mr. Martinez about the problem of sedimentation. He said, "The dam was designed to last for 50 years. So it should last another 30 years from now. The sedimentation is a problem. We have replanted some trees, but when the people see the trees growing, they cut them for firewood."

Mr. Martinez stated that there was no plan for what will be done to replace the electricity from the dam, at this point.

I chose not to question Mr.

Martinez's understanding of the role of the dam and lake in the lives of the region's people. From what I had seen at Chixoy, there was transportation from nowhere

The taxi driver told me, "Here 54 people died in the course of building the dam. There is a monument to them over by the power plant." There is no monument to the others, who were not killed by accident.

amounting to 68.75% of its total. This is not the total energy supply of Guatemala, however, as INDE's contribution is 43% of the total supply. The rest of Guatemala's supply sources are privately owned.

Mr. Martinez described the impact of the dam to me. "The

to nowhere, on an environmentally doomed lake. I left with a feeling that I had visited an office hermetically sealed from reality.



Guatemalan Conservation: A Call to Action

By Elena Perez

Park Laguna del Tigre in Danger

Conservationists are calling international attention to the National Park Laguna del Tigre, an endangered northern Guatemalan tropical rain forest and wetlands region in the hub zone of the Mayan Biosphere. Although Guatemalan law protects this region, it is gradually being damaged by illegal poaching, careless tourists, cattle ranchers, and slash-and-burn agriculture. In February, the Guatemalan President and Congress, the Human Rights Ombudsman, and Conservation International were asked to participate in the protection of this region. Conservation International, supported by wealthy donors such as Harrison Ford, Michelle Pfeiffer, and Kevin Kline, recently visited Guatemala and made a contribution of \$35 million toward a research center in Laguna del Tigre.

Oil Industry Destroys Park

Environmentalists are also urging these organizations to protect the area from destructive oil activity currently being conducted by Basic Resources International. The adverse effects of the oil industry include dynamite explosions; chemical muds; poisonous gases; water, soil and air contamination; highway construction; and colonization of the zone, which brings further environmental, social, and

health degradation to the region.

Conservationists Assassinated

The Guatemalan government especially is being pressed to support human rights and ecological justice in light of increasing outrage against the recent assassinations of two conservationists. On February 29, Erwin Aroldo Ochoa López and Julio Armando Vásquez Ramírez, both working for the National Protected Areas



Council (CONAP), were shot and killed as they exited a restaurant in Puerto Barrios, Guatemala. Ochoa was the Legal Advisor to CONAP and was in charge of investigating more than 40 cases of environmental crimes perpetrated against protected areas and natural resources in the Atlantic Zone of Guatemala. Vásquez was the Administrative Assistant for CONAP in this region.

Government's Duty

Conservationists feel that the assassinations demonstrate the danger that

still exists in Guatemala in speaking out against violations of environmental, human, indigenous, and socio-economic rights. They emphasize that Guatemalan President Alfonso Portillo has included the defense of human rights and the fight against impunity in the five pillars of his administration. Now conservationists worldwide are demanding that he prove to the international community that he truly has the political will to create justice. The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

has begun a campaign for ecological organizations to demand that the Guatemalan government intervene immediately in the case in order to identify and prosecute the killers. According to Mario Antonio Cueto, a Public Ministry investigator, the

evidence shows that the killing was committed by a professional, suggesting that "behind him there is an intellectual author and a motive that stems from the work of the ecology activist." Environmental organizations have asked the government to send more police protection.

For more information, please contact:

The Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala at
nisgua@igc.org or www.nisgua.org

Guatemalan News and Information Bureau at
gnib@igc.org

BIOTECH: A threat to Mexico's Diversity?

By Laura Saldivar Tanaka

"Today, the US government is leading the charge for biotechnology by arguing that the world won't be able to feed itself in the future." (Dawkins, 2000). But it is interesting to note that most genetically modified crops require management systems similar to the green revolution. These systems have led over the long run to an increase in hunger and severe damage to the environment.

Most people in the biotech and agribusiness sector do not understand farming in Latin America countries, and they know even less about the cultural, social and environmental aspects of farming. On the other hand, powerful corporations such as Monsanto, Norvartis, Merck, Diversa Co, and American Cyanamid see Mexico as providing a pool of invaluable genetic resources, a cheap labor force, and a growing market.

Bio-prospecting and Bio-piracy

Studies suggest that Mexico holds around 10 percent of the world's biodiversity, with 40 percent of plants and 17 percent of mammals species endemic (native to Mexico). At least 180 species, from 70 different families, have been domesticated in Mexico through the history of the agriculture. Considering this great diversity and agricultural history, various international institutions and corporations have cemented unconstitutional pacts with national institutions.

An example of this is the agreement signed in November 1998 between

Diversa Co. of San Diego and the Institute of Biotechnology of the National University in Mexico (UNAM). This agreement lets Diversa conduct analyses of collected materials from the Mexican forests, deserts, rainforest, volcanoes, and other unique ecosystems. Similarly, in November of 1999, the ECOSUR signed a treaty with the University of Georgia and Molecular Nature Limited, which allows the UGA and MNL to bioprospect into the southern state of Chiapas without consulting the indigenous population.



Bio-pollution

The introduction of transgenic seed varieties has been recognized by important governmental agencies such as CONABIO and CONACY as a key concern for Mexico's environment. They claim that the lack of evidence of environmental impacts should not be interpreted as a lack of risk. Despite this, the introduction of transgenic material is already taking place in the country.

Transgenic corn has been used for a number of years. In 1998, five millions tons of transgenic corn were imported

from the United States into Mexico. These grains were mixed with non-transgenic crops without notifying consumers, creating a risk that some farmers might have used these mixed seeds for planting putting at risk more than 300 native varieties of corn.

Recently, Monsanto signed an agreement with a national research institution which will allow Monsanto to plant transgenic potatoes for export in great quantities. In exchange Monsanto is releasing information which will make local varieties more pest-resistant.

The Big Picture?

After writing this, a question occurs to me: is choosing biotechnology the best way to solve the food production question? For me, choosing biotechnology is choosing the "hard path," where highly-centralized, costly, and rigid systems are implemented. I would say that instead we ought to look for solutions within the small farm /alternative systems as more feasible ways to provide more self-sufficient production systems and cause less damage to the environment.

After all: "Because they are alive, genetically engineered products are inherently more unpredictable than chemical products. Genetically engineered products can reproduce, mutate, and migrate" and therefore the "biological contamination would be the nightmare of the 21st century". (Rifkin & Kimbrell, 1993)

Mexican Bean Biopiracy

US-Mexico Legal Battle Erupts Over Patented Enola Bean

Plant Breeders' Wrongs Continue

**From Rural Advancement
Foundation International -
RAFI**

www.rafi.org

*Compiled by Laura Saldivar-
Tanaka*

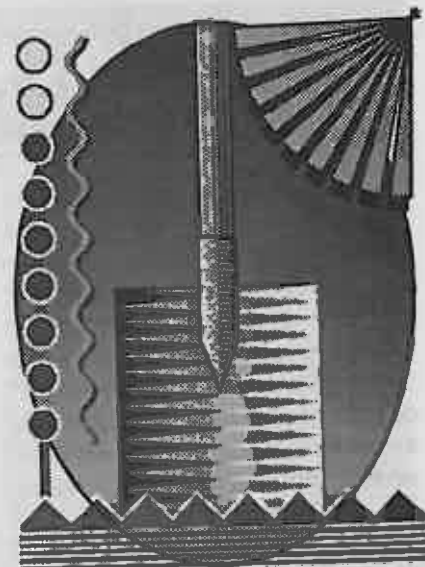
Summary: A US-based company, POD-NERS, L.L.C., is suing Mexican bean exporters, charging that the Mexican beans (*Phaseolus vulgaris*) they are selling in the US infringe POD-NERS' US patent on a yellow-colored bean variety. It's not surprising that the Mexican beans are strikingly similar to POD-NER's patented bean. That's because POD-NERS proprietary bean, 'Enola' originates from the highly popular 'Azufrado' or 'Mayocoba' bean seeds the company's president purchased in Mexico in 1994. The Mexican yellow beans have been grown in Mexico for centuries, developed by generations of Mexican farmers and more recently by Mexican plant breeders. Last year RAFI released a report, *Plant Breeders' Wrongs*, which documents 147 suspected cases of institutional biopiracy. In RAFI's opinion, the Enola bean patent is a textbook case of biopiracy, and it confirms - once again - that the plant intellectual property system is predatory on the rights of indigenous peoples and farming communities.



Rural Advancement Foundation
International (RAFI 1/17/2000)
**Messages from the Chiapas
'Bioprospecting' Dispute**

*An analysis of recent issues
raised in the Chiapas
'Bioprospecting' controversy
with reflections on the mes-
sage for BioPiracy*

The more information that surfaces about the U.S. Government's International Cooperative Biodiversity Groups (ICBG), the more we are persuaded that current realities render equitable bioprospecting the implausible stuff of myth and legend. In keeping with the Season, if there is a Santa Claus, Virginia, it sure isn't Uncle Sam. Even the best-intentioned projects seem destined to devolve into biopiracy. On December 1st, RAFI issued the news release 'Biopiracy Project in Chiapas, Mexico Denounced by Mayan Indigenous Groups - University of Georgia Refuses to Halt Project.' (www.rafi.org). The news story arose from requests made by 11 Mayan organizations (known as the Consejo) in Chiapas for RAFI to go to Chiapas and to discuss



their opposition to the ICBG-Maya project with them. Following meetings in Chiapas and in Mexico City, RAFI contacted the University of Georgia (UGA, Athens) to understand their perspective on local opposition to the bioprospecting agreement. Based on these discussions, especially UGA's refusal to stop the project and to participate in an open meeting on the issue in Chiapas, RAFI concluded that wider attention should be drawn to the situation. Accordingly, RAFI's December 1st news release quoted the parties involved at considerable length in order that their concerns could be heard. Somewhat uncharacteristically, RAFI avoided extensive editorializing. (RAFI, 12/22/1999)

Useful web pages on
biopiracy,
bioprospecting, small
farm threats

www.rafi.org
www.rachel.org
www.foodfirst.org
www.greenpeace.org

www.iatp.org

Mexico's Changing Environment

By Laura Saldivar-Tanaka

How do we modify our environment to meet our needs? What role has pressure from the North played in Mexico's modification of its environment?

Does production for human consumption justify the exploitation and damage of the environment?

Today, the global economic model is leading to great changes in the traditional production systems of every country in the world. It is pushing small farmers to change their production models, from self-sustainable ones to those based on cash and export crops, and is pushing microindustries out of the way in order to let big corporations take over.

In Mexico, just a few years ago small poly-culture farms were the prevailing production systems. On average, the production model of these farms is less aggressive towards the environment; they are biologically more diverse, requiring very few external inputs, and relying more on local labor and knowledge. Unfortunately, today more farms are changing to monocultural crop production.

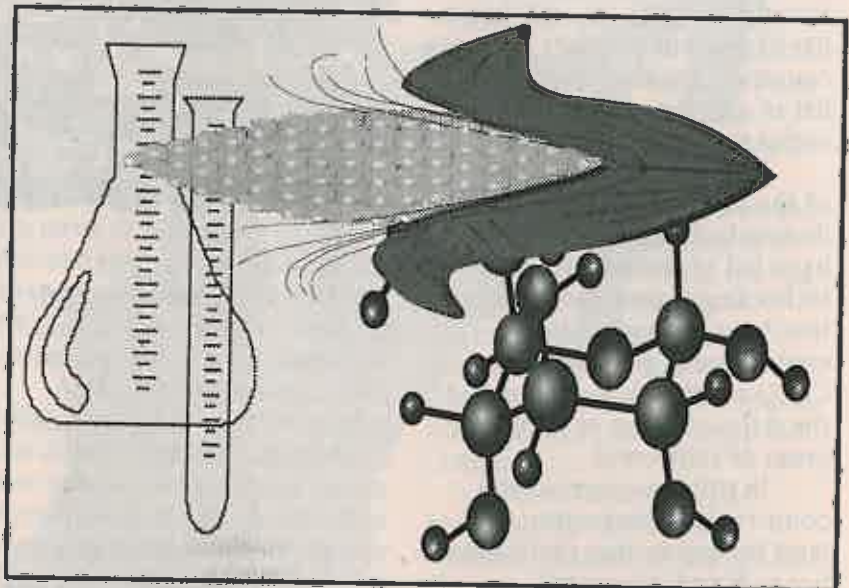
Ecologically, this type of farming has been shown to fail in the short term, becoming an easy target for "pests" and therefore requiring the use of products that degrade the soil's productive capacity and are not sustainable in the long term. Furthermore, in recent years the area allocated for export crops has grown, along with the pressures on natural ecosystems.

Food products of monocrop systems do not

cover the basic nutritional requirement of rural families, and the switch to these products has led to great socio-cultural changes. "Export agriculture means that the poor majority in the third world often loses out to better-off consumers abroad" (*Food*

of the imported grain is transgenic, with no notice given to the public. This situation has its roots in NAFTA and the inability of Mexican agriculture to compete with the highly subsidized American grain industry.

Most export crop



First, Summer 1998). In most of the production regions of Mexico we can see examples of these changes. In Northeast and Central Mexico, the highest production levels of cash and export crops are mostly vegetables, as grain production cannot compete with the low prices in the United States.

Today, Mexico, the bioregional center of the origin of corn, has to import about 60 percent of its corn. The quality of this corn is not meant for human consumption but for animals. Illegally, the Mexican government has been selling this as mill corn for tortillas.

Worse, about 80 percent

production is carried out under conventional modern agricultural practices: the extensive utilization of agrochemicals (pesticides and fertilizers) and machinery, and the promotion of monocultures. Over time, the use of agrochemicals has polluted water sources, threatened the health of workers and consumers, and contributed to a loss of biodiversity. Many of the agrochemicals used in Mexico have been banned in the United States for these reasons.

Continued on the Next Page

Furthermore, these kinds of practices require extremely high quantities of water. In Mexico, about 80 percent of the water for human purposes is used for irrigation. Consequently, water has become a scarce element, especially in those areas of high agricultural production. The government is seeking to meet these demands by increasing dam construction. In the last few decades, with the economic aid of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, several dams have been built in the country, resulting in a large list of environmental and social problems.

In the southeastern part of the country, the market demands for export cattle have led to the use of technologies and procedures that have damaged the environment in several ways. Cattle ranches have promoted the deforestation of extensive areas of rainforest.

In other regions of the country the reclamation of land for expanding plantations has reduced important sections of natural ecosystems, and again is reducing the biodiversity of those regions. With the decline of the small farms system in Mexico, people in the rural areas are forced to migrate to the cities to try to get a job, no matter how low the wages may be. The brave ones will attempt to cross the Rio Bravo to the north.

But I have only mentioned the agricultural aspects. While today the IMF and World Bank are urging the Mexican government to become an industrial country, the truth is that the small Mexican industries and enterprises are going out of business. Mexican-owned businesses are

being replaced by foreign companies and free-trade zones. These industries are attracting many migrants from the rural areas, and are

accomplish this, resources are often redirected, leaving low-income groups at a disadvantage. Water distribution is already a big

problem throughout Mexico, and with the incoming industries it is getting even worse, leading to the exploitation of aquifers and rivers. Something similar happens with the electricity demand, but in this case because there are not yet efficient ways of getting renewable energy, the way to increase the production has been the building of hydroelectric dams.

We can conclude that these big production systems are normally meant to supply and reduce cost of production for those in the north, regardless of the social and ecological consequences in the south. In the last decade since the structural adjustments, the poor population in Mexico has increased from 17 percent to almost 60 percent, according to the World Bank's own figures, and similar numbers can be drawn for the depletion of natural resources. Should we thank the IMF and World Bank for it?

demanding many more services and resources such as water, electricity, oil, raw materials, and they are also generating a great deal of waste. With all these people migrating from the rural areas, Mexico's once self-sufficient food production system is threatened, and every day dependence depends on imported basic products. Furthermore, the needs for shelter, food, health, education, and other services still have to be met.

At the same time the demands of industry also have to be met. In order to



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A Pesticide Cloud...

By Sam Costello

For the subsistence level farmers who grow coca and poppies, the plants which are the base ingredients in cocaine and heroin respectively, in Colombia's rainforests, it is not unusual to have guns fired at them from passing aircraft, according to an article on the World Wildlife Federation's (WWF) website (wwf.org).

"Before the policemen fumigate an area, they send a helicopter to spread bullets all over the region", the article quotes one witness as saying. "They do that to ensure nobody will attack the aircraft carrying out the fumigation."

As part of its largely ill-conceived "war on drugs," the U.S. State Dept. authorized widespread aerial herbicide spraying in Colombia in 1996, a policy which in 1999 alone may have cost as much as \$68 million to U.S. taxpayers.

Like much of the war on drugs, however, this practice seems to be not only ineffective, but also dangerous. Coca farmers have adopted new techniques for maintaining their crops, and the herbicide, whose direction and application cannot be controlled from the air, may be the cause of extensive environmental damage.

According to an article entitled "Casualties of the 'War on Drugs': Traditional Farms Destroyed with Herbicides," written by Elsa Nivia and Rachel Massey and published by the Global Pesticide Campaigner in August 1999, the aerial spraying policy has been wildly ineffective: from 1996 to 1998, coca production has

increased by 50%.

This increase can partially be attributed to the coca grower's relocation of their fields. According to Klaus Niholm, of the United Nations International Drug Control Program, quoted in the same WWF article mentioned earlier, producers simply move deeper into the jungle. "They try to hide at least part of their crops from the fumigation aircraft and in doing so they destroy more tropical rainforest."

The WWF article reprints Colombian Ministry of the Environment figures which show that "more than a million hectares of Amazon rainforest, Andean forests, and paramos have been destroyed over the past 24 years to establish illicit crops."

Aerial spraying has not only caused farmland sprawl, but also sickness in humans and animals and the destruction of legal, staple crops. In "Casualties of the 'War on Drugs': Traditional Farms Destroyed with Herbicides," authors Nivia and Massey note that herbicide spraying directed at poppies "destroyed crops and pasture lands... Fish and chickens died, other farm animals became ill, and both adults and children suffered symptoms of pesticide poisoning." They also say that "mothers reported on illnesses among children, including respiratory distress, rashes, vomiting, diarrhea, fever, migraines and conjunctivitis."

The fall-out from aerial spraying is not limited to health issues (it should be noted, however, that there is not yet a direct correlation established between spraying

and illness), but extends to economic ones as well. Nivia and Massey report that the spraying has injured the market for agricultural goods, noting that the "sale price of milk and cheese has fallen by 50% or more, due to customers' fears that the cows have drunk water contaminated with pesticides."

It seems that action is not being taken by those charged with the responsibility of safeguarding the public. The WWF's article notes that, General Rosso Jose Serrano, Director General of Colombia's National Police, "has admitted in a letter that accidents happen, though he says they are not his responsibility."

Not every member of the Colombian government is as aloof. The WWF article quotes Juan Mayr, Colombia's Environment Minister, as saying that alternatives to aerial spraying must be found and that drug policy must be changed.

The future of aerial spraying, as well as its benefits, is unclear. The United States government clearly wishes to continue the program, and, as long as Colombia's government wants to receive the piles of foreign aid dollars the U.S. has been sending its way, it seems likely that it too will assent. However, as the practice continues, opposition grows. A combination of peace, environmental and indigenous activists may be able to apply the necessary pressure to those responsible that the spraying will end. If so, you'll hear about it in the CUSLAR newsletter.

Sam Costello is a senior at Ithaca College and has been a CUSLAR member for over two years.

The Whales Win—Mexico

By Laura Becerra

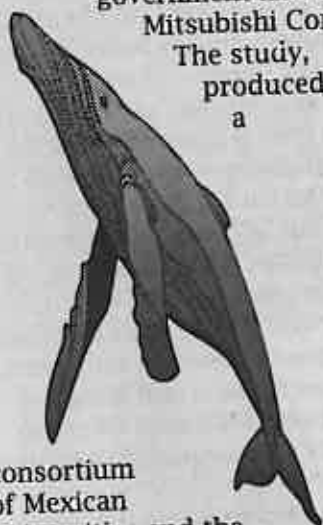
For six years, the placid waters of San Ignacio Lagoon, on the Pacific coast of Baja California, have been at the center of one of Mexico's fiercest battles between environmental preservation and economic development. The battle ended abruptly in March when President Ernesto Zedillo announced that he would drop a government-sponsored proposal to create the world's largest industrial salt plant on the shores of the lagoon. The previously proposed location of the plant is a critical area that schools of gray whales use as a breeding ground every winter.

Ernesto Zedillo's decision was one that could serve as a precedent in environmental politics in Mexico. The unusually public nature of the debate, which stretched from remote Mexican fishing villages to advocacy groups on Cape Cod, and involved poets, movie stars, a multinational corporation, and the Internet, was a first for Mexico, winners and losers say. "This was the most sophisticated environmental debate we've ever had in this country," said Alberto Szekely, a prominent environmental lawyer and one of the leading opponents of the plant. "Most environmental problems in Mexico are the result of our precarious legal system. But this time, fortunately, it worked." Environmental issues in Mexico have often taken a back seat to such pressing problems as economic stability, combating poverty, or corruption.

Scientific opinion differed on whether the salt plant would have harmed the

whales. Much of the recent debate focused on the merits of a 3,000-page environmental impact study done for the company, Exportadora del Sal, SA, also known as ESSA, a joint venture between the Mexican government and the Mitsubishi Corp.

The study, produced by a



consortium of Mexican universities and the Scripps Institute of Oceanography in California, concluded that there would not be significant damage to the whales' mating area. A United Nations study last year arrived at a similar conclusion. Backers of the project also pointed to a smaller plant situated to the north in the town of Guerrero Negro, to bolster their case. There, the number of breeding whales has increased since the salt plant opened 40 years ago.

However, environmentalists said the new plant would upset the ecosystem in a variety of ways: an excess of brine residue, a byproduct of the salt-making process, would be poured back into the ocean; the plant's evaporation ponds would alter the amount of rainwater runoff into the

lagoon; and the noise from large extraction pumps would hurt sea life. Opponents went on to say that the San Ignacio Lagoon is protected by law; the area is part of a biosphere reserve and was designated a United Nations World Heritage Site in 1993. Critics also said the factory would have set a dangerous precedent for other ecologically fragile areas.

To oppose the development, Serge Dedina, an University of Arizona geographer, got in touch with Homero Aridjis, a prominent Mexican poet and leader of a group of environmental advocates based in Mexico City. They organized with 58 other Mexican groups to oppose the plant and began confronting government officials as well as teaming up with two US organizations, the International Fund for Animal Welfare in Yarmouth Port, on Cape Cod, and the Washington, D.C.-based Natural Resources Defense Council. They collaborated in attacking the project from legal and scientific angles, bringing in their own experts and filing scores of legal briefs demanding more public scrutiny of the proposal.

This decision can serve as a precedent for future decisions about the environment and could possibly change environmental politics for Mexico and other Latin American nations as well as bringing environmentalists one step closer to achieving their goals.

See: www.ole.com
www.latimes.com

Laura Becerra is a senior at Ithaca High School and a CUSLAR volunteer.

TEXACO'S SHAME

Environmental Destruction in Ecuador

by MARCIE LEY

Footage of an indigenous protest in Quito shows Ecuadorian natives in colorful, revealing costumes. They are barefoot, they hold spears and blow guns, they chant and sing in native tongue. Contrasted with the modern buildings and busy streets, they appear as timeless representatives of cultures perceived by many to be virtually extinct. This is clearly a publicity stunt.

The reality in the Ecuadorian Amazon is that indigenous people wear Western clothes, ride around in canoes with outboard motors, and use shotguns to hunt wild game. When indigenous representatives go to Quito to protest they don traditional clothes and carry spears to construct an image that implies an existence threatened with extinction in an appeal to Western paternalism to promote action on their behalf. By doing so, they help to guarantee their physical and cultural survival in the face of increasing pressure to push them aside and get at the wealth that lies under their feet: oil.

The Amazonian Oil Boom

Texaco and Gulf first discovered oil in the Oriente of Ecuador in 1967. In an agreement signed with Ecuador, Texaco and Gulf not only received the rights to production but were also entrusted with the environmental management of an area spanning five million acres. The original contract guaranteed 93% of the profits to the two industrial giants

and the remaining 7% to the government of Ecuador. In 1977 Gulf sold its share to the state oil company, now known as Petroecuador, while Texaco remained until 1992. Over the course of the contract period, Texaco pumped 1.2 billion barrels of oil out of the Oriente.

Prior to the oil boom, the Oriente was isolated from the rest of country because there was no paved road connecting the area to Quito and other important cities. When Texaco struck oil it was quick to introduce a transportation infrastructure to the Amazon, allowing easy access to mining, timber, and agro-industrial companies which greedily staked claims to undeveloped land. The government did nothing to stop the encroachment upon native territories. In fact, in order to relieve the land pressures and rising poverty of the highlands, officials urged colonization of the rainforest.

The loss of land held devastating consequences for the native people whose dependence upon vast tracts of undisturbed tropical forests has almost guaranteed the extinction of their traditional culture. The influx of colonists has accelerated the rate of acculturation of the remaining indigenous groups. The collision of two drastically different ways of life has, more often than not, led to a cultural devastation. Those who were affected are mainly the Cofan and Secoya peoples. Some groups have been entirely wiped out by the

incursion of the oil industry. The site of the first Texaco well, what is now the shantytown of Lago Agrio, was once a prosperous Tetete village. There are no surviving members of either the village or the Tetete people.

Environmental impacts

Beginning with the one at Lago Agrio, Texaco and its partners drilled a total of 325 wells into the floor of the Amazon. To facilitate transport to its hungry, mostly American, consumers, a 315-mile Trans-Ecuadorian pipeline was constructed that stretches over the Andes mountains to Pacific coast. According to research conducted by the environmental lawyer, Judith Kimerling, leaks from this pipeline have dumped 16.8 million gallons of crude into the rain forest, twice as much oil as the *Exxon Valdez* spilled into Prince William Sound.

Texaco consciously increased the environmental impact of inevitable pipeline leaks by digging hundreds of waste pits into which was poured the by-products of extraction. Laden with heavy metals such as mercury, lead, cyanide, and arsenic, "water of production" is normally treated and re-inserted into the wells. However, in Ecuador, unlike in most countries, the environmental regulations did not require treatment nor reinsertion.¹ Production water was, instead, allowed to collect into stagnant pools and from there, slowly made its way back into rivers and streams. In total, the pits dug by Texaco in the Amazon leaked 30 billion gallons of untreated waste into the local water supply. Texaco also burned off excess natural gas, spread crude oil along roads, and dumped waste into

collection pits.

A study sponsored by the Ecuadorian government found that the aquatic ecosystem was severely disrupted due to the high levels of oil and grease and the lack of dissolved oxygen in water sources. In 1993, a team of doctors, lawyers and scientists were sent by the Center for Economic and Social Rights to assess the health impacts of oil development. They found levels of cancer-causing toxic compounds 10-1000 times greater than what the EPA guidelines determined safe. Consistent with these findings were reports of higher incidences of cancers and environmentally-related illness among those populations living in closest proximity to where extraction was taking place.

Who is to blame?

Considerable disagreement exists over who is responsible for the damage, what can be done about it, and who will do it. The environmental protection laws regarding oil production were virtually non-existent in the first two decades of the oil boom. Although vague, the contract between Texaco and Ecuador did require that measures be taken to protect the natural environment from contamination. Why nothing was actually done is perhaps due to the central role the oil industry plays in the Ecuadorian economy. Export earnings account for over half of the government's yearly budget², badly needed income for a country with a huge external debt. It is hardly surprising then that until significant pressure was put on the various parties involved, responsibility for environmental damage was

neither assigned nor claimed.

As they began to feel the effects of oil exploration in their territories, indigenous people, as well as colonists who were equally affected, became increasingly resistant to such activity. In response to the threats to their livelihood, the native capacity to organize politically in opposition to oil industry and government developed into a strong oppositional force. The Cofan and other groups benefited from the rising international popularity of the environmental and human rights movements. Through transnational advocacy networks created by NGOs, the people of the Oriente reached media and sympathetic outsiders and increased international awareness around the issue.

Texaco has been particularly targeted by international activists because of its virtual monopoly on the extraction industry in Ecuador. The biggest complaint is that the techniques used by Texaco in the Amazon are far below international environmental management standards. This, in the minds of most activists, constitutes a form of environmental racism that draws immediate sympathy and support in the transnational community. That support enables the people of the Oriente to take action against Texaco by using boycotts and litigation to pressure the company.

Jota v. Texaco

A class-action lawsuit against Texaco was filed in 1993 by an environmental lawyer and Ecuadorian chemist, Cristóbal Bonifaz. The suit was brought on behalf of the 25,000 people affected by Texaco's oil extraction in

Ecuador.³ Originally known as *Aquinda v. Texaco*⁴, it claims damages of \$1.5 billion to be awarded to the Quichua, Cofan, and Siona-Secoya for the environmental destruction carried out by Texaco in the last 25 years. The specific demands of the groups are for the waste pits and other toxic site to be cleaned up and for financial restitution for the suffering the pollution has caused.

The plaintiffs claim that while Texaco ceased its operations in Ecuador in 1992, prior to that it was directly responsible for the environmental damage done to the Oriente during the period from 1964 to 1992. The lawsuit points out that Texaco introduced the technology and methods used in the extraction process to the region so that when it turned production over to the state owned company, Petroecuador, the aging machinery and inappropriate methods continued to be used. Furthermore, the plaintiffs allege that Texaco has refused to clean up the 632 waste pits they left behind or otherwise accept any responsibility for the current state of the rainforest.

In response the company released a statement in January, 1999 saying:

"During its 26 years in Ecuador, Texaco Petroleum acted responsibly, complied with all Ecuadorian laws and international petroleum industry standards, and used appropriate and accepted practices of the time. At the end of Texaco Petroleum's involvement with the consortium, Texaco Petroleum agreed to undertake a \$40 million redemption program, designed with the Ecuadorian

government, to close and remediate approximately 260 sites. That program has been completed and approved by the Ecuadorian government.

What is revealing about Texaco's statement is that it claims to have done nothing wrong yet admits that Texaco consented to a need for some kind of clean-up program. In 1995 Ecuador and Texaco reached an agreement to clean-up the toxic production wastes Texaco originally dumped into the forest. According to Iván Narváez, a representative of Petroecuador, "Texaco has dealt with only 139 of the 632 waste pits that they left behind. Their idea of cleaning up was simply to remove the waste from these pits and dump it into six new, enormous pits which now hold 80,000 barrels of toxic crude."

Texaco's major claim is that it didn't violate any Ecuadorian laws. Activists and lawyers argue that Texaco did violate international standards of health and right to life.

Texaco also argues that if the case were to be heard in the US the national sovereignty of Ecuador would be violated. Bonifaz's response is that Texaco violated Ecuador's sovereignty by conducting operations that hurt the people of Ecuador. Texaco has stated that it is not subject to suit in American courts because all of its operations were conducted by a subsidiary, TexPet. The plaintiffs argue that all technical decisions regarding the conduct of business were made at the corporate headquarters in White Plains, New York. Texaco, undoubtedly, would rather see the case tried in Ecuador for financial considerations. If a case were to be initiated against TexPet the potential

monetary award to the plaintiffs is considerably less due to the lesser value of TexPet's operations.

Furthermore, as Bonifaz and others believe, there is very little chance that if the case were to be tried in Ecuador that justice would be served. The influence Texaco has in Ecuador is extraordinary due to the money it was contributed to the national economy. The company is seen as god-like while deeply entrenched racism puts the indigenous people in a clearly subordinate position.

In November of 1996, Southern District Judge Rakoff denied jurisdiction of the US courts and granted motion to dismiss. He based his decision of the fact that the government of Ecuador did not support the plaintiffs in their claims against Texaco. In 1997, newly elected President, Fabián Alarcon, stated Ecuador's



support for the lawsuit despite pressure from the US ambassador and Texaco. In October of 1998, the Second Circuit Court of Appeals overturned Judge Rakoff's decision to dismiss the case. At present, the issue of jurisdiction has not yet been determined.

The implications of this case are potentially great if a decision is made in favor of the plaintiffs. It will be the first time that a US corporation operating overseas will be held legally and financially responsible for its conduct on foreign soil. While it is highly unlikely that the people of Ecuador will actually be

awarded \$1.5 billion, any substantial amount will send a message. Far from prompting a moral reevaluation of corporate action, it would likely lead to the realization that large damage settlements cut into profits. The hope is that a cost-benefit analysis will cause companies to question whether environmental destruction is worth it in long run.

It is unclear how effective a ruling against Texaco will be in terms of cleaning up the Oriente and improving the lives of the people. Given the government of Ecuador's estimate of the \$5 billion cost to clean up the damage, there is little chance that a thorough clean-up will ever take place. And while certain measures can be taken to reduce the environmental impact of pollution, the cultural impact is much harder to address. The Cofan and Secoya have seen their traditional way of life threatened to near extinction. While the lawsuit against Texaco does not directly address this aspect of the situation, the people themselves have addressed it through their willingness and ability to organize and resist.

1 The cost of production in Ecuador is \$1/barrel. In Texas, where law requires treatment of production water the cost per barrel is \$6.

2 Amazon, the area with the greatest natural resources, is the poorest part of country. Despite the nation's dependency upon the resources of the Oriente, virtually none of the money generated through oil revenue is reinvested in the region (Walmsley 153).

3 A second action, *Ashanga v. Texaco*, is on behalf of 25,000 people who live downstream.

4 The lawsuit is now titled *Jota v. Texaco* because the woman named on the original, María Aquinda, has since died of cancer.

Marcie Ley is an active CUSLAR volunteer.

Dry Canals: Future Environmental Threat?

By Laura Saldívar-Tanaka



The Panama Canal has been reverted back to Panama and trade corporations have been looking for alternative ways to transport goods within the Pacific and Atlantic. Through this visionary exercise planners have come up with the idea of the "dry canal", a system of high-speed rail lines and superhighways that will connect ports and move huge quantities of goods across Central America. 1]

While the Panama Canal is being renovated, the construction and planning of new canals is taking place. For example in the South Atlantic Autonomous Region of Nicaragua, one such canal has been authorized in spite of the protests of the local people, non-governmental organizations, and environmental groups. Another canal is planned for Mexico's Isthmus of Tehuantepec, which will destroy and affect most of

the Chimalapas, which is today not only the most biodiverse region of the country, but also the land of different indigenous groups and small farmers. Other canals are planned for

Other canals are planned for Colombia, Guatemala and El Salvador with the financial support of the Inter America Development Bank, and the World Bank. 1]

Colombia, Guatemala and El Salvador with the financial support of the Inter America Development Bank, and the World Bank. 1]

It is widely known that these type of mega-projects are not coming alone, but are usually implemented along

with other "development projects" such as industrial parks -with *maquiladoras*-, tree plantations, -generally of Eucalyptus-, shrimp farms, petrochemical facilities, mining and dams. In conclusion, these kinds of mega-projects foretell serious environmental impacts- destruction of rainforest, pollution- and social consequences. We must follow and challenge the development of these projects. 1]

1] Action for Community and Ecology in the Region of central America (ACERCA)
www.acerca.org

Laura Saldívar-Tanaka is a first year graduate student in Natural Resources. She is from Mexico City, Mexico.

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Watch out for GE trees !

by Laura Saldivar-Tanaka

From NATIVE FOREST
NETWORK new letter
March 27, 2000.

Activists from the Native Forest Network (NFN), the World Rainforest Movement in Uruguay, ACERCA (Action for Community and Ecology in the Regions of Central America), and Rainforest Action Network (RAN) publicly announced the launching of a major international campaign against genetically engineered trees.

This announcement was made at a press conference following attendance of Biodeviation 2000, a counter-conference and protest to BIO 2000, the International Biotechnology

Meeting and Exhibition, on late March. The announcement coincided with the beginning of "New Trees Grow Closer: The Ecological, Ethical and Scientific Issues of Forest Biotechnology", "The next 50 years will see a forestry endeavor worldwide profoundly shaped by biotechnology," the BIO agenda reads.

"Genetic engineering of trees poses a real threat to forests and their ecosystems," said Dr. Ricarda Steinbrecher, a genetic scientist who works with the University of Liverpool. She continued, "Proper risk assessment is impossible; we neither know the stakes nor the odds."

"GE trees present a tremendous threat to forests around the world," stated

Patrick Reinsborough, Outreach Coordinator for the Rainforest Action Network.

Mick Petrie, NFN's campaigner on GE Trees, went on to say, "Additionally, because GE trees are still very close to their wild relatives, they are extremely susceptible to genetic pollution. Many of us see forests as diverse habitats providing the last refuge for the earth's declining biodiversity. The risks of genetic pollution in our remaining native forests are unknown, irreversible and potentially one of the greatest threats to biodiversity ever."

NATIVE FOREST
NETWORK <http://www.nativeforest.org>

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www.meaning.org

We stand today at a crucial juncture in the history of our political culture and economic life. The corrupting influence of big money, the intensely partisan spirit, the lack of any meaningful mainstream response to frenzied globalization, and the failure to address seriously the long-term environmental health of the planet, all reveal an increasing emptiness of spirit at the center of political power that cries out for meaningful change and renewal.

The protests against the WTO in Seattle have demonstrated the potential for challenging the neo-liberal, amoral, consumerist paradigms that dominate our culture. Yet as Newsweek magazine commented about the protests, "One thing that seems to be lacking today is a mission statement, a credo, that gives the movement, such as it is, some focus." This conference seeks to achieve just such a focus, to create a new language and credo that can unify the disparate movements who realize the long-term damage to our personal and planetary well-being by the political, economic, and cultural status quo.

We challenge the accepted values of selfishness and materialism and develop an approach that emphasizes the creation of a loving, just, spiritually and ecologically sensitive society. In contrast to the often narrow agenda of traditional progressive and conservative politics, we seek to explore how our psychological and spiritual needs can be integrated into an agenda of human rights, corporate and political ethics, and the healing of our relationship to nature. We offer an opportunity for those who embrace holistic and ecological values, and who have often felt excluded from the existing liberal/conservative political debate, to come together to discuss how ethics, a concern for the common good, and a community spirit of caring can begin to replace the cynical self-interest and corporate-technocratic worldview that currently dominate public discourse.

For more information, or to register, call 212.219.2527, x.110. In Ithaca, 607.266.8386

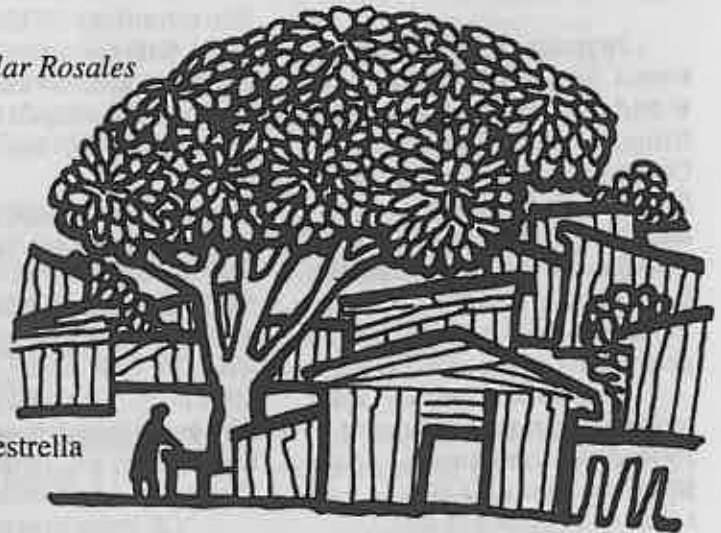
CUSLAR'S Poetry Page

La casa donde habita la poesía

A Julio Andrade Yacamán y Carlos Villar Rosales

El ave fénix, única y verdadera, es la poesía.
Si pudiéramos mirarla siquiera,
dijimos.

Por ese camino y amados por el fuego
llegamos
a los pies de la gente de pueblo, y ahí,
fuera de nuestros límites
pudimos ver a ras de suelo y pobre como una estrella
la casa donde habita la poesía.



The House Where Poetry Lives

To Julio Andrade Yacamán and Carlos Villar Rosales

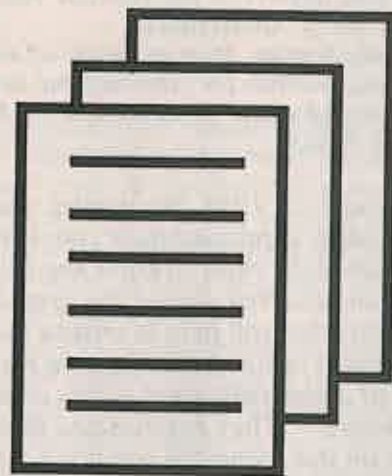


If we could only see her,
we said,
the only real phoenix,
poetry.

Bent to that road and loved by fire,
we came at last
to the feet of the people. There,
just out of reach
we saw
level with the ground and poor as a star
the house where poetry lives.

Roberto Sosa was born in Yoro, Honduras in 1930. His childhood coincided with the dictatorship of Tiburcio Carías Andino, a period of severe political repression. *The House Where Poetry Lives* was translated by Jo Anne Engelbert and is found in *Common Grief*, 1994

New in the CUSLAR Library



*Guatemala: Memory of Silence
Report of the Commission for Historical
Clarification Conclusions and
Recommendations*

The concept of the truth commission has gained high profile status in recent years and has been implemented widely across the globe in countries attempting to reconstruct after years of civil wars, secret wars, and massive human rights violations. South Africa has seen one and there have been calls for one in the United States.

The thinking behind these commissions goes: previously obscured history must be set right, an accurate record of what has happened here—what is true—must be taken if any true healing, any substantive reconstruction, is to be achieved.

This is the philosophy which drives *Guatemala: Memory of Silence*. This slim volume (weighing in at under 100 pages) contains the Conclusions and Recommendations of the Commission for Historical Clarification, the body assigned the task of helping Guatemala heal after its decades-long civil war.

Containing a history of the country's civil conflict, an assignment of responsibility for human rights violations,

a record of the peace process, recommendations for ensuring future peace and tolerance, as well as assorted maps and graphs supporting the documents, *Memory of Silence* is a useful and complete history and Guatemala's arduous war.

Though a bit short, perhaps, and certainly the product of a political process, not an academic or historical one, this collection of documents is relatively uncompromising and thorough.

For anyone interested in truth commissions, historical accuracy, or *Guatemala: Memory of Silence* is an important piece of history.

Reviewed by Sam Costello.



**GUATEMALA
MEMORY OF SILENCE**
TZ'INIL NA'TAB'AL

Report of the Commission for Historical Clarification
Conclusions and Recommendations

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Guatemala Never Again! Recovery of Historical Memory Project

The Official Report of the Human Rights Office,
Archdiocese of Guatemala

The Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America (Maryknoll),
The Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIR) and *The Latin America Bureau* (LAB) 1999, Orbis Books, Maryknoll,
New York 10545

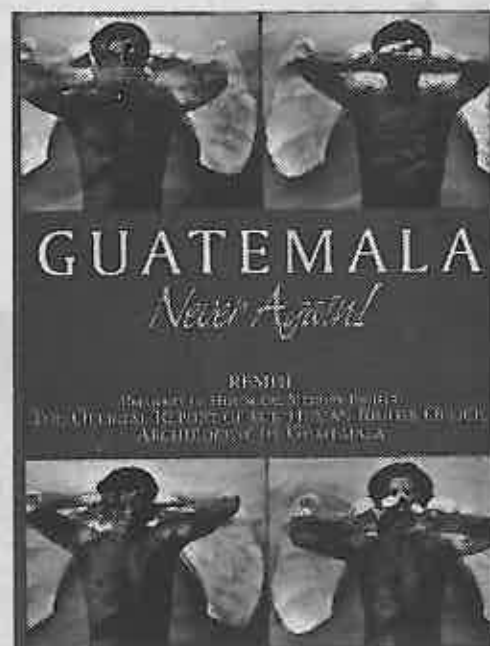
On June 23, 1994, the parties who negotiated the Peace Accords expressed their conviction that all of the people [have] the right to know the full truth about the events that occurred during the armed conflict, and that this clarification will help to ensure that these sad and painful pages of history will not be repeated and that the process of democratization in this country will be strengthened. They emphasized that [knowing the truth] is an indispensable condition for achieving peace.

--Speech by Monseñor Juan Gerardi when the original four volumes were presented in Guatemala on April 24, 1998. Two days later, he was assassinated by two military personnel who have now been charged with his murder.

This remarkable volume brings to readers of English the horrific results of the dirty war in Guatemala through direct quotation of testimonies of victims and perpetrators of the violence. The book is organized in such a manner that the testimonies are juxtaposed by boxed commentaries of the editorial staff that include for example: explanations of Concepts Found in Mayan Culture (pg. 51) and Preparing a Massacre (pg. 172). The testimony of military personnel giving their experience of preparations for a massacre, inserted in the testimonies of victims, illustrates how such atrocities could have been common in Guatemala in *The Methodology of Horror* in chapter 9 (pgs. 126-174).

The book is divided into four major sections: 1) The Impact of the Violence, 2) The Methodology of Horror, 3) the Historical Context, and 4) The Victims of the Conflict. Photographs depict everyday scenes of Mayan life, the military and their daily activities, people who have been displaced, civil patrollers, and grave sites. A photograph of dictator General Rios Montt, the author of the razed earth policy (who ruled from 1978-1983 and is currently the president of the Guatemalan Congress) reminds the reader of the painful contradictions that remain as this war torn country struggles to establish democracy.

I used *Guatemala Never Again* in two courses: my Freshman Writing Seminar - Questioning Humanity: Human Rights in Latin



America, and in Perspectives on Latin America, an upper division course required for students concentrating in Latin American Studies. Irregardless of level, students were universally shocked and stunned by the factual testimonies, the reflections of the editorial staff, and by the history that is presented. At first students were puzzled by the lack of an explanation of what was going on to orient their reading. But with further study, most students appreciated being thrown into the midst of the testimonies themselves. I would suggest this volume for high school and college use accompanied by films such as *Breaking the Silence*, the film about Rigoberta Menchu. Maps are not included in the volume and are needed. Also, a time line would be helpful because we in the United States are so woefully ignorant of the events in Guatemala, the war engineered by the CIA in 1954 that deposed a democratically elected President and installed the first of a long line of military dictators that finally ended by the Peace Treaty signed in 1996.

Epica has also produced a study guide that is especially useful for community group study of the Guatemala Never Again Project entitled: Refusing to Forget: Joining with Guatemalans to Recover our Historical Memory, published by The Campaign for Peace and Life in Guatemala, Washington, D.C.; in English.

*Reviewed by Billie Jean Isbell
Dept. of Anthropology
Cornell University*

Can Cuba Survive? An Interview with Fidel Castro

by Beatriz Pagès, translated by Mary Todd Melbourne, Australia, 1992

As part of a generation who equated communism with evil long before its fundamentals were actually explained, I knew Fidel Castro as the enemy. His passionate rhetoric and violent revolution threatened our freedom, our political and economic relations with the world, our essential Americanism. The Castro presented in *Can Cuba Survive?* shows us the same man spouting the same ideologies he has fought for and lived under for forty years—and I am on his side.

The book is the written record of an interview with Castro conducted in 1991 by the Mexican journalist, Beatriz Pagès. The topics are loosely formatted into chapters which address topics such as relations with the Pope, the Cuban economy, the fall of socialism in Eastern Europe, among others. While the reader can only speculate about the extent to which the interview was edited for the purpose of publication, it appears that very little polishing has been done to the final product. Castro's musings and tangents are included, giving the reader the illusion that he or she is eavesdropping on a conversation with the infamous leader.

A window this intimate reveals Castro in a different light than most North Americans are accustomed to. He appears as a very moral and meditative individual. When discussing the Persian Gulf War he is quick to condemn both the US and Iraq for their aggressive actions, yet he seems almost forgiving when discussing the mistakes made by Iraq and the United Nations. At another point Castro addresses various other political movements and their consequences with the same detached

sympathy. As he points out the historical and political circumstances it becomes clear that he has examined each of these situations with an analytical point of view. Forty years in power has, far from wearying him, enabled him to grow intellectually in a way that only serves to strengthen his convictions.

Present, of course, is the harsh criticism of the United States and its hegemony. Yet Castro does not take the opportunity to dwell on the injustices done to his country alone. He points out the fallacy of equating democracy and social justice with capitalism

and offers the worsening economic and social conditions of Latin America in the last thirty years as proof. His call for hemispheric unification to battle increasingly unequal trade balances and escalating debt is a direct response to the "Pax Americana" and NAFTA proposals recently announced when this interview was conducted. He cautions that, "[Latin America] would become suppliers of cheap raw materials and cheap labor, attracting industries with low capital investments per

worker as well as polluting industries." Given the political activism and discourse against these very realities that is attracting increasing attention in this country lately, Castro seems more like a prophetic visionary than the violent lunatic of our history.

Reviewed by Marcie Ley, a CUSLAR volunteer and Ithaca native.



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Special thanks to all our CUSLAR supporters who came out cook, clean, chop, dance and eat at the annual CUSLAR Noche Latina fundraiser event held on March 7, 2000 at the Common Ground! This event was sponsored by La Cocina Latina and the Common Ground and we especially appreciated the live music performance by Carlos Gutierrez & Co. !!

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