



# CUSLAR Newsletter

Fall 2003



The Committee on U.S. - Latin American Relations  
[www.rso.cornell.edu/cuslar](http://www.rso.cornell.edu/cuslar)

*Recognizing Inspiration...*

This fall marks two years of intense fear and violence that has become reality for many people worldwide. September 11, 2001 and the aftermath of the terrible events of that day remain fresh in our minds and a significant part of many people's lives around the world. Prior to September 11, many people outside of the United States (including some within this country) were familiar with the fear and violence to which many U.S. Americans have since been exposed. The suffering and exploitation which is reality for many people throughout the world make possible the reality of many U.S. Americans, which is comprised of ignorance, comfort and apathy.

The "War on Terrorism" has disrupted this false notion of reality as it restricts civil liberties and impedes our Constitutional Rights. It is increasingly important at this time to recognize the realities of U.S. intervention abroad, through direct use of military force and the equally destructive economic intervention that appears in the form of the WTO, FTAA, IMF and World Bank, to name a few that are mentioned in this newsletter. These multinational treaties and organizations impact our lives too, not just "the poor in faraway lands." Gradually they are sacrificing our individual rights and freedoms for the expansion of corporate control. We must recognize that shift in power before it is too late and remember that it is the people who have the power. And we do!

Bolivians demonstrated the power of the people with their victory against the water privatization in Cochabamba in 2000. The recent international mobilization to hold the Bush Administration accountable for its actions in Iraq is overwhelming proof of the power of the people. This fall thousands of people will protest U.S. imperialism and corporate globalization at the WTO meetings in Cancun, the FTAA talks in Miami and the annual vigil and demonstration at Fort Benning, GA. Millions of people across the globe are working in solidarity towards a just peace.

I am thrilled to join the CUSLAR team, working to affect positive change and to encourage cooperation between the local and global communities.

Meaghan Sheehan  
CUSLAR Co-coordinator

The Committee on U.S.-Latin American Relations (CUSLAR) is a Cornell University based group, founded in 1965, which seeks to promote a greater understanding of Latin America and the Caribbean. The members of CUSLAR are a diverse group of people united in our concern about the role of the U.S. in the social, political, and economic affairs of the region. Within this context we support the right of the people of Latin America and the Caribbean to self-determination, and support their efforts to free themselves from a legacy of colonialism, exploitation, and oppression. CUSLAR works for peace, justice, and greater mutual understanding in U.S./Latin American relations through education, solidarity, and support of human rights.

If you are interested in writing or editing for the Newsletter, please call the CUSLAR office at (607) 255-7293. Articles and letters to the editor should be sent to: CUSLAR, 316 Anabel Taylor Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853, or via email at [cuslar@cornell.edu](mailto:cuslar@cornell.edu). The CUSLAR Newsletter is published three times a year.

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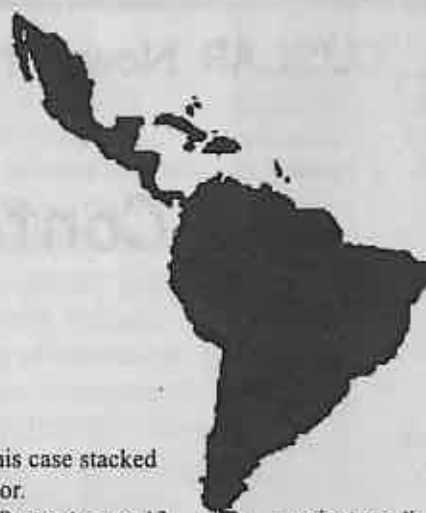
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# In Brief...



Compiled by Claire Stoscheck

## Former Dictator Now Presidential Candidate

One July 31, former dictator Gen. Efraín Ríos Montt was finally registered as presidential candidate for the ruling Guatemalan Republican Front (FRG) for the Nov 9 elections, after a 14-year legal battle. Ríos Montt's 16-month stint as de facto ruler in the early 1980's was one of the bloodiest periods in Guatemalan history since the Spanish conquest. A scorched earth campaign effectively ended a leftist insurgency but led to the death of thousands of people, the vast majority of whom were civilian Mayan Indians.



Ríos Montt

In a week before his official registration, a protest in support of Ríos Montt's campaign descended into violence. On July 24, hundreds of FRG supporters laid siege to part of the city's business district and the Supreme Court and Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) buildings.

One week later the Constitutional Court (CC) overruled a Supreme Court injunction against Ríos Montt's candidacy, ordering that he be registered within 24 hours. Critics complained that changes that added Ríos Montt sympathizers to

the panel hearing his case stacked the court in his favor.

—Latin American Press, August 13, 2003

## Bush, the Rainforest, and a Gas Pipeline to Enrich His Friends

President George Bush is seeking funds for a controversial project to drive gas pipelines from pristine rainforests in the Peruvian Amazon to the coast. The plan will enrich some of Mr. Bush's closest corporate campaign contributors while risking the destruction of rainforest, threatening its indigenous peoples and endangering rare species on the coast. Among the beneficiaries would be two Texas energy companies with close ties to the White House, Hunt Oil and Kellogg Brown & Root (KBR), a subsidiary of Vice-President Dick Cheney's old company, Halliburton, which is rebuilding Iraq's oil infrastructure. The pipeline slices through some of the most biologically diverse places on earth.

The Camisea natural gas project - with reserves of 13,000 billion cubic feet of gas - has already scared off two big investors, Citigroup and the Overseas Private Investment Corporation. According to an internal report by the US Export Import Bank, obtained by the lobby group Amazon Watch, proposals to mitigate the environmental impact of the

project are "woefully inadequate" and will lead to mudslides, destroy habitats and spread diseases among indigenous peoples.

One of the threatened areas is described as "one of the world's most pristine tropical rainforests", the area is home to the Nahua, Kirineri, Nanti, Machiguenga and Yine indigenous groups. Past contact between indigenous peoples and loggers has proven disastrous - 42 % of the Nahua died from diseases contracted from outsiders in the 1980s. Already, the project, which is 60 per cent complete, has run into difficulties, including the kidnapping of 60 pipeline workers last week. They were freed later by the Peruvian military.

Nevertheless, the Bush administration plans to approve financial support for the project via both the US Export Import Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). The Bush administration is reticent about its plans but is keen to exploit new sources of energy to reduce dependence on Middle Eastern oil. Its ambition to open up the Alaskan reserve proved controversial, and has so far been blocked by the US Congress.

-July 30, 2003 by the Independent/UK

## Conservation International Intervenes in Montes Azules

New York-based Conservation International, an NGO with millions of dollars in annual contributions from some of the largest and least environmentally conscious corporations in the US,



called for the immediate "relocation" of five campesino communities in the Montes Azules bio-reserve. Most of the five communities are Zapatista support bases. Ruth Jimenez, a Conservation International spokesperson, referred to the communities as "detonadoras" (detonators) of social conflict. Last week a Mexico Solidarity Network delegation visited two of the communities, Nuevo San Rafael and Nuevo San Isidro. Community leaders are rejecting further negotiations with the federal government until the San Andres Accords are implemented. Apparently Conservation International is not calling for the relocation of its own "eco-tourism" facility located within the boundaries of Montes Azules.

—Mexico Solidarity Network

### Mexico: Government Agreement with Farmers on NAFTA

In an important policy shift, President Vicente Fox's administration has agreed to seek major changes in the North American Free Trade Agreement to help Mexican agricultural producers. Under an accord reached with leaders of agriculture organizations, the administration pledged to seek to negotiate a side agreement that would exempt beans and some corn varieties from the tariff-elimination process.

Pressure from agricultural organizations has been especially strong this year, as tariffs were eliminated from all US and Canadian agricultural imports excluding white corn, beans and powdered milk.

The federal executive "will begin immediate consultations with the governments of the US and Canada with the objective of revising the tariff-lifting process on white corn and beans established under NAFTA and to substitute it with a permanent administrative mechanism for imports," read the text of the agreement, known as the National Accord for the countryside. Among other things, the accord would boost financial assistance to the farm sector and develop other mechanisms to assist agricultural producers.

Still, the participating organizations threatened to reject any agreement that did not include some renegotiation of the agricultural sections of NAFTA. "We were not about to break off or close the dialogue," said Victor Suarez Carrera and Miguel Colungas, representatives of The Countryside Can't Take Any more. "But the government had to understand that we were not seeking just an increase in funds or more programs but a major change in policy."

In the end, the president agreed to their demand to seek to exempt corn and beans from NAFTA tariffs but did not agree to make changes to tariff provisions for other products.

Interior Secretary Santiago Creel said the agreement, which offers almost \$284 million in emergency aid to the agriculture sector this year, is likely to become official at a signing ceremony at the end of April.

The president's decision to support changes in the NAFTA agriculture sections may also be related to the upcoming July 6 congressional and gubernatorial elections, which are expected to be very competitive. Opposition parties sought to make the agriculture question a centerpiece of the election.

—SourceMex

### Venezuela's Chavez to U.S: Mind Your Own Business

Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez on Wednesday [July 30, 2003] warned the United States not to meddle in his country's affairs following comments by a U.S. official about a possible referendum on his rule. "I have to remind the U.S. one more time that they have no right to express their opinion ... we are an independent country not a colony of North America," the president told thousands of cheering supporters during a street rally. The outspoken ex-army paratrooper elected in 1998 has often riled Washington with his fierce populist, anti-capitalist rhetoric and close ties with states such as Communist Cuba. His comments followed remarks made by State Department spokesman Richard Boucher urging the government and opposition to respect an accord they signed in May on the possible referendum on Chavez's rule. The Venezuelan constitution allows for a referendum on the president's rule after August 19 — halfway through his current mandate. But the opposition says Chavez is trying to block and stall the vote. Government officials have said they will accept a referendum but only after the opposition has completed the legal requirements. They say the National Assembly or the Supreme Court must first appoint a new National Electoral Council to oversee the vote. Boucher said Tuesday a decision on the referendum lies "with the courts, the National Electoral Council and the people of Venezuela, rather than with the executive branch of the government." He also said the United States expected the government to investigate the kidnapping of former Tachira State governor and opposition leader Sergio Calderon. The opposition charges the government is involved in his disappearance from his farm at the weekend. Officials say they are still investigating.

—Reuters, 7/30/03

### Chile: U.N. Ambassador Removed

President Ricardo Lagos announced on May 7 that he would reassign Chile's U.N. ambassador, Juan Gabriel Valdes,

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to Buenos Aires. When Chile assumed its seat on the U.N. Security Council at the beginning of 2003, Valdes showed a willingness to challenge US policy on Iraq-surprising the Bush Administration, which had hoped for Chile's acquiescence on critical war votes. Valdes spoke out against the war on Iraq and cogently argued for a multilateral resolution to the conflict, much to the annoyance of the US/UK/Spanish pro-war trio.

Valdes's timing couldn't have been worse. The US/Chile free trade agreement was winding its way through the US Congress, with a good change of being signed in April. Instead, the Bush Administration wage a subtle campaign of intimidation by helping to stall passage of the legislation, while the US-Singapore trade pact was ratified without a hitch. Singapore had back the US-led war against Iraq in the UN Security Council. The Chilean government has sought a trade agreement with the US for 12 years, and President Lagos's administration had used the promise of economic prosperity through free trade to mollify a Chilean public growing angry at a growing list of corruption scandals involving legislators and other elected officials.

The good news for Chile is that following the announcement of Valdes's reassignment, the Chilean secretary of state, Soledad Alvear, traveled to the US in June 2003 and secured a verbal promise from the US government that the free trade agreement would be signed as soon as possible. The bad news is that Chile has lost an assertive voice on the world stage and a change to stake out a position independent from Washington, D.C., something it has been unwilling to do since the end of the Pinochet dictatorship in the early 1990's.

~Washington Post, 5/14/03; Council on Hemispheric Affairs, 5/26/03; Elmostrador, 6/05/03.

## Paving the Road for the FTAA

by Dana Brown

With the next round of the FTAA (Free Trade Area of the Americas) negotiations coming up this November in Miami, Florida(1), I believe it's important for us to understand what people are already facing throughout the hemisphere today so that we can have a better understanding of what would come with the passage of the FTAA. Currently, there are many structural adjustment/infrastructure development programs being implemented throughout the hemisphere, many for the purpose of paving the road(sometimes literally!) for the passage of the FTAA.

The following is a list of just some of the destructive "development" projects being implemented across the hemisphere and their financiers. Most of the projects are financed by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). Established in 1959 to "help accelerate eco-

nomic and social development in Latin America and the Caribbean", the IDB is the oldest and largest regional multilateral development institution. It is the main entity promoting the Plan Puebla Panamá (PPP) as well as providing funding for the IIRSA (the Regional Infrastructure Integration Initiative, the PPP's southern cousin, which is a regional infrastructure development scheme for a large part of South America).

**\* Proposed Camisea Natural Gas Project, Peru (IDB Loan)** — The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) is currently considering loaning US \$75 million towards completion of Peru's \$2.7 billion Camisea Natural Gas Project, the first major gas development initiative in the Peruvian Amazon. The project involves the construction of four initial drilling platforms in the Lower Urubamba Valley of the Peruvian Amazon, two pipelines for transportation of natural gas and liquid natural gas to the Peruvian coast, and a natural gas distribution

network and export facility in Lima and Callao. There are several serious concerns associated with the social and environmental impacts of the Camisea project. Not only is the project affecting indigenous communities known to be living in voluntary isolation, but it is furthermore located in one of the world's most ecologically prized and pristine primary tropical rainforests. Exploration, extraction, and transport activities have already led to degradation and conversion of critical natural habitats and have opened the way to a potential influx of colonizers, settlers, poachers, and other extractive industries. Furthermore, the planned gas export facility on the Peruvian coast would be located in an internationally recognized marine reserve, and necessary impact studies and alternatives analyses have not been completed. **For more information on this project see:** [http://www.amazonwatch.org/megaprojects/peru\\_camisea.html](http://www.amazonwatch.org/megaprojects/peru_camisea.html), <http://www.oxfamamerica.org/advocacy/art681.html>

**\* Plan Puebla Panama (IDB)** — This is a regional integration project that intends to integrate the infrastructure and economies from the Mexican State of Puebla to Panama, including the

construction of roads, hydroelectric power and maquiladoras. Our concerns center on potential environmental impacts of these projects and public consultations necessary to ensure that the interests of indigenous people, small producers and the rural poor are responded to. **For more information on the PPP see:** <http://asej.org/ACERCA/ppp/ppp.html>, <http://www.globalexchange.org/campaigns/mexico/ppp/analysis.html>, [http://www.mexicosolidarity.org/plan\\_puebla\\_panama.html](http://www.mexicosolidarity.org/plan_puebla_panama.html), <http://www.americaspolicy.org/pdf/articles/0204puebla.pdf>

**\* Cana Brava Project, Brazil (IDB)** — This hydroelectric dam project on the Tocantins River in Brazil is undergoing inspection by the IDB's Independent Inspection Mechanism. Concerns include the lack of adequate compensation given to displaced families and lack of adequate consultation with those whose livelihoods depend upon this river. **For more information:** <http://www.wrm.org.uy/bulletin/42/Brazil.html>, <http://www.irm.org/programs/latamerica/index.asp?id=programs/latamerica/010626.iadbletter.en.html>

**\* The Bolivia-Brazil Pipeline** — This natural gas pipeline stretches 3000 km from Santa Cruz, Bolivia to Porto Alegre, Brazil and crosses several important ecosystems. The project has failed to address environmental concerns as well as concerns related to the indigenous peoples of the region whose resources are threatened by this project. **For more info:** <http://www.foc.org/camps/intl/institutions/boliviabrazil.html>, [http://www.bicusa.org/lac/bol\\_brazil.htm](http://www.bicusa.org/lac/bol_brazil.htm)

**\* The Struggle Against the Yacyreta Dam (WB and IDB Loan)** — The Yacyreta Dam is a joint project of Paraguay and Argentina. It is supposed to generate 2700 megawatts of electricity. Concerns include the insufficient or inadequate environmental and social impact mitigation, compensation and resettlement plans. **For more information:** <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/42/003.html>, [www.irm.org](http://www.irm.org)

**\* Termoelectrica del Golfo project, Mexico (IDB Loan)** — This is the first ever coke smelting project in Mexico to produce electricity. The project has been approved by the IDB for review by the

**more information:** <http://www.urban-watch.org/art/HIC-en020827135945.htm>

**\* Santa Cruz-Puerto Suarez Highway, Bolivia (IDB Loan)** — Funding the partial paving of a 642 km road connecting Puerto Suarez near the Brazil-Bolivia border with Santa Cruz in Central Bolivia. Major concerns involve the environmental impacts on three major ecosystems: the tropical forest of the Serrania Chiquitanas, the deciduous forests of Chaco, and the wetlands of the Pantanal.

**\* Corredor Sur (Panama) (IFC Loan)** — A 19.5 km toll highway in Panama City connecting the financial district to the eastern sector including the international airport. Concerns include erosion damage, flooding, and inadequate compensation associated with the resettlement related to the project. **For more information:** <http://www.ciel.org/Ifi/ifccasepanama.html>

**\* Land Reform and Poverty Alleviation II, Brazil (WB Loan)** — The second phase of a market-based land reform project enabling poor individuals and families to purchase their own plots of land. The government has undertaken land reform programs, and concern exists as to whether the World Bank project will become an alternative rather than a complement to the government's programs.

Faced with all these destructive plans being implemented throughout the hemisphere without the consent of the people, I believe we need to concentrate on development alternatives and local autonomy in decision-making. There are many models being tried throughout the Americas—many forms of local and regional decision-making and experiments in sustainable development.

One recent development on that front has been the Zapatistas\* (the EZLN: Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, and their support bases) reassertion of their local autonomous

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Independent Inspection Mechanism. Parties filing the complaint cite violations of Mexican national law as well as concern over the lack of pre-existing data regarding the impacts on the environment and public health. **para más información en español:** [www.alianzaenfrentebid.org/biblioteca/mitos.pdf](http://www.alianzaenfrentebid.org/biblioteca/mitos.pdf)

**\* Mexican Mesoamerican Biological Corridor** — Creation of 5 biological corridors that will connect existing biological reserves in the interest of protecting forest, coastal, and mountain ecosystems. Main areas of concern have revolved around the participation and consultation of indigenous groups. *For*







by Kathy Russell

In June of this year I went to Cuba as part of a delegation of North American Philosophers and Social Scientists organized by the Radical Philosophy Association (RPA) to speak at a conference at the University of Havana. There were over 60 of us. Last year the delegation was over 90. Many had to drop out this year (e.g., a group of over 25 African Americans going to study Yoruba culture) because of yet another series of new travel restrictions. On March 24, the Office of Foreign Assets Control suspended people-to-people licenses for travel to Cuba. These new license requirements apply not only to US citizens, but also to non-citizens living here or traveling through a US agency.

People-to-people licenses were part of the Track II strategy, the "battle of ideas," designed to allow people from our country to go to Cuba so that they could extol the glories of US capitalism to the Cuban people, thus undermining support for their government. But the Cubans were winning this particular battle because people were learning instead about all the positive things Cubans had—like free education and health care—and they wanted more of that here. So the rules changed!

spected Cuba's territorial integrity, nor its right to self determination. But our policies against Cuba have also limited the rights of US citizens: our freedom to get an education, to travel and to enter into economic and cultural exchanges, for example.

Educational and cultural exchanges between our two countries have been virtually eliminated. Cuban musicians, students, intellectuals, athletes, and scientists

are refused visas. I have invited Professor Miguel Limia, a noted Cuban philosopher and President of the Council of Social Sciences, to speak at

SUNY-Cortland but his visa has been denied twice.

#### Cuban successes

The US blockade has worked to a certain extent, because it has hampered great social experiment that is the Cuban revolution from blossoming on its own terms. Despite repeated attempts by the US government to undermine it, however, the revolution has made inspiring progress.

For example, health care in Cuba is universal and free. There is one family phy-

In its relations with Cuba the US has made a mockery of the universal principle of national sovereignty. We have not re-

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sician for every 168 people. Infant mortality fluctuates between 6 and 6.5 per 1000 live births, the lowest rate in the Western hemisphere. Today, 48% of all Cuban doctors are women and people of color (IFCO, Pastors for Peace volunteer).

While I was there several Cubans were proud to tell me that 85% of the people own their own homes; the rest pay rent which is 10% of their salary. All children in Cuba have real access to free education and computers and audiovisual materials are found in every school—they use solar panels in remote areas even if there's only one pupil. According to the UN Development Program and the World Bank, Cuba has a literacy rate of 97%. I visited a social work school where I met students who are part of a new program to provide young people between the ages of 17 and 30, who were not already in school or employed, the chance to go back to school and receive a stipend from the state while they study.

#### Will Cuba Be Next?

One thing that impressed me quite deeply when I was there is the very real worry that the US will attack Cuba as it



has Iraq. After September 11 President Bush put Cuba on its list of terrorist nations, and he frequently accuses Cuba of developing biological weapons, despite internationally respected evidence that it is not doing so.

In April US ambassador in the Dominican Republic Hans Hertell stated that the invasion of Iraq is "a very positive sign and is a very good example for Cuba." The war on Iraq is the beginning of "a crusade of liberation

that will cover all countries in the world, including Cuba," he exulted.

Florida governor Jeb Bush said that after the "success" of Iraq, the United States should look to Cuba. "A regime that totally lacks respect for human rights can't be kept in place," he said (La Jornada, 4-12-03). This spring in Miami right-wing Cubans were demonstrating with signs reading "Iraq now, Cuba later."

What's preventing US military aggression against Cuba? For one thing, our government knows that Cuba, unlike Afghanistan and Iraq, is not weak. It has a strong military and the support of its people. A poll conducted by the independent Costa Rican firm of CID Gallup in 1994 (a period of severe economic hardship and increased pressure from the US) found that 69% of Cubans identified as revolutionaries, socialists or

communists. 58% thought that on balance the revolution had more achievements than failures. Only 24% said they were not integrated into the revolution. ("Cuba Update," Feb. 1995)

The RPA delegation visiting in June



Free the Cuban Five from a 2002 San Francisco demo

country's socialist character and national dignity. We have been impressed by the spirit of the Cuban people manifested in this process and its participatory and democratic character, reminiscent of our own earlier New England town hall meeting tradition."

Free the Cuban Five!

Gerardo Hernández, Antonio Guerrero, Ramón Labañino, René González and Fernando González are currently serving from 15 years to two life terms in federal prison in Florida. Two are U.S. citizens. After their arrest by the FBI in September 1998, they were convicted of espionage and related charges

in June 2001 and sentenced that December. They had revealed evidence that right-wing groups in Miami had made concrete plans for terrorist attacks against Cuba. Instead of acting against these plans as required by international agreements, our government jailed the five men. Spouses of two of the men have been denied visas to visit their husbands three times. Ivette, the 5 year old daughter of René González has not her father for 3 years.

The case is being appealed in the 11th circuit court in Atlanta. It is a national priority for the National Lawyers Guild whose president Bruce Nestor said, "At issue is a politically charged prosecution by the U.S. government of five men who were simply trying to defend their country from long-documented acts of terror attacks by organizations in Miami."

The appeals claim the five were denied rights of due process, and they "document the media intrusiveness and ha-

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*Kathy Russell is a Professor of Philosophy at SUNY Cortland, and an active member of the Ithaca Coalition for Global Justice*

**Stop  
the  
FTAA**



**Shut  
Down  
the  
SOA!**

*Southeast Uprising*

**Nov.19/21 Miami, FL ~**

**Nov.22/23 Fort Benning, GA**

Economic oppression and military repression are flip sides of the same coin. The economic terrorism inflicted on the poor that accompanies "free trade" agreements could not stand without the repressive military apparatus that brutalizes people who rise up to resist it. Those who oppose the globalization of greed and those who work to end US training of repressive foreign armies are joined in one effort.

Concerned citizens from all over North America will converge from November 19-21, 2003 in Miami, Florida to voice their opposition to the Free Trade Area of the Americas agreement (FTAA) and from November 22-23 in Ft. Benning, Georgia to speak out against the School of the Americas (SOA). Miami will be the host of the FTAA ministerial meeting, which brings together the trade ministers of the hemisphere to launch the final stage of the FTAA negotiations. **For more information visit [www.lasolidarity.org](http://www.lasolidarity.org)**

#### **The FTAA:**

All over the hemisphere, folks are learning about The Free Trade Area of the Americas (The FTAA or "NAFTA on Steroids") which aims to expand the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) throughout the entire Western Hemisphere. Implementation of the FTAA - which is expected to be adopted no later than 2005 - would empower corporations to restrict governments from setting labor and environmental standards. It would enhance corporate control at the expense of citizens and the environment throughout the Americas. **For more information visit [www.stopftaa.org](http://www.stopftaa.org)**

#### **The School of the Americas:**

The School of the Americas (SOA), in 2001 renamed the "Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation," is a combat training school for Latin American soldiers, located in Ft. Benning, GA. In its 56 years of existence, the SOA, often called "The School of Assassins," has trained over 60,000 Latin American soldiers in counterinsurgency techniques, sniper training, commando and psychological warfare, military intelligence and interrogation tactics. These graduates have consistently used their skills to wage a war against their own people. **For more information visit [www.soaw.org](http://www.soaw.org)**

**For information on local transportation opportunities to GA and/or FL contact CUSLAR at (607)255-7293, [cuslar@cornell.edu](mailto:cuslar@cornell.edu) or [www.rso.cornell.edu/cuslar](http://www.rso.cornell.edu/cuslar)**

# Follow the Money : In whose interests is war being fought in Colombia?

by Marcie Ley

Imagine a war waged by well-organized terrorist networks, heavily armed and funded by wealthy extremists. The armies recruit young idealists who, having grown up not knowing a world without violence, are willing to sacrifice their lives to bring peace and justice for their people. The battlefield is often urban centers and the vast majority of casualties—more than 20 each day—are civilians. Millions more are forced to flee their communities and live under the repression and fear caused by such extreme violence.

Despite this grim reality, rarely does the world's attention focus on Colombia, the country where this conflict has raged for over 40 years. Seldom does the daily violence make headlines in the US even though US citizens are financing all sides of this war through military aid and participation in blackmarket as well as legitimate economies. NGOs and advocacy groups frequently call for the cessation of US military aid to the government of Colombia on the assumption that funding and equipping one side of the conflict fuels the violence and reduces the chances of a negotiated peace. Undoubtedly, without the \$2.5 billion given by the US to Colombia in the last decade the violence would not have escalated as rapidly. Yet in order to successfully lobby for the decreased militarization of US policy toward Colombia, US taxpayers who are footing the bill need to understand who benefits from the continued violence and a militarized solution to the conflict.

Since the passage of Plan Colombia, the

1999 aid package that drastically stepped-up US involvement in Colombia under the guise of fighting the drug war, the most frequent criticism has been that very little of the money has actually left the US. Over 70% of the allocation pays for equipment and training, including hundreds of millions for helicopters alone. Without ex-

tricity companies operating—with very little transparency and congressional oversight—in Colombia.

Much ado has been made about the 2003 Foreign Appropriations Bill which included a \$98 million provision to protect an oil pipeline primarily owned—with a 44% share—by Los Angeles-based Occidental Petroleum.

The money funds the training and equipping of the 18<sup>th</sup> Brigade, a unit of the Colombian Army whose sole responsibility will be to protect the Cano-Limon pipeline from guerrilla attacks. The two major leftist guerrilla groups involved in the Colombian civil war, the FARC and ELN, target the pipeline as a way to strike at the heart of Colombia's economy. According to the guerrilla logic, by attacking the infrastructure that enables foreign corporations to profit from oil extraction, they protect Colombia's resources from exploitation and convince the government and company that they are a force to be reckoned with.

The Colombia government used to charge a "war tax" to foreign oil companies operating in Colombia of \$1.23 per barrel that funded the Colombian forces protection of foreign investments. Although this tax was removed, Occidental and other countries have continued to support the Colombian armed forces who have in turn been linked to paramilitary forces operating in the Aruca province where the pipeline is located. The US Embassy in Colombia openly admits that Occidental supplies the gas used by helicopters purchased using Plan Colom-

## OIL FIELDS AND GAS PIPELINES



ception, all of the weapons manufacturers are US defense contractors all of which lobbied heavily for increased military aid in Plan Colombia. Furthermore, the funds allocated for the training of the Colombian armed forces pay the salaries of active US soldiers as well as retired soldiers now working for one of the numerous private secu-

rities. Although this tax was removed, Occidental and other countries have continued to support the Colombian armed forces who have in turn been linked to paramilitary forces operating in the Aruca province where the pipeline is located. The US Embassy in Colombia openly admits that Occidental supplies the gas used by helicopters purchased using Plan Colom-





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bia funds that transport the 18<sup>th</sup> Brigade and the US troops that are training them. It is no surprise then that Occidental lobbied heavily for increased US funding for militarization of Aruca. As a recent Witness for Peace report points out, US taxpayers are being asked to foot the security costs of Occidental's continued operations in Colombia estimated to be \$3.70 per barrel produced.

Protection of the Cano-Limon pipeline has also served as a major source of income for the guerrilla groups as well. Witness for Peace alleges that Occidental has paid millions of dollars in bribes to the FARC and ELN in exchange for letting the company continue to extract and transport Colombian crude. Along with revenue from local drug production and kidnapping, the guerrillas fund their involvement in the civil war through these extortion payments. By funneling money to both sides of the conflict Occidental has helped fuel the

flames of a war which they are now turning to US taxpayers to resolve by the use of greater force.

Critics of Plan Colombia have pointed out from the beginning that US business interests lay at the heart of US military involvement in Colombia. Ostensibly passed by Congress as part of the drug

*Plan Colombia and its successors...are less about reducing the world's drug supply and more about stabilization of Colombia for foreign investment.*

war, Plan Colombia and its successors, such as the Andean Regional Initiative, are less about reducing the world's drug supply and more about stabilization of Colombia for foreign investment. In an interview conducted in July 2000, exiled Colombian journalist Alfredo Molano warned, "It was a plan made to fit the

vested interests in Washington, the foreign businesses, the military contractors that also influence the Colombian government. And naturally the Washington interests to create more favorable conditions for North American investments, to create the basis for an offensive against drug trafficking and the guerrilla movement."

As violence in the Middle East and political unrest in Venezuela continues to threaten US access to large oil reserves, the US government increasingly looks to non-OPEC oil producing countries such as Colombia. With geographic conditions similar to its neighbor Venezuela and vast amounts of unexplored territory, many suspect that Colombia could potentially become a major supplier of oil to North America. Yet without stability exploration and investment is impossible.

Oil is not the only thing motivating foreign interest in Colombia. As negotiations for the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and Plan Puebla Panama (PPP) intensify, Colombia finds itself strategically located from both a geographic and political perspective. The northwest corner of Colombia has for decades been the site of significant guerilla and paramilitary activity. The Darien region along the border of Panama is well-known to be one of the most violent corners—interesting when one considers its potential as a transportation corridor linking South and Central America as well as the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. This is the only region through which the Pan-American Highway—stretching from Alaska to Patagonia along the west coast of two continents—is unfinished. Similarly, as the Panama Canal becomes increasingly obsolete, a new passage called the Atrato-Trando canal which would pass along the Atrato river has been proposed. Neither of these major projects can be realized if the area remains unpacified. Some have speculated that the increased paramilitary and military presence in this area that has led to massive displacement of the civilian popu-

lation in what was formerly guerrilla territory is caused by an interest in developing these projects.

While advocates of free trade and economic liberalization contend that unless conditions in Colombia become more favorable for foreign investors, the war-ravaged economy will never recover. But those who stand to gain the least from proposed transp. corridors and resources extraction, are the ones for whom repression and violence is a daily reality. With already over 2 million internally displaced refugees, Colombia and its supporters in the US must first consider the human consequences of devel. projects and put the safety of communities before profits.



*Marcie Ley is a former CUSLAR Coordinator and is active in the Colombia solidarity movement*

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## The Ithaca Fair Trade Coalition is Growing!!

The **Ithaca Fair Trade Coalition (IFTC)** is currently a project of associates of the Committee on US-Latin American Relations (CUSLAR), the Ithaca Ten Thousand Villages Store, the Tompkins County Living Wage Coalition, and other interested individuals. The Coalition is currently seeking to expand its member base to include a wider variety of local organizations. If you feel that your organization/religious group/union/etc. aligns with what we stand for, and are interested in becoming a member of the Coalition, please contact us. In addition, if you are interested in attending the Coalition's bi-weekly meetings, let us know. E-mail: [ithacafairtrade@hotmail.com](mailto:ithacafairtrade@hotmail.com) Phone: 255-7293 Web-site: <http://www.catalyzer.tk/fairtrade/>

The IFTC Goals: Our mission is to educate the Ithaca area about fair trade and to promote fair trade locally and globally. We staged Ithaca's first Fair Trade Fair in support of World Fair Trade Day in May 2003. Encouraged by the success of the Fair, we plan to continue our consumer education with speakers, teach-ins, a film festival, a holiday Fair Trade shopping event, and more. In addition, we plan to promote local businesses selling fair trade and to help businesses to get started in the sale of Fair Trade items. Finally, we plan to work with people in our local government to pass Fair Trade resolutions. The Fair Trade Fair will most certainly become an annual event.

### How Can You Get Involved?

Join us! We welcome individuals, organizations, and businesses, donations, ideas, enthusiasm, and energy! Just print out the form below and mail (or e-mail) it to us to get started.

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Organization affiliation, if any \_\_\_\_\_

There are many ways to join our efforts! Please indicate how you'd like to help:

- ☐ Become an IFTC member. I agree with the goals of IFTC and am willing to have my name / organization listed as a member for publicity purposes.
- ☐ Attend IFTC meetings.
- ☐ Join a working group to plan and coordinate IFTC projects.
- ☐ Help plan and stage events.
- ☐ Help with consumer education.
- ☐ Educate local businesses about fair trade.
- ☐ Promote local businesses who sell fair trade items.
- ☐ Help maintain the website.
- ☐ Recruit other individuals or organizations to participate.
- ☐ Work with local government to promote fair trade.
- ☐ Write letters, OpEds, or news articles.
- ☐ Speak at public meetings, gatherings, or teach-ins.
- ☐ Participate in petition drives.
- ☐ Join the IFTC listserve, to receive meeting updates, activities announcements, fair trade news, etc.
- ☐ Make a donation to support the programs of IFTC. I would like to make a donation to IFTC.  
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# Guatemala Bleeds; US Press Shrugs

By Jeffrey St. Claire

(this article originally appeared in Counterpunch, July 29, 2003)

All hell is breaking loose in Guatemala and few outside that tragic nation seem to care or even notice.

In recent days, followers of General Efraín Ríos Montt, stirred into action by the rightwing Republican Front Party (FRG) which he controls, have charged into the streets of Guatemala City armed with machetes, clubs and guns. Led by FRG militants, the crowds, including many members of the Guatemalan army, have marched on the nation's courts, opposition parties and newspapers, torching buildings, shooting out windows and bullying opponents of the Bible-spouting dictator.

The riots were orchestrated by Ríos Montt's cohorts after the Guatemalan Supreme Court (the nation's second highest court) suspended his campaign for the presidency and agreed to hear a complaint brought by two right-center parties that the general, the butcher of thousands during the 1980s, is constitutionally barred from running for president of the country he once ruled with an iron fist.

The 77-year old Ríos Montt, now white-haired and grizzled, denounced the ruling as "judicial manipulation" and, in a radio address, implored his followers to take to the streets to protest the decision. Within an hour of his speech, thousands of the general's backers had flooded the capital city, blocking traffic, chanting threatening slogans and waving machetes.

Hooded men ransacked buildings, fired machine guns from SUVs, smashed win-

dows and set fire to cars and piles of tires. The situation in Guatemala City became so chaotic over the weekend of July 26th that the both the UN mission and the US embassy were closed.

It all seemed like a bloody flashback to the 1980s, when Ríos Montt's goons roamed the streets at night threatening nuns and priests, kidnapping reporters, torturing dissidents and killing at will, especially those of Mayan descent.

Journalists appear to have been a main target of the attackers. In the first wave of street violence, Hector Ramirez, a reporter for a Left-center television station, was hounded and chased by a mob until he collapsed in the street and died of heart failure. As Ramirez was carried away, the rioters chanted, "Journalist Spotted, Journalist Dead."

Edgar Valle, a reporter for the Noticias television news show, was briefly detained and roughed up by Ríos Montt's mob. "They attacked everybody without differentiating," said Valle, after being released. "It was strange to me because my channel has always been identified with the government. These people didn't want the press to cover what was happening."

The rioters seemed to target cameramen in particular. Hector Estrada was filming the riots for Guatevision when he was

attacked by a gang of masked men swinging machetes. They seized his video camera, drenched him with gasoline and tried to light him on fire as he fled down the street.

"I was praying for God to save me," said Estrada. "I thought they were going to hack me to pieces."

Two political reporters in Guatemala told CounterPunch that they have received multiple death threats in the past week. One of the reporters told us that he had gotten two telephone calls threatening him and his wife and children.

Another reporter said that she had arrived home to find a death threat nailed to the door of her home.

"The press is the only functioning institution in this country," says Mario Antonio Sandoval, vice president of the excellent daily paper Prensa Libre. "That is why they either have to control it or scare it into silence."

The strategy appears to have worked. Even though much of the violence has been aimed at journalists, the US press has largely ignored the riots and the political re-emergence of Ríos Montt and his rightwing thugs. In the US, only the Miami Herald printed detailed accounts of the riots.

Not only has the Guatemalan govern-



Nun with a Wanted poster for Ríos Montt at public ministry in Guatemala City, June 2001

ment taken no action to quell the rioters, members of the Army and police have actually joined the frenzy of violence. One account of the riots by Prensa Libre tallied 46 criminal acts of violence and vandalism, 12 of those the paper said were committed by government troops and police.

Fearing the impending return of the regime that slaughtered nearly 200,000 people, Mayan peasants in the highlands began steaming across the border into Mexico last week. But they were blocked by hostile border patrols with orders from the Mexican government, under its cruel Plan Salvamento, to either send them back into Guatemala or lock them up in immigrant concentration camps, where they are routinely starved and abused by guards.

The reaction of the Bush administration to Rios Montt's antics has been restrained, given the circumstances. Even though the US Embassy was taunted by rioters, there have been no statements of condemnation directly from Colin Powell. Indeed, we've only heard from state department spokesman Richard Boucher, who continues to say the administration would prefer that Rios Montt not run for office. This weekend Boucher was again rolled out to remark on the rampages in the streets of Guatemala City. "They are a dangerous mockery of protest," Boucher said. But he stopped short of pointing the finger at the General, whose infamous career is every bit as bloody as that of Saddam Hussein.

A Rios Montt victory in November could complicate matters for a Bush administration that is crusading against political corruption in Latin America. Of course, the preacher in this crusade is none other than the unappetizing Otto Reich, who enjoys deep and warm ties to Rios Montt and his gang of gruesome generals.

Still, Rios Montt is an unreconstructed monster of an older vintage, trained in the art of the military strongman at the

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School of the Americas in the 1950s. Powell no doubt feels that the general, if elected, might become as problematic as Manuel Noriega was for the current president's father. That said, the Bush administration may calculate that it can't afford to be too harsh in its condemnations of Rios Montt, who no doubt has many stories to tell about the CIA's affirmative role in the Guatemala bloodbaths of the 1980s.

Guatemala's court system is a maze of

*"We don't have a policy of scorched earth; We have a policy of scorched Communists."*

*Efrain Rios Montt, 1982*

conflicting and overlapping jurisdictions. Already this year, Rios Montt's election bid has been ruled on by three different courts, the electoral court, the Supreme Court and the constitutional court.

Last week's decision to suspend Rios Montt's campaign by the Supreme Court came only day's after the nation's highest court, the so-called Constitutional Court, approved the general's candidacy in a sharply divided 4-3 decision. The majority on the constitutional court agreed with Rios Montt's

claim that the constitutional amendment that bans those who seized power in military coups from running for president doesn't apply to him since the amendment was passed after he had left office.

The General took power in a bloody coup in 1982, which was backed by the Reagan administration. Over the next 18 months Rios Montt supervised a vicious crackdown on political opponents and Mayan peasants that left more than 19,000 dead, thousands more in jail and more than 100,000 displaced from their homes. He has been called the Pinochet of Guatemala and several war crimes complaints are pending against him in different courts in Guatemala and in Spain.

The constitutional court is slated to hear Rios Montt's appeal later this week. However, the three members of the court who voted against the General in the previous case announced that they will not attend the hearing unless their safety can be guaranteed by the current government, headed by Rios Montt's protégé Alfonso Portillo.

Rios Montt has boasted that he owns the votes of four justices on the court. And indeed that's precisely how many votes he got in the July 15th ruling that initially put him on the ballot.

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rassment into the lives of the jurors selected for the trial, their doubtful impartiality given the bias associated with the trial location, and the efforts made to influence them by right wing anti-Cuba organizations." (<http://www.freethethefive.org>)

"It is outrageous that while the US government is allegedly waging a 'war on terrorism,' it is imprisoning Cubans who were trying to stop deadly attacks on their country," says Gloria La Riva of the National Committee to Free the Five.

On June 10, 2003, the Berkeley City Council was the first city to pass unanimously a resolution demanding a fair trial in a neutral venue. They also called for the Cuban Five to be given the same family visitation rights, humanitarian concerns and equal treatment under the law as any other prisoner in the U.S.

Perhaps Ithaca should be the next city to pass such a resolution!

#### RESOLUTION OF THE NORTHAMERICAN DELEGATION

To the 15th Conference of North American and Cuban Philosophers and Social Scientists

University of Havana, June 23-27, 2003

Our delegation included 60 educators,

students and community activists from North America and at least four other international locations. We came to learn more about the progress of Cuba's struggles to determine its own social and political development. We were in Havana for more than two weeks and participated in critical dialogue with our Cuban colleagues and peers. We also attended and reviewed lectures and workshops concerning Cuba's distinctive cultural, historical, political, social and economic development. From these experiences, we choose to offer the following Resolution:

Whereas: Humanity has always dreamt of a better world, one marked by equality, solidarity, and the ability of all people to survive and develop their human potential; and

Whereas: The recent series of interventionist wars undertaken by the U.S. government seems to be only the beginning of a longer process whose goal is world domination imposed through armed force; and

Whereas: The immense protests against the war and in favor of peace demonstrated that the people of the world, including significant sectors of the North American people, reject this proposition as a goal of foreign policy; and

Whereas: The present U.S. administra-

tion is militarizing the world and is initiating what it cynically calls "preventative wars"; and

Whereas: The Bush administration does not hesitate to violate international rights and generalize the inhumane practices inaugurated at Guantanamo; and

Whereas: This same administration further does not hesitate to reduce the civil liberties of its own citizens and to destroy the democratic tradition of its own people; and

Whereas: The administration does not hesitate to adopt attitudes and actions with hegemonic and racist characteristics; and

Whereas: Cuba is at the doorway of the empire and fears, not without reason, that it can be one of the next targets, given that there are many signs that support this fear: the growing media offensive, the accusations of terrorism, diverse types of provocations, an increase in the extent of the blockade, the financial support of opposition and of subversion, and the announcement of future attacks on the country by government spokespersons;

Whereas: Many of our group call upon those who have recently criticized the verdicts rendered by Cuba's system of justice to more fully consider the context of those verdicts and the consequences of their public criticism.

Therefore, be it resolved that:

1. We, the participants of the 15th annual Cuban and North American Philosophers' and Social Scientists' Conference, deplore the imminent threat of war against Cuba posed by the U.S. government.

2. We call upon U.S. citizens to become aware of Cuba's grave situation and to take necessary steps to discourage and resist U.S. intervention.

3. We call upon the United Nations and its various agencies and commissions to assure that the United States abides



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## Two Venezuelan Mayors: Press Freedom, Soft Drinks, and Democracy in the Andes

By Justin Podur

August 3, 2003, [www.zmag.org](http://www.zmag.org)

A recent Human Rights Watch report, which was harshly criticized by supporters of Venezuela's 'Bolivarian Revolution', said that "there are few obvious limits on free expression in Venezuela. The country's print and audiovisual media operate without restrictions." Two months after the report was published, on July 14, one of the country's audiovisual media outlets came up against a rather serious restriction—it was shut down and its equipment confiscated. The outlet in question is called CatiaTV, but it was not shut down by the Chavez government but by the mayor of Caracas, Alfredo Pena, who is an opponent of Chavez.

CatiaTV was an experiment in genuine community television. It was started by a group of people in Catia, a vast and extremely poor borough of Caracas, who thought to film one of the community's events to show it to the community. It gave poor people the opportunity to make their own programs, about themselves, for themselves. In April 2002, when the coup against the Chavez government took place, workers in CatiaTV were instrumental in helping to get the state television channel, Channel 8, back online, breaking the monopoly of misinformation of the private television networks and facilitating the reversal of the coup.

Reporters Without Borders (which did protest against the closing of CatiaTV), demonstrating a disappointing lack of understanding of the Venezuelan media situation, said that reporters there were "caught between an authoritarian president and an intolerant media." The private networks are advocates of a coup, call support-

ers of Chavez 'monkeys', and distort information to a remarkable degree. But the people can't rely solely on the state media. This is exactly what makes community media like CatiaTV so important. It is also why Alfredo Pena shut it down.

Who is Alfredo Pena? The mayor of Greater Caracas was a supporter of Chavez and had been a journalist himself (his email, should you want to write him and tell him to give CatiaTV their transmitter back, is [alcalde@alcaldiamayor.gov.ve](mailto:alcalde@alcaldiamayor.gov.ve)). But his more recent fame has come from his use of the Policia Metropolitana in Caracas. There is evidence that Pena's police were instrumental in the coup, murdering Chavistas on April 11 2002 in actions that were blamed on the government and used to justify the coup. A reporter for the Narconews Bulletin, Alex Main, describes some of the actions of this police force during the coup in April 2002:

"The PM played their first major political role on April 11th of this year [2002] when they accompanied an illegal opposition march on Miraflores presidential palace that produced a

cloud-cover of chaos allowing a media-driven coup d'etat to take place. That afternoon, Venezuelan commercial television showed images of

a few pro-government demonstrators who, for several minutes, fired automatic pistols over the railing of the Puente Llaguno bridge which overlooks the Avenida Baraldt, a main artery that leads towards Miraflores. Private Venezuelan television channels showed these images over and over while a commentator explained that the shooters were assassins who were deliberately killing "peaceful" demonstrators in the opposition march. What these TV channels failed to show their viewers was the wider-angle camera shots that allowed one to observe that other individuals on the bridge were ducking for cover and were quite obviously being shot at by an unseen aggressor.

"The unseen aggressor, as the pictures and videos of Venezuelan independent media were to reveal, was none other than the Policia Metropolitana." (1)

Pena's police continue to play this role. During Venezuela's 'National Strike' in January 2003, the Policia Metropolitana killed two more Chavistas, who the media then claimed were members of the opposition. (2)

Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez has wondered publicly what the response would have been had he shut down a commercial television station. The international media, and the United States, might have had more to say had it been one of the TV stations of the wealthy

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shut down by President Chavez, instead of a station of the poor shut down by mayor Pena.

Even as they struggle to try to defend CatiaTV, the 'Bolivarians' are on the offensive in other parts of the country. A different Venezuelan mayor has found himself on the side of the workers in Venezuela's conflict. The mayor of the town of Villa de Cura in Aragua, Estefano Magione, supported the seizure of a Pepsi-Cola bottling plant by its workers on July 9. The workers seized the plant to prevent what they believed was an impending closure. "The action of the workers was justified, given the company's behaviour... we had tried to do everything possible to help the company," the mayor said. "We offered to help them with distribution... but they refused... for 3 years they have not paid taxes, not collaborated with the municipality, stolen the water of Villa de Cura and continually harmed the interests of

the workers. We've been tolerant because we didn't want them to close the plant. What else do they want? It's impossible to be any more tolerant."

Owned by one of Venezuela's wealthiest families, Pepsi was an active player in the coup and in 'National Strike' in December and January, in which the wealthy of the country tried to oust the Chavez government by locking out workers and stopping the economy (3) The Pepsi plant in Villa de Cura is reported to have destroyed 600,000 cases of Pepsi during the 'strike'.

Soft drink bottling is an arena of social struggle in Venezuela's neighbour, Colombia, as well, where the food worker's union SINALTRAINAL has called for an international boycott of Coca-Cola. In recent years, 8 workers have been killed, 1 driven to suicide, 2 exiled, 48 fired, 150 imprisoned under false pretenses, and 70 threatened with death, at Coca-Cola bottling plants who use paramilitary death squads to destroy efforts at unionization. (4)

As Colombia's President Alvaro Uribe Velez continues to unleash violence on Colombian people in the name of a policy

he calls 'democratic security', the Venezuelan 'opposition' (a group that includes free speech supporters like Alfredo Pena) is trying to organize a referendum to oust Venezuela's President Chavez. Chavez's government will try to argue that the referendum should not take place for procedural reasons, and will likely try to use these arguments to delay or even prevent the referendum. If the 'opposition's' record is any guide, they will fight even dirtier. (5) Carlos Andres Perez, former President of Venezuela who is in hiding in the Dominican Republic from multi-million dollar corruption charges, has demonstrated the opposition's democratic credentials by stating that "I consider that the solution to our dramatic crisis is to pass power first to a civilian-military junta for a period of two years with the objective to return Venezuela to democratic rule."

It's to be hoped that Venezuelans continue to succeed in their struggle against the kind of 'democracy' on offer by the likes of Alfredo Pena and Carlos Andres Perez.

Notes:

1) See Narconews: <http://www.narconews.com/Issue26/>

*Justin Podur is a ZNet commentator and developer. He maintains ZNet's South Asia, Africa, and Race Watch pages as well as the Colombia and Chiapas Crisis pages.*

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**article541.html**. Some of the evidence Main referring to is summarized in several articles of this pro-government website, including:

(<http://www.aporrea.org/dameverbo.php?docid=8595>) One of the journalists who took some of the famous footage, Luis Alfonso Fernandez, later discussed some of the ways the video was manipulated.

2) Diana Valentine reported on this for ZNet: <http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?SectionID=45&ItemID=2855>

3) See Podur, 'Venezuela's National Strike', on ZNet: <http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?SectionID=45&ItemID=2729>

4) See Andy Higginbottom, 'Boycott Coke!', on ZNet: <http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?SectionID=9&ItemID=3937>

5) See Chris Kerr, 'The Next Battle for Venezuela', on ZNet: <http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?SectionID=20&ItemID=3965>

*Want to find out more? Join CUSLAR for an evening of film and discussion. On Wednesday, September 24 at 8pm in Uris Auditorium (CU) CUSLAR will be showing, "The Revolution Will Not be Televised", a new documentary about the overthrow and reinstatement of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. See: [http://www.chavezthefilm.com/index\\_ex.htm](http://www.chavezthefilm.com/index_ex.htm) for more about the film.*

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authority. The EZLN has officially handed over control of the autonomous zones to local authorities that will function much like town councils. During the August 8, 9, and 10 celebration of the inauguration of these "good government juntas", a sign hung on the wall reading "Here the people lead and the government obeys". And that is exactly what they propose to do, rule and develop their own land as they see fit, and make sure the government obeys their authority.

In a series of communiqués(2) released in late July of this year, the Zapatistas stated their vehement opposition to the Plan Puebla Panamá and other destructive development plans. In addition, they outlined their idea for a series of local and international development plans that, unlike the above plans, would be created from the ground up by communities around the world.

There are also other alternative solutions that have been and are being proposed by people and organizations throughout the Americas. For example, there is an entire alternative text to the FTAA, the Alternatives for the Americas, that was drafted by individuals and NGOs across the hemisphere in 1998 at the people's summit in Chile(3). And there have been series of people's summits to counter the official, exclusive summits and negotiations surrounding the FTAA, CAFTA, and the Plan Puebla Panamá, in which individuals and civil society organizations have come together to discuss grassroots organization of resistance, and development of sustainable alternatives for the hemisphere.

The people of the Americas have shown over and over again that there is hope, that there is a better way. Especially now, as we in the US see our rights being restricted and our freedoms being taken away by our own government, we must come together and demand the right to self-determination of all peoples. We can build a better world.

And the time is now.

Notes:

(1) for more information about the FTAA and this November's actions in Miami, see: [www.stopftaa.org](http://www.stopftaa.org)

(2) lea todos los comunicados en español en: <http://www.fzln.org.mx/>; the whole series of communiqués is available in English at: [www.utexas.edu/facstaff/Cleaver/aguascalientes.html](http://www.utexas.edu/facstaff/Cleaver/aguascalientes.html)

(3) the text of the Alternatives for the Americas can be read online in English, Spanish, French, and Portuguese at: <http://www.web.net/comfront/alts4americas/eng/eng.html>

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Rigoberta Menchu, the Mayan activist who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1982 and brought genocide charges against Rios Montt in Spain, bitterly concedes that the general is probably right about having the top court rigged in his favor. She says Rios Montt and his FRG party, its accounts plump with funds derived from a fruitful association with Colombian drug cartels, have corrupted the judicial system through bribes and intimidation in an attempt to grease the old dictator's return to power.

"The court has supported a coup d'etat by the Rios Montt's Republican Front," says Menchu. "And they have hidden its hand. The FRG usurped a court that was meant to protect the legal and moral welfare of the Guatemalan state."

Menchu also says that the Rios Montt knows he doesn't have the votes to win the election in November unless he intimidates enough people into staying away from the polls. He certainly is off to a brisk start. But she suggests that the general's campaign and the riots that have accompanied it may in fact be a kind of calculated rouse designed to create a chaotic and unstable political situation that would lead the military to seize control of the government in another coup.

"It looks a lot like 1982," she said.

That was a very bloody year.

*Jeffrey St. Clair is author of **Been Brown So Long It Looked Like Green to Me: the Politics of Nature** (Common Courage Press) and coeditor, with Alexander Cockburn, of **The Politics of Anti-Semitism** (AK Press). Both books will be published in October.*

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by all UN resolutions, especially those calling for lifting the blockade against Cuba, rather than threatening invasion. Cuba deserves the right to pursue its social system, uninhibited by U.S. interference.

4. We call for justice for the five Cubans incarcerated in U.S. prisons after an unfair trial. Their efforts to combat terrorism against Cuba originating from U.S. soil are worthy of our gratitude, not of the harsh sentences they received.

5. In light of the grave dangers presented by U.S. belligerence and antagonism against Cuba, we call upon all members of our delegation and urge the citizens of the world to continue to defend Cuba's right to sovereignty.

6. Furthermore, we resolve to disseminate this statement, including but not restricted to the following means: communications with colleagues and deans, college and university publications, other professional publications, letters to the editor and senators and other representatives.

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