Act like it's a Globe
Not an Empire

The Committee on U.S. - Latin American Relations
Editorial

Ithaca was fortunate to host several exceptional visitors recently. Personally, we were greatly impacted by the visit of Marylen Serna Salinas, a community leader from Cajibio, Colombia—Central New York’s Sister Community. In addition to hosting her in Ithaca, we traveled to Madison, WI with Marylen for a Colombia Support Network conference (http://www.colombiasupport.net/). The conference gave us a closer look at the harsh reality of the conflict in Colombia. There we heard the testimony of three Colombians who have experienced the violence and horror of Plan Colombia on the most intimate level; we also formed lasting relationships with these people.

The thing we remember most about Marylen is her smile, and her ability to work tirelessly for weeks on end. She is driven by her goals for a better world, but she’s also driven by hope. She has a lot to be proud-of, to be happy about, and to be thankful for. This we have in common. While we will never be able to truly identify with each other’s perspective, we can still stand in solidarity with one another in the struggle to create positive change in the world. We are deeply inspired by the Movimiento Campesino de Cajibio (see pg 10) and the Plan de Vida, which they conceived to provide a blueprint of what they are struggling for in their community—not just what they are struggling against. The Plan de Vida is a central part of their movement and situates them as the protagonists of their own history and the creators of their identity.

While we are inspired by the actions of the courageous Colombians we met, we are enraged by the oppression inflicted upon them and millions of other Colombians that is financed with our U.S. tax dollars. This U.S. “aid” comes to a staggering total of over $3.7 billion since 2000 alone. The majority of this money comes in the form of military aid that finances all sides of the conflict while neatly lining the pockets of U.S. corporations. Despite this vast amount of “aid” that the U.S. is providing to Colombia, very little of it is spent on social programs and humanitarian aid, and even that aid comes with heavy strings attached.

It is imperative that we examine critically our country’s policies without censoring ourselves. Criticism does not negate the positive, rather it allows for a more accurate analysis. And while we question the intent behind U.S. foreign policy, we must not neglect the domestic reality. As Marylen states in her interview (on pg. 11) “the first step is that we become like sisters and brothers” in our local communities in order to effectively establish international sister partnerships. How are our sisters and brothers in the U.S. struggling to survive without health care or a living wage, for example, affected by our government?

The picture is grim, but there are things that we can do with our great privilege as U.S. citizens to support the struggle, bravery, and innovation of the communities of Colombia and those at home. Here in the global North, we have all the resources of the world at our fingertips, but we often lack the very things we need to build strong movements for change. We lack hope. We lack community. We lack the passion, the urgency, or the dedication that comes from living in a place where change is the only choice. But these are things that we can change.

We can - and must - resuscitate the humanity being oppressed by corporate globalization and a confusion of values in order to recognize our true selves and the connections that we share with one another. Compassion is not enough, but it is a start. And it offers us a possibility for deeper understanding from which we can work towards the globalization of hope and solidarity. Let us be inspired by all those we meet in struggle. Let us work to globalize hope, love, compassion, and understanding—the truest forms of solidarity.

Meaghan Sheehan and Dana Brown

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. The CUSLAR Newsletter is published three times a year.

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VENEZUELA

Venezuela Invasion?

On April 13, the Colombian senate approved a resolution that condemns the “dictatorial regime” of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez Frias and calls for the Organization of American States (OAS) to apply the Interamerican Democratic Charter to Venezuela.

According to Article 21 of the Charter: “In the event of an unconstitutional alteration of the constitutional regime that seriously impairs the democratic order in a member state, any member state or the Secretary General may request the immediate convocation of the Permanent Council to undertake a collective assessment of the situation and to take such decisions as it deems appropriate.”

What is meant by “such decisions” is not specified in the Charter, but it is generally accepted to include all actions up to and including military intervention by OAS states, including the United States.

Immediate responses to the Colombian senate resolution from both the Colombian and Venezuelan governments were swift in coming. Two official responses were released by Colombian governmental bodies.

The first response came from Colombia’s Delegation to the Andean Parliament, which stated that the views expressed by the Colombian senate are not necessarily those of the Colombian government and people, and that the decision to invoke the Democratic Charter is in the hands of Colombian President Alvaro Uribe Velez. Then, in a paragraph that is edited out of most news reports, the Colombian Delegation calls upon the Venezuelan government to find an “exit” to their situation, which is a more mildly worded version of the Colombian Senate resolution that they supposedly condemned. This response was hardly reassuring to the Chavez government.

The most notable Venezuelan response to the Colombian resolution came from Jose Vicente Rangel, Executive Vice President of Venezuela, who made the astute observation, “Senator Gomez Hurtado’s proposal has as its basis the United States government’s campaign against Venezuela and the geo-strategic development of Plan Colombia.”

Rangel’s statement also makes note of the fact that the original Spanish version of Proposition 249 is written in bad Spanish, with misspellings and grammatical errors that are uncharacteristic of the normally high standards of Colombian jurisprudence. Rangel proposes that the proposition could have been “inspired and edited by the Venezuelan coup leaders in exile in Bogota, Pedro Carmona [exiled FEDECAMARAS president] and Daniel Romero, spokesman of the de facto government the 12th of April [2002].”

However, others take a more sinister view...

Some Colombian social and political leaders [Temor por guerra entre Colombia y Venezuela, New Colombian News Agency] point to the recent presence in Colombia of U.S. Congressman Lincoln Diaz Balart… cheerleader for the right-wing Cuban exile community in Florida… as possibly having an influence in the drafting of this document. Venezuelan National Assembly (AN) deputy Tarek William Saab characterized the Colombian resolution as a “vile pamphlet” which, besides being poorly written, appears as though it could have originally been written in English by the U.S. State Department.

What could be behind the Colombian Senate resolution?

Many point to U.S. policy in Colombia under the program Plan Colombia. It is not inconceivable that part of Plan Colombia would be to destabilize and overthrow the Chavez government and install puppet leaders to make U.S. access to Venezuelan petroleum resources easier and cheaper.

Perhaps it is to this end that the Colombian government has purchased forty AMX-30 tanks from Spain with U.S. assistance. And, knowing how U.S. covert operations have been conducted in the past, it is quite possible that the U.S. has great interest in testing and observing how much support the Chavez government has by, for instance, sending its surrogates to attack the hospital in Monagas State and watching the community response. This could also extend to observing the Venezuelan diplomatic response to the (intentional?) provocation produced by the Colombian senate resolution.

Is a U.S.-backed invasion of Venezuela by Colombia imminent?
Perhaps. The one person who has remained conspicuously silent on this issue is Colombian President Alvaro Uribe, who holds the keys to this situation.

The Venezuelan National Assembly passed a resolution on April 15 condemning the Colombian senate resolution. Among other things, the resolution calls upon President Uribe to "speak to the issue of this anti-Venezuelan agreement."

We are all waiting for President Uribe's response...

(Source: Znet, April 18, Philip Stinard)

**Venezuelan military commanders say they have evidence of U.S. involvement in 2002 coup**

Venezuela's two highest ranking military commanders said Tuesday (April 13, 2004) they had evidence the U.S. participated in a 2002 coup that briefly ousted President Hugo Chavez. Army Cmndr. Raul Baduel said U.S. airplanes entered Venezuelan airspace and active-duty U.S. officers entered Fort Tiuna, the country's largest military base, during the short-lived coup led by dissident generals in April 2002. The U.S. Embassy declined to comment on the allegations Tuesday.

Defense Minister Gen. Jorge Garcia said military authorities recorded radar images of the U.S. planes and helicopters doing "reconnaissance along the coasts" of Venezuela during the coup. Baduel also said a registry at Venezuela's army command headquarters shows that soldiers from a U.S. military mission entered the building during the coup, which was spurred by street violence that killed 19 Venezuelans.

Facing a possible recall vote, Chavez has repeatedly accused Washington of destabilizing this oil-rich South American country and playing an important role in the April 2002 putsch. Diplomatic relations between Caracas and Washington suffered after the U.S. initially blamed Chavez for his own downfall during the coup, which was belatedly condemned by U.S. officials. U.S. officials deny Chavez's allegations of coup-plotting, arguing the Venezuelan leader is trying to draw public attention away from opposition efforts to unseat him through the recall. Foreign Minister Jesus Perez urged Washington Tuesday not "underestimate" Venezuela's allegations.

"We are waiting for these responses from the U.S. government," Perez said during a congressional ceremony to celebrate Chavez's dramatic return to power when the rebellion led by dissident generals crumbled. (Source: Dow Jones Newswires)

**BOLIVIA**

**Bolivia to hold July referendum on natural gas reserves**

Bolivian authorities announced Wednesday (April 14) that a referendum to decide on the future of the country's vast natural gas reserves will be held July 18. The convocation came in the form of a decree by President Carlos Mesa published in the official gazette. Mesa promised the referendum in his first public comments after assuming the presidency from Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada on Oct. 17, 2003. Sanchez had been ousted in a popular uprising sparked by the gas issue.

The decree was signed after Mesa made some changes to his Cabinet, including replacing Hydrocarbons and Energy Minister Antonio Aranibar, who held the post less than a month, with Xavier Nogales. The referendum will include questions on the new energy policy developed by the Mesa administration, which has drafted a new hydrocarbons law to replace the one that had been in place since 1996. Large foreign-owned oil companies that have been operating in the Andean nation since the 1990s are opposed to the tax changes included in the new law.

Bolivia has proven and probable natural gas reserves of some 54.9 billion cubic feet, the largest in volume in South America after those of Venezuela. Mesa called a referendum on the natural gas issue following the opposition's popular upheaval last October over the export of natural gas via a port in Chile, with which Bolivia has a long-standing territorial dispute. (Source: EFE, April 14, 2004)

**Bolivian cocaleros mobilize to stop construction of military base**

Bolivian cocaleros of the Yungas region mobilized from April 5 to 7, blocking the highway that connects La Paz to the east. Starting April 8, they declared a state of emergency in response to the construction of new military infrastructure and the attempts to forcibly eradicate their crops.

In June of 2003, confidential reports leaked from the Ministry of Defense demonstrated that the government had agreed to demands from the U.S. for the construction of two new military bases inside Bolivian territory. One would be in the Yungas region, the other in the Chapare - the country's two major coca cultivation zones. It was former president Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada's government that made these commitments to the U.S., but these commitments are now being fulfilled under the new administration. In the Rinconada region, construction has begun on new police/military barracks. There are also rumors circulating about
the installation of the “Tricolor” radio station in the Chapare.

According to the government, the Police, Transportation, Immigration, Forestry, and Coca Management departments, as well as the Mobile Rural Patrol Unit and the Search and Rescue Group will fund the barracks’ construction – but “it is not a military base.” But according to the coca growers of the Rinconada, it represents the repression and militarization of their home, human rights abuse and forced eradication of their crops.

Yesterday (April 7), after three days of conflict, the government and the coca growers signed an accord, which indefinitely suspends the construction of the Rinconada base. It also requires that the existing installations not be used as barracks, and that no forced eradication take place in the three provinces of the Yungas region. The farmers and the government will establish a joint committee to evaluate the alternative development programs, the creation of competing coca markets, and the maintenance of local roads left nearly impassable by years of government neglect.

Having achieved their goal of shutting down the military base construction indefinitely and preventing the eradication of their crops, the coca growers lifted the highway blockades and returned to their communities. (Source: NarcoNews, Alex Contreras Daspinciero, April 8, 2004)

COLOMBIA

Uribe “sorry” for Colombian deaths

Colombian President Alvaro Uribe has publicly apologized for the army’s killing of five peasant farmers. The five, including a baby, were shot dead by army soldiers who say they mistook them for guerilla fighters. In a nationally televised address, Mr. Uribe said the incident was a tragic episode, but rejected calls to moderate the anti-guerilla campaign. Earlier, Mr. Uribe met relatives of the victims, and said he was personally taking charge of the investigation.

The deaths are the latest in a series of deadly errors by soldiers. In March, the Colombian army killed seven policemen and four civilians by mistake in an ambush, and in February, a student was shot dead by a sentry at a military base. (Source: BBCnews, April 14)

MEXICO

Estrada fires entire state police department

Gov. Sergio Estrada of Morelos ordered the mass firing of all 552 state police officers Monday (April 12), several days after top police commanders were arrested on charges they provided protection for drug traffickers. Estrada said he would launch a complete restructuring of the so-called investigative police so that it has agents “fully trained in criminal investigation... respecting a code of ethics in strict compliance with the law and human rights.”

“The record of each of the dismissed officers will be investigated”, said Estrada, who added that the police will be replaced by officers graduated from the state police academy who will be aided by federal forces.

“The new members of the force will be subjected to regular lie-detector tests as well as psychological and drug and alcohol testing”, Estrada said.

The police department’s former chief, José Agustín Montiel, and his operations director, Raúl Cortés, were arrested last week on suspicion of protecting a cell of the Juarez Cartel, named for the city where the drug-trafficking organization is based. Federal organized crime prosecutor José Vasconcelos said the two were part of a network of police officers that helped protect the cartel. (Source: El Universal, April 14)

PERU

Peru OKs Murder Charges for Ex-President

Peru’s Congress approved murder charges against ex-President Alberto Fujimori for allegedly authorizing the death squad killing of a union leader more than a decade ago, officials said Thursday, (April 15). Fujimori’s government collapsed amid a corruption scandal in November 2000. He has since lived in Tokyo, protected from extradition by Japanese citizenship. He denies any wrongdoing and insists the allegations against him are politically motivated. Peruvian prosecutors have piled up more than a dozen charges against him — from murder to illegal wiretapping and corruption — in hopes of pressuring Tokyo to extradite him.

Congress voted 56-5 with four abstentions late Wednesday (April 14) to approve charges that Fujimori directed a paramilitary death squad to murder one of the nation’s most influential labor leaders, Pedro Huíca, the legislature said in a statement released Thursday (April 15).

Huíca, a popular leader of organized construction workers, had been a harsh critic of Fujimori before his December 1992 murder.

Fujimori and his government investigators maintained that Shining Path guerrillas killed Huíca, although witnesses said the men who grabbed him outside of his Lima home drove sport utility vehicles with police license plates. Huíca was found shot to death on the outskirts of the capital. Investigators reopened the case after Fujimori fled Peru.

Pro-Fujimori legislators on Thursday (April 15) criticized the congressional vote, claiming the charges lack evidence.

Fujimori has vowed to run for Peru’s presidency in 2006, despite the mounting criminal charges against him and a congressional ban on his holding public office until 2010. (Source: Reuters, April 16, 2004)
A Break with Haiti’s Past?
by Kevin Murray

The United Nation’s special representative has completed an assessment trip to Haiti. Since his return, Reginald Dumas has made statements that offer a glimmer of hope for a country ready to embrace any positive sign.

He insisted that the U.N. must make a long term commitment if it wishes to overcome the “start-stop cycle that has characterized relations between the international community and Haiti.” Furthermore, the U.N. must provide “sustained assistance...that involves the people of Haiti.”

This, of course, begs the question of how the Haitian people will be involved. Dumas remains anchored in the U.N. idiom of building state institutions. In the case of Haiti, it will be just as important to strengthen nongovernmental organizations and to mend the torn relations between the state and the Haitian nation. Mr. Dumas’s itinerary in Haiti shows too little effort to reach nongovernmental organizations that must be part of any success story there.

Nevertheless, the U.N. must take the initiative once more in Haiti. Any international effort led by the United States and U.S. Marines is going to lack credibility with most Haitians...for good historical reasons. Already many Haitian organizations are calling for an immediate end to what they see as a U.S. occupation of Haiti. The plan for Brazil to assume command of a multinational force in Haiti must move forward quickly.

The current crisis in Haiti certainly pre-dated the February 29 departure of ex-President Jean Bertrand Aristide. The political storm around Aristide has, however, altered the nature of Haiti’s troubles.

U.S. conservatives opposed Aristide from the moment he entered Haitian politics, and did everything they could to undermine him. At the same time, Aristide’s leadership generated broad civil opposition to his presidency within Haiti. In the end, he also faced a rogue’s rebellion led by urban gangs that his government had armed, as well as disgruntled ex-military men, which included several known murderers and torturers.

The U.S. government certainly played a determinate role in the Aristide endgame. Many Haiti supporters join Aristide in insisting that the ex-President left Haiti in a U.S.-sponsored coup, and they demand an investigation of the U.S. role. Such an investigation should take place, regardless of the Bush Administration’s clear intent to avoid any more embarrassing revelations in an election year. Mr. Dumas maintains that a U.N. “facilitated” investigation is still on the table due to an informal request by Haiti’s CARICOM neighbors.

While much remains unclear in Haiti today, the armed remnants of Haiti’s military and paramilitary groups pose a clear and present danger. Reliable information already links these people-who have become celebrities in some circles-to a variety of recent human rights abuses including reprisal killings of Aristide supporters and attacks on organized workers and others not connected to the ex-President. Pro-Aristide gangs also continue to operate, at least in Port au Prince.

The international community can prove that it is serious about a break with the past by moving quickly to disarm all illegal armed groups in Haiti. Known criminals should be arrested immediately, and investigations of claims of abuse during the Aristide era must go forward.

But Haiti cannot change without doing something about the grinding poverty of its people. This will require confronting a heritage of injustice with roots stretching back to the days of Saint Domingue.

Aid to Haiti is an urgent priority, but so are changes in multilateral policy toward the poorest country in the hemisphere. Aid given with one hand amounts to little if our other hand grasps Haiti’s throat and squeezes it with demands to lower tariffs, privatize public services and reduce social spending. Can we not say that IMF-imposed “structural adjustment” reform in Haiti is a definitive failure, and seek another form of economic cooperation? A new view of cooperation with Haiti will not solve the country’s problems-only Haitians can do that—but it will open a door to a new future.

We welcome the U.N.’s hopeful words on Haiti, but await the concrete actions that will signal a true break with the past.

Kevin Murray is Executive Director of Grassroots International, a Boston-based aid organization supporting Haitian organizations since 1991.

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CUSLAR Newsletter 7 Spring 2004
Election Analysis: El Salvador, 2004
prepared by CISPES March 30, 2004

On March 21, 2004 Salvadorans went to the polls to elect a new president. When the vote count was officially completed a few days later, the declared winner was Antonio (Tony) Saca, a 39-year old media mogul and former head of the El Salvador's largest private business association, ANEP. The right-wing ARENA party that Saca represents was able to claim victory, calling the results a mandate for "free" trade and its far-right, pro-U.S. policies. The real winner in these elections, however, was not a candidate or a party; the real winner was fear, intimidation, misinformation, and outside intervention. Never before has a political campaign so effectively blurred the real social and economic issues, shifting the focus to ridiculous ideological propaganda and baseless threats related to U.S. immigration policy. In this, the United States government was not only complicit, but especially in the last days of the campaign, a primary protagonist in the fear campaign. For U.S. citizens concerned about democracy and sovereignty, it is this aspect of the 2004 Salvadoran presidential elections that is most alarming, and which ultimately must be countered so that such dramatic intervention does not change the political balance again.

ARENA's Tony Saca ended up with around 57% of the vote, while Schafik Handal, the candidate for the Farabundo Marti Liberation Front (FMLN), polled just under 36%. The margin was surprisingly large given the close race that many polls had predicted, especially before February when the U.S. State Department began its full-scale intervention in the electoral process. The final margin also corresponded to an exceptionally high voter turnout of nearly 70%, the largest turnout since the Peace Accords in 1992. The 2004 elections, however, were far from a triumph for democracy; in fact, the open, democratic process was undermined in multiple ways that demonstrate the severe limitations of representative democracy in a country like El Salvador. Accusations of fraud and vote buying were abundant on Election Day, and many procedural anomalies were noted by international observers, some of whom were themselves victims of government intimidation. Other problems with the voting process, mostly associated with terrorism (both the attacks on the World Trade Center and the more recent bombings in Spain) to accuse the FMLN of having links to international terrorism. Newspaper ads and ARENA campaign speeches played up old anti-Communist mythology by claiming that the FMLN would steal private property, close banks, enlist young children into a new guerrilla army, and destroy all relations with the United States. Finally, owners of maquila factories, department stores, and other business sent memos to employees warning of mass firings if the FMLN win the elections.

The absurd claims about remittances and U.S. immigration policy were by far the most damaging, given that one quarter of the Salvadoran population lives in the U.S., and that the $2 billion they send back home represents over half of El Salvador's GDP. On election day, many Salvadorans openly repeated the fear that an FMLN victory would lead to their family members' imminent deportation from the U.S., and short of that, an end to the flow of money that they depend on to survive. Here, the U.S. government proved a reliable ally to ARENA, not only refusing to deny such false claims, but in the end reinforcing them through public statements. U.S. government officials, from Assistant Secretary of State Roger Noriega to President Bush's special envoy Otto Reich, questioned future U.S. economic relations with El Salvador should the FMLN win. They also made blatantly pro-ARENA statements (in the case of Reich, while on a conference call at the ARENA campaign headquarters) that amounted to partisan campaigning. The final blow came when Thomas Tancredo, a well-known xenophobe and anti-immigrant Congressman, threatened 3 days before the elections to introduce legislation that would control the flow of remittances.
stances to El Salvador should the FMLN win the elections. Given the front-page coverage those statements received in El Salvador, it seems clear the U.S. achieved its purpose of swaying many Salvadorans to vote against the FMLN.

Would the FMLN and Schafik Handal have won under different circumstances? Early exit polls and the perception of many voters and observers alike indicate that the results could have been very different. The FMLN exceeded its own hopes and expectations by receiving over 800,000 votes, nearly double the quantity it received in the victorious 2003 legislative elections. Those that voted for the FMLN did so with a strength and conviction not seen in previous elections, and in the face of the fear campaign, it took enormous courage for them to do so. Many people commented on the fact that more FMLN voters proudly wore red on Election Day, in defiance of right-wing propaganda and fears over the election results. For this reason, too, afternoon exit polls on Election Day indicated a close race and even an FMLN lead, perhaps because more FMLN voters chose to make known their courageous vote. Many ARENA voters, on the other hand, grudgingly supported the party that continues to ignore the needs of the poor majority in El Salvador, driven by fear rather than conviction. As one FMLN supporter noted, the elections decided by the collective will of the respective party voters and not a one-person-one-vote system, it could have been the Frente that won in a landslide. Finally, the large number of FMLN voters represented a sizable force that came out in support of a true leftist alternative to neoliberal capitalism, not a moderated critique of that system that the U.S. government could openly accept.

Many FMLN leaders and activists see the current political conjuncture as a positive, though challenging, moment for the Left in El Salvador, one that will be built upon in the struggles ahead. As Schafik and other social movement leaders acknowledged in the days following March 21, winning executive power through elections represents only one avenue for moving forward the project of social change in El Salvador. The FMLN and the Salvadoran social movement will continue to work to change society as part of a long-term project, through the national assembly, through respect for the Salvadoran Constitution, and perhaps most of all, through resistance in the streets. Those aspects of the electoral program that moved many to vote for hope over fear will still be the centerpiece of the party’s work: stopping privatization, preventing “free” trade agreements, reactivating the agricultural sector, recirculating the colon, strengthening local development and small businesses, and supporting the struggles of labor unions, women’s groups, youth, organized communities, and all those that continue to fight for a better El Salvador.

Indeed, for a social movement that had put so much stake in an FMLN victory, it will be challenging to move forward and confront a new ARENA government emboldened by the apparent electoral mandate. Yet rather than licking their wounds, many groups are relishing in the challenge, preparing to confront the new government over the U.S.-Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), as well as potential plans to privatize public water systems and health care. Taking advantage of new social alliances that emerged through the FMLNs electoral campaign, groups like the Popular Social Bloc for Real Democracy (BPS) will continue to bring resistance to the streets of El Salvador, while developing grassroots alternatives to current neoliberal policies. The chant of “the struggle continues!” resonated powerfully in the protests and Romero Day commemorations that immediately followed the 2004 presidential elections.

What remains to be seen is whether the U.S. government will be held accountable for its destructive role in the Salvadoran elections. Despite a fervent campaign by CISPES and other solidarity organizations to counter U.S. influence, and despite numerous statements by angry Congressional representatives denouncing the State Departments intervention, it is likely that Bush, Noreiga, continued on pg 20.
The following is an interview conducted on April 4, 2004 with Marylen Serna Salinas, representative of the Campesino Movement of Cajibio, Colombia. (Translated and edited by Colleen Kattau)

Colleen: Perhaps you could begin by describing where Cajibio is and what this region is like.

Marylen: Cajibio is in Cauca, which is in the southwestern part of Colombia, about 650 kilometers from Bogotá. It is an agricultural municipality with 36,000 inhabitants, 1,800 of whom live in a small town which is the county seat. The rest of us are located in the countryside. We are small farmers having an average of 4 hectares (~10 acres) per family. Our main products are coffee, sugar cane, plantain, sugar cane, and plantain. A large part of the land is in the hands of an international corporation called Smurfit Cartón de Colombia which produces the raw material for the processing of paper. Cajibio has a long history of struggle for social justice. Fifty years ago the first movement for land recovery was initiated. We are well-organized because our ancestors, the Nasa or paez (which means ‘person’) culture left us with an ancestral legacy of trabajo comunitario, or community work, which is embodied in the minga. As part of our cultural heritage, the minga is something that we’ve been able to conserve, support and strengthen over time.

C: Can you speak more about the minga?

M: In the paez language minga means community work—basically doing work which has a common goal—such as fixing a road, making a bridge, building a schoolhouse... and it is also largely used for crop planting. Food produced by the minga, for instance, is done collectively. If the crop planting is collective, than the harvest is also. Thirty years ago the minga was used in cultivating maize, an ancestral tradition of the region that has been getting lost, but is being recovered by certain groups.

In September we had two mingas. First we cleared the land, then we prepared the soil and planted seeds collectively. We brought the community together again for the first harvest in which we prepared and shared the envuelto which is a way of preparing maize. It was a way of thanking god for this first harvest and for this collective work.

Today the minga, also called cambia de mano, is used for other things as well that affect the community. One day people will work at one farm and then the next day at another. Men use the minga to produce things, women use it to improve their households and to raise their animals, young people use it to make places to play sports. Each group uses it for what they need to accomplish.

These opportunities to work together generate much more organized, solid and permanent relationships whose objective is not only to work together, but in the long run to seek an alternative to development that will strengthen the entire community. It is much better to work together. It’s more fun, and gives us more hope when we all get together to do the same work.

C: Can we continue with describing the process in which you made the decision to re-establish the collective way of working, and the challenges you’ve faced in doing so and the successes that you’ve achieved?

M: Community work was reclaimed in an even stronger way in tandem with land recovery. Our region was colonized by the Spanish who had usurped the indigenous peoples’ land through a process of deception. Many indigenous peoples were inebriated and then forced into signing documents which gave over land to the colonizers. Other land was taken over when the person least expected it, as a way to pay debts that that person did not even have. Other land was just taken outright by force. Over time this process made it so that peasants lost their indigenous roots. They realized that it was necessary to reclaim their land, but that this land was not to be bought because it was already theirs. One way to recover land is to ask the state for resources to gain it back. Another way that began in the 1940s was that a group of landless families would join together, take the landowner by surprise, and take over the unused land that he held. In all these cases, all the land that was taken was not being used. Perhaps, if at all, it served as an occasional vacation spot for the landowner, so he could go to a pretty farm with nice horses to enjoy a weekend or two every year and then, but it was not being used to produce food. This land recovery was done collectively and many people died in the process because the landowners were supported by police and military forces or by private groups that were hired to kill the comuneros.

On the one hand, the peasants sought to take the land, but their real purpose was to take care of it, to steward and protect that territory. We had to do this collectively. This was a starting point for also reclaiming collective techniques for working together.

The challenge we face is to generalize community work to make it a viable alternative for the entire community, since not all families see it as an option. One
of the most important challenges is to get the people who think that working for a business or for a landowner is good to change their minds and shift their gaze to their farm and to their community. We hope that they see the benefits of working in common to gain autonomy over their production, to have an economy that is genuinely theirs.

Some people who did work for multinational businesses and who abandoned their farms to dependent salaried jobs have come to reclaim their traditional collective work on their own farms as a way to gain self-sufficiency for their families and for improved productivity for the community as a whole, and this is an achievement of the Small Farmers Movement.

C: What are some of the outside pressures that you are up against? How can the sister communities work together mutually to support your work?

M: A sistership has to be realized within a context of community. The first step is that we become like sisters and brothers among ourselves in our respective communities so that we start from a basis of well-established relationships. Once we've been able to organize and set forth some commonly agreed goals, we can go out to other communities to form sister city relationships. As the scripture says, we need to create light inside our own house in order to spread the light outside of it. So, there's a fundamental element to all of this and that is the importance of family life- that we be brothers and sisters within our own homes and within our larger community and organizations. We've been working on this for several years and have made inroads within the community. We've made some mistakes and there are still some weaknesses, but we think that now we are in a position to reach out to other communities. A sister city partnership should have some particular characteristics: we should meet as equals, with fraternity, respect and autonomy.

Our community work has been threatened by violence. In Colombia, any collective expression, any resistance, any alternative vision is met with threats from a system which wants to destroy any form of community organization- especially one which specifically refuses to accept a system based on individualism. Trabajo comunitario or community work breaks with an individualistic ideal which the media and the state try to feed us every day. We confront this system precisely through collective work, but we need our work to endure over time and survive even in the midst of war.

In this sense, to have a sister city partnership in another country such as the United States helps us to protect that fabric that we have woven historically and have continued to create, yet has been so difficult to sustain alone because of the threats that violent conflict imposes. As a sister community you can give testimony before government entities in the U.S. and Colombia to say that collective expression, community work, and organizational initiatives are not "terrorist activities" and are not seeking to attack the state. On the contrary, they are helping to construct a true democracy and a true peace with justice.

It is also extremely important that the resources that are going to foment war and promote militarmist go instead towards programs and projects that genuinely improve the conditions of life and really address the underlying causes of violence, that is, the great injustices which generate the armed conflict in this country.

C: You've spoken of trabajo comunitario as part of the cosmovision of the indigenous peoples. Can you tell us more about how that vision differs from, let's say, modern western culture?

M: The indigenous cosmovision begins with la tierra (trans. note: meaning the earth and land) as the fundamental element of existence. It is the mother of the indigenous peoples. The cosmvision begins with the respect that we have for the earth and all it contains. It is a vision that is not about over-exploitation of the land, but rather taking only what is necessary while conserving what may be necessary for future generations. We see how a capitalist system just does not understand this. It thinks it can sell and buy the land, contaminate, exploit, injure, and pillage it. What indigenous peoples seek is that land not be only that little physical and geographical piece, but that it be seen as a territory where lives develop in abundance and freedom including being able to develop and create autonomous systems of justice based upon balance and equality. A system in which there is self-determination, and a right to decide what kind of development is best for them. They also seek a territory in which their language, culture, artistic expression, and dress be representative of their cosmovision. For this to happen it is necessary that we be able to develop autonomously. In this sense indigenous people have an immense advantage because they are thinking very seriously about their future, about conservation, about the environment, and about human beings themselves as a fundamental part of...
Colombia

the earth.

C: You’ve been here for a few days now. What have you observed about the culture here so far?

M: It’s a bit difficult because it’s a very short time, and then there’s the language barrier. There is a lot going on around me that I can’t understand. But I am observing the embodiment of capitalism-seeing capitalism in its element. I have been able to touch the best part by being able to share this experience with many people who have a similar critique of the system. But I’ve been able to observe how capitalism reveals itself on a daily basis here. This is a country that requires many, many things to maintain itself. In this sense it is true that what is said of these capitalist countries that they take much more than what they need. They consume so much of what we need elsewhere. What we are lacking there has been brought here to fulfill a level of overconsumption while we over there barely maintain a minimal subsistence.

A great number of the peoples of Latin America are in a situation of scarcity while the owners of their resources extract them because the system here demands it. One of the most important things that people can do is to reevaluate this inequality to consider how living far beyond what it takes to survive in turn means that there’s scarcity of these very same resources in other places. This inequality prohibits a fair distribution of resources when a society consumes so much and demands so much. Look at the case of petroleum. This country consumes a tremendous amount of petroleum for its huge number of cars and trucks. There’s no one source of oil in the world that can sustain this demand and so it becomes more and more necessary to declare another war so that oil can once again be pillaged from its place of origin and acquired by the place of demand. But it’s not that it really is needed there-it’s that it’s demanded. Life could be so much simpler. No?

C: Yes... How is the struggle that you have in Cajibio linked with those of other communities in Colombia?

M: Joining together with other organizations is extremely important in the struggle for structural change in our country. For that reason, different campesino organizations have come together to be part of the National Agrarian Coordinating Committee whose purpose is to promote agrarian life with dignity so that small farmers are able to remain in the countryside and can build relationships of equality among ourselves as farmers. Its purpose is also to demand that the state fulfill its obligations and responsibilities to the campesinos. In our region we maintain close ties with indigenous and Afrocolombian communities, as well as with women’s organizations-all of whom are trying to defend and protect fundamental rights such as rights to water, to a clean environment, and the right to organize. We are also trying to coordinate our efforts in order to prevent actions in violation of human rights. Only through unity and the strengthening of our organizations can we defend ourselves and move forward. Our unity is one of the things that has made it possible for us to reign in many of the threats against our rights. The solidarity we are forging on a local, national and international level has contributed toward realizing our goals.

We are also establishing economic ties among each other in a process of exchange, marketing of products, and sharing experiences and knowledge. We are expanding our organizational initiatives to bring student groups and urban populations into this process of reclaiming and restructuring. The idea is to open and expand this space of socioeconomic and cultural interchange to strengthen our community.

C: Finally, can you speak about the current situation and how Plan Colombia is being played out at this time.

M: Colombia has an economic system that is not working for the vast majority of Colombians. It is one based on competition where some accumulate so much wealth while the vast majority live amidst conditions of isolation, unemployment, lack of health care, little education, and high costs of social services. There’s a high degree of marginalization. Today 60% of Colombians live below the poverty line and are falling further into misery. According to official statistics, 22% of Colombians are unemployed. All of this is historical, as is the great armed conflict that we are living through now. Many people have taken up arms because they cannot bear the injustice. We also have...
Recognizing the Human Face of Castro's Cuba
by Betty Jeanne Rueters-Ward

Late on January 23, 2003 I sat in my cabin of the S.S. Universe Explorer, scribbling notes into my journal and hunched over a copy of the notice which was now posted throughout the ship: Briefing with President Castro TOMORROW, 1800 Hours!

I literally pinched myself to confirm that I would soon meet the infamous leader of a nation which so captivated me. Before college, I learned only that Fidel was evil and that Cuba was bad, yet these matters were never explained further to me. Now I was in Havana, engaging face-to-face with people of a country that was otherwise locked away from me. Though my time was very limited, I was one of relatively few U.S. citizens who had the opportunity to witness firsthand a fragment of the Cuban reality.

During the spring of 2003, I joined approximately 750 participants in Semester at Sea, an academic study abroad program which describes itself as more than another semester at school; it is a life-altering learning adventure. Over the course of four months, my shipmates and I circumnavigated the globe, engaging in brief but powerful visits to nearly a dozen countries. The night we sailed away from Havana only five days into our voyage I was already overwhelmed with joy, humility, confusion, astonishment, and the burning desire to share with others what I had been so lucky to experience.

Though many of my companions seemed unaffected by our privilege as visitors to Cuba, that night I was awash in guilt. I pictured our group which consisted primarily of white, comfortably wealthy college students happily descending from a gleaming cruise ship, digital cameras in hand. Even I had held the naive belief that in three days, I could gain an accurate understanding of Cuba. And while I can now refer to an arsenal of mementos from my visit (even a handwritten transcript of Castro’s four-hour address!) I have become starkly aware that the reality of Cuba still remains to be understood.

Following my return to the United States, I became increasingly interested
in the availability of people-to-people licenses, which allow U.S. citizens to pursue legal, educational travel in Cuba. Such legitimate travel continues to be under attack by the Bush administration, under the authority of the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC). According to the Center for Cuban Studies, legal travel to Cuba is facing its worst moment in the last years. Programs which have long offered cultural exchange programs, such as the American Friends Service Committee, Global Exchange, and the Center for Cross-Cultural Study, are finding their licenses threatened or revoked.

According to its website, the OFAC's mission is to administer and enforce economic and trade sanctions based on U.S. foreign policy and national security goals against targeted foreign countries, terrorists, international narcotics traffickers, and those engaged in activities related to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Despite the current War on Terror which finds most U.S. politicians and the mainstream media focused on Al Qaeda and Iraq, much of the OFAC's workforce is monitoring not the activities of terrorists, but rather those of civilians traveling to Cuba.

Despite the fact that President Bush supports the OFAC, and threatens to veto all legislation allowing travel to Cuba, both Houses of Congress have recently approved legislation to end the travel ban. The House of Representatives voted for the last four consecutive years to end the travel ban. On September 9, 2003 the House approved three amendments that would cut funding for the enforcement of travel restrictions. Among these was an amendment that would reinstate people-to-people educational licenses. In November, Senators Enzi and Baucus introduced the Freedom to Travel to Cuba Act, which was approved by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee 13-5.

On February 5, 2004 Senator Baucus issued a statement on the Floor of the Senate, in which he said:

"Mr. President, the fight to end the Cuba travel ban is not over. It has only begun. It is ironic that we finally face this moment at the same time that we are scrutinizing both the War on Terrorism and the stretched federal budget - because enforcing the Cuba travel ban means the use of scarce federal resources. Just as disturbing, late last year the Department of Homeland Security announced that it, too, would divert some of its resources to monitor-

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Celebrating 10 years of Resistance with the Zapatistas!

By: Emily Shumway

On December 31, 2003, the small Zapatista community of Oventic, in the highlands of Chiapas, Mexico, was full of visitors. Tents were set up all over the hillside community as an estimated 1,000 people gathered for the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the Zapatista uprising. A group of Zapatistas played live polka music on a stage at the bottom of the hill and a festive feeling hung in the misty air.

As part of the Schools for Chiapas (SFC) “Delegation for Peace” and representing Ithaca’s Bikes For Chiapas, CUSLAR coordinator Meaghan Sheehan, Recycle Ithaca’s Bicycles coordinator Bob Wolfé, Ithaca College student Meghan Sickmier, and I, along with over 40 other SFC delegation members, visited Oventic over the week of New Year’s. SFC is a not-for-profit organization that brings international people to visit Chiapas and learn about the Zapatista movement while helping build schools and other projects. Bikes For Chiapas fixes up bikes in Ithaca, NY, and then delivers them to the Zapatista communities in Chiapas where they are used by teachers and doctors who need them.

Over forty other delegation members and I were graciously welcomed to Oventic, also known as Caracol Dos, which is part of a series of self-governing communities and Zapatista meeting places in the highlands of Chiapas, Mexico. Because the Mexican government has failed to give anything except empty promises to the indigenous people, the Zapatistas decided to take matters into their own hands and have built seven Caracoles, or autonomous municipalities, such as this one. In Caracol Dos the Zapatistas have built a primary school for indigenous children (with the help of organizations like SFC), a free clinic, a women’s cooperative where the women sell their hand-made products and equally split their earnings, and a Zapatista boot factory. A speech preceding the New Years festivities. As I stood listening, on the dirt floor of a meeting room in the community, I nodded in agreement. The Zapatistas were certainly still here, and they were still fighting for "Trabajo, Tierra, Techo, Pan, Salud, Educación, Democracia, Libertad, Paz, Independencia, y Justicia" (work, land, shelter, bread, health, education, democracy, liberty, peace, independence, and justice) as the Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle had stated on the morning of their uprising in the streets of Chiapas, January 1, 1994.

As night approached on December 31, 2003, people began to gather on the basketball court for dancing. Members of the Junta said a few words and then proceeded through the gathered crowd. I got a chance to see them clearly; some wore hats with brightly colored ribbons hanging from them, and they all wore ski masks or bandanas to cover their faces. When the midnight hour arrived, fireworks were lit, bringing in the New Year and commemorating how at that very moment, exactly 10 years earlier, their armed uprising had begun.

The EZLN (Zapatista Army of National Liberation) wore ski masks and bandanas to cover their faces as they took the city San Cristóbal de las Casas, in Chiapas, Mexico on the first chilly morning of January 1994. On leaflets posted all around the city they declared war on the Mexican Federal Army “the basic pillar of dictatorship under which we suffer.” Despite the retaliation from the Mexican government, the EZLN succeed over the next few months in catching the interest of the Mexican people who empathized with the Indians struggle. Eventually international press
and public became more aware of the Zapatistas and the struggle of the “sin rostros”, the faceless, underprivileged indigenous of Mexico, was heard.

As Subcommandante Marcos of the Zapatistas said, NAFTA was “a death sentence for the Indians.” NAFTA has been a great injustice to the indigenous of Chiapas, many of whom are corn farmers, and the Zapatista uprising was timed to accent this.

When the midnight hour arrived, fireworks were lit, bringing in the New Year and commemorating how at that very moment, exactly 10 years earlier, their armed uprising had begun.

The small-statured Mayan people, most of whom are shorter than I (and I'm only 5' 3''), went on dancing past 6 in the morning January 1, 2004. Who could blame them, though, to celebrate a little freedom in such a cruel world. The Zapatistas’ “Declaration of War” posted on the first morning of their uprising writes:

“We are the product of 500 years of struggle: first against slavery, then during the War of Independence against Spain led by insurgents, then to avoid being absorbed by North American imperialism, then to promulgate our constitution and expel the French Empire from our soil, and later the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz denied us the just application of the Reform Laws, and the people rebelled and leaders like Villa and Zapata emerged, poor people just like us. We have been denied the most elemental preparation so that they can use us as cannon fodder and pillage the wealth of our country. They don’t care that we have nothing, absolutely nothing, not even a roof over our heads: no land, no work, no health care, no food, no education. Nor are we able to freely and democratically elect our political representatives, nor is there independence from foreigners, nor is there peace nor justice for ourselves and our children. But today, we say ENOUGH!”

For the indigenous to survive all of that and rise-up again is plenty reason to dance.

I found, throughout the week I spent in Oventic, that the attitude of the Zapatistas was far from bitter. They were actually unbelievably welcoming and kind. Besides the fact that they allowed us to sleep in their school, share their bathrooms and wander their enclosed community, the Junta always told us, “This is all yours. This celebration is yours. Please be completely at home here.” There was no sign of prejudice against any visitors and I really came to believe they are creating “a world where all worlds fit” as is a common saying down there. As we left Oventic after the New Year’s celebration, I noticed a billboard that had been put up outside Caracol Dos. “Todo para todos, nada para nosotros.” “Everything for everyone, nothing for us.” Although the indigenous of Mexico have been through a lot, their desire for peace and prosperity for all still lives and it makes me believe that there is still hope for the people of Mexico and around the world.

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Emily is an Ithaca unschooler and Bikes for Chiapas volunteer who likes blossoming trees, studying for the SATs, and playing Ultimate Frisbee. This was her first trip to Chiapas.
Book Review

Daniel Wilkinson
Silence On The Mountain: Stories of Terror, Betrayal and Forgetting in Guatemala

As we approach the 50th anniversary of the CIA-led coup that deposed President Jacobo Arbenz of Guatemala in July of 1954, it is instructive to observe the horrific consequences of this illegal and undemocratic act. Given the present situation in Haiti and Venezuela, the history of Guatemala should sound a warning to everyone who is concerned with the long-term effects of such actions. In the 40 years following the coup, somewhere between 200,000-300,000 Guatemalans were killed, primarily indigenous Maya, with over 440 villages totally destroyed; over a million people have been displaced internally, with hundreds of thousands of refugees who fled to Mexico, the United States and beyond.

The story told in Daniel Wilkinson’s Silence On The Mountain makes clear that the destruction of the Agrarian Reform instituted under Arbenz is still being felt in Guatemala today. By focusing on the union activities of one particular coffee plantation, La Patria, we are shown how the repression which followed the coup silenced all dissent in the Guatemalan countryside for years to come. Throughout the book, the campesinos refuse to talk about the Arbenz era, though the destruction of the unions was over 40 years ago. As one union organizer comments:

“...the people would be producing a hundred times more than it is now, and our people wouldn’t be so poor.”

During the round-up of alleged subversives by lists provided by the National Committee for the Defense Against Communism, the government of Colonel Castillo Armás began the practice of kidnapping and “disappearing” labor leaders. Under the revised Labor Code, the government was able to declare anyone a communist, without right to defense or appeal, thus allowing for their imprisonment or murder. From July to November 1954, over 72,000 names were put on that list. Many of these named campesinos appear in Silence On The Mountain, and almost all refuse to discuss their previous union activity.

The Telling of History Is Always A Political Act.

It is a tribute to the determination of Daniel Wilkinson that he continues to search for the truth about the demise of the Agrarian Reform in spite of the complete silence he encounters. As he delves more deeply into the history of La Patria, he becomes noticed by the security forces and the local governmental leaders who begin to question his motivations. Since so many have lost their lives investigating this history, the danger is palpable:

“Danger quickens the senses and provides a break from the oppressive inertia of everyday existence. Hope may accompany this fear—the pressure is mounting—something has to give. To galvanize this emotional energy, to channel the fear into hope and the hope into action, this is the work of revolutionaries.”

We also hear the voices of the campesinos who forged the guerrilla movements which opposed the US-funded security forces in Guatemala. Unfortunately, it was a battle against overwhelming odds: during the 1960’s, direct military aid increased to reach nearly $50 million a year; there were dozens of Counter-Insurgency Specialists working out of the US Embassy and hundreds of military personnel who were being trained in Counter-Insurgency techniques, including torture and assassination, at places like the notorious School of The Americas. The brutal massacres of entire villages, in essence to drain the sea of community support in which the fish (guerrillas) swim had a devastating effect on the morale of the guerrillas. As one former guerrilla comments:

“The cold reaction of the people affected our morale. When you are up there in the mountains under the rain, under the bombardment, and you go into the community, the people are too scared to talk to you.”

continued on following page
For further information on the History of the 1954 coup and its after-effects, see:


The terror that was visited on the Guatemalan people has had devastating effects of the possibility for the rebirth of a revolutionary spirit. As one veteran of the Arbenz era comments: It is not the same. The children of the revolutionaries have been killed. The resistance has been cleared out. The people in the plantations now are the poorest in the country.

With the recent [2003] electoral campaign of former President Rios Montt and the reappearance of his armed thugs, Nobel Prize-winning Mayan spokesman Rigoberto Menchu was moved to comment: “It looks like 1983 all over again.” It is clear that the continued silence of the victims of the repression that reached a peak in the early 1980’s continues to affect politics in present-day Guatemala. When contemplating the effect of this silence, Mr. Wilkinson notes:

“After September 11, the people in the US got a taste of the fear caused by Terrorism. We were fortunate, however, to escape the silence. But, in Guatemala, fear and silence prevailed. Guatemala was a place where Terrorism did, in fact, win.”

For all those who are attempting to rebuild a world devastated by the terror of death squads and the horrors of the 20th century, the author of this important book offers a good place to start: The key to the reversal of the terror which has devastated Guatemala lies in the growth of the Indigenous Human Rights Groups who refuse to remain silent in spite of the horrors and continued repression. The Indigenous Rights Organizations are stronger that anything Guatemala has ever seen in its history. And they will continue to tell their story as seen through their eyes. This continues to be a very revolutionary act.

Thus, it is important to tell the history in Guatemala, Haiti, Cuba, Venezuela and throughout Latin America for it serves as a tool for empowerment and as a hope for a future that is not filled with lies and myths being repeated as though they were the truth.

“Until the Lions have their Historians History will always glorify the Hunter”

-African proverb

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Coup Plot, Exposed, Shakes Bolivia

by Luis Gomez

originally printed on www.narconews.com, April 18, 2004

LA PAZ, BOLIVIA. APRIL 17 2004: It wasn’t a secret, but for a while, nobody was paying attention: there are groups plotting to destabilize the government of President Carlos Mesa, that are considering a coup d’etat in order to finalize the sale of Bolivian gas to Chile despite the outpouring of popular will against such a deal expressed in last October’s insurrection.

Of course, U.S. government officials have a lot to do with it (beginning with the Viceroy David N. Greenlee, his friends in the CIA, and even officials from the gringo agency USAID). It took a counterintelligence memo, put together by confidential Bolivian and Chilean sources, specifically accusing those foreign companies and politicians – to bring this matter to light. Then Congressman Evo Morales denounced the coup attempt, and the questions began...

Yes, kind readers, the social movements also do counterintelligence work. But, let’s take this piece-by-piece.

After taking office in October 2003, President Mesa promised to consult the Bolivian people, through a referendum, on the possible exportation of Bolivian gas to Chile and other markets (mainly in Mexico and the United States). This had been one of the demands of the insurrection that toppled Mesa’s predecessor, Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada. Predictably, the interests who could be harmed by such a referendum, mobilized to protect their business deal. Among them are multinationals energy businesses like Enron, Repsol, and BG (formerly British Gas) that control the exploitation and transport of oil and gas in Bolivia, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, and other countries. In the same way, as the counterintelligence report mentions, members of Bolivia’s armed forces, together with politicians linked to former president Sanchez de Lozada, have been plotting to pressure the government.

In the midst of these pressures from the right (and from international capital), are several U.S. actors that, in recent weeks, have been putting public pressure upon both Mesa’s administration and the social sectors, sticking their noses more and more into Bolivian affairs. A good example, to begin with, would be the recent conflict in Yungas, where the coca growers blockaded the roads and stopped the construction of an antidrug base in La Rinconada financed by the Bush Administration. As Narco
News South American Bureau Chief Alex Conterades reported as it was happening, the blockades begun on April 5th ended in an agreement between the farmers and government minister Alfonso Ferrufino. The focus of this agreement is a more profound dialogue between coca growers and the government, a freeze on forced eradication in Yungas, and suspension of the construction of the barracks at La Rinconada.

Viceroy Greenlee, that same day, turned up the heat when he visited the offices of Bolivia's Secretary of State to say that the drug issue "is delicate." But he refused to comment openly on his position. Instead, he deflected questions toward the issue of a treaty that provides immunity for U.S. military officials and whatever they do in Bolivian territory, signed by the administration of Sanchez de Lozada, but that was never ratified by the national congress.

"Hopefully one of these days it will be ratified because we want to collaborate with Bolivia," said Greenlee. Does this have anything to do with the theme of this article? According to the counterintelligence report, it seems that it does.

"Intelligence personnel at the US Embassy (CIA) are working with other intelligence agencies (Chile-Israel) to destabilize the government of President Mesa. Objectives: Stop the Referendum, the Constituents' Assembly, passage of a new Hydrocarbons Law and achieve the sale of gas through Chile," the counterintelligence report says. To achieve these objectives, agents of the CIA are working on "various hypotheses and action plans." In reality, there are three concrete plans, each of which not only attacks the government of Carlos Mesa and the sovereignty of Bolivia, but also shoots to kill against the will of the people."

A Coup, an Early Election, or Shut Down the Congress

According to the information collected in the report, the preparations for a coup d'état in Bolivia have the main goal of "provoking the reaction of the social movements to create chaos and internal division," justifying, with that, the entrance of Chilean military troops, supported by U.S. Marines, to "pacify" the country. In the process, they would behead the social movements and create a government in accordance with the interests at play: an operation very similar to the coup against Jean Bertrand Aristide in Haiti. The coup would be headed "by military officials, and supported by military units, high police chiefs, and the U.S. Embassy."

But, according to this counterintelligence document, the preparations have hit a snag: some military officials had patriotic reactions, causing the planned date of the coup, March 25th, to be postponed. Among the report's list of military and police officials involved, some of whom are retired, are Army Generals Miguel Vidaurre, Luis Vargas, and Orlando Paniagua, as well as a dozen police colonels, all linked to former defense minister Carlos Sanchez Berzain. Berzain, who served under Sanchez de Lozada, was in charge of the massacre of Ayamara peasant farmers and citizens in El Alto last October.

In any case, some military officials from Chile have come to Bolivia to continue organizing this plan, conducting acts of sabotage in border regions. All of this is accompanied by unusual movements of Chilean troops and weapons all along the Bolivia-Chile border, in particular in Colchane, in the north of Chile, and where dozens of elite units (with 500 troops), tanks, fuel, and munitions. Townspeople in the small communities in Southern Bolivia (in the Uyuni region, where the world's largest salt desert exists) have also denounced the entrance of Chilean military troops that, they say, "enter the towns and act as if they are in their own country's territory."

As detailed in the counterintelligence report:

Chilean troop movements: From October 24 to 30, 2003, more than 500 military vehicles (a military convoy) came up from the bases north of Santiago to the large barracks in Iquique (Huara), approximately 100 kilometers from Pisiga... this movement of troops and vehicles is part of joint exercises by the Chilean Army.

From November 1 to 10, 2003: More than 100 armored and assault vehicles rose from Huara to Colchane (a town 7 kilometers from Pisiga) with nearly 3,000 men. Beginning on this date the quantity of troops and vehicles of different kinds included artillery vehicles... By the last estimate, in late February 2004, there were 20,000 men deployed in the encampment, combing the border, south and north of Colchane. Movement in March 2004: In the first week of the month nearly 100 trucks (including personnel carriers and others) with provisions and equipment.

Between March 12 and 14, 2004, they rise from North of Santiago to Huara, nearly 400 armed vehicles some with rockets (on the backs of trailers), with motors reconditioned to operate at more than 3,500 meters above sea level.

March 22nd and 23rd Hercules transport planes and fighter planes arrive at the airport of the Condors in Iquique. Nearly 3,000 men -- elite forces (uniforms distinct from those of the soldiers and with berets) also arrive, of which about 500 go to Colchane. Currently, it is estimated that there are 31,000 soldiers in the Chilean Army.

Monday, March 29: Two columns of vehicles, 25 of six and ten tires, go from Huara to Colchane. 38 loaded trucks (could be with provisions or equipment).

But if that plan fails, the intelligence agencies of Chile, Israel, and the US, have a Plan B: They seek to pressure the Mesa government to call early elections. Former Bolivian President Jorge "Tuto" Quiroga appears to be involved in this, giving instructions to his collaborators in Bolivia to work to call early elections "in May or June of 2005." The continued on next page
continued from page 9

Reich, and the rest of their cronies are putting each other's backs in the aftermath of the FMLN's electoral defeat. For solidarity activists, this reality is extremely disturbing. Though it seems daunting, we must accept the following challenge: to fight so that outside, imperialist intervention does not determine the next political contest, not even in El Salvador, not anywhere in Latin America, not in the rest of world. The massive, deceptive U.S. intervention in these elections proves another thing: that El Salvador remains an important strategic place in the Americas. And it will continue to be so, because the FMLN and the powerful movement for social change live on.

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goal? “Prevent the Constituents' Assembly, reform the Hydrocarbons Law, and bring the extraction of gas to Chile.” And it makes sense, since Quiróga already declared, during a December 2002 visit to the United States, that he had signed, with George W. Bush, the first agreements for the sale of Bolivian gas...

And if Plan A and Plan B remain stalled, Plan C then contemplates provoking the closing of the National Congress and its dissolution, or at least keeping Senator Leopoldo Fernandez, of the party founded by the late dictator Hugo Banzer and former president Quiróga, at his post as Senate President until next August, in preparation for a coup. According to the Constitution, if neither the president nor the vice president are in office — in other words, if they succeed in driving Carlos Mesa from power (right now Bolivia has no Vice President: it had been Mesa before Sanchez de Lozada resigned), the Senate President would become the new president...

This counterintelligence document is not the only source on these issues. Last March 26th, the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, General Luis Aranda Granados, said on local television that, “generals, colonels, and mid-level military officials on leave from the Armed Forces are seeking to destabilize the government of President Carlos-Mesa, in coordination with some political parties and labor unions.” In fact, some hours after Congressman Evo Morales came forward with this counterintelligence report, the leader of the MIR’s (Left Revolutionary Movement) congressional delegation called upon Defense Minister Gustavo Arredondo to report on the coup plot: “We want the Defense Minister to explain the statements by the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, who said that there are retired police and military officials, who are on leave, plotting a coup d'état.

Sticking their Noses—and a lot of Money—in Bolivia

While they consider the possibility of direct (or indirect) military intervention, US officials are meddling in every issue that will define the future of this country, not just the sale of gas or a change in government. The USAID agency has recently launched a project of “social and democratic development” in the city of El Alto, the epicenter of last October’s insurrection. The gringos are spending $300 million dollars, basically to buy people, to encourage a discourse that is less radical and more favorable to U.S. policies, such as the sale of gas.

In a similar example, Narco News received a report a few days ago accusing some organizations “promoted by the U.S. government” of attempting to influence the character of the proposed Bolivian “Constituents’ Assembly.” Labor leader Oscar Olivera, Chapare coca grower leader Leonilda Zurita, and human rights defender Luis Sanchez made this accusation in a text circulated among participants at a seminar in Cochabamba, one of several regional seminars organized by the National Electoral Court on the issue of the Constituents’ Assembly. The text, which was also sent out to several media organizations, mentioned interference from the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI).

The NDI, like the IRI, according to the accusation, have worked actively in coup-plotting activities against the government of President Hugo Chavez in Venezuela. For example, “on April 12, 2002, in a fax sent to the media... IRI president George A. Folsom rejoiced over Chavez’s fall from power.” In light of that, said Olivera, Zurita, and Sanchez’s texts, “there can be no doubt that the IRI comes here to Bolivia to influence matters of hydrocarbons (oil and natural gas) and the Constituents’ Assembly through activities similar to those they have conducted in Venezuela—financing enemies of the Constituents’ Assembly and groups that support the oil and gas companies unconditionally, and fomenting separatist speeches that only benefit the enemies of Bolivia.”

As you can see, kind readers, what began here in Bolivia in October 2003 has not yet finished. Or, as the Bolivian social leaders claim, “foreign groups, linked to the banks and oil companies, are putting together an entire strategy for a new stage of domination over the Bolivian people.” And among the ironies of fate, it is important to remember (and to remind) the current president of Chile, the “socialist” Ricardo Lagos, in whose own country the socialist government of Salvador Allende was toppled by Augusto Pinochet in a very similar political project. It is impossible to know, today, if Lagos remembers the massacres ordered by the dictator and the exile of many Chileans, including himself... or whether perhaps today he has adopted his enemies’ brutal practices as his own. We will have to be on alert, because this new attack on democracy and against the social movements in Latin America is barely beginning, and, unfortunately, we are going to have much more to report in that respect.
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just law.”

Groups such as Pastors for Peace have demonstrated that peaceful, responsible, socially cognizant travel to Cuba is still possible, even in the face of legal restrictions. More importantly, such travel is absolutely vital in order for us to develop an accurate picture of the U.S./Cuba relationship. People-to-

people licenses create an invaluable opportunity for students, religious clergy,
doctors, activists, journalists, and others to more completely understand the reality of the Cuban nation, and how individual actions (or inactions!) can af-

ect the political climate surrounding this conflict.

As the Cuban embargo and its travel restrictions continue to be both chal-

lenged and reinforced, questions remain as to how educational travel and po-
tential tourism will affect the situation. The fact remains that legal travel to Cuba continues to be threatened. And without this right, the ability of the people of the Americas to stand in so-

liarity with each other will be threatened as well.

Betty Jeanne, a CUSLAR intern, graduates from Ithaca
College this spring. She credits her professor, Hector Velez, for
inspiring her to self-educate around U.S./Latin American
relations, and Cuba in particular.
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