The “dolores” of Latin America
Dana Brown, CUSLAR Coordinator

According to the US Ambassador to Uruguay, the United States recently gave Uruguay a loan of “mil quinientos millones de dolores” (1.5 million pains/griefs). The profundity of the Ambassador’s mistake amazes me, for “dolores”, and not “dólares” is exactly what Latin American countries have gained from such US generosity in the past. And now, for every “dolor” Uruguay receives from the IMF, their debt grows by four dollars.

The US, and our partners in neoliberal crime like the IMF, offer billions in “dolores” to Latin American countries every year. Our “dolores” have built pipelines and clear-cut forests in the indigenous lands of Southern Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and others. They train Latin American soldiers to torture their own countrymen. Our “dolores” bring Coca-Cola and Round-up, maquiladoras and black hawk helicopters into every Latin American community. Our “dolores” fuel a tragic war in Colombia. And now we are seeing that our neoliberal “dolores” have broken the banks of many South American countries, causing the continent’s countries to topple like dominoes.

The “dolores” of the IMF weigh heavily on Brazil right now, as the candidates in the coming elections are being told how they must run their country in order to receive this “generous” loan. Despite the $30 million bailout, speculators continue to drive down the value of Brazil’s currency, the real, which has fallen by more than 20 percent this year.

More than half of the “aid” given to Colombia in Plan Colombia ends up being spent on US banks through contracted services and the purchase of military equipment and supplies. These dollars do not create economic stability, but rather greater economic dependence on the US. In addition, they further US dominance in the Western Hemisphere.

Trade agreements like NAFTA, CAFTA (Central American Free Trade Agreement), and the FTAA (Free Trade Area of the Americas), transfer dollars from South to North and “dolores” from North to South. As Americans we must realize that throwing dollars at Latin America’s problems is not creating solutions. Moreover, it largely contributes to their troubles by fueling existing conflicts, creating economic dependency, and feeding the banks of greedy US corporations.

This issue of the CUSLAR newsletter explores some of the “dolores” of Latin America, and their relationship with North American “dólares”, by examining Plan Puebla Panamá, Plan Colombia, the IMF in Brazil, and other issues.

We are in a time of crisis. And the IMF is not going to bail us out.
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Leader of the cocaleros almost takes presidency in Bolivia.

The most salient feature of Bolivia’s June 30 presidential elections was the surge of the campesino and coca growers’ party, MAS, led by Evo Morales. Morales had trailed at fourth place with 13 percent of the vote during pre-election polls. Four days before the election the U.S. government spoke out publicly against the candidate, indicating that U.S. assistance to Bolivia would be endangered if Morales were elected. These statements by the U.S. ambassador to Bolivia, Manuel Rocha, appear to have backfired, with Morales’ popularity increasing dramatically. The final vote saw him draw 20.94 percent of the vote, a close second behind former president Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada, who had 22.46 percent of the vote.

Morales suggests that U.S. aid to Bolivia encourages corruption and repression and does not benefit the majority of Bolivians. He opposes globalization, and he says, “capitalism is the worst enemy of humanity and the environment”. These ideological positions and his continued support of coca growers in Bolivia make him unpopular with the U.S.

The U.S. policy position regarding the Bolivian elections is consistent with attempts to marginalize the coca growers at the same time as their demands are resonating more and more with a growing number of Bolivians. U.S. officials consistently demonize coca growers and leader Evo Morales-Ambassador Rocha went so far as to label the coca growers the “Taliban of Bolivia”.

The final election results saw Sanchez de Lozada take presidency, with the support of Jaime Paz Zamora.

Andean Peace Zone

The foreign relations and defense ministers of Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela agreed at a June 18 meeting in Lima, Peru, to establish a peace zone encompassing the five countries’ land, air space and waters.

The Lima Commitment-Andean Charter for Peace and Security prohibits the use of force among the five countries, as well as the use of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. Nuclear weapons testing is also banned, as is the use or transportation of weapons of mass destruction. The countries also pledged to gradually eliminate land mines, exchange information that could be used to prevent terrorism, and place limits on defense spending and controls on conventional weapons. Peruvian Foreign Minister Diego Garcia Sayan said that the char-
ter "will set an important precedent that will make Latin America a leader" in controlling defense spending.

(Latinamerica Press, July 1, 2002. Vol. 34, No. 13)

Texaco in the Amazon

Rainforest Indians of Ecuador and Peru have lost an appeal aimed at reinstating nine-year-old litigation against Texaco, alleging that toxic dumping devastated their environment and exposed residents to cancer-causing pollutants. The U.S. Second Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed a trial court's ruling dismissing two class-action lawsuits on grounds that the United States was not the proper place for the litigation, and that Ecuador would be a more convenient location.

The plaintiffs alleged that a Texaco subsidiary dumped an estimated 30 billion gallons of toxic waste into their environment while extracting oil from the Ecuadorean Amazon between 1964 and 1992. They alleged that instead of pumping the substances back into emptied wells, the Texaco subsidiary dumped them in local rivers, directly into landfills or spread them on the local dirt roads. They also alleged that the Ecuadorean Pipeline, constructed by Texaco, leaked large amounts of petroleum into the environment. The Indians alleged that they and their families suffered various injuries, including poisoning and development of precancerous growths. Although Texaco denied allegations in the suits, the merit of the case was never decided by the trial or appeal courts. Instead arguments focused on where the cases should be heard. Joseph Kohn, one of the lawyers representing the Indians, told Reuters that the legal team is evaluating the ruling to determine whether to pursue further appeals. "We do think the court made it clear that if the courts in Ecuador don't hear the cases, they will be heard in the United States," said Kohn of Philadelphia's Kohn Swift & Graf. "One way or another, our clients will get the merits heard in court."

Carter visits Cuba

Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter's May 12 arrival made him the highest-profile U.S. political figure to visit the island since Washington broke ties with Havana following Cuba's 1959 revolution. In his welcome speech Castro hailed Carter for his efforts to improve relations between the two countries.

In a televised and uncensored speech addressing a Havana University audience that included Castro, Carter proposed a plan to improve U.S.-Cuba relations. He asked the U.S. government to take the first step by lifting its 40 year old embargo against Cuba and its restrictions on traveling from the United States to Cuba. He urged Cuba to improve its human rights record and mentioned the Varela Project, a petition drive by Cuban dissidents asking for a referendum on civil liberties.

On the final day of his visit, Carter urged President George W. Bush's administration not to fund Cuban dissidents. Carter said any financial connection to the U.S. government, whether direct or indirect, "would damage
severely their integrity”.

(Connection to the Americas, June 2002, Vol. 19, No. 5)

Paramilitaries Execute Two Zapatistas

Two campesinos from EZLN support bases were assassinated by paramilitary groups in the morning of August 25 in ranchería Amaytik at the independent municipality Olga Isabel. The newspaper La Jornada has reported on the previously announced assassination of two Zapatistas in the Ricardo Flores Magón Autonomous Municipality. The ‘official’ version, released on August 26 by the State Prosecutor’s Office, and widely refuted by residents of the area, is that it was due to an infamous “family” dispute.

These are the second and third deaths of residents of the bases of support of the EZLN in recent days. Every day this seems more and more like a coordinated operation of the diverse paramilitary groupings that operate in the forest and the Northern zone to harass and intimidate the communities in resistance. The murders happened near an operational base of the Mexican Army, leading many to believe that the government is complicit.

There has been a deployment of Army troops - unprecedented since December of 2000 - into the cañadas of the Selva Lacandona. In late August, hundreds of troops moved into the extreme northern parts of the Selva, including tanks and armored vehicles. Autonomous municipalities have reported several other remarkable troop movements in the area over the last 36 hours.

Human rights organizations mobilized at least three brigades of observers from San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Ocosingo and Chilón to head to the scene of the assassinations. The recent movements of the Army towards the interior of the gorges and the north, ostensibly to stem the paramilitary violence, seem rather to have stimulated it. The murders were perpetrated by paramilitaries under the control of the governing party in the region, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI).

Coca Growers Decide to Impede Eradication in the Chapare

On August 10, the Six Coca Growers’ Federations voted to begin to actively impede forced eradication efforts in the Chapare. The decision reflects the group’s growing frustration with the continued militarization of the region, in spite of the MNR’s campaign promise to remove the armed forces from the region and indignation for the Chipiriri confrontation that occurred in early August. During the second half of this month, self defense groups became active and blocked remote paths and roads in the Carrasco Federation, near Ivirgarzama, in Ibuelo and in the Tropico Federation. According to Hernan Capirrolo, Joint Task Force commander, the troops have been withdrawn from conflictive areas and are awaiting orders from the executive branch.

(Andean Information Network)
THE PLAN PUEBLA PANAMA – THE RESISTANCE IS SPREADING!

BY ALICIA SWORDS

This article follows David McClure’s “Plan Puebla-Panama Seeks to Spread NAFTA’s Ills South” in CUSLAR’s Spring 2002 issue.

In June 2001 at a summit in El Salvador, Central American business and government leaders officially unveiled and signed on to the Plan Puebla Panama (PPP). A huge infrastructure and industrial development program promoted by the Mexican government and the International Development Bank (IDB), the PPP has been called the “doorway” to the Free Trade Area of the Americas (the FTAA), the “linchpin” of globalization,¹ the “mother of all megaprojects.” The $20 billion program proposes to build or improve over 5000 miles of superhighways, over 1100 miles of electrical lines, a series of hydroelectric dams, railroads, sea ports and airports, and six industrial processing zones or maquilas.² It aims to protect a “biological corridor” and promote tourism.

Its fans, (US and Central American governments, transnational business interests and lending institutions) dress up the PPP in the language of poverty alleviation, human development and ecological protection. But they have not made the effort to inform the people who would be affected.

There are admittedly many challenges to informing the 65 million people who would be impacted by the plan – international borders, language barriers, illiteracy, and uneven access to radio and television. Even so, in the last year, hundreds of community organizers in Mexico and Central America have worked hard to make people aware of the PPP. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), churches, regional networks and local associations have dedicated time and resources to inform people about the ways that the Plan threatens their communities. In this process, the inspirational model, strategies and rhetoric of the Zapatista movement serve as tools for many. Existing civil society networks have provided communication channels for educating people about the PPP.

In the last year, diverse groups have become aware of and involved in protesting the PPP. Indigenous communities, women’s groups, campesinos, cooperatives, environmentalists, doctors and health practitio-

Criticisms of the Plan Puebla Panama:
1) Planners have not provided clear information to the public.
2) Not consulting the affected communities violates International Labor Organization Convention 169 on indigenous rights.
3) The PPP’s budget favors transportation (82%) over social development (2.9%).
4) It does not require environmental impact statements for most projects.
5) It responds solely to U.S. interests.
6) Its development model destroys regional food security, relies on sweatshops and agroexports, and threatens biological and cultural diversity.
ners, students, teachers, and artisans have come together across borders to share information and experiences. At and between biannual international meetings, they have improved their communication and created common plans of action. In May 2001, one month before the official inauguration of the Plan, 250 people had already convened for the First International Forum against the PPP in Tapachula, Mexico, near the Guatemalan border, to reject the PPP. In November of that year, 600 people came together in Xela, Guatemala, and again in July 2002, 1000 people met in Managua where they affirmed their commitments to reject the Plan.

Many of these same organizations also are networking to organize related international forums in Central America on militarization, transgenics, dam projects, and the FTAA. In July of this year, I participated in an international forum on Biodiversity organized by this network in Xela, Guatemala. I watched as indigenous doctors and midwives shared recipes and exchanged herbal remedies and practices. Campesinos exchanged and shared local seed varieties, honoring their ancestral knowledge and expressing their rejection of policies that promote export agriculture and transgenic seeds. Representatives from diverse movements throughout Central America shared testimonies of human rights violations and demand protection for basic economic, social, cultural and land rights. Popular educators distributed cassettes of a radionovela, a soap opera for radio designed to raise awareness in local languages (and with local humor!) about the PPP and the FTAA. In workshops, people shared strategies and

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You can support the struggle against the PPP!

- Organize local actions in your community on October 12th 2002, Indigenous People’s day, declared the International Day of Opposition to the PPP
- Inform yourself about the PPP. Check out the following websites:
  - The Mexican Presidency [PPP.presencia.gob.mx/PPP](http://PPP.presencia.gob.mx/PPP)
  - Inter-American Development Bank [www.iadb.org/PPP](http://www.iadb.org/PPP)
  - Centro de Investigaciones Económicas y Políticas de Acción Comunitaria (CIEPAC), San Cristobal, Chiapas [www.ciepac.org/PPP.htm](http://www.ciepac.org/PPP.htm)
  - Red Mexicana de Acción Frente al Libre Comercio (RMALC) [www.rmalc.org.mx/PPP.htm](http://www.rmalc.org.mx/PPP.htm)
- Connect with and support the work of organizations in the USA that work to educate people in the USA about the PPP:
  - Action for Community and Ecology in the Regions of Central America (ACERCA) [www.asej.org/ACERCA/index.html](http://www.asej.org/ACERCA/index.html)
  - Alternatives [www.alternatives.ca](http://www.alternatives.ca)
  - Bank Information Center [www.bicusa.org/lac/PPP.htm](http://www.bicusa.org/lac/PPP.htm)
  - Committee in Solidarity with the People of Central America (CISPES) [www.cispes.org](http://www.cispes.org)
  - Global Exchange [www.globalexchange.org/campaigns/Mexico/ppp](http://www.globalexchange.org/campaigns/Mexico/ppp)
  - Grassroots International [www.grassrootsonline.org](http://www.grassrootsonline.org)
  - International Development Exchange (IDEX) [www.idex.org](http://www.idex.org)
  - Mexico Solidarity Network (MSN) [www.mexicosolidarity.org/plan_puebla_panama.html](http://www.mexicosolidarity.org/plan_puebla_panama.html)
  - Networks in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala [www.nisgua.org/articles/ppp.htm](http://www.nisgua.org/articles/ppp.htm)
  - Rights Action [www.rightsaction.org](http://www.rightsaction.org)
  - Social Justice Committee [www.s-j-c.net](http://www.s-j-c.net)
experiences of challenging neoliberal policies on dams, parks, displacement and resettlement, and constructed common plans of action. Clearly, at this forum, diverse groups were learning from each other about alternative forms of "development."

Forum participants take seriously Zapatista mar "mandar obedeciendo" – to rule by obeying. At the 3rd forum on the PPP in Managua in July 2002, participants demanded that the organizing NGOs listen to the participants. According to representatives of several Mexican organizations, some of the organizers of the forum had received funding from institutions that favored the PPP. Throughout the conference, these NGOs had pushed for negotiating with the World Bank, IDB and governments. Participants explained proudly that they had taken the microphones from the organizers, demanded that the PPP be "vigorously rejected" and insisted that facilitating and agenda-setting at the conference be made more democratic and transparent.

The fourth international forum against the PPP is scheduled for March 2003 in Honduras.


2 Call, Wendy. "Resisting the Plan Puebla Panama" in Citizens Action in the Americas, #2, online at www.americaspolicy.org

Alicia Swords is a PhD student in Development Sociology at Cornell University. She recently traveled in Mexico to begin a project about learning among social movement networks.
Dónde Está el Baño?: Cornell study examines sanitary conditions on New York State farms

by Ingrid Bauer, '02

Elena Hernandez (not her real name) doesn’t do farmwork anymore. But she still has stomach problems because she used to not eat or drink while working to avoid having to go to the bathroom. “Where I have worked they don’t provide drinking water or toilets,” said Elena. “Most of us bring our own water. Sometimes they have toilets, sometimes they don’t—it depends on when the [health] inspector comes. When only a few people are working in the field, there are almost never toilets, which is actually permitted by law, but they really should provide transportation to a bathroom somewhere else. Sometimes if we’re getting paid by the hour the boss doesn’t let us take bathroom breaks.” It’s hardest for women when they can’t go to the bathroom, she said.

“Their water is running in the fields, and they are spraying pesticides in the fields and packinghouses, and to learn about their attitudes toward sanitation practices. The results will be used to create educational materials for workers and growers about the importance of proper handwashing to prevent microbial contamination of fresh fruits and vegetables. The Cornell Migrant Program and CUSLAR also hope the study will provide hard facts to use in farmworker advocacy campaigns.

Handwashing and pesticides

Access to handwashing facilities is also important to farmworkers because of pesticide exposure, an issue the GAPs sanitation study did not cover. When asked about handwashing, Elena Hernandez immediately began to talk about pesticides. “When they put on pesticides,” Elena said, “even when it stings our eyes and you can smell it, some bosses say it’s safe to work. Others tell us to stop working if we can feel the pesticides on our skin, but not before. Sometimes the neighboring farmer will be spraying while we’re working, and they don’t notify us, they

For more information about food safety, check out www.gaps.cornell.edu (Good Agricultural Practices Project). For farmworker advocacy links, visit http://eds.aas.duke.edu/saf/links.html (Student Action with Farmworkers) or http://www.ruralmigrantministry.org (Rural and Migrant Ministry). To learn more about organic agriculture in New York State, go to www.nola.org (Northeast Organic Farming Association).
Stories from the field:
Interviewing migrant farmworkers in New York State

By Ingrid Bauer, '02

This summer I worked on a Cornell-sponsored study of farmworkers' access to sanitation facilities on fruit and vegetable farms in New York State. One of the most enjoyable aspects of my job was meeting farmworkers and listening to their stories about work, immigration, and home. I also witnessed events on farms and camps that made me cringe or smile. I would like to share a few of these stories and events, with the hope of shedding some light on a mostly invisible community of people who put food on our tables.

The first survey I conducted was in the health outreach van with a Mexican woman who lived with her husband and two young children in the city of Newburg, New York. She worked in a nearby apple packing plant, and her husband worked in a hotel. While the plant had bathrooms, there was no drinking water, so all of the workers brought water from home. She washed her hands regularly because of the pesticides on the apples. Twice she developed a severe rash on her hands from chemical contamination. It wasn't until a group of workers got together and demanded gloves that they were provided.

On the way back to the clinic we stopped at a farm to drop off some information for some of the workers, who lived in a tidy row of trailers behind the barns. The woman said dreamily how nice it would be to work on a farm and be outside all day, to live in a nice trailer, to have a little garden, to get out of the city. Her attitude was far from "Ugh, how can people live like this!"

When we knocked at a camp in Niagara County, an older Mexican man answered the door and graciously invited us in. He was tall and had a slight limp. After I began to explain the survey, he interrupted me to say that he had been injured on the job, and wondered if we could help him. He lifted up his pant leg to display a long gash on his right shin, the foot below swollen so the skin shined. Yesterday he fell of a ladder while pruning an apple tree, he said. The owner brought him to the hospital emergency room, where they gave him a prescription for pills without so much as cleaning or dressing the wound. No translator was available at the hospital to explain what the prescription was.

After years of crossing illegally, one [man] finally decided to apply for permanent residency in the US. He cannot return to Mexico until his papers are processed, or else he loses all the time he's accumulated so far. [Therefore] he might not go home for Christmas this year.

Want to know more about the conditions of Farmworkers in New York State? Want to know what you can do? Join the newly formed Student Action with Farmworkers group at Cornell. Contact rab46@cornell.edu or pem23@cornell.edu for more information.
The FTAA and the Crisis of Our Destiny

August 4, 2002

When the representatives from the thirteen colonies of North America met for the first time to reject the new customs proposals that had come from the capital, they never could have imagined the consequences of their action. At the end of the 18th century, England was the most powerful nation in the world, endowed with invincible armed forces which no one dared to defy.

That moment represented a crossroads in world history. The decision of that generation determined the destiny of the United States of America.

This was not an isolated incident. History is replete with such situations. Each period of crisis lends itself to a rearrangement of the global order. Former colonies emerge as powerful nations, and invincible empires retreat to colonial situations. These are moments of risks and possibilities.

Not just any crisis generates such possibilities. It remains to be seen if the current crisis, only beginning to take hold, will call into question our destiny.

The strategy of the United States is to impose upon our continent the Free Trade Area of the Americas, an expansion and radicalization of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). In its practice, the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) will make possible the deregulation of all Latin American economies and, consequently, the annihilation of the role of nations.

If the FTAA is put into effect, what will be the destiny of Brazil?

We can affirm with certainty that our economy will be definitively returned to the state of a economic source center, we will be deprived of our own currency, without an autonomous economic policy and submitted to the will external economic centers and legal jurisdiction. In other words, we will find ourselves squarely within the classic definition of a colony.

Nation or colony? Caio Prado Junior taught us that every people has in their evolution, seen from a distance, a certain historical sense. In our case, we were born a colony and our sense of future has come from our capacity to transform this original non-nation into a true nation.

However, we are in the face of a crisis of destiny. The place that we occupy in the coming historical period will depend on our capacity to impede the FTAA in the next few years.

That is our great challenge: to build a powerful mass movement to defeat the FTAA. It will not be an easy campaign. We will have to educate, raise consciousness, mobilize and organize millions of people and popular activists in the next years.

The National Popular Plebiscite is only the beginning. It will be the large educational instrument through which the people will insert themselves into the center of this debate. Every militant will be able to set up a polling place and collect votes. All will be able to participate. It will be an unparalleled opportunity to awaken the anti-imperialist consciousness, to mobilize organizers and popular activists and to debate with the people about the necessity of constructing an alternative.

The struggle against the FTAA will require patience and courage, but it will make possible the most important victory of the Brazilian people: our second and definitive independence.

Ricardo Gebrim is a leader of the National Coordination Committee of the Popular Consulta (Plebiscite) Movement.

CUSLAR Newsletter 12 Spring 2002
"We made a decision: first, to defend our lands and also to resist becoming involved in the war. It wasn’t an easy decision to make or follow through with but despite all of our hardship, we know why we are doing this and why we continue with our struggle."

Javier Sánchez, a representative of the Peace Community of San José de Apartado, Colombia, spoke these words during a recent visit to Ithaca, New York. Part of a national tour organized by the Fellowship of Reconciliation, his stop in Ithaca was sponsored by a local group, the Committee on US-Latin American Relations (CULSAR). As the oldest continuously active solidarity organization in the country, CULSAR’s mission is to raise awareness about the effects of US policy toward Latin America. We believe that one of the most powerful means to educate people about US foreign policy is to hear the stories of those that are directly affected by such policies. Javier’s visit gave us a first-hand perspective on the violence that ravages his people.

Ask most people living in the United States what Colombia is like and the inevitable reply is that it is a land of drugs, violence and guerrillas. For someone who pays moderately close attention to the mainstream press this picture is fairly accurate, for it is more or less all that is presented to American audiences. But ask one of the more than one million Colombians living in the US to tell you something about their homeland and you will be greeted by images of a country tremendously rich in terms of cultural traditions, biological diversity, and natural resources. This fierce national pride may contrast starkly with the popular image of a country plagued by violence. Yet this richness lies at the heart of the 38-year civil war that has driven so many from their homes. Whether it be drugs, oil, human labor, access to markets, etc., Colombia has something the rest of the world wants.

**Plan Colombia is a plan to kill**

For decades the US has maintained a strong presence in Colombia and in other Andean countries under the pretext of fighting the War on Drugs. In the last several years this involvement has largely taken the form of direct military aid to the Colombian government. Of the $1.3 billion proposed by the Clinton administration and allocated by Congress in 2000 for Plan Colombia, the overwhelming majority is designated for military equipment and training. The rationale is that the guerrilla armies, most notably the FARC (Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia), rely on narco-trafficking to fund their revolutionary activities. Under this logic, destroying the FARC would devastate the Colombian drug trade and significantly reduce the amount of cocaine and heroin entering the US market.

For years critics have attacked the supply-side emphasis of the current drug policy as expensive and ineffective. A RAND study recently found that it is 26 times more cost effective to use education and treatment to address the drug problem in the US (www.rand.org). Furthermore, Colombia’s cocaine production and export has increased rather than diminished in recent years. Meanwhile in the US the street price for cocaine has gone down while purity has increased. Clearly, if Plan Colombia’s main objective is to reduce the supply of drugs in this country, billions of our tax dollars have been squandered.

If we stop to consider
where exactly this money goes we get a clearer picture. Of the $1.3 billion aid package, $600 million is designated for the purchase of helicopters such as the Blackhawk which is manufactured by Sikorsky, a US-based defense contractor. Another $350 million is allocated for maritime and aerial interception which often takes the form of fumigation. The chemical used in aerial spraying is glyphosate, also known as Ultra-RoundUp, and is manufactured by the US-based Monsanto Corporation. And, $96 million is budgeted to strengthen the Colombian police forces which often receive training from their US counterparts.

What this breakdown means is that more than half of the money allocated for Colombia does not actually leave the US. Rather, the majority of this aid to Colombia goes to pay salaries, purchase equipment and supplies, and contract services to mostly US citizens and corporations. A quick look at which interest groups (defense contractors, chemical manufacturers) and elected officials (such as Sen. Joe Lieberman of Connecticut, home of Sikorsky) support such an aid package reveals what factors really determine our foreign policy. Given that the Bush administration has requested an additional $567 million in mostly military aid, the focus on militarization will undoubtedly continue to dominate the strategy in Colombia.

For the people of Colombia, however, the costs of militarization are extremely high. In four decades of civil war, over 40,000 people have been killed, the majority of whom were civilians. In addition to the one million people that have fled the country, another 2 million have been internally displaced due to intolerable levels of violence and oppression. As Javier pointed out in his presentation to CUSLR, to be forced to leave one’s land and move to urban slums with no means of self-sufficiency and no community structure is so tragic that many choose to remain and suffer the consequences.

While Colombia is indeed embroiled in a civil war, and atrocities are committed by all armed actors, it is impossible to place blame primarily on the guerrillas. In fact, 70% of the violence is attributed to the paramilitary groups who carry out most of the massacres of civilians. The main paramilitary group, the AUC (Self-defense Units of Colombia) have been placed on the State Department’s list of known terrorist groups (see “Picking our Enemies: US Doesn’t Mind Terrorists in Colombia”, RESIST Newsletter, May 2002). They share this distinction with the FARC, yet unlike the guerrillas the AUC maintains a close relationship with the Colombian Army. It is widely acknowledged by paramilitary leaders and Colombian government officials that without this collaboration, the FARC would control far more of the Colombian countryside.

“We stated our opposition [to Plan Colombia] from the beginning because we knew that it is a plan to kill.” Javier affirms what human rights reports—including those prepared by the US State Department—have documented: militarization leads to violence and the majority of the victims are civilians. By supplying the Colombian Army with weapons and training, while acknowledging their strong ties to the paramilitaries, the US is essentially funding a war that Colombia is waging on its own people.

**They want us to leave our lands**

During the 1980s and 90s, the FARC maintained a strong pres-
ence in the northern Uruba area of what is now the Peace Community of San José de Apartado. Javier remembers being offered guns by the guerrillas as an invitation to join their struggle. Nearly everyone in the community refused to take up arms. Shortly thereafter, the army stepped up its repression of the FARC by helping to create and support paramilitary groups which also terrorized the community. Many of the residents fled, and it wasn’t until the community took the courageous step of declaring itself a Peace Community that people started to return. Those families who came back did so at tremendous risk to their lives, a sacrifice that many were willing to make having experienced the poverty and isolation of living in urban slums. As Javier points out, “Coming back means returning to their homes and lands and being able to work again.”

Despite having declared neutrality, San José de Apartado continues to suffer persecution. The community has seen 107 of its members killed, 90% of them by the paramilitaries. Recently, a paramilitary group blocked the main road into the community, virtually paralyzing it economically. As Javier points out, “The idea is that we go hungry so that we abandon our lands. Above all, there is economic interest in the land.” He explains that foreign interests pressure the government of Colombia to allow the establishment of mines and large cattle ranches. “We also know well that there are large projects being planned like a dry canal that will link the two oceans.”

While the location of San José de Apartado is of strategic interest to many, the same can be said about much of the country. Control of Colombia’s vast natural resources lie at the heart of the conflict. The Bush administration’s proposal to allocate $98 million to train a Colombian army battalion to defend an oil pipeline owned by Occidental Petroleum, based in Los Angeles, is evidence of the link between corporate interests and foreign aid.

As the FARC pointed out during the recently suspended peace negotiations, the civil unrest in Colombia will continue until the underlying structural inequalities are addressed. It is impossible to pursue peace without alleviating poverty and inequality. However, groups that express opposition to governmental policy and are politically more in line with the guerrillas have been violently repressed. Assassinations of community and labor leaders, journalists, and activists are common and contribute to a general stifling of political dissent. Without the participation of civil society, democratic reform will remain elusive and Colombia will continue to be racked with violence. US lawmakers need to keep this in mind when creating foreign policy.

CUSLAR operates under the assumption that a clearer understanding of what is really happening in Colombia is necessary to affect positive change. By sharing his experiences with residents of our community, Javier inspires us to change what he and the people of Colombia cannot—a US foreign policy that is responsible for the suffering and inequality of so many. He offers us an opportunity to support struggles for peace, justice, and sustainability and reminds us that it is possible to create policies that will alleviate poverty and injustice, promote peace and respect for human rights in Colombia. CUSLAR’s job is to make his voice heard as loudly as possible.

Marcie Ley is a former CUSLAR Coordinator.

CUSLAR Newsletter 15 Spring 2002
The Noose
By Eduardo Galeano

Are we so easily moved? President Bush was moved by the drama of Uruguay, though there is no indication that he could find our country on the map. Was he overcome by the spirit of abnegation of our president, that good man always ready to serve in the line of fire against Cuba, Argentina, or whatever target the commanders fancy? Who knows?

The fact is that Bush said: "We must lend a hand." And immediately after, the international credit organizations, who serve the same function as the parrot on the pirate's shoulder, said exactly the same thing.

And so our legislators met, racing the clock, and by a majority—a majority deaf to any debate—they voted in a heartbeat for a law that would administer the coup de grace to Uruguay's state bank. The law was well founded: it was "pass the law or kiss the money good-bye."

So people craned their the necks skyward searching for airplanes. The dollars didn't travel by plane, but they got there all the same. The U.S. ambassador, who doesn't speak a word of Spanish, said in Spanish, with one mistake: "mil quinientos millones de dolares"—1.5 billion tribulations. His error revealed the truth.

The countries of Latin America won independence mortgaged to the bank of Britain. With time, we changed creditors. And now we owe much more. The more we pay, the more we owe; and the more we owe, the less we decide. Held hostage by foreign banks, we cannot even breathe without permission. Latin Americans live to pay the so-called "debt service"—service of a debt that multiplies like rabbits.

The debt grows by four dollars for every dollar we receive, yet we celebrate each new dollar as if it were a miracle. As if the noose tightening about our necks could serve to raise us from the bottom of the well.

For four years, Uruguay country, or a country that renounced being a country to enter the globalized world through the service entrance. A lovely way to integrate into the market, while disintegrating. The banks go bust while the bankers line their pockets. The government, governed, pretends to govern. Closed factories, abandoned fields; we produce beggars and police. And emigrants. In the dead of winter, all night long, people line up in the streets waiting for passports. The young leave for Spain, Italy, wherever they can, following the itinerary of their grandparents—in reverse.

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Savings are the basis of the fortune of the bankers that usurp them. This movie house has been showing the same picture for years and years: banks emptied out by their owners, unpayable debts transferred to the entire society. Sheltered by the secrecy of banking, the magicians of finance disappear. The military dictatorship disappeared like money. Their successful racket leaves hordes of people with their savings ripped off, swindles and as many employees in uncertainty, and a huge public debt that covers the fraud of a few.

Private banks, which were deserving of so many million-dollar bailouts, loan money to those who already have it and not to those who need it, growing more and more divorced from production and work—or what little production and work there still is. Yet this mind-blowing industry was just compensated by the new law that decreed the death of the state bank.

If things go on like this, sooner than later the state companies may end up as our only negotiable currency as the unpayable foreign debt comes due. It will be something like the execution of the state, before a firing squad of its creditors. And it won't matter much then what the people think—the people, who in a plebiscite ten years ago voted 70 percent against privatizations.

More state, less state, almost no state at all? A state reduced to the functions of vigilance and punishment. Punishment of whom?

The international financial dictatorship requires the dismantling of the state, but only the elimination of public oversight could explain the scandalous impunity with which certain Uruguayan banks were plundered. "The supervisors are not seers," said a deputy of the ruling party as justification. The ultimate responsibility for bank oversight lay with a brother-in-law of the president.

But most eloquent was the spectacular collapse of a few giant American companies. In the end, it happens in the country that imposes "deregulation" on other countries, or, to put it another way: It imposes the obligation to shut one's eyes to the perks and pecadillos of the world of business. The US has produced the most colossal bankruptcy in history, confirmation that "deregulation" leaves one free to lie and steal on a gigantic scale. Enron, WorldCom, and other corporations could easily carry out their stupendous heists, passing off losses as earnings and making little accounting mistakes to the tune of billions of dollars.

The means recently announced by President Bush to straighten out errant executives and their accomplices are quite dangerous. If they are really applied, and retroactively, he and almost all of his cabinet will end up in prison.

How much longer will Latin American countries keep taking orders from the market as if it were their destiny? How much longer will we continue begging lined up with the other supplicants? When will we finally convince ourselves that indignity doesn't pay? Why do we not forge a common front to defend our prices, if we know we are being divided to be conquered and ruled. Why do we not join together against this usurious debt? What power will the noose have if it can't find the neck?

Eduardo Galeano, a Uruguayan journalist, is the author of "Memory of Fire" and "The Open Veins of Latin America." This article is published with the permission of IPS Columnist Service.
for, so he was taken to the pharmacy where he spent a day's pay on a bottle of medicine he couldn't even read. He had been taking the pills since the night before, but his foot was more swollen than before, and the wound was colored purple and yellow. I spent the next ten minutes assuring the man things would be ok while my teammate made phone calls to the hospital and to Oak Orchard Health Clinic in Brockport, trying to find out what could be done. Finally she determined that the man had been prescribed an antibiotic that took three days to take effect. Unfortunately, Oak Orchard could do nothing to offset the cost of the medicine, and the recently established migrant health program in Niagara Falls was unreachable.

At the same camp I had the opportunity to interview and then talk more informally with a Mixtec man from Guerrero, Mexico (many workers in Niagara and Orleans counties spoke more Mixteco than Spanish). His cousin was a former farmworker with whom another team of interviewers had worked in the Brockport area. In 1992 this man came to Albion from Mexico under contract with the Garcias. (According to the Buffalo News (June 21, 2002) Maria Garcia and five family members were recently arraigned on charges of forced labor, illegal and unsafe transportation, and green card and Social Security fraud. A federal grand jury indicted them under the 2000 Trafficking and Violence Prevention Act.) Over the years he worked on a series of farms where wages were bad and the living conditions even worse. He was happy to be working on this farm where they pay was decent and the housing was new and clean. Indeed, this camp was in the top ten percent of labor housing we saw. Six men shared four large bedrooms, a living room with cable TV, a kitchen with two refrigerators, and laundry room. The only thing they lacked, he said with a grin, is air conditioning.

At an onion farm in Orange County, five men live in a trailer behind the packinghouse. They have no vehicle and live far away from other farms, so they were happy to have visitors and we talked at length. All of them cross illegally from Mexico every year, at trip that costs $2000. When we arrived, they were hoeing their garden, a two-acre plot of black dirt. Besides herbs, tomatoes, radishes, and other vegetables for home consumption, they were growing over an acre of watermelons for sale, which bring in a little extra cash.

Many farmworkers have huertas (garden plots) where they grow vegetables, herbs, and corn to supplement their diets and pocketbooks. Some growers grant their workers an acre or two. Small gardens outside of houses and apartments often distinguished them as home to farmworkers. Even after a long day in the fields, these Mexican and Central American immigrants will spend time tending their gardens, the only plants they can call their own.

While watching a Sunday afternoon soccer tournament near Brockport, we got talking with two cousins. They described crossing the border, crawling through dank tunnels and then through the desert, which was hot during the day and freezing at night. After years of crossing illegally, one of the cousins finally decided to apply for permanent residency in the United States. He cannot return to Mexico until his papers are processed, or else he loses all of the time he's accumulated so far. He might not go home for Christmas this year, because he knows he won't get back in to the US.
The cousins also told us that it is hard when they return to Mexico. They’re used to the comforts of life in the US now, and they don’t fit in back home. The last time they were home they left in the middle of the night to avoid a painful and shameful goodbye; they just couldn’t stand small-town life anymore.

One berry farm in Oswego County is not a pleasant place to work, let alone live. There are no toilets or handwashing facilities in the fields, even though they are harvesting strawberries, which go unwashed directly to market. The labor camp could house up to a dozen workers, but only three men are living there. A man in his sixties met us in front of one of the trailers, and apologized for the mess before inviting us in. The trailer was in pretty bad condition. He was the only worker around; one man had drank a few beers and passed out, the other had gone to the store. Usually this man’s wife comes with him, but this year she stayed in Mexico due to poor health. Maybe the trailer was in such dismal shape because of her absence.

Some of the farm’s workers live forty-five minutes away in the city of Oswego. Despite the long commute, they would rather live in their own apartment than on the farm, because the owner deducts too much for rent in those awful trailers.

The third housing situation was the saddest yet. In May two parents (the mother was Mexican and the father was Guatemalan) and their 9-year-old son traveled to New York State from Arizona in hopes of finding farm work. After sleeping for a number of days in their car, they ended up on the doorstep of the Catholic deacon in Fulton. The Deacon found them a job at the berry farm, but they couldn’t live in the labor camp there. Instead, they were renting a trailer with broken windows at a mosquito-filled campground ten minutes up the road. The trailer had no toilet or running water, so they hauled water from a few hundred yards away, and used the bathroom in the camp house. The boy, who was perfectly bilingual, had nothing to do all day when his parents were at work. He was excited about going to summer school at the nearest ABCD center, an hour away in Red Creek.

Passing through the fields one afternoon in the health clinic outreach van, we stopped to talk to two Guatemalan men driving tractors. The young man I interviewed was 24; he came to the United States when he was 17. He spoke as much English as Spanish, and we switched back and forth between the two languages. He has never been back to Guatemala, and says he has no hope of returning.

Some health programs are severely understaffed, and funding is being cut. One evening at the Oswego County Health Clinic I was asked to help a young Guatemalan man fill out a medical history form. The form was in Spanish, but he could not read or write, so I asked him questions and filled in the answers. He was only twenty, two years my junior, and many of the questions made us both blush and look away. “Have you had sexual intercourse in the last six months?” “Did you use a condom?” “Are you satisfied with your sexual activity?” He was there for an ear infection! When we saw each other on a nearby farm the next day, we greeted each other, and I asked him if he could hear better now. I did not ask him about his love life.

At a farm near East Bloomfield we were welcomed into a clean, carpeted trailer that smelled of cooking food. This was home to six Guatemalans: three young men and a middle-aged
continued from previous page
couple with their daughter. The girl was severely disabled; she must have been five or six years old, but was tiny, and sat rocking back and forth in a baby walker. She needed close supervision; I wondered who watched her during the day when her parents were working.

After finishing the surveys we sat and talked for over half an hour. Come to find out, the three younger men were from a village outside of Tacaná, San Marcos. They knew many members of the family I stayed with last February in the village of Cunilaj. The older man was from Cabricán, a Mame town in the northermost section of Quetzaltenango, where I volunteered for three weeks in a primary school when I was fifteen. He had not returned in over five years, but I was there only a few months ago, so I shared news about the new paved roads and the addition to the school. We were all beaming with excitement; I can only imagine what it is like for a gringa to show up speaking Spanish and knowing the latest gossip from the Guatemalan highlands. Before leaving we exchanged addresses, and I told them to contact me if they needed anything.

Continued from page 10
don’t care. Some people eat lunch without washing the pesticides off their hands. Other people wash their hands at the drinking cooler, leaving pesticide residues on the button. Then we drink that water.”

The health effects of pesticides and other agrochemicals on farmworkers range from skin rashes, to genital infections, to chronic respiratory illnesses. Supporters of organic agriculture have long argued that conventional farming hurts the environment and consumers, yet they have failed to include farmworkers in the equation. Farmworker advocates and supporters of organic agriculture need to join in an effort to reduce and/or eliminate the use of toxic chemicals in agriculture.

Whether through sanitation or pesticides, farmworkers and consumers are closely connected. If consumers are worried about E-coli outbreaks in fresh strawberries, they should also support workers’ access to sanitary facilities. If consumers want food free of chemicals, they should advocate on behalf of workers exposed to pesticides in the fields.
In moments
of the most gripping fear
and the densest silence
to speak up
is the most trusted obligation
of intellectuals
in every country,
and if they would impose
silence upon us
we must speak
out loud,
toll like a church bell,
even with the risk of falling
into the dark sea
from which no one
rises
but instead becomes
a pure essence
of ashes
in a multiple remembrance.
But if one falls
for a love which
is greater than
all the cathedrals together
with all the planets,
if one falls
it's because someone
had to fall,
so that hope itself
does not fall.
Someone always has to fall
in a place
where dignity and freedom
and an afternoon meal
were so far away
from the quotidian and simple
life of men
that it was necessary
to maintain the height
of grateful gestures
the hoarse and rugged trajectory
of anger
definitively
so as not to fall
to the level of that vile worm
which prides stumbling
about every where.
No doubt about it.
Before the fear
and the silence,
before the fierce repression
of those who deeply
fear
the hurricane of the dawn
the intellectual
should remember
that if he flees
his sharp destiny
that if he is silenced
stumbling dog like
on the feet of his fear
something of his country
is hushed and shunned
stumbling along with him.
And that is horribly
bitter for a people
who cannot
renounce the struggle
because they cannot renounce
victory.
Intellectuals
of my harsh country
I invite you to struggle,
to the fearless proclamation
of our sufferings
our graceful and thundering
cry
of the battles which continue
so that freedom
will not appear in mourning
darker than ever
among us!

by Otto Rene Castillo

*Otto Rene Castillo was a Guatema-
lan revolutionary, a guerilla fighter,
and a poet. Following the 1954 CIA-
sponsored coup that overthrew the
democratic Arbenz government,
Castillo went into exile. Upon later
returning to Guatemala, he secretly
and joined one of the armed guerilla
movements in the Zacapa mountains.
In 1967, at age 31, Castillo and other
revolutionary fighters were captured;
he, along with his comrades and
some local campesinos, were brutally
tortured and then burned alive.
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