CUSLAR Newsletter
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I WANT OUT

The Committee on U.S. - Latin American Relations
As I am preparing this edition of the CUSLAR newsletter, many in our country are contemplating what will happen if/when our administration decides to go to war with Iraq (not to mention the fact that we have been consistently bombing Iraq for over a decade already). It is a terrifying prospect, I admit, whose ramifications I cannot fully imagine. However, what I find infinitely more frightening than this is our collective ability to forget all of the other problems in our country and our world. Whatever happened to Enron and Worldcom? How about the ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor right here in the world’s most prosperous nation? What about the horrifying rate of prison expansion? What about the environment? Not to mention all of the other wars our government is fighting. What happened to Afghanistan? Israel and Palestine? How about Colombia? How many Americans can find Colombia on a map, much less tell you that our government is financing their “civil” war? What is going to happen in Venezuela, Argentina, Brazil, and Chiapas in the next few months? And how many of us will be paying attention?

Last night I watched Michael Moore’s new film, Bowling for Colombine. And what struck me most was the way in which he described America’s culture of fear. We obsessively lock our doors to keep unknown perpetrators out. We send our mail to laboratories and order gas masks to protect ourselves from deadly Anthrax. We fear flying, West Nile virus, and killer bees. We fear the threat of “evil-doers” of the world who live halfway around the globe and are concocting plans for our destruction. We fear each other. We fear what we are supposed to fear, and forget the rest.

But I’m tired of this incessant circle of fear and violence. I say, let us not live in fear. Let us not be distracted. Every few years we get fed a new story, but the reality remains the same. Another enemy to fear. Another war to fight. But it really all boils down to the same thing.

We know how the story has played out in Latin America. We’ve always been fighting a war there. It used to be a war on Communism. Then it was a War on Drugs. Now it is a War on Terrorism. And in 10 or 20 years it will be called something else, but it will still be a war. Because Latin America will still have resources that we want. And isn’t that what this is all about? We only fight wars for oil. For timber. For water. For natural gas. For access to these resources. And our government consistently scares us into going to war with them.

So today I am starting a “No Fear” campaign. Because I refuse to blindly fear whatever we’re told to fear this week in order to get us to blindly follow our leaders to yet another war. Let’s empower ourselves so that we do not have to live in fear of every illusive enemy our government tells us about.

No Fear.
No War.
No Blood for Oil.
Not In My Name.
Not Now.
Not Ever.
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Lula takes Presidency in Brazil

SAO PAULO, Brazil — Former union boss Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva won Brazil’s presidential election runoff by a landslide on October 27th, marking a historic shift to the left in Latin America’s largest country.

Ruling party candidate Jose Serra conceded defeat, hours after Mr. Lula da Silva’s Workers Party had declared its candidate the winner. With 95 percent of the vote counted, Mr. Lula da Silva — a former shoe shine boy who rose to become the head of a labor union — had 61.5 percent to Mr. Serra’s 38.5 percent, the government’s Supreme Electoral Tribunal announced. Thousands of Lula da Silva supporters gathered in the streets of Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, waving his party’s red flag in celebration.

Mr. Lula da Silva, popularly known as Lula, just missed a victory in the first-round election on Oct. 6, forcing a runoff against Mr. Serra.

Brazil has never elected a leftist president. Its last leftist leader was Joao Goulart, a vice president who assumed power in 1961 when the centrist president resigned. Mr. Goulart served 2½ years and was deposed by a right-wing military coup.

Lula first ran for president in 1989 as the candidate of the Workers Party, urging landless farm workers to invade private property and calling for a default on Brazil’s foreign debt, which now stands at $230 billion. However, in the three subsequent presidential campaigns, Mr. Lula da Silva moderated his radical tone.

Mr. Lula da Silva has criticized current President Fernando Henrique Cardoso’s unbridled free-market policies but is believed to be considering several fiscal conservatives as members of his economic team.

Latin American “Axis of Evil”

An influential lawmaker has called on President George W. Bush to support the ouster of left-wing Venezuelan strongman Hugo Chavez, warning of the formation of a potential “Axis of Evil” in the Americas. Just days before Brazilians elected radical populist Lula da Silva as their president on Oct. 27, House International Relations Committee Chairman Henry Hyde (R-Ill.) sent President Bush a powerfully phrased letter warning that a trium-
The action at Bechtel, one of the world’s largest construction companies, coincided with massive demonstrations in Quito, Ecuador as civil society groups tried to shut down the gathering of world leaders scheduled to meet there from October 28 to November 1 to hammer out details of the FTAA text. The FTAA is a “free trade” agreement that would expand the reach of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to 34 countries across South and North America and the Caribbean (except Cuba). It would expand the rights granted to corporations through NAFTA, making it the largest free trade zone in the world and the most far-reaching trade and investment agreement ever signed.

150,000 March in El Salvador against Privatization
The Salvadoran government illegally fired Alirio Romero, Secretary-General of the STSEL electricity workers union, and four other union activists. In response, three union activists began an indefinite hunger strike. They are camped out in front of a government building, with permanent support from unions and organizations in the Salvadoran social movement. Meanwhile, 150,000 doctors, healthcare workers, patients and their supporters marched today in opposition to the planned privatization of health care in El Salvador.

With the beginning of official negotiations for the CAFTA free trade agreement between the US and Central America just around the corner Salvadoran President Francisco Flores seeks to privatize health care and other basic services, such as electricity. Flores’ privatization plan would allow multinational corporations, like HMO’s from the United States, to “invest” in public health care...
and leech public resources away from the ISSS, leaving the public hospitals without any funding. Union leaders refer to the plan as "Pay or Die," as it would make health care a luxury for the privileged few with the capacity to pay for it.

Faced with such a generalized popular uprising, the right-wing government has fallen back on repression. Police have threatened and harassed marches and demonstrations, and in one incident violently dragged 15 STISSS workers by their hair out of a hospital that the union had taken over. A death squad calling itself the "Extermination Commandos" has targeted some 35 doctors and their families with anonymous death threats. The government is illegally withholding salaries from striking workers, trying to starve them back to work. More than 30 ISSS workers have already been fired and 342 more doctors could now be fired for participating in the strike.

Recent Attacks in Guatemala

In response to increasing human rights attacks in recent months, NISGUA coordinated a public campaign involving almost 70 organizations in the US, Europe, Mexico, and Canada. They placed an ad in Prensa Libre, a leading Guatemalan newspaper, to express their profound concern about the increasingly violent environment facing human rights activists in Guatemala.

In the weeks preceding the ad, there had been a drastic increase in blatant attacks and threats to human rights worker. These include the assassination of Guillermo Ovalle of the Rigoberta Menchu Foundation, persecution against members of the forensic anthropologist teams carrying out scientific work in the search for and exhumation of clandestine cemeteries, the kidnapping and beating of Domingo Yaxon Guarcax of the National Coordination of Guatemalan Widows, threats against Bishop Alvaro Ramazzini and other priests that labor in areas heavily affected by the internal armed conflict and the persistent agrarian crisis, and threats against members of the Association for the Integral Development of Victims of Violence in the Verapaces Maya Achi, including Jesus Tecu and another key witness in the genocide cases against Generals Lucas Garcia and Rios Montt.

The ad reiterated NISGUA's full support for the peace process in Guatemala and urged the Guatemalan state authorities to take an active role in investigating human rights crimes and to combat illegally armed groups and all cells of power that threaten citizens' right to life, dignity, work, and development.
Sí a la Vida, No al ALCA
by Meaghan Sheehan

On October 31, 2002 thousands of people from across the Americas converged in Quito, Ecuador. They were not there to celebrate the Dia de Musica Criolla — rather the men and women, young people, elderly, and campesinos representing each country in Latin America, joined in the common goal of demonstrating their opinion to oppose the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). Delegates from the 34 countries of the Western Hemisphere, (excluding Cuba) gathered in Quito to secretly negotiate the free trade agreement, which is modeled on NAFTA and an expansion of the plan to increase privatization and deregulation.

U.S. Trade Representative Robert Zoellick described the U.S. interest in Latin America through CAFTA and the FTAA as part of a bigger picture, “to advance U.S. objectives for the multilateral negotiations currently underway in the World Trade Organization” (8/22/02 letter to Congress). “We have no way to live, and the FTAA will only make it worse. When we complain, the U.S. government calls us terrorists. We are not threatening anything, but we are hungry and tired and things have to change,” said Leonidas Iza, the President of the CONAIE (the Ecuadorian indigenous federation).

The blatant U.S. imperialism exercised in the FTAA will affect the people in Latin America by making colonies out of their countries, vulnerable to exploitation by the United States and corporate interests. Many North Americans are also concerned about the impending disaster if the FTAA is approved, which the U.S. hopes to achieve by January 2005.

Modeled after the World Trade Organizations’ General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), the FTAA will include commitments to “liberalize” trade in services such as education, health care, environmental services (which can include access to water!), energy, and postal services. Examples: Privatization of public schools and prisons (like in the U.S.) which would open the door to greater corporate control, corruption and the cutting of critical corners (such as medical care for inmates or upkeep of safe school facilities) to increase profits; and privatization of postal services by transferring U.S. Postal Service functions to a few delivery companies like FedEx, which

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Shock to the System: a growing indigenous and people's movement in Bolivia

by Linda Farthing and Ben Kohl

First published by In These Times, September 16, 2002 issue; www.inthesetimes.com

On June 30 indigenous leader Evo Morales won significant support in presidential elections for the first time, rattling the Bolivian establishment and the United States. It shouldn't be so much of a surprise: the second place finish for Evo Morales, a leader of the powerful coca growers union, is a rejection of both World Bank-led economic policies and the U.S.-financed War on Drugs that has been brewing for some time.

With almost 21 percent of the vote, Morales received just 1.5 percent fewer votes than mining entrepreneur and former President Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada (or 'Goni'). Sanchez de Lozada formed a weak coalition to win the congressional runoff, capturing the presidency on August 6th.

A number of factors contributed to Morales' surprising showing at the polls. Since 1998, under intense U.S. pressure, more than 80 percent of the coca that had been the country's most valuable agricultural product has been eradicated. Bolivia's success has led the United States to consider the country its most successful drug control program in the Andes. But a severe economic downturn has resulted, and promised U.S. aid to offset the effects of eradication has been slow in coming.

Consequently, active anti-U.S. sentiment now joins frustration with previous democratically elected governments, which have contributed to establishing Bolivia as one of the most corrupt countries in the world. Income levels have stagnated for the past 20 years, and the economic collapse of Argentina has hit the country particularly hard since January, remittances from an estimated 1.5 million Bolivians residing there have dropped sharply.

The 2001 victory against privatization of the city of Cochabamba's municipal water supply put Bolivia on the anti-globalization map. The "water wars," an uprising of a broad coalition of citizen groups, led to a state of siege and the subsequent expulsion of an international consortium, led by the U.S. firm Bechtel, now suing the Bolivian government for $25
million for breach of contract. The popular victory fueled nationalist sentiment against neoliberal economic policies and contributed to a wave of protests by tropical coca growers and indigenous peasants, who repeatedly blocked national highways in 2000 and 2001.

This nationalist, anti-neoliberal sentiment undermined support for Sanchez de Lozada, who as Minister of Planning was a principal architect of the 1985 application of structural adjustment policies, which privatized state enterprises, led to the firing of tens of thousands of public workers, and severely reduced social spending. The successful implementation of structural adjustment in Bolivia made the country a model for development policies later applied around the world.

A decade later, during his first administration, Sanchez de Lozada pushed through the partial sale of the country's largest state-owned firms to multinational capital. Before privatization, income from oil and gas production provided almost 50 percent of government revenue, and its loss has contributed to the ongoing financial crisis.

But perhaps U.S. ambassador Manuel Rocha gave Morales the biggest push at the polls. In a highly publicized announcement just days before the election, Rocha promised to withdraw all U.S. aid if Morales became president. Popular anger at this patent meddling in the country's democratic process boosted Morales' support significantly: Bolivian analysts estimate that the 'Rocha effect' contributed as much as five percent to Morales' final tally. Since the election, the press has dryly referred to Rocha as Morales' campaign manager.

The growing role of indigenous people in local government also contributed to Morales' success. In 1995, Sanchez de Lozada's government introduced a decentralization scheme that increased local participation in planning, while successfully fragmenting opposition to neoliberal policies and refocusing attention on the local level. As a result, more of the rural population, which make up almost half of the country, voted for indigenous leaders rather than the usual mestizo ('mixed') urban populists who have successfully manipulated indigenous voters for decades.

This display of electoral power - almost a third of the 157 members of the Congress and Senate are now indigenous - has significant implications for social movements throughout South America. Over the past 20 years, political decentralization programs from Mexico to Chile have to varying degrees allowed for increased grassroots participation in local government. At the same time, economic crises have created unrest and resentment at policies favoring international capital and reduced social spending.

The growing frustration with the status quo has been expressed through the election of progressives in Chile and Peru as well as Morales' success in Bolivia. Both Brazil, where the Workers' Party currently leads at the polls, and Ecuador, where an indigenous candidate is showing growing support, have presidential elections scheduled for October.

The challenge for these new political forces will be to develop innovative policies - whether in government or in opposition - capable of addressing the needs of the poor majority in an increasingly global economic setting.
In December of last year (2001), Argentina's economic downturn of the previous three years became an economic and political crisis, as Argentina stood in default on its huge loans and the fixed convertibility of the peso equal to the dollar was released. Hundreds of thousands took to the streets in protest, the presidency changed hands numerous times, and the banks and the IMF stood implicated by many. The reason why this formal "model of the neoliberal success story" is currently suffering are of course very complex, and the peoples' responses are equally complex and interesting. Out of this crisis blossomed social organizations galore, united under the slogan "Que se vayan todos" which is a variably interpreted/general expression of the need to get rid of all the current politicians and start over. At this time, neighborhood assemblies were born in which neighbors got together to organize themselves locally, and continue to do so, creating local soup kitchens, medical clinics, and community spaces. The unemployment rate is around 25% and the poverty rate right at 50% of the population of the country. Having little recourse, many unemployed workers have formed movements to fight for jobs and/or unemployment benefits. One of these movements is that of the piqueteros, who cut off major transit routes in order to expedite actions.

In Argentina, there are between 8 and 10 thousand jobs recovered by the workers through self-management of factories that have or were about to go bankrupt from the government to help their suffering families.

Another response to the difficult economic situation, and perhaps one of the most notable activities in this country of social movements and organization is the "taking" by the workers of closing or bankrupt factories. To better explain this phenomenon of fabricas tomadas (taken factories), I'll take an example from the many: the Brukman Factory. Brukman is located in Buenos Aires and prior to the crisis in December, produced suits for Christian Dior. As the 3 year eco
nomic crisis grew worse in 2001; the workers were paid less and less, and during the months leading up to December, were collecting only 5 pesos per week, while minimum wage is around 400 pesos per month. In December, the workers (around 250) chose a delegation to speak with the owners, asking for 100 pesos per week and the payment of past wages since the 5 pesos weekly doesn’t even cover basic transportation costs. The owners agreed to pay and left ‘to go to the bank.’ The workers waited. And waited. And waited. They had limited options: they could leave and search for another job (in a country with 25% unemployment rate and really no available jobs), or they could take their future into their own hands. They soon decided to maintain their position in the factory, night and day, and to not only continue production, but to also sell their products (although now illegal). They had taken the bankrupt factory from the owners and for almost a year now have managed it through commissions elected from and by the workers themselves. The factory continues functioning and now all the workers receive equal wages, no matter what their jobs, splitting the factory’s income equally amongst themselves and a few sick or retired workers.

In Argentina, there are between 8 and 10 thousand jobs recovered by the workers through self-management of factories that have or were about to go bankrupt, similar to the case of Brukman. Most face many legal problems in that, due to Argentina’s bankruptcy laws, workers are not able to expropriate the machinery nor factory itself, although they are responsible for paying the large debts left behind by the owners (the Argentine Bankruptcy laws grossly over-favor the owners and the workers nationwide are joining together to demand a change in the laws).

Looking through a Marxist perspective, the reappropriation of the means of production from the owners into the hands of the workers is an incredible step. From there the taken or recovered factories fall into two models: 1. Those workers that want their factory to be a cooperative owned and run by the workers, and 2. Those that want the state to take ownership of the factory (and its debt), but let the workers run the factory. Where it goes from here is an exciting and hopefully fruitful transformation. The fabricas tomadas have received types of support and solidarity from all parts of Argentina, and the workers have been transformed from every day minimum-wage factory workers into the leaders of a new national social movement: heroes of economic change and the empowerment of the worker.

Lindsey Saunders is a Cornell Student studying abroad this semester in Buenos Aires, Argentina.
What's the Buzz on Fair Trade Coffee?

by Daniel Fireside

You might wonder, what is fair trade coffee, and why should I care about it?

Coffee may be a small part of your budget, but the price of coffee is a life and death matter for the 25 million people around the globe who grow it for a living, as well as the millions more that benefit from the coffee economy. In fact, coffee is the second most valuable traded commodity in the world (oil is number one). Coffee revenue makes up a significant share of economic activity in dozens of the world's poorest countries. Because the best coffee needs to be grown in mountainous regions and picked by hand, peasant farmers can be as efficient as large plantations. As a result, coffee is a popular cash crop for small farmers, who currently produce about half of the world's supply.

Right now the coffee market is in one of its worst crises in history. The world price for green (unroasted) coffee was over $4 a pound in 1997. For the last few years the price has been stuck at about 50 cents a pound, well below the cost of production. The result has been catastrophic for the small peasant farmers and their families, and devastating for the economies of the producer nations.

Desperate Colombian coffee farmers are switching to a different addictive plant stimulant, coca (the raw material for cocaine), putting themselves in the crosshairs of the multibillion dollar US war on drugs. The fragile economies of coffee dependent nations in Africa, including the war-ravaged nations of Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and Ethiopia, are on the point of collapse.

The countries of Central America have lost over $4 billion in the last two years alone due to the price drop. In Guatemala, where I recently spent four months conducting research, I saw that many rural villages had been completely abandoned by all working age men. Coffee prices had fallen so low that it wasn't worth it to harvest their crops, and the coastal plantations were no longer hiring seasonal labor. Desperate for cash, the men have moved to overcrowded urban shantytowns, or set out on a perilous, and often deadly, journey across the US border.

The human cost of the coffee crisis is quickly mounting. Coffee dependent regions like Central America, where residents still struggle to cope with the legacies of U.S. sponsored civil wars and waves of natural disasters, are ill equipped to deal with the collapsing coffee market. Malnutrition is on the rise throughout rural Guatemala. In Nicaragua and

Is your coffee fair? If you bought it at Cornell, odds are it's not.
Honduras the UN has called for international donations to combat outbreaks of famine and starvation. In the coffee growing regions of Guatemala, farmers told me that they had to pull their daughters and sons out of school in order to save on fees and perhaps add a few pennies to the family income.

Some argue that the recent price collapse is due to increased production by Brazil and Vietnam, helped by the generous support of international development banks. Others point to Phillip Morris (Maxwell House), Proctor and Gamble (Folgers), Nestle (Nescafe), and Sara Lee (Douwe Egberts – Cornell's supplier until recently). These four companies control over 80 percent of all coffee consumed in the United States, and about 60 percent of coffee around the globe. While wholesale prices have plummeted by 80 percent in the past five years, retail prices have fallen less than 20 percent. The price difference has gone straight into the pockets of the giant coffee companies.

According to the International Coffee Organization, coffee revenues to producing nations have dropped from $11 billion in 1990 to $5.5 billion today. At the same time, coffee revenues to consuming nations have jumped from $30 billion to over $70 billion in the same period.

The big coffee companies say that the market will bring back a balance between supply and demand and the price will go back up. They remain unconcerned that poor farmers are paying the billions of dollars the companies are reaping in windfall profits. Decades of economic development are being undone.
while the coffee crisis plays itself out.

Rather than wait for a market fix, concerned coffee roasters and consumers are pushing their own remedy: fair trade.

What is fair trade coffee? Fair trade coffee got its start in Europe in the 1970s as a way to support progressive cooperatives in Central America and Mexico. With the help of international monitoring organizations and growing consumer demand for ethically traded products, the fair trade movement grown into a market worth over $400 million a year, that includes basic goods like honey, cocoa, tea, bananas, and other products.

A small farmer in the conventional market sells hundred pound bags of unprocessed coffee cherries for whatever a local buyer (known as “coyotes”) will pay. The coffee will change hands as many as twenty times before it reaches consumers as roasted beans. For what ends up being a $10 bag of coffee, the small farmer will get as little as 10 cents. Turned into 40 cups of coffee at $1.00 per cup, this means that the farmer is getting about .0025 percent of the value of the coffee.

Under fair trade rules, a coffee roaster has to guarantee a minimum price of $1.26/lb for green coffee, and pay an extra $0.15/lb premium if the coffee is certified organic. (Nearly all fair trade coffee is organic. However, only a small percentage of organic coffee is fairly traded.) This price represents a living wage to farmers, reflecting not just the costs of production, but also the expenses of shelter, food, and education. Fair trade roasters pay 5 cents above the global price if it rises above the fair trade minimum. Roasters must also sign long term contracts to discourage speculation and provide credit to farmers to get them through the growing season.

To sell to the fair trade market, farmers must belong to a cooperative that abides by democratic principals and promotes sustainable farming techniques. All of the fair trade coops I visited this summer received training on organic farming techniques and learned how to grow coffee in a way that promotes economic and biological diversity.

Fair trade is definitely living up to its promise in the coffee growing regions I visited. Farmers in San Juan La Laguna, a small indigenous village on the shores of Guatemala’s beautiful Lake Atitlan, have been selling all of their coffee to a fair trade roaster in California for the past ten years. Benjamin Chojobotillo, the president of the local coop proudly showed me the concrete houses that the farmers built, the coffee mill that allowed members to keep more of their profits, and the composting units that turned coffee waste into rich organic fertilizer instead of ground water pollutants. “We take great pride in our coffee plants,” Benjamin told me under the verdant coffee canopy near his home. “Selling to the fair trade market means we get a just price that sustains our way of life.”

Unfortunately, most fair trade farmers don’t do as well. “The problem is that
the fair trade market is just too small,” explained Gerardo de Leon, the manager of FEDECOAGUA, a cooperative umbrella group that represents over 30,000 farmers in Guatemala. “We’d gladly sell all our coffee to the fair trade market, but because of low demand we can only sell about 20 percent there. The rest we sell on the conventional market at the best price we can get. We spread the fair trade benefit to all the farmers.”

I asked Gerardo what the most important thing that US consumers could do to help coffee farmers. Without hesitation he replied:

“Expand the market for fair trade coffee.”

Although consumer awareness about coffee is steadily growing, certified fair trade coffee is barely a blip on the global radar screen. In Europe, where fair trade coffee is easily found on supermarket shelves and coffee shops, about two percent of coffee is fair trade. In the US, the number is far from reaching even one percent.

This is a great opportunity to make a difference right here in Ithaca. According to university officials, Cornell dining establishments serve up over one million cups of coffee each year. If this coffee was traded fairly, the direct impact on farmers’ lives would be enormous. In response to requests from student activists, the university agreed to serve fair trade coffee as an option in several Cornell Dining-run cafés. Flavored and decaf coffee is still unfair, as is all the coffee in dining halls and department-run cafés, like the Green Dragon and Temple of Zeus.

A collective of student activists called Fair Trade Cornell is currently lobbying Cornell Dining to guarantee that all of its coffee will be certified fair trade by Earth Day, 2003. It’s an ambitious goal. Although student activists are working on this issue across the country, no other university has gone 100 percent fair trade (Brown is getting close).

Cost and quality are not an issue. Although fair trade farmers who grow our coffee are getting a fair price. It’s up to concerned Cornell coffee drinkers to make it happen.

Contacts:
Fair Trade Cornell: Andres Blanco: mab59@cornell.edu
Cornell Dining: William McNamara: wmm37@cornell.edu
Seattle’s Best Coffee: Carol Rogalski: CRogalski@afce.com
Amnesty for Undocumented Mexicans in the U.S.?
by Rebecca Bixby

"Who's the Illegal Alien? PILGRIM? P?" (Chicano artwork)

This fall, a continuous flame is being carried from la Basílica de Guadalupe in Mexico City, Mexico, to St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City, USA, on foot.

The 3,300 mile journey is sponsored by the Tepeyac Association, a non-profit grouping of 40 community-based organizations in New York City. More than 2,000 runners from Mexico and the United States will participate in la Carrera Antorcha Guadalupana bearing a flaming torch, a symbolic expression of solidarity across state lines. The run has already passed through Matamoros, Tamaulipas, across the border and into Brownsville, Texas, and is on its way North with a planned stop at the White House in Washington, DC on December 7th. The route is perhaps a familiar one to many immigrants and Mexican migrant workers who have traveled North from their hometowns in Mexico. For decades now, there has been a romanticization of the journey North from Mexico at the same time that many journeyers experience it as a way of life, and often the sole option for economic survival. That this particular journey is being billed as a "pilgrimage", rather than what can be a grueling routine, is significant. The word "pilgrimage" is defined in the American Heritage Dictionary as "A journey to a sacred place; a long journey of exalted purpose or moral significance". Most often the term is associated with religious ritual, in this case the run represents both aspects. This

The runners carry banners naming them, "Messengers for the dignity of people divided by the border"

York City is the destination and culmination of the cross-country trek carries more than religious import; it expresses pregnant symbolism through the linking of two nations that have become one for many individuals, workers, employers, families, neighborhoods, organizations and communities, those that are geographically proximate as well as dispersed.

The conceptualization of community pervades contemporary migration debates, the political realm of voting rights for nationals living abroad, and sociological as well as anthropological studies of cross-border relations. The runners carry banners naming them "Mensajeros por la dignidad de un pueblo dividido por la frontera", "Messengers for the dignity of a people divided by the border", which directly challenges spatial and political percep-
tions of community. A widely-used term in academic discourse today is transnationalism, which has been used to refer to the activities of hometown associations such as Tepeyac as well as the mere practice of sending back remittances from the U.S. to family and friends at home, therefore sustaining community across borders. It has also been defined as existence in a ‘social field’ which is inextricably linked to two nations. Without delving too deeply into a discussion over the classifications and distinctions which define “true” transnational activity, we can explore relevant questions the debate raises. How does transnationalism fit into our perception of community, and what are the implications for membership?

Mario Nerja, the Tepeyac Association’s coordinator, states clearly the purpose of the run, “to carry the message of support for a general amnesty and the legalization of more than 9 million undocumented immigrants in the United States. In this way, they would become legal, permanent residents in this country.” (The Brownsville Herald, 11/5/2002). This is a hope-inspiring statement, a call for attention to the civil and political rights of persons who reside in our communities but are not seen as “belonging”. It is also an appeal to the U.S. government, made by Mexican citizens, non-citizens, and perhaps some undocumented themselves, on behalf of their fellow nationals. In this case, as is increasingly the case in an age of free trade, open markets and heavy flow of goods, capital, labor, and even government across borders, that definition of “national”, and the corresponding assumed allegiance to one “nation” is, of course, elusive as well.

However, we find ourselves at a crucial juncture where we can not afford to allow the elusivity of definitions and the intentionally perpetuated apathy toward implications of free trade and economic inequality across our border with Mexico impede efforts toward taking action. The transnational orchestration of a shared political project has the clear objective of obtaining amnesty, which may be increasingly out of reach. On September 5th, 2001, Presidente Vicente Fox and President George Bush met to discuss immigration policy, border relations, and the possibility for an amnesty for the more than 3 million

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people living in the Americas will not be misrepresented! It is the responsibility of each individual to act actively and responsibly to prevent the implementation of the FTAA.

MORE INFORMATION ON THE FTAA AND ALTERNATIVES:

Top Ten Reasons to Oppose the FTAA: http://www.globalexchange.org/ftaa/topten.html

FTAA Myths and Realities: http://stopftaa.org/info/info_factmyth.html

The full text of the Alternatives for the Americas is available at: http://www.globalexchange.org/economy/alternatives/americas/

FTAA Official Website: http://www.ftaa-alca.org/

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could then send postal rates through the roof.

Also, The FTAA provides a potential "back door" for the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) through the negotiations on investments and liberalization of the financial services sector. Modeled on NAFTA's Chapter 11, the USTR says that FTAA will include "investor-to-state" suits. These allow corporations to sue governments in secret "corporate courts" for any act that may indirectly affect their profits, such as the enforcement of public health laws. In other words, the FTAA would provide a hemispheric "regulatory takings" clause that explicitly values corporate profits over human costs and environmental degradation.

The people have organized, sacrificed and stand determined to prevent the disastrous FTAA from being implemented. When lives are on the line, the incentive factor is that much greater. Nearly 800 million

WHAT CAN YOU DO??

1. Contact your elected representatives
2. Raise public awareness: write a letter to the Editor, pass out fliers, hold a teach-in
3. Pass a local anti-FTAA resolution (check out the one Santa Cruz did!) http://www.peoplesconsultation.org/action/resolutions.html
4. Support your local economy
5. Support development alternatives (check out the Alternatives for the Americas: http://www.globalexchange.org/economy/alternatives/americas/
Basta NAFTA y CAFTA
by Mark Engler

Twenty-two years ago, before he was assassinated in the Cathedral of San Salvador after giving mass, Archbishop Oscar Romero sent an urgent letter to U.S. President Jimmy Carter. Appealing to the President’s “religious sentiments and feelings for the defense of human rights,” he demanded: “Stop sending aid to the military here, because they use it only to kill my people.”

Today, those honoring Romero’s memory and carrying forth his mission of combating poverty and injustice in El Salvador have a new message for President George W. Bush: Stop the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) and other neoliberal economic policies that punish the poor.

Earlier this year, President Bush traveled to El Salvador to help “modernize its economy” and to promote pro-corporate “free trade” measures like CAFTA. While Bush has never been known for his mastery of the finer points of geography and foreign affairs, Salvadorans were outraged that he scheduled his visit on March 24, the day normally reserved for commemoration of Romero’s death. In San Salvador thousands marched both to protest Bush’s advocacy of an elite economic agenda and to remember the life of the martyred Archbishop, a stalwart defender of the country’s poorest citizens.

In an article with Miguel Cavada Diez, well-known liberation theologian Jon Sobrino, S.J. wrote that “the visit has produced indignation in many over the incredible insensitivity in the choice of the date. Did not they train in the United States many of the military criminals whom Monsenor Romero denounced? Did not the United States support some of the same groups that produced Romero’s assassins? No one should be surprised that there are protests.”

The bloody war in El Salvador ended ten years ago, with the signing of the Chapultepec Peace Accords. However, policies supported by the United States continue to thwart efforts to promote human rights in that country. Washington DC-based financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank often make cooperation in various “structural adjustment” schemes a necessary condition for countries to receive development assistance. In this case, U.S. economists applauded the conservative Salvadoran governments of the 1990s as they slashed social services and privatized public assets in utilities and telecommunications. While newly-private enterprises raised costs for consumers, the government helped union-busting businesses push wages in the “modernizing” economy toward sweatshop levels. Early this year it decided to cut 10,000 jobs in the public sector, a huge number that will send ripples throughout El Salvador’s small economy.

The same communities most affected during the country’s time of violence have been victimized by this type of economic transformation. According to the United Nations Development Program, El Salvador has among the starkest levels of income inequality in the world — and they are growing. Even self-interested government officials acknowledge that half of the country lives in poverty. Responding to these difficult realities, many Salvadorans rely upon money sent back from relatives in the United States — the same immigrant workers who are consistently mistreated in this country — to make ends meet.

Hector Dada Hirezi, a leading commentator and past member of a transitional national government, recently responded to ruling-party statements suggesting that the safety net created by family remit-
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tances is a positive outgrowth of their economic and political policies. “What kind of economic policy,” he said, “is based on the exodus of the population, rather than creating a country in which the Salvadoran people will want to stay and build their future?”

Early this year, George W. Bush indicated that CAFTA would be a top item in the U.S. economic agenda. This treaty would bring the five countries of Central America into a NAFTA-style free trade agreement with the United States. Such an agreement would weaken national sovereignty, push further privatization, and increase the power of multinational corporations. As barriers to their mobility decrease, these compa-
nies perpetuate a “race to the bottom” — continually threatening to move production to areas with the fewest protections for workers’ rights and the environment. Moreover, a flood of U.S. imports would inhibit local businesses from developing in the country which could provide dignified work for the Salvadoran people.

During his life, Romero was not opposed to aid from the United States. But he insisted that aid genuinely benefit the most needy and not “limit the Salvadoran people’s legitimate right to self-determination.” Unfortunately, the neoliberal economic agenda that George W. Bush is pursuing does the latter — it traps people in the developing world into a plan for development that favors wealthy investors and weakens democratic decision-making. Within the Catholic Church, those working to honor Romero continue to advocate for the Archbishop’s canonization. But religious and lay people alike celebrate his memory as they rebuke President Bush’s version of “modernization” and envision a more just international economy.

Mark Engler, a writer based in New York City, has previously worked with the Arias Foundation for Peace and Human Progress in San José, Costa Rica, as well as the Public Intellectuals Program at Florida Atlantic University. He can be contacted at <engler@eudoramail.com>.
undocumented Mexicans living in the United States. The resulting legislation, bill 245i, which would grant a blanket amnesty to Mexicans without documents residing in the U.S. as of February, 2001, was dropped after September 11, 2001. Now Fox is gearing up for a PR campaign this winter, hoping to press the issue with the United States and also regain the faith of the bi-national Mexican constituency who he now relies on for support. However, Fox may be unable to re-direct the current momentum of U.S. immigration policy, which is focusing on reinforcing border patrols, closed borders, drastically restricting family unification visas, and includes Attorney General John Ashcroft’s call for the arrest and deportations of 300,000 undocumented aliens.

It has been made clear that Mexican migrants, immigrants, and residents in the U.S. play a vital role in both the U.S. and Mexican economies; the U.S. agricultural industry as well as urban employers rely heavily on Mexican labor, and projected remittances to Mexico for 2002 are estimated at $10 billion, a sharp increase from $5.8 billion in 1999 (Migration News, http://migration.ucdavis.edu). Beyond the economic statistics, a community is growing, one that is diverse in composition as well as geographic dispersion, but which finds commonality in the cause for pushing legalization. How long will we fight to be granted a general amnesty every few years? Does this solve the problem? It seems that it only exacerbates tensions and conflict between liberals and conservatives whose nativist sentiments are inflamed at the proposition of legalizing 4 million undocumented Mexicans with one gesture, and seemingly without justification. Nor are liberals satisfied, since an amnesty necessarily has defining parameters of who will be included and excluded, and is often used instrumentally as a political tool rather than a serious solution. The schizophrenic character of the condemnation and simultaneous overlooking of undocumented residents in the U.S. is illustrated in the recent tragic D.C. area sniper investigation. Two undocumented Mexican men in a white van were forcefully arrested and ordered deported while the FBI assured all other undocumented residents their legal status would not be investigated if they were to call in tips. If national security is facilitated by unity, then we are facing a growing threat, and one which needs to be confronted. The continued marginalization of undocumented residents of both Mexican nationality as well as other foreign nationals who live, work, participate in, and belong in what is called the United States is furthering disunity with ominous implications for the immediate future.

Perhaps the fault lies with our concept of transnationalism as something that occurs between states, and not within the boundaries of a single state. In this light, the Carrera Antorch a banner carries a message for all of us, “For the dignity of a people divided...”, not just by one border but the many borders distinguishing resident from non-resident, foreign from national, and member from alien.

Rebecca Bixby is a senior in Sociology and Spanish, studies Mexican migration, and has been involved with advocacy for farmworkers in New York State, also the focus of her thesis.
BIKES FOR CHIAPAS

CUSLAR, LASP, and RIBs, are working together on an exciting new project in 2002-03. Hundreds of bicycles donated by members of the Ithaca area community will be refurbished into good working order by project volunteers with the knowledgeable direction of RIBs staff (and the well supplied RIBs shop!). We will then work together with partner organizations in Chiapas to coordinate the shipment of these bikes to teachers and doctors there who can use them to get to work. We want to send not only bikes, but tools, spare parts and supplies, and bike repair know-how. If you are interested in getting involved, there’s a lot that could be done - wherever your strengths lie, we can use them!

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