¡BOLIVIA SOBERANA!

¡FUEFA EL GRINGO!

¡EL GAS NO SE VENDE!

¡EL ALTO DE PIE

¡NUNCA DE RODILLAS!

The Committee on U.S. - Latin American Relations
www.rso.cornell.edu/cuslar
Fostering Justice: A Journey from Within Reaching Around the Globe

Friends in the U.S. have asked “What are you running away from?” when I travel to other countries. It is not what I am trying to escape that drives me. Rather it is a desire to learn, to understand that which is different. My experiences outside of the United States have brought into focus for me the reality of life within the United States. They have also taught me the importance of understanding more thoroughly the different realities of life in the U.S.A. Of course, there are many different ways to understand ‘the other’, each of them equally valid when approached with a self-critical lens.

In this newsletter we see a glimpse of the changes that are taking place locally, globally and the effects that such changes are having on the individual level.

From Ithaca, community members and students have joined together in several projects linking the United States with communities in Latin America. Bikes for Chiapas is a fast growing project that has captured the interest of other communities in the United States, thereby building bridges at home as well as abroad. Several of us from Ithaca will travel to Chiapas for the second Bikes for Chiapas delegation in December/January ’03-’04. We are fortunate to have this opportunity to travel and know our neighboring sisters and brothers. We can use our privilege constructively, as many have done before us and continue to do, by sharing our experiences upon returning home. We can create a closer image of that reality which is so different from our own.

My hope is to foster connections among people who are so distant, both physically and culturally, so that common ground may be found, or at least the seeds of compassion, which can only grow and nourish humanity. Justice is a much more feasible goal when we work together and understanding each other—and our differences—is imperative.

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

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

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CUSLAR Newsletter
Winter 2003 - 2004

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IN BRIEF...

Compiled by Ana Cajina

Ecuador

Texaco Pollution Case Begins in Ecuador
by Barbara J. Fraser

The tiny courtroom in Lago Agrio, a jungle town in northeastern Ecuador, was packed on Oct. 21 for the start of a landmark trial against US oil giant ChevronTexaco for pollution caused by its operations more than a decade ago (LP, Jan. 18, 2003). But while many of the 70-plus plaintiffs in the case are members of the Secoya, Siona, Cofan and Huaorani peoples, there were only a few indigenous people in the crowd of lawyers, journalists, environmentalists and spectators.

After nearly a decade of legal wrangling in US courts, the case returned to Ecuador, to the courtroom where Judge Alberto Guerra presided, flanked by a huge painting of Lady Justice in native garb against a backdrop of rivers, hills and forests, a toucan perched over her scales and a puma at her feet.

In the street outside, barred from the courtroom by a row of riot police, several hundred people — some in feathers, face paint and traditional garb — chanted slogans against Texaco and listened to the court proceedings over a loudspeaker. Not all were convinced that justice would be done.

“It’s been 10 years and we’ve never been able to talk face to face with the company,” said Elias Piaguaje, a Secoya leader who is one of the plaintiffs. “Look what’s happened today — they’re all inside, and we’re out here in the street shouting. To me, it’s an insult.”

Between 1971 and 1992, a consortium involving Texaco and state-owned PetroEcuador pumped 1.5 billion barrels of oil from the area. The plaintiffs argue that the company improperly disposed of 18.5 billion gallons of wastewater, contaminating soil and the streams and rivers on which at least 500,000 people — including some 30,000 members of indigenous communities — depend for drinking water and irrigation.

For most of the day, the company’s lawyers argued that the case should be thrown out because ChevronTexaco was not responsible for the actions of its former subsidiaries and because it had already invested US$40 million in cleanup operations that were approved.

The company also challenged the retroactive application of a 1999 hydrocarbons law that holds companies to stricter cleanup standards, but the plaintiffs’ lawyer, Alberto Wray, disagreed. “We’re talking about damages that are still occurring, because the toxic substances are still present and are still causing contamination,” he said.

As for the cleanup efforts, lawyer Steven Donziger, who represented the plaintiffs in the US court case and is serving as an adviser in the Ecuadorian case, likened it to “applying makeup.” He estimated that the cost of repairing the damage from the more than 600 waste pits would exceed US$1 billion. Other experts have estimated that the cost could be five or six times that amount.

“The cleanup that was done was a disaster, because they only covered up (the waste). Now the damage is even greater, because it’s filtering into the water sources. It may be less visible, but it’s more intense and more serious,” said the Rev. José Miguel Goldáraz, a Spanish Capuchin priest who has worked in the area for 30 years.

Although the suit seeks cleanup and does not mention a specific dollar amount, money is one of the points of contention. While Ricardo Veiga, ChevronTexaco’s vice president for products in Latin America, pointed out that the company had provided US$5 million for community development projects in some of the affected zones, some local residents saw those payments as hush money.

After receiving the funds, several local governments and indigenous organizations withdrew from the lawsuit. “The fact that Texaco has given money to local governments does not affect the plaintiffs’ right to live in an environment free of contamination,” Wray said. Goldáraz was more blunt, saying, “Oil has corrupted (local) leaders.”

During the demonstrations outside the courthouse, people living near the waste pits told of family members falling ill or dying. Goldáraz said that a study carried out by the Capuchin mission found high rates of cancer and stomach and skin problems.

The judge, who has lived in Lago Agrio for six years, seemed sympathetic to the plaintiffs’ complaints. “I know the situation,” he said. “There is pollution. Sometimes even I” — he left the sentence hang-
Members of Amazonian Indigenous Group present "bill" to Texaco for pollution in Ecuador.

...ing, but scratched at the skin of his neck — "because of the water." At the end of the initial hearing, Guerra gave both parties six working days to present documents and witnesses. He and court investigators will then sift through the documents and inspect the affected area. "I know that the parties are going to request the inspection of about 100 wells," he said, adding that he expected to issue a ruling within four to six months.

"This is a historic case because it is going to set a precedent not only in the legal sense, but also in the human sense," he said. "To me, nature is like a pregnant woman. No one can put toxic substances and pollutants into the womb of a pregnant woman. We have the responsibility to care for her."

Whatever Guerra's verdict, an appeal is likely. The case could eventually reach the Supreme Court. If the plaintiffs lose, Donziger said, they could return to US courts. While Guerra said he did not expect the Texaco case to end up on his desk, he added that he believed the US Second Circuit Court of Appeals made the right decision in ruling that it should be tried first in Ecuador. The US court ruled that the Ecuadorian court's decision would be binding on the company in the United States (LP, June 18, 2001).

Meanwhile, not far from Lago Agrio, the Kichwa people in the community of Sarayacu have been trying to stop oil prospecting on their lands. On Oct. 16, lawyers presented the case before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. Government officials have threatened to send in the military to enable the Argentine Compañía General de Combustibles (CGC) to go ahead with seismic testing (LP, March 26, 2003).

For the indigenous people of Sucumbíos, the issue goes beyond cleaning up toxic waste. Although their territories are legally recognized, the government reserves the right to grant concessions for subsoil resources like oil, gas and minerals (LP, April 22, 2002).

According to Piaguaje, the communities see none of the wealth that those resources represent. "It was the government that negotiated with the company, so the government should pay us and give us the wells that are producing," he said. "The underlying problem is one of ancestral indigenous philosophy against national and foreign laws.

The real problem is social cultural and philosophical — it's a matter of world view. All I want is to be able to sit down and discuss conditions on equal terms."

-Latin American Press

Argentina

From Garbage to the Classroom
Fernando Sánchez in Buenos Aires

Project makes it possible for children to stop scavenging and return to school

Carolina, 10, has a smile as white as her apron and above all, a lot of fatigue. "Today I woke up very early to come to school," she said, obviously content. And it not hard to understand why.

Born in a poor home in which her mother and her seven siblings eke out a living as scavengers of recyclable goods until recently going to school was just a dream. "Since I used to go out every night to scavenge and I would go to sleep very late, I missed school a lot and when I did go I didn't understand anything. Now it's different. I come to school rested and I can learn," she said.

Carolina is part of a project of the non-governmental organization Alma Mater Indioamericana (AMI) called "From garbage to dignity." With financing from the International Labor Organization (ILO), 650 children scavengers or cartoneros of José C. Paz, Tigre and San Miguel — three of the poorest areas of Buenos Aires province — have been able to return to the schools they had attended only sporadically or had deserted altogether. And most importantly, they have been able to get off the streets.

According to figures from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), in Argentina there are 1.5 million working children, many of whom collect cardboard and other recyclable goods (LP, Feb. 26, 2003).

For this reason, the project — which today includes 240 families most of them made up of single women with an average of four children — represents a ray of hope.

"The idea is very simple: we generate enterprises that give work to the parents, and in return they commit that their children will stop working and will go back to school," said Karina González, executive director of AMI.

The star of these productive initiatives is "El Niño" dishwashing detergent, produced and sold by mothers and a few fathers of the young cartoneros. Once in the program, they receive training and a monthly salary of around $170 by pledging that their children will stop collecting recyclable goods and return to school.

The ingredients for the detergent are donated by the United Nations and it is produced in a schoolroom. It is sold among neighbors, although some commercial establishments have started stocking it and an important supermarket chain has shown interest in the
News Briefs

Although it is the best known, this is not the only enterprise underway," Gonzalez said. "Some other families are making pastas or dough, weaving baskets or receiving a loan to start a business. In all cases, they are projects that can generate income for the families and are sustainable over time."

The program began in November 2002 and currently operates in these three areas of Buenos Aires province that dramatically reflect the social and economic crisis that exploded in December 2001 (LP, Jan. 14, 2002).

Even in these neighborhoods, the public school continues to be an important factor in containing the crisis. There, children eat what is sometimes their only meal of the day and they also feel protected in a hostile environment in which crime and drugs are everyday occurrences.

"Children who scavenge for recyclable goods are badly fed, they get sick from being in constant contact with garbage and in addition they are exposed to all sorts of dangers," said Graciella Della Giovanna, principal of School No. 15 in Jose C. Paz. "And because they get tired, they don't attend school and show up only to eat. That's why when they proposed this idea to me, I was so enthusiastic that I even made available some classrooms where the parents could work. Rather, where the mothers could work, because there are hardly any fathers."

Nevertheless, putting the children back in school required more effort. For this reason, supplementary classes were held during the summer vacation so that the children who were going back to school could be at the same level as their classmates, said Cuban teacher Felix Muñoz, head of the Education Department of AMI.

Teachers were also trained in new methodologies, vital for knowing how to educate these children with specific needs and rhythms of learning. "The class should attend to the particularities and differences, interests and motivations of each child," Muñoz said.

"If all of this is not taken into account, then the class only benefits a few. In this case, there would be neither learning nor equality." The families that join the program receive sacks of food to combat malnutrition and children also visit the dentist to prevent the loss of teeth when they become adults.

Going to the movies, the theater and amusement parks are also an important component of the program. In addition, on the weekend children learn how to use computers. Mothers cannot contain their pride when they tell how their children are learning to fight with computers.

"I am very happy. This is going to help them a lot," said Patricia Sosa, mother of six children. "I make a living from scavenging although she has started to produce detergent, a project in which she places enormous expectations. "I couldn't study and for this reason I want them to be able to."

Nicaragua
Colin Powell Visits Nicaragua

During his recent visit to Nicaragua, Secretary of State Colin Powell requested that the Government of Nicaragua destroy the SAM-7 missiles that they have had since the US presence in Nicaragua during the Contra uprising. "These missiles have cost the Nicaraguan Armed Forces too much money and I hope they are destroyed in the near future," stated Powell as he met with Enrique Bolaños at the Presidential Palace.

Though Powell was vocal about the destruction of these missiles, which had been left in the country during the time of the US participation in the contra led attacks on the Sandinistas, he refrained from mentioning how the United States would collaborate with Nicaragua's efforts to restore peace and security. "Nicaragua struggles with terrorism and drug trafficking on a daily basis," states Maria Jose Uriarte, from La Prensa. "Powell has not shown how the US will help us."

When asked why the US was not helping Nicaragua more with these problems, Powell said that "aside from drug trafficking and terrorism, his greatest fear was a possible war among the Central American nations." For Nicaraguans, this answer did not suffice in showing how the United States would make up for the violence they brought to the country during their 1980's Cold War in Central America.

-La Prensa: www.laprensa.com.ni

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On July 10, 2003, I joined the little yellow school bus for peace, a project of Schools for Chiapas in San Diego, in a caravan that left Houston, Texas. On July 25th we had arrived in Chiapas, the southernmost state of Mexico. I set out on this trip with the goal of assisting in a bicycle workshop and helping to start a project which would supply bicycles for health and education promoters, more affectionately known as Bikes for Chiapas.

I was unclear as to what role I would play in this process and what exactly we would be doing. Of all the caravan participants from North America, I knew the most about bikes. Luckily for me, on the way to Chiapas we stopped in Oaxaca to pick up bike mechanic Eliseo and his apprentice, Alejandro, both of whom work with a Mexican non-profit called COVORPA. Eliseo knew a great deal about bikes and the workshop could not have gone off as well as it did without him.

With the bus we brought 17 bikes, a random sampling of components and tools, as well as three complete sets of the necessary tools to run a bike shop. We planned on giving this workshop to members of three different Zapatista communities. When the proposal for the Bikes for Chiapas program was taken to the communities, people from Roberto Barrios, Fransisco Gomez and Oventic communities all responded as interested, and promised to send delegates to participate in our workshop.

When we arrived in Oventic on Saturday, the Marcos communiqué about the changes from aguascalientes to Caracoles had just been released and there was no one there from any of the other communities to participate in the workshop that was set to start on Monday. Although we were quite anxious, we eventually had 11 participants in the workshop.

On Monday, the day we were supposed to start the workshop, I had to return to San Cristobal, to get a briefing from ENLACE Civil on the general situation in Chiapas surrounding the Zapatistas.

When we returned, Eliseo and Alejandro had started to work with seven kids from Oventic—the oldest could not have been older than 15. That evening we meet folks from the other two communities ready to learn how to set up a bike shop. Later in the week, two more people from Francisco Gomez arrived.

During the workshop, we went through all the parts of a bike, as well as how to use all the tools they were receiving. We went over the most common repairs a number of times (fixing flats, adjusting brakes and derailers), we talked a little bit about the theory behind running a bike shop, but they—particularly the kids—were mostly interested in doing the hands-on work.

On Thursday, Eliseo and Alejandro had to return to Oaxaca, leaving me and Sergio, the bus driver/mechanic, who had no experience with bikes but knew how machines work, running the bike workshop. We basically reviewed the stuff we had already gone over, and finished repairing the 17 bikes we had brought down. We decided that Saturday would be the last day of the workshop.

The participants asked to take Sunday off and on Monday we began sorting the tools and components into 3 equal groups, one per community. The folks in charge at Schools for Chiapas thought this was extremely important and we did this in what I saw as something of an obsessive manner: we counted the number of spokes and made sure that they were divided equally.

We settled on doing a raffle as a fair way to divide the 17 bikes and the extra tools we had accumulated. This took some time to engineer but once we fi-
Ithaca has become a starting ground for grassroots programs such as Bikes for Chiapas. The participation levels from community members and students alike, is growing everyday. Bikes for Chiapas has taken flight in Ithaca with no signs of slowing down. Currently, RIBS (Recycle Ithaca's Bikes) along with CUSLAR, and many generous volunteers have been working hard to prepare a shipment of 350 bikes for the December/January delegation. Community members and students are making the trip to Chiapas to celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the Zapatista Uprising in the Autonomous Zone. Participants will be working hand in hand with members of Schools for Chiapas and Chiapas community members to disperse bikes and build the second bike shop.

WAIT!!! The campaign doesn’t stop in December! This is an ongoing project. If you are interested in donating either time or money, (or both!) to help this incredible project, volunteers are always needed at the RIBS repair shop- skills are not a prerequisite!

Please contact RIBS (607)256-5355 or CUSLAR (607)255-7293 to learn more about this project.

BIKES FOR CHIAPAS WANTS YOU!

We need you, your family, your friends and your neighbors to come to the RIBs shop and help fix the bikes!

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Recycle Ithaca’s Bicycles (RIBs)
309 S. Corn Street
by Laura MacDonald

Since returning from a Witness for Peace delegation to Colombia last March, it has remained very important to me to work to support the people of Colombia in their resistance to the continued militarization and privatization of their country, especially since both of these troubling trends would not be possible without the financial backing of the United States. So I am extremely excited to announce the formation of the Cajibo Central New York Sister Partnership. Cajibo is a region similar to one of our counties, located in the province of Cauca in southwestern Colombia. While in Colombia, we were privileged to make the acquaintance of Marylen Serna Salinas and her husband John Henry Gutierrez, two dedicated organizers with the Small Farmer Movement of Cajibo.

The people of Cauca have been subject to violence on the part of the armed actors in Colombia’s conflict, particularly the right-wing paramilitaries, who have documented connections to Colombia’s military. In addition, there is widespread poverty, exacerbated by violence and economic globalization. The civil war in Colombia is dominated by the quest for control of the nation’s land and resources. There are many powerful interests struggling for control, including guerrillas, paramilitaries, multinational corporations, and drug cartels, many of whose interests are intertwined. They want the land not for its agricultural capacity but for oil and other natural resource exploitation, infrastructure, and huge development projects. Groups such as campesinos (small farmers), Afro-Colombians, and the indigenous, whose cultures and livelihoods depend on the land, are pushed off through violence, threats, unfair economic policies, and aerial fumigations.

Formed in 1990, the Small Farmer Movement of Cajibo arose out of the need for unity among these various groups, with the goal of strengthening the work already being done and creating a more organized structure of resistance. The Small Farmer Movement of Cajibo is centered on the “Plan for Life,” a proposal for alternative development created by 687 community representatives over the course of a four-day summit. With an emphasis on non-violent resistance and the strengthening of civil society, the Plan for Life is structured around seven work areas: Health, Education, Agro-Environment, Territory and Authority, Culture and Identity, Infrastructure Projects, and Political Organizing.

Marylen and John Henry stressed the importance of building international solidarity. The Small Farmer Movement has developed a proposal for groups from other countries that would like to work together with them and support their work. One of the reasons for international soli-
Darity is to serve as a form of non-violent self-defense for threatened communities. The violence that has characterized the Colombian conflict is dependent on the impunity granted to the perpetrators. Because the victims are poor and often without access to the means to raise awareness of what has happened, and because they face threats of further violence, they are effectively without a voice. International solidarity can make violence and threats of violence visible on an international level. One way that we in Central New York hope to accomplish this is by setting up an alert network to spread the word when organizers or others in the Cajibo community are threatened. We can then apply pressure where it is needed. Simply making it known that the situation is being followed by people in the United States can make a great deal of difference.

Secondly, international solidarity can be a means for us to help support the civil society that US aid to Colombia - tilted so heavily towards the military - neglects. In our sister relationship with the Small Farmer Movement of Cajibo, we will be working jointly on a nutritional improvement program. Due to widespread poverty in the area, many local women have been forced to work for large area farms, undermining the productivity of their own small plots of land. This forces many mothers to be away from their children and prevents them from growing their own food.

In response to this situation, women in the community have created places where they can care for the children while their mothers are at work, provide the kids with basic foods, and give them a pre-school education. We will be working with the Cajibo municipal committee of Community Mothers and the leadership council of the Small Farmers’ Movement of Cajibo to improve the nutrition of these children by raising funds for the establishment of community gardens. Each garden will be used by about ten families. We are developing a campaign where individuals, families, or groups can sponsor a garden.

We are very fortunate to be involved with this group. They are extremely well-organized and dedicated to nonviolent, grassroots solutions to the problems faced by Colombians. Viva la solidaridad internacional!!

- Article originally published in “Peace Newsletter” of the Syracuse Peace Council: http://www.peacecouncil.net/724/724CNY-Colombia.htm

Contact CUSLAR for more information about the CNY-Cajibo Sister Partnership. (607)255-7293 or <cuslar@cornell.edu> or Laura MacDonald at <lauramacdonald@hotmail.com> or (315)422-4924.
Bolivarian Revolution Struggles On In Venezuela
By Edward Dvorak

Just days before he was scheduled to give a speech at the UN in New York, the President of Venezuela, Hugo Chavez Frias, abruptly canceled his trip. Intelligence sources in Venezuela announced that they had “overwhelming evidence” of a CIA-backed plot to bring down his plane en route to New York.

Chavez has also raised concerns about Venezuelan anti-government forces training on U.S. soil. These training camps were reported in an editorial in the Wall Street Journal on Jan. 29, 2003. Chavez spoke forcefully about the allegations:

There in the US, they are conspiring against Venezuela. Terrorists are training against Venezuela and it is a demand that must be made of the US because they are obligated under International Law to act. If what they say is true, that they are fighting against Terrorism, they should act against the terrorists on their own territory that are threatening Venezuela.

The U.S. government quickly announced that they would open up an investigation into the allegations made by President Chavez. The US Ambassador to Venezuela, Charles S. Shapiro responded: “[I]t is not necessarily a crime, but we are in the full process of collecting information. If there is anyone to blame, our government knows what to do.”

White House Special envoy Otto Reich said that the charges were “absolutely ridiculous. Such a plan does not exist. The Venezuelan government is accusing the CIA in an attempt to create an impasse and deviate attention from the recall vote.”

This latest reported attempt on the life of Chavez is only one of a series of plots to remove him from office. On April 11-13, 2002, Chavez was removed from office in a 48-hour coup d’etat that was lead by businessman Pedro Carmona and officers in the military. The U.S. was the only Western Hemisphere nation to recognize the dictatorial government which overthrew the democratically-elected leader. Only the enormous public outcry of millions foiled the coup attempt and Chavez was re-instated.

Washington has also tried to impose new Presidential elections through the Organization of American States (OAS). However, in December of 2002, this plan backfired when the proposal became the first major U.S. initiative to be unanimously rejected by the OAS in a vote of 32-0.

On September 26th in New York, Foreign Minister Roy Chaterton Matos told the UN General Assembly that the opposition parties will go to any length to promote violence in their attempts to overthrow Chavez. He also defended the government’s policies saying that they were a necessary antidote to the effects of “savage neo-liberalism. After many years of malfeasance and endemic corruption, Venezuela is now beginning a profound process of peaceful democratic change. The developing world is suffering hunger, misery, and exclusion caused by unjust economic policies.”

However, instead of investigating the charges made by the Venezuelan government, the US media responded with charges of their own. On October 6, 2003, US News & World Report published an article by Linda Robinson entitled, “Terror Close To Home.” Among other allegations, this report, which cited only unnamed US military and intelligence officials, accused the Venezuelan government of supporting the Colombian guerrillas and other Arab Terrorist groups. The article concludes ominously: “Given all that is happening in Chavez’ Venezuela, some American officials regret that terrorism is seen chiefly as a Middle East problem and that the U.S. is not looking to protect its Southern Flank.”

Chavez has said that the obvious aim of the article was to create a pretext for continuing subversion to overthrow the
Venezuelan government. He described the article as "sewage. It’s disgusting, it comes from the extreme right-wing sectors in the United States. I can only hope that the circles of power in the U.S. don’t keep on repeating such rubbish and lies. The suggestion is that I am a terrorist and should be aggressively pursued. The CIA used similar arguments in their 1973 coup d'état against Chile’s President Salvador Allende."

The Venezuelan Ambassador to the US, Bernardo Alvarez Herrera, also responded by sending a letter to U.S. News & World Report commenting that Ms. Robinson did not offer any concrete proof of her allegations. Ambassador Herrera concludes his letter: "By reporting unproven allegations as facts and ignoring contrary evidence, Linda Robinson’s October 6 article portrayed Venezuela in a manner so misleading that it undermined the credibility of U.S. News & World Report."

Venezuelanalysis has recently reported that US General James T. Hill of the Southern Command spoke with reporters after a seminar at the Center for Strategic International Studies in Washington, DC. He was asked about the claims that the Venezuelan government was collaborating with radical Islamic groups and Colombian guerrillas. Hill said: "We don’t have any proof to validate that article."

Earlier in October, U.S. Southern Command Director of Operations, Brigadier General Benjamin R. Mixon also dismissed the allegations in an interview with the Miami Herald.

Linda Robinson, who continues to defend her article, is a member of the US Council on Foreign Relations, an influential group that has dominated foreign policy since World War 2. Venezuelan billionaire Gustavo Cisneros, who, according to several sources, including Newsweek, was a financial supporter of the April 2002 coup. He is also a member of the Council.

The Venezuela government is still waiting for the U.S. government to respond to the reports of anti-Chavez terrorist groups training on US soil.

Opposing The Neoliberal Agenda

Many have noted that the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela is the strongest democratically-based opposition to the neoliberal agenda happening in the world today. In the words of Chavez("In Venezuela, we are developing a model of struggle against neoliberalism and imperialism. For this reason, we find that we have friends in the world, although we also have many enemies.

Ever since Chavez was elected in a landslide victory in 1998, the powerful business interests, the rich landowners, and the opposition-controlled media have continually promoted efforts to force him from power. After the failed coup, oil executives, along with oil workers led a 61-day General Strike in Dec - Jan. 2003, which caused massive social and economic destruction throughout the country. Chavez responded by firing 15,000 employees of the company Petroleos de Venezuela (PDVSA). The workers were fired for abandoning their jobs and for acts of sabotage against the oil-dependent economy. Commenting on the crisis at PDVSA, newly-appointed Director, Ivan Hernandez states: "The company had grown outrageously in the last ten years, especially at the management levels in the cities. There were 600-700 oil executives in Caracas alone; that was not justified." When asked if the fired workers would be able to return, he responded: "I think that the oil workers were very confused and manipulated. They lost their sense of loyalty and a sense of belonging to work and family. They cannot come back, because the damage is too big; the social damage to the country is terrible." In an article about participatory democracy in Venezuela, Charles Hardy writes: "The saddest part about all of this is the time, energy and income the country has lost because of the attempt of the elite to sabotage the efforts of the government in the last four years."

Henk Ruyssenaars, an Amsterdam-based member of the Foreign Press Foundation and veteran journalist who covered the US-Chile intervention 30 years ago comments:

"It is strange that in every country, there is this group of greedy people who will sacrifice even their own family if need be to get richer at the expense of everyone and everything. Like Allende said: 'We better do something about, and react to those traitors before they put another Pinochet in Venezuela.'"

Opposition To Stage Recall Vote of Chavez

The Opposition is currently trying to gather the necessary signatures required to call for a Revocatory Referendum, whereby Chavez can be removed from office by a recall vote. The original Feb. 2003 campaign was recently dismissed by the national Election Institute (CNE), on account of discovering many fraudulent signatures. In October, the Opposition began claiming that Chavez is attempting to intimidate those who may sign against him in the present
campaign. Chavez responds: “All that I am going to say on the matter is that I do not want to return to the policies of the Punto Fijo corruption that was before.”

By referring to Punto Fijo, Chavez was describing the power-sharing arrangement of the Accion Democratica (AD) and the Christian Socialist parties (COPEI) that was fraught with corruption and led Venezuela to the verge of political and social bankruptcy. Former President Carlos Andres Perez, who was convicted of corruption in 1993, is currently in exile in the Dominican Republic. Noting that the Dominican government refuses to extradite Perez on an international corruption warrant, Vice-President Jose Vicente Rangel says: “We are frankly surprised that the Dominican government can protect a criminal like the ex-President.”

During October, another controversy erupted when the telecommunication regulatory agency CONATEL confiscated transmitting equipment from the TV giant, Globovision. The international media was quick to condemn this action by the Chavez government. However, it was quickly established that Globovision had been using the equipment to broadcast on illegal, unregistered frequencies. Chavez has repeatedly charged the 24-hour news channel with providing backing for the short-lived coup in April 2002. He has also complained about “Media Terrorism” and accuses the privately-controlled media of promoting efforts to force him from power. Recently, Chavez told a group of businessmen in Caracas: “If the private TV channels go back to promoting destabilization and violence in the country they won’t be able to broadcast any more. It is as though they light a match and then throw gasoline on it, we can’t permit that.”

**Historic Land Reform Process Continues**

It is well known that the current Land Reform in Venezuela is bitterly opposed by the large landowners and the business interests that were profiting from the mass importation of food. Before the enactment of the Ley Tierra (Land Law) in 2001, Venezuela imported approximately 70% of their food. President Chavez asks rhetorically, “We have excellent conditions to supply ourselves with a great deal of what we consume, so why is it that we are importing black beans?” According to the National Land Institute (INTI), 60% of the arable land is owned by less than 2% of the population, with vast tracts of land that remain uncultivated. Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of farmers remain landless.

“At a historic gathering on August 30, 2003 in Caracas, the INTI distributed over one million hectares of state-owned land to peasant and indigenous farmers throughout Venezuela. The transfer of land was witnessed by peasant and indigenous leaders from throughout the hemisphere. Blanca Chancosco, woman of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities in Ecuador (CONAIE) said: “Continental Unity will be necessary to defend the Land reform process. In this hemisphere, land is not a gift, but it is simply being returned to its rightful owners after five centuries of usurpation.” The second stage of the plan is to deliver another million hectares by the end of the year.

However, the land reform process has been met with stiff resistance by the large landowners throughout the country. In recent months, peasant leaders claim that dozens of campesinos have been murdered by sicarios, assassins hired by the landowners, in an effort to throw the land reform process into chaos. In the State of Zulia, on August 27, Indigenous Rights Attorney Joe Castillo was murdered, while his wife and one-year old son were wounded in the attack. Many have said that the assassination is part of a concerted policy to eliminate leaders who defend the rights of the indigenous and the campesinos.

“Venezuela right now has the only government-administered land reform in Latin America,” said Peter Rosset, co-Director of the Institute for Food and Development Policy. “In the US, Chavez is often painted as a villain or crazy but the land reform shows he is much more on the side of the poor than any other president in the region.”

Those who have benefited from this process, like Anable Soto, currently working on a cooperative farm with 32 other campesinos and their families, openly praise the developments: “I had always aspired to have a piece of land to work, to live on, but that was never possible before. Chavez has given us what no government has.”

In many of the States in Venezuela, local ranchers accuse the government officials of encouraging farmers to occupy private ranches. INTI officials say that they have openly condemned the illegal occupations, pointing out that the campesinos were acting independently. According to Marino Alvarado, a researcher for Provea, a Caracas-based human rights group, “The illegal invasions are the exception, not the rule.”

Under the Ley Tierra, the distributed land remains in the hands of the State, while the government encourages cooperatives and collective farms, while providing housing, health care and education. Critics say that the law violates the right to private property; the opposition claims that Chavez is practicing “Castro-Communism.” The Chavez government responds that they are protecting the small landowners who were often forced to sell their property to the
large landowners because of debts and lack of credits. They argue that forming peasant cooperatives is the only way to compete with large-scale agribusiness.

Violence remains a constant threat during the land reform process. Richard Vicas, a INTI coordinator in Portuguesa State remarks: “I’ve received a lot of death threats. I take them quite seriously. This opposition kills.” In this conflict, largely ignored by the opposition-controlled media, over 75 campesinos have been killed in only two years. Most of those killed were supporters of Chavez. Despite these crimes, the unavailing support among the poor for “Our Commandante” Chavez is overwhelming. Everywhere, people are talking about maize, vegetables, fruits, cattle, fish-farming, land cultivation, schools, and housing. No one forgets that the first thing done during the coup of April 2002 was to annul the Ley Tierra. If they take all this away from us, there will be war,” warn the peasants who have struggled so persistently to see the victory of the Bolivarian Revolution.

Improving the Lives of the Urban Poor.

To address the need of the urban poor, the Chavez government has created a network of “Bolivarian Circles” to begin the extensive social and political activism necessary to aid the disenfranchised population. These Circles have brought basic literacy training to over half a million in recent months; hundreds of thousands of children have started school for the first time; many work to secure credits for small businesses; and recently, doctors imported from Cuba as part of a petroleum deal are paying house calls to poor neighborhoods. Most importantly, tens of thousands have received title to the land that they have been squatting on for generations. Many of the urban poor speak of hope for the future that they never had before.

“The people have awakened. We will never go back to the past.” Said Josephina Corrani, who works as a maid by day and a community organizer by night. Maria Lopez echoes those views: For many years I had lived here. Yet, I never worked for the community. Now, I feel important.” The Bolivarian Circles also encourage the members to learn and teach each other their constitutional rights and responsibilities. In the barrios around Caracas, many are taking those responsibilities to heart. In these neighborhoods, there are many who are willing to defend Chavez to the death, and it is not an uncommon sight to find the portrait of Chavez on the altar next to Jesus Christ.

Opposition leaders accuse the Bolivarian Circles of being armed practitioners of terrorism. Both the Venezuelan and international media have been disseminating this message in their newspapers, radio and TV broadcasts. Unfortunately, with very limited resources and inefficient public relations, it has been very difficult to compete with the lies and distortions presented by the major media corporations. (For more on their work, see bolivariancircles.net)

Chavez’ sympathies with Cuban leader Fidel Castro and his continuing support for peasant and indigenous rights have made him an easy target for those that accuse his supporters of being promoters of terrorism. Yet, opposition leaders have been unable to produce any credible evidence linking the Bolivarian Circles to terror activities. It remains just another tactic to create chaos in a country that is courageously trying to address the need of the poor. We ask that you join us, staying that the Revolutions of the 21st century can be decided by voters, rather than by being fought by death squads and guerrillas-Bolivarian Circles.

The events of the attempted April 2002 coup were captured in the excellent documentary: The Revolution Will Not Be Televised. Co-Directors: Kim Bartley & Dominic O’Brian. Available at Alternatives Library, Anabel Taylor Hall @ Cornell University. For an in-depth introduction to the Chavez phenomenon, see: Steve Ellner, David Hillinger (eds.) Venezuelan Politics in the Chavez Era: Class Polarization and Conflict. [Boulder, CO; Lynne Rienner, 2003]
Nicaragua: un pais pobre, llena de cultura y tradición. A poor country, full of culture and tradition; so my teenage host brother instructs me, as he demonstrates a traditional dance step or recites a verse by national poet-hero Ruben Dario. After a month living and learning in northern Nicaragua, I'm struck by the accuracy of the phrase. According to World Bank statistics, a shocking 80 percent of Nicaraguans live on less than a dollar a day while almost 95 percent live on under two dollars a day (1998 estimate). Yet the Nicaraguan people are warm, vital, and proud, their culture and political history rich in ways inadequately captured by economic statistics. It is this Nicaragua which today stands poised at a crossroads, a vulnerable nation facing the intensifying juggernaut of economic globalization and the persistent regional dominance of my own U.S. government.

I've come to Nicaragua to study and work with Centro de Idiomas, a unique language and cultural exchange program based in the city of Ocotal, Nueva Segovia. Founded as a partnership between Nicaraguan and U.S. constituencies, the not-for-profit center is designed to be a sustainable and participatory conduit of ideas between two distinct cultures. It encompasses a primary and secondary school in which the curriculum includes native-speaker English instruction beginning in pre-school, evening community English classes, and an exchange program that partners foreign student-interns with organizations in Ocotal. Visiting internacionalistas also enjoy participating in intensive Spanish language classes and homestays, allowing U.S. and Nicaraguan participants to live together, learn and teach together, and work together toward mutual respect and critical cross-cultural reflection.

And so reflect I do...

It is a powerful opportunity, both exhilarating and exhausting. At times my American expectations, and especially my language limitations, are visceral. I want a planned meeting to start and end on time (or at least to take place); to receive a direct answer to a direct question, to express a complex topic using appropriately complex words. I long to walk down the street anonymous, without inviting attention and catcalls. Women in Nicaragua are strong and capable, but also strong is an accepted machismo, which seems especially roused by backpack-toting gringas.

In other instances I swell with admiration for the people who welcome me into their lives. I am generously pilled with food, rich café, and patient conversation. I've developed quite an affection for cold showers, and I iron even my T-shirts to satisfy the cultural emphasis on looking neat and elegante. Above all, I am awed by the spirit of the Nicaraguan people who—through wars, want, natural disasters, lofty dreams, and bitter disappointments—continue, with open hearts, to keep on keeping on.

According to the dominant neoliberal narrative, Nicaragua has been pursuing "impressive economic reforms...to shed the legacy of a decade of civil war and economic mismanagement" under the leftist Sandinista government of the 1980's. It is of course an intentionally incomplete history, which distorts the authentic struggles of most Nicaraguans.

Nicaragua's centuries of exploitation by imperialist powers and local elites is an all too familiar story. More unique in the national consciousness are certain powerful flash points of successful resistance. For example, the legendary General Augusto César Sandino, who led a long guerilla struggle (1927-1933) to expel the U.S. marines from Nicaragua, in addition to supporting agricultural cooperatives and workers in the northern Segovias. Sandino remains a national hero and cultural icon, embodying anti-imperialist and leftist ideals.

When in 1979 a new generation of leftist Sandinista revolutionaries successfully toppled the repressive dictatorship of the (U.S. - backed) Somoza dynasty, popular hopes in Nicaragua soared. My compañeros in Ocotal speak emotionally of this time when they surged forth into rural communities to support the national literacy campaign, when public health care and education were freely accessible to all, and when a wide variety of social programs were established and well-funded by the new government of the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN).

But as the 1980's unfolded in the Sandinista-controlled Nicaragua, so too did an ongoing war against the U.S.-financed Contras, a hated mandatory military draft, high defense expenditures, ballooning international debt, chronic shortages, and a crumbling national economy. In 1990 the FSLN lost the presidential election and peacefully transferred power to a broad coalition of opposition groups united behind
Doña Violeta de Chamorro, who would work toward national reconciliation and to reestablish world diplomatic and economic ties.

During the revolutionary decade (which still shapes the U.S. perception of Nicaragua), the Sandinista leadership doubtlessly made mistakes, faced internal criticism and resistance, and in cases used its power for personal gain. But it also confronted the reactionary, unrelenting hostility of the United States under President Ronald Reagan. Because of its ideological opposition to the socialist FSLN government, the Reagan administration cut off all foreign aid to Nicaragua, instituted an economic embargo, and supported the devastating Contra war, even secretly and illegally funneling funds for the Contra rebels by selling arms to Iran. Facing such military and economic pressure from the world’s superpower, what formative government could have successfully carried out the Sandinista attempt at radical social, economic, and political reform? Without the U.S. hegemonic imposition, what alternative outcomes could have been realized?

Despite its failure to meet expectations, the continuing impact of the Sandinista revolution cannot be underestimated. The FSLN party remains an important player in national and municipal politics; in Ocotal, the mayor has been Sandinista since 1979. Substantial numbers of Nicaraguans also still hold fast to deeper Sandinista ideals, which prioritize social equity and challenge the prevailing orthodoxy of a global capitalist system. Furthermore, Nicaraguans now enjoy and vigorously exercise considerable civil liberties, rights recently gained within the lifetime of the adult population.

Dramatically different from the Sandinista period, however, is the ideological orientation of the current national government under the right-wing Partido Liberal Constitucionalista (PLC). Elected in 1996, hard-core capitalist and PLC President Arnoldo Alemán promoted international investment and exports at the expense of the social safety net. His vice president and successor President Enrique Bolaños now promises a “New Era,” though I assume this is meant not to suggest any major policy shifts, but rather to distance himself from the endemic corruption of the former administration. Alemán is in jail (according to more skeptical friends, only temporarily) for robbing almost US$100 million from his impoverished fellow citizens.

It is this precarious historical moment—as I now understand it, with my apologies for any inadvertent inaccuracies—that I am able to share in through Centro de Idiomas. Walking through the park on my way to class, I pass two adjacent benches, each stenciled with a symbol: the profile of Che Guevara and an Adidas logo. They seem a fitting metaphor for the tensions that I am struggling to understand. A second vignette: at the annual Festival de Maíz in Jalapa, several elaborate floats challenge aspects of economic globalization, including the highly unequal trade between the brand-name imports that Nicaragua buys from the United States and the agricultural products it exports at rock-bottom prices. For sale at the festival is every corn treat imaginable, and a wide variety of trinkets made in China. The day’s major sponsor, in addition to the ubiquitous soft drink and liquor ads, is a corporation peddling GMO corn seeds.

Nor are such contradictions lost on Nicaraguans. Indeed, in contrast to the U.S. public they have a far more immediate stake in globalization’s alphabet soup of acronyms and repercussions. Burdened with a crushing international debt, Nicaragua awaits a World Bank/IMF (International Monetary Fund) review of its structural adjustment program and progress, including to determine potential debt relief under the HIPC (Highly Indebted Poor Country). In Ocotal it is a topic for both headline news and dinner table talk, as the results will influence economic indicators and government spending in areas like education and social services.

Nicaragua and four of its Central American neighbors are also in the midst of free trade negotiations with the United States, to hammer out the CAFTA (U.S. - Central American Free Trade Agreement) as a stepping stone towards the FTAA (Free Trade Area of the Americas). Central American policy makers hope to lock in neoliberal reforms and to woo U.S. investors. But the United States is pressuring them to accept a deal that will expose Nicaragua’s small-scale and subsistence farmers to subsidized U.S. competition, while doing nothing to ensure expanded markets in the United States or crucial protections for the region’s people, natural environment, and security. I share the fears of area farmers, who take to the streets with a clear message. TLC: muerte a la agricultura. The Free Trade
Agreement kills agriculture.

Meanwhile, many Nicaraguans I meet hold a simpler dream in relation to the United States. They want to go work there, illegally if necessary, for the U.S. streets are considered paved with jobs. Nicaragua’s unemployment rate is debilitating (at roughly 25 percent according to the CIA World Factbook), and still more workers are glaringly underemployed. Other Nicaraguans pin their hopes on receiving remittances or international assistance, which make up a significant portion of Nicaragua’s national income. Dependencies can be created with the best of intentions.

Nicaragua’s problems are daunting and structural. And though Nicaraguans continue to struggle for positive change, the nation’s options today in fact seem far narrower than just two decades before. In his national proposal for 2004, President Bolaños lists as his second priority educational and social spending. But these fall beneath the all important task of paying interest on Nicaragua’s foreign debt, to stay in the good graces of creditors and the IMF. Meanwhile, Nicaragua’s unionized public school teachers (who earn about US$70 per month) continue to hold rolling strikes due to the government’s refusal to pay their contract-mandated bonuses. In Spanish conversation class we discuss their efforts, and our instructor observes, “In Nicaragua we have political freedoms and are always protesting, but the government doesn’t really listen. Nothing changes.”

I am a privileged visitor in Nicaragua who, unlike my warm hosts, can come and go as I please from life in this remarkable, vulnerable country. I therefore especially value the opportunity to share my time and energy while here with Centro de Idiomas, a sustainable partnership working to facilitate progressive education and social change. My students cheer when it’s time for English class. Their caring instructors and wonderfully involved parents are also eager for me to help teach, both my language and the deeper lesson of cooperation and mutual respect across cultures. Smiling, one of our closest Nicaraguan partners confides that though she wouldn’t have agreed to work with Americans fifteen years before, she’s since learned that the American people are not the same as the U.S. government. Now this profesora reminds her students: “Alone, our dream for Centro de Idiomas would have remained a dream. Together, we make it a reality.”

A message from Centro de Idiomas founder Dhyana Kuhl: In order to see our plans through we will need the participation and partnership of other highly motivated organizations and skilled, enthusiastic people with entrepreneurial spirit. Centro de Idiomas calls on individuals to be learners and teachers alike, remembering always to look critically at themselves, their history, their own cultural perceptions, and the nature of their society. By fostering a collaborative community within our school we broaden the impact of our initiatives by actively entering society as heralds of change.

Dhyana and Vanessa can be reached by e-mail at: centro_nuevasegovia@yahoo.com.
The A-B-C of Popular Revolt

By Andrea Arenas Alipaz and Luis Gomez
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It wasn’t a coup. It was the people. And nobody, not even Viceroy David Greelee, could stop it.

Gonzalo “Goni” Sanchez de Lozada had to resign from the Bolivian presidency after weeks of popular mobilizations, for having massacred the people, for lying, and for trying to hang on to power by any means necessary. Now, vigilant and festive in the streets, the Bolivian people are the live expression of a democracy constructed from below.

A. Who & How

“If Goni wants money, let him sell his wife,” the men and women of deep “Bolivia Bronca” began to chant two months ago. It all began there: The sale of the country’s natural gas reserves, a multi-billion dollar business deal that the Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada administration tried to make with the multinationals ING and Sempra, passing a pipeline through Chile to the Pacific. “Not the multinationals, nor the Chilenos, should benefit from the Bolivian people’s wealth. We are going to recover our natural resources,” was what Congressman Evo Morelos, leader of the coca growers, said during a session of the national Congress.

In the beginning of September, Congressman Felipe Quispe, national peasant farmer leader, began a hunger strike, demanding that the gas not be for sale. The well-known “El Mallku” made it clear: “This is a personal business deal for Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada.”

The national labor union, Central obrera Bolivia, (COB) led by Jaime Solares, launched a series of marches in different regions of the country. But, the government didn’t see any strength in the mobilizations—that was a mistake.

After the first blockades, confrontations, and deaths in the high plains of Sorata & Warisata, the movement from the towns snowballed. On October 8th, in El Alto, with 800,000 residents, the neighborhood councils began to adhere to the COB action plan, based on an indefinite General Strike.

The massacres of the following days brought determination to the people. El Alto resisted, with sticks and stones, the rain of tear gas and bullets. Then, nearly all of the cities of Western Bolivia mobilized. Still, Goni insisted he would not go, because, he claimed, the Bolivian people were with him.

“...the Bolivian people are the live expression of a democracy constructed from below.”

Then, the general strike hit Cocalamba, Oruro was paralyzed, Potosi too, and Sucre saw 25,000 people take to the streets, day after day. In La Paz, the residents came out to receive the marchers from El Alto, and together they took the Plaza of San Francisco several times, demanding the exit of the “gringo,” as they called the President who was raised in the U.S.

B. What

On Tuesday, October 14th, when the president called for a dialogue with the leaders of the opposition, it was already too late. When the massacres began, all the leaders joined under one banner: The resignation of Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada.

"How can we have talks with an assassin," said Felipe Quispe. "The people know. The people think. The people decide. There will be no talks until the president resigns," added Evo Morales. Via radio, the voice of the people began to be heard: NO—he must go.

On Thursday, October 16th, thousands of coca growers arrived in La Paz, along with hundreds of miners from the South. El Alto came down from the hills again, into the city. An open meeting was held to decide what to do, and the popular clamor was to refuse to move one step from the demand that the president resign. Never before in the 21-year history of the Democracy of Bolivia had there been a demonstration like this one: 200,000 people marching, chanting, deciding, from below, the future of their country.

By Thursday afternoon, the intellectuals, artists, and the middle classes began to join the opposition. Ana Maria Romero, former Public Defender of the nation, launched a hunger strike along with 6 others. Ten hours later, there were already 400 people in the hunger strike throughout Bolivia.

C. When

On Friday, October 17, the demands of the mobilization were finally answered. After killing more than 80 Bolivian citizens, after wounding more than 400, Sanchez de Lozada literally flew out of his post--toward Miami.

At 9:00 am, the envoys from Brazil and
Argentina entered the Presidential Palace. At 10:00 am the mediators headed to the house of Vice-President Carlos Mesa, who had just bid goodbye to Vice-Roy Greenlee. “We will not permit that democratic institutionality be violated,” said Greenlee, assuredly terrified of the panorama of Indians that watched him from afar. At 11:00 am, the leader of the New Republican Force party, Manfred Reyes Villa, left the house of the president and announced to the national press that he was resigning from the governing coalition.

While these events were occurring, the Bolivian people continued marching and breaking all records; there were 350,000 in the streets of La Paz, coming from everywhere. Under such pressures from the Bolivian people, and despite the fact that, just hours earlier, Sanchez de Lozada had declared to Telefe of Argentina and CNN that he would not resign, he was indeed already preparing his resignation. However, he did not show his face in the halls of Congress; instead, he sent a letter and a video.

Two helicopters were sent to transport the ex-president and the Defense Minister, Carlos Sanchez Berzain. Journalists who re-corded the scene noted women with placards that read, in English, “Goné, Go Home.”

Evo Morales said that this was a great triumph for the Bolivian people. He asked all the people to avoid confrontation and said that we were beginning to recover democracy, adding: “We are going to defend the Constitution.” He also said that the new president, Carlos Mesa will have to answer to the Bolivian people, in particular, amending the hydrocarbon law because, “we can’t lose so many lives and still not win back our fuel.”

In an interview with CNN, Morales also corrected the accusations made by Sanchez de Lozada who said that he had connections with the Colombian FARC rebels and was also a narco-trafficker. The coca growers’ leader denied all of this and said that the ex-president had always accused the popular movements of those connections.

Addressing Carlos Mesa, he added: “He will have to accept that there will never be ‘zero coca’ in this country. We hope that things will change and that Mesa will not submit himself to the imperial interests of the U.S. We know that the U.S. Ambassador Greenlee has been trying to put pressure on Carlos Mesa. But we hope for a new policy, more open, more humane, that leaves behind the attacks and assassinations that we have suffered for so long.”

When asked if he was thinking of joining the new administration, Evo Morales responded: “The Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) doesn’t seek jobs in the new government. It will not co-govern with Carlos Mesa or anybody else because we have great differences in culture and ideology.”

“The defense of our natural resources is an issue that affects the entire Bolivian people. This is our wealth. And we should benefit from it. The same is true of the coca leaf, which has been part of our culture for millennia.” Plan Colombia, said Evo, is no more than a plan to colonize us. “I’m remembering that the Colombian and gringo troops dedicated to combating the narco are also guarding the oil pipelines.”

At 9:30 pm, the Congress began its session to ratify the resignation of Sanchez de Lozada. The party bosses agreed that they would simply read the letter of resignation signed by Sanchez de Lozada and transfer power to Carlos Mesa. At 10:25 pm, Carlos Mesa was sworn in, and became President, thanks to the people. In his first words as head of state, Mesa, a former leader of the La Paz journalists’ union, said that he would put the gas issue to a referendum so that the will of the people would be respected.

“We must be able to understand the country, beginning with the ethnic groups like the Quechus, Aymaras, and Guaranes, who have constructed the history of inequality with their blood, a history that we are obligated to repair.”

At 10:45 pm, on October 17th, 2003, Bolivia has a new president, and from the street, the fireworks sound and this nation is celebrating triumph. The people came, they spoke, and they decided. A new victory for Authentic Democracy has been constructed, but with death and with rage. The War on Drugs, imposed by the gringos, has suffered a brutal defeat with what has happened here. The maximum leader in El Alto, with tears in his eyes, commented this evening that there is no doubt that the people of Bolivia “have delivered a huge punch to the United States.”
AN APPEAL FOR SUPPORT
by Terry Turner

The Kayapo, an indigenous people who inhabit extensive territories on both sides of the Middle Xingu River, have called a meeting of all indigenous peoples of the valley of the Xingu, to be held in November at Piaracu, one of their villages located on the Xingu near the ferry crossing of Brazil Route 080. The purpose of the meeting is to coordinate a united response by all the indigenous nations of the Xingu valley to several developments that threaten the survival of the riverine ecosystem and all the people, indigenous and non-indigenous, who depend on it. These developments include:

1) the attempt by the Federal government of Brazil to revive plans for a series of hydroelectric dams to be built on the Xingu and its tributary, the Iriri. These dams would flood large areas of territory used by the inhabitants of the region, damage forest ecosystems and their fauna, destroy fisheries, and provide no compensatory economic benefits to the indigenous and non-indigenous populations of the valley. The first of these dams is to be built at Belo Monte, near Altamira on the Lower Xingu. This dam scheme, initially proposed in 1988, was the object of the famous Altamira rally of "the Peoples of the Xingu" led by the Kayapo in 1989, which is generally credited with having blocked its construction at the time.

2) the growing pollution of the Xingu headwaters and its tributaries by cattle ranchers and soybean farmers, who have occupied lands immediately adjoining the National Park of the Xingu. The peoples of the Upper Xingu who live within the Park have launched a project to combat this problem, with the support of the Instituto SocioAmbiental, a leading Brazilian NGO;

3) the illegal invasion and sale of large areas of land on the east bank of the Middle Xingu, in the area called Kapotinhore, which the Kayapo regard as an integral part of their territory. This is the last area on either bank of the Middle Xingu that remains undemarcated. Within the past two years it has been illegally invaded by land speculators and ranchers. One of these invaders has already cleared a large tract extending right up to the river bank that has threatened to kill any Indians who approach "his" land, and has fired upon Indians attempting to pass by on the river. The Kayapo have therefore been forced to abandon travel downriver from their villages of Mentukitere, Kapot and Piaracu.

Tensions among some of the fifteen Kayapo villages and between the Kayapo and some of the other indigenous peoples of the Xingu Park have hitherto prevented any combined response to these threats. The purpose of the proposed meeting at Piaracu is to overcome these divisions by uniting in struggle against all the threats to the Xingu and its peoples. Opposition to the Xingu dams has been growing among the non-indigenous people of the Lower Xingu in recent years, represented by the Movement for the Development of the Trans-Amazonica and the Xingu, and the newly organized Women's Movement of the Xingi, all centered in the town of Altamira and its adjoining region. Leaders of these movements have thus far sought in vain to promote collaboration by indigenous groups, especially the Kayapo, in efforts to reconstitute the coalition that organized the victorious Kayapo-led Altamira rally of 1989. The Kayapo call for the Piaracu meeting is intended to organize an indigenous coalition that can join with the non-indigenous movements of Altamira in a united movement to save the Xingu ecosystem as a whole with all its peoples. The Kayapo argue that the separate existing local campaigns—the Upper Xinguano fight against the pollution of the headwaters, the Kayapo fight to save the east bank of the Middle Xingu from illegal invasions by river-polluting soy farmers, and the fight of the Altamira movements against the hydroelectric dams—are really interconnected aspects of a single great struggle to save the Xingu and all its peoples from the effects of destructive development. All engaged in these struggles, they as-
Photo source: http://www.uwec.edu/greider/Indigenous/SouthAmerica/Flavia/indians.htm

sert, should therefore support one another and jointly appeal for external support. The Kayapo envision this united movement as culminating in a joint rally at Altamira in November or December of this year!, conceived as a repetition of the great Altamira rally of 1989, to confront and defeat the government’s attempt to revive its plan for the damming of the Xingu.

For the Piaraçu meeting, the Kayapo plan to invite about 100 indigenous representatives from their own communities, the peoples of the Xingu Park, and the indigenous groups of the lower Xingu. Some of these can come by bus or by river, but many will have to be flown by air taxi, especially if the interdiction of the Middle Xingu by trigger-happy ranchers cannot be overcome in time. Expenses for travel, food and the construction of new dormitories at Piaraçu are expected to run close to $10,000.00 US. Contributions of any size would be greatly appreciated. The Instituto Raoni, the Kayapo organization that is coordinating the preparations for the meeting, will accept direct deposits to its bank account: Instituto Raoni, Conta corrente 19000-4, Agencia 11779-5, Banco do Brasil, Colider Mato Grosso, Brazil CEP 78500

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