La Tierra es Vida

A Terra é Vida

Land is Life

The Committee on U.S. - Latin American Relations
http://www.rso.cornell.edu/cuslar/
Create Hope Today

When I started writing this editorial at the beginning of November, I was feeling hopeless. November 3, 2004 was a dark day for many people. Fortunately my despair gave way to a feeling of renewed hope. Working in the field of peace and justice, I feel a responsibility to remain hopeful. It was scary to feel the vacancy inside where I normally find the energy to work toward change. Maybe I felt the loss inside because so many people have dedicated their lives to social transformation, and for what, four more years of counter-productive foreign and domestic policy with the same administration? This won’t stop us though. We have years of progress and success to inspire hope and the strength to continue.

I have been inspired by so many others to “zoom out”, to view our lives and the efforts that we are involved in from afar. I use caution with the “zoom out” method that it not be an excuse for inaction or, even more importantly, a reason to decrease the pressure on the urgent need for social change. It is almost a paradox. We are so small, yet so powerful at the same time. Every action we take or words shared with someone else have a direct impact on so much around us, and continue to have an effect long after we have moved on. Yet at the same time, our struggle for social transformation or justice and peace, in whatever form it takes, must not completely overshadow our concern for the only thing any of us really do have control over, ourselves.

I am certain that in another 40 years, CUSLAR will be celebrating 80 years of working for peace and justice throughout the Americas. Initially it was a disheartening realization that CUSLAR was addressing the same core issues a decade ago as we are now, with some variant in the region of Latin America. The core problems may remain the same (US violence in the forms of domination and exploitation, general oppression of the poor in Latin America, etc.) but the regional shift signifies that the solidarity work throughout the years has been effective. And we will continue to see successes with each one of us playing an essential role. It is unfortunate that we are still struggling to solve the same problems, but reassuring to remember the conflicts that have been solved, the people who have been empowered, and the relationships that have formed.

Therefore I am optimistic that CUSLAR will still be active in another 40 years. I feel hopeful that others will continue on the journey toward change just as so many have before us. It is a journey that is strengthened as we learn from what has been successful and add new visions and ideas, too. Although our individual words and actions are very powerful on a personal level, the “movement” does not depend on one person or idea. Each of us, as so many before us, and many others to come, make up the intricate, beautiful pattern of peace, hope, and most importantly, love.
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The Committee on U.S.-Latin American Relations (CUSLAR) is a Cornell University-based group, founded in 1965, which seeks to promote a greater understanding of Latin America and the Caribbean. The members of CUSLAR are a diverse group of people united in our concern about the role of the U.S. in the social, political, and economic affairs of the region. Within this context we support the right of the people of Latin America and the Caribbean to self-determination, and support their efforts to free themselves from a legacy of colonialism, exploitation, and oppression. CUSLAR works for peace, justice, and greater mutual understanding in U.S./Latin American relations through education, solidarity, and support of human rights.

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

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Chile
Mapuche Acquitted of Terrorism Charges

By Human Rights Watch
(Temuco, Chile, November 4, 2004)—The acquittal today in southern Chile of seven Mapuche defendants and a non-Mapuche sympathizer charged under Pinochet-era counterterrorism laws is a victory for justice and moderation, Human Rights Watch said today. At the trial, which ended today, a court in Temuco concluded unanimously that the evidence was too weak to sustain charges of illicit terrorist association against the defendants, members of an indigenous community affected by longstanding land conflicts. “The court acted with laudable independence and impartiality in reaching this verdict, given the huge legal resources deployed against the Mapuche defendants,” said José Miguel Vivanco, executive director of the Americas Division of Human Rights Watch. “We hope the attorney general’s office learns a lesson from this verdict and desists from such terrorism prosecutions in the future.”

The eight defendants were accused of forming an illegal association to commit acts of terrorism in order to resolve land conflicts in favor of the indigenous Mapuche community. None of the alleged crimes involved a direct threat to life. The Mapuche were defended by attorneys from the Public Defender’s Office, a body created under Chile’s new Code of Criminal Procedure that provides skilled counsel at no cost to those unable to hire a lawyer.

Among those testifying for the prosecution were at least six so-called faceless witnesses (testigos sin rostro) whose identity was concealed from the defendants and their lawyers, and who appeared in the courtroom behind screens and with voice-distorting microphones. In a report published on October 27, Human Rights Watch described how the use of “faceless witnesses” violates due process norms protected by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Under Chile’s new Code of Criminal Procedure, enacted in Temuco in 2000, the prosecution and the victims can ask the Supreme Court to annul a trial on grounds that their rights were not respected. In a 2003 case involving three of today’s defendants, the Supreme Court annulled their acquittal following a request by the prosecution and the victims, and ordered a retrial. Two of them were convicted in a second trial and sentenced to jail terms of five years for “terrorist threats.”

In its recent report, Human Rights Watch explained that the application of antiterrorism laws to common crimes like those in this case was unjustified and disproportionate. The report pointed out that antiterrorism laws are harsh because of the exceptional seriousness of the crimes they cover, and that they should never be applied to crimes of lesser gravity.

The law under which the defendants were tried was enacted by Gen. Augusto Pinochet in 1984 to confront growing armed resistance to his rule. Under new provisions of the law later introduced under elected governments, crimes of arson may be considered terrorist actions when intended to “spread fear in the population or part of it,” even if they do not constitute a direct threat to life, liberty or physical integrity.

Source: Human Rights Watch

El Salvador
U.S. Trade Unionist Assassinated in El Salvador

Mr. Gilberto Soto was assassinated Friday evening, November 5, at 6:00 p.m., while visiting his mother in the city of Usulutan, El Salvador. He was just about to begin organizing Central American port workers and documenting violations of the rights of workers hauling the containers of the Maersk Shipping Company when he was killed...

...Mr. Soto received a call on his cell phone and had just stepped outside the doorway of his mother’s home, searching for better reception, when he was approached by two men who shot and killed him at close range. He was shot in the upper back and on the lower side, near the kidney. It was this shot which severed his aorta, the major artery to the heart. He died immediately.

The killers fled, running to a car waiting about 100 yards away. There may also have been a third assailant on a bike. There was absolutely no attempt to rob Mr. Soto. It was clear that the sole intent was to kill him. There were several eye witnesses.
Mr. Gilberto Soto was a long time organizer with the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT). Based in New Jersey, he was in charge of organizing port container drivers in the northeast of the U.S. He was currently involved in organizing drivers in Elizabeth, N.J.

Less than a year ago, Mr. Soto met in New York City with Denmark's SID Union (The Specialized Workers Union in Denmark) Central American Representative, Bjarne Larsen. The IBT and SID were interested in collaborating on a joint project documenting the systematic violations of worker rights by Maersk, one of the largest shipping companies in the world.

Mr. Soto was just about to begin his organizing work in Central America when he was murdered. He was going to meet with port workers in El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua. However, his real interest was to meet with and assist the drivers who hauled Maersk containers. In El Salvador, the working conditions are horrible, with excessive shifts and low wages. The drivers have absolutely no right to organize, and any hint of workers trying to exercise their legal right to Freedom of Association would be met with mass firings. The drivers are paid for only the hours they are on the road. A trip from a free trade zone in El Salvador to Puerto Cortez in Honduras could take seven-to-nine hours. Then there would be all the down time for which they are not paid, followed by another long haul back to El Salvador.

In Honduras, about 700 of the container drivers are organized, and a much smaller group was just newly organized in Nicaragua.

Weeks had gone into preparing for Mr. Soto's trip. Many emails had gone back and forth, and many drivers had been approached and spoken with. It is possible that word leaked out.

Mr. Gilberto Soto's family in El Salvador will not be frightened. They are calling for a full investigation. Mr. Soto's sister told us: "We need an investigation. This murder did not just happen. There is something behind this. We demand justice in this country (El Salvador), where there is so little justice."

Mr. Gilberto Soto would have been 50 years old on Saturday, November 6, the day after he was assassinated. He leaves behind a 25 year old son. His mother and sister are accompanying his body from El Salvador to the U.S. this Thursday. Mr. Soto was born in El Salvador and immigrated to the U.S. in 1975. His family says that Gilberto had no enemies in Usulutan. It was quite the opposite - he was loved and respected.

If an international trade union leader can be murdered in El Salvador, we can only imagine the repression the Salvadoran workers are facing on a daily basis. This is another tragic example of how CAFTA (Central American Free Trade Agreement) will continue to fail the workers in Central America and the U.S. While CAFTA goes out of its way to provide all sorts of legal protection to the product, there are no similar enforceable laws backed up by sanctions to defend the rights of the human being and workers who made the product.

Source: National Labor Committee www.nlcnet.org

Nicaragua
Nicaraguan Leftists Gain in Elections. Sandinista party appears headed for victory in 15 of 17 provincial capitals.

(MANAGUA, Nicaragua, November 9, 2004) — Nicaragua's leftist opposition Sandinista party, which fought a civil war with U.S.-backed rebels when it ruled in the 1980s, made strong gains in weekend elections, taking control of almost all major cities.

Results released Monday showed the Sandinistas handing a heavy defeat to the ruling party, which has been weakened by internal feuding and a drive to remove President Enrique Bolaños amid campaign finance and corruption allegations.

"Most Nicaraguans are convinced that the only force that can save this country, the rich and the poor, is the FSLN," or Sandinista National Liberation Front, former President Daniel Ortega, the party leader, told thousands of supporters in Managua's central plaza.

The capital, Managua, held by the Sandinistas since 2000, was the main battleground for 152 municipalities that were up for grabs Sunday. With 73% of the vote counted in the race for Managua mayor, Sandinista candidate Dionisio Marenco had 45%, compared with 36% for Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, son of former President Violeta Barrios de Chamorro.

The Sandinistas also appeared to be headed for victory in at least 15 of Nicaragua's 17 provincial capitals and in 91 towns, election officials said. The party held 11 of those provincial capitals going into Sunday's elections.


Venezuela
Chávez Allies Take 21 of 23 States

By Juan Forero
(November 5, 2004) Election authorities said that the governor of Carabobo, a state that has been a bastion for antigovernment forces, had lost his seat to a pro-government challenger in the regional elections on Sunday, cementing President Hugo Chávez's political dominance of the country. The victory by Luis Acosta, a former general, in the tight race against the incumbent, Henrique Salas, means that Mr. Chávez's allies swept nearly all the opposition candidates from important
The number of killings of union members has dropped in Colombia, from a high of 222 in 1996. But union leaders, foreign diplomats and political analysts say the government has done little to improve safety - underscored by the fact that the union leaders killed in Saravena had asked the government for better security.

Paramilitary organizations, which use death squads to erode support for rebel groups, have accused unions of working with guerrillas. Rebel groups have, to be sure, drawn some members from unions.

But union leaders have also made enemies of powerful forces in Colombia’s highly stratified society, both for their leftist declarations and their harsh criticism of fiscally conservative governments bent on privatizing industries and holding down labor costs.

The attorney general’s announcement came days after Secretary of State Colin L. Powell warned the Colombian government that it must curtail rights abuses or risk losing aid. On Tuesday, Vice President Francisco Santos acknowledged that the government had erred in its initial characterization of the killings, saying, “Yes, we were wrong.”

Colombia is by far the world’s most dangerous country for union members, with 94 killed last year and 47 slain by Aug. 25 this year, according to the National Union School, a research and educational center in Medellín. Most of those killings were by right-wing paramilitary leaders linked to rogue army units. Worldwide, 123 union members were slain last year, according to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, a Brussels-based group.

...
BOGOTA, Sep 15 (IPS) - A tandem bicycle with a loudspeaker moves back and forth from one end of the massive indigenous protest march to the other, as the 50,000 demonstrators make their way along the Pan-American highway to the city of Cali in southwestern Colombia.

The protesters — Nasa (better known as Paez) Indians and members of other indigenous groups as well as black communities, peasant farmers and trade unionists — are to reach Cali on Thursday, after walking or riding in trucks a total of 100 kms since they set out on Tuesday.

The job of the “radiocicleta”, or radio-bicycle, is to report what is happening during the march through a broadcast signal linked to Radio Payumut, a small indigenous radio station that broadcasts in both the Nasa language and Spanish from Santander de Quilichao, in the southwestern department (province) of Cauca.

The march was called by the Nasa people to protest the human rights abuses and violence of the four-decade civil war, a proposed constitutional reform that would basically impose the re-election of right-wing President Alvaro Uribe and free trade agreements currently under negotiation with the United States.

In each town they pass through, the marchers stop to hold a session of their “mobile congress.”

Since leaving the town of Santander de Quilichao on Tuesday, the march has become the biggest in the history of the department of Cauca, which stretches from the Andes mountains in the east to the Pacific Ocean in the west, and is the ancestral home of the Nasa people.

The Nasa, who the Spanish conquistadors dubbed “Paez” — which means “house” in the Nasa language — today number around 140,000, which makes them the second-largest indigenous group in Colombia, whose 90 native ethnic groups account for around two percent of the country’s population of 43 million.

The theme of the “mobile congress” is “Minga for life, justice, happiness, freedom and autonomy”.

“Minga” is an indigenous word for an ancestral practice of communities joining efforts or “meeting for the achievement of a common goal,” journalist Mauricio Beltran, communications adviser to the National Indigenous Organisation of Colombia (ONIC) and the Association of Indigenous Councils of Northern Cauca (ACIN), told IPS.

The organisers say the “minga” or “mobile congress” is being held in defence of the right to life — not only of human beings, but of plants,

borders Cauca to the north — by students and members of Women in Black, an international peace network.

Anti-government protests are also scheduled in other cities for Thursday.

Violence has not been completely absent in the peaceful mobilisation. A bodyguard of Governor Angelino Garzon, who belongs to the leftist Polo Democratico party and has supported the march, was killed at noon on Tuesday in Cali.

“It’s a sign for me,” Garzon told the press, while the indigenous groups that organised the march pointed out that the murder was also a message for the public at large.

The organisers say the “minga” or “mobile congress” is being held in defence of the right to life — not only of human beings, but of plants,

“Among indigenous people, two of us come together for a ‘tull’ (traditional planting), 10 of us come together for the harvest, 1,000 when we need to fix a road, 18,000 if we have to make decisions for the future, and all of us if we have to come out to defend justice, happiness, freedom and autonomy,” says a communiqué issued by the Nasa Indians prior to the march.

The statement is signed by ONIC, ACIN and the Cauca Regional Indigenous Council (CRIC), a legendary organisation in the history of struggles over land in Colombia.

The demonstrators will be received Thursday in Cali — the capital of the department of Valle del Cauca, which
animals, lakes and rivers as well.

They also say the meetings along the way are aimed at coming up with strategies to defend the rights and freedoms that were gained when the constitution was rewritten in 1991, which the activists say are threatened by the constitutional reforms proposed by the Uribe administration.

In addition, they hope to draft proposals for blocking a free trade treaty that Colombia is negotiating with the U.S. government, "because the talks are taking place behind the people's backs, and because nature and the future and the welfare of the people are endangered by the logic of turning things that cannot be sold and that must be protected into merchandise and business' opportunities.

The fourth round of negotiations of the proposed free trade deal between Washington and Peru, Ecuador and Colombia is taking place this week in Puerto Rico. In previous rounds, Washington proposed mechanisms aimed at exerting patent rights over Colombia’s biodiversity, among the richest in the world.

President Uribe opposed the march on security grounds. He also accused the indigenous organisers of expressing political positions.

"I see no link between the problems that are being brought up and the march," said the president. "I see that the march has a political objective and it should be clearly presented as such, instead of putting forth lies.

"Tell the truth, say you have a political party, and that you want to march and protest, but don't invent stories to tell the country," Uribe said last Friday.

The demonstrators responded that they are not speaking for the government, but on behalf of "the people."

On the first day, the march reached the town of Villarrica, in Cauca, where the demonstrators spent the night in tents and shelters set up with plastic sheeting and tarpas.

By the time the march reached Villarrica, the original 25,000 people who left Santander at 8:00 AM Tuesday had swelled to around 50,000, said Beltran.

The organisers had set a target of 40,000 people. But they now believe that 70,000 people could march into Cali, one of Colombia’s biggest cities, on Thursday, Beltran commented to IPS.

He also said that many residents of Cali are supporting the protesters by participating in food collection drives to help out with "the touchiest aspect, because the group is growing continually and food will become an increasingly difficult issue."

Media coverage of the march is carried out by the Communication System for Peace (SIPAZ), which groups 138 community radio stations in 17 regions of Colombia, including 30 indigenous stations.

"Some of the indigenous stations have already begun to re-broadcast, others will begin to do so in the next few days, and the idea is to have total coverage by Saturday. This is the first time that such a broad network of alternative media outlets has operated in Colombia," said Beltran.

The local CMI TV programme, filming the march, showed a police presence, but with the officers posted far away from the protesters, who are accompanied by their own indigenous guard, which was set up to assert the autonomy and neutrality of the Nasa people in the midst of the armed conflict that has had Colombia in its grip for four decades.

Uribe has suggested incorporating the indigenous guard, which is armed only with staff that symbolically assert authority in the community, into the state security services that fight the guerrillas. But he has met a resounding rejection to his proposal.

Early this month, five indigenous leaders, including Arquimedes Vitonas, mayor of the town of Toribio in Cauca, where CRIC was founded, were kidnapped by the leftist Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

continued on next page
But they were freed within days, after the indigenous guard staged an (unarmed) rescue mission.

The Nasa people, who have a long, successful experience in participatory municipal government and development planning, won the National Peace Prize in 2000.

And in February Vitonas received, in the name of his people, the Equator Prize from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The Nasa Project was one of seven “outstanding community initiatives” selected from a total of 400 from around the world.

Vitonas and another Nasa leader, Gilberto Munoz, have also been recognized as ‘Masters of Wisdom’ by the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

After Vitonas was kidnapped, the UNDP issued a strongly-worded statement on his behalf.

One of the indigenous guard leaders who led the rescue of Vitonas and the other kidnapping victims “was today (Tuesday) cooking stew for 100 people at 3:00 after walking all day long, while a ‘chirimia’ (five-member Nasa musical group) played traditional songs on flutes, drums and a seed instrument,” said Beltran.

“These communities have built a civil resistance movement like few others in the country, and today they can show with pride that the war is not a core feature of the structures of their lives,” columnist Fabio Velasquez wrote Tuesday in the Cali newspaper El Pais, criticising Uribe’s opposition to the march.

Source:

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Bush Flees America as Haitian Troops Move in to Restore Order

By Todd Saddler

I recently traveled to Haiti for three weeks, having lived there off and on for ten years. Following the news of the most recent coup d' état against Haiti orchestrated by the Bush administration, I felt the need to write something about it in order to keep my head from exploding.

Upon further reflection, I decided that all the information that I could wish to convey to my compatriots about this situation was already out there for those who wanted to find it. The best thing I could do would be to put it into a coherent frame of reference: What would it look like to us if we were on the receiving end of our own foreign policy and media coverage?

So please imagine yourself trying to survive on an income of one dollar per day, and coming across the following magazine article as you sift through the garbage of a wealthy foreigner living in a high-walled compound above your neighborhood....

President George W. Bush fled the strife-torn United States during the predawn hours Monday, while rebel groups converged on Washington D.C. A Haitian spokesperson said that Bush and his family were taken to a waiting Haitian Air Force jet and flown to the location of his choice, which turned out to be Antarctica.

"I was the victim of a modern style kidnapping, an anti-democratic coup d' état" complained Bush when journalists were finally able to catch up with him at the Amundsen-Scott Research Station at the South Pole. "A ridiculous assertion" shot back Haitian Secretary of State Yves-Andre Wainwright, "This was a voluntary departure." According to Wainright, a group of Haitian officials went with an armored SWAT contingent to the White House at around 3 AM, at Bush's invitation. After an informal breakfast interview, they proceeded to escort Bush to the National Airport where, as he was boarding the plane, he offered a "gesture of resignation" to the Haitian Ambassador.

Bush was hung out to dry by Haiti's Aristide administration, even as NATO Haitian descended into anarchy and flooded Haiti, Mexico, and even Canada with economic refugees.

Bush, the first white president in America's troubled history, joins the company of Panama's Manuel Noriega and Chile's Augusto Pinochet as he goes into exile a year before his term in office expires. He was scooped onto the compost pile of history by a heterogeneous coalition of political opposition and armed freedom fighters led by a professional wrestler, an alleged mass murderer, a pedophile and a spammer.

While conservative Haitian thinkers claim that white people are culturally or genetically incapable of self-rule, Haiti's Aristide administration has not gone so far in their criticism of Bush. "The scientific evidence for that hypothesis is inconclusive" stated a Presidential Palace spokesperson in a press conference today. "American democracy just needs a little more help from its friends."

Haiti has been forced to intervene in US politics a number of times over the northern country's chaotic history, including a Haitian Armed Forces occupation from 1929 to 1942. This time, Haiti stumbled into the U.S. reluctantly.

During this year of Haitians' bicentennial celebration, they clearly did not want to get entangled in a thankless act of charity. Alas, events overtook them and they were faced with the odious prospect of going in, with the attendant risks, or standing by while a country just 600 miles from Cape

Some would argue that America has already been the recipient of bountiful support, citing Haitian funding of U.S. political parties like the Greens, the Libertarians, The Neo-Nazis, the International Socialists, and the Marijuana Legalization Party. Such funding, it was hoped, would diversify the U.S. political spectrum and avoid the emergence of a single party state following the collapse of the Democratic Party. America has benefited from Haitian good will economically as well. The

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A New Beginning for Uruguay

The People Take Power as the Left Wins First Election in 174 Years

By Alex Contreras Baspineiro
Narco News South American Bureau Chief

(November 4, 2004) Nobody who had the privilege of being in Montevideo on October 31, 2004 will easily forget that historic day. The leftist Broad Front coalition won the general election with the support of the majority of the Uruguayan people, ending the long rule of the National and Colorado parties.

It is the left’s first national victory in Uruguay’s 174 years.

“This victory is not for us old folks, it is for our children and grandchildren, for this beautiful country that deserves a better future,” said Javier Saralegui, one among the half-million people who filled Montevideo’s Entrevero Plaza and the surrounding streets. “More than thirty years have gone by... thirty years (since the founding of the Broad Front party) to bring about this great happiness!”

“Yesterday’s Switzerland”

Those who have known Uruguay for many years will remember that this small southern country was known as “the Switzerland of América” for its high standard of living, closer to that of a developed country than one of the “third world.”

Now, the situation has changed. From 137,700 unemployed people (out of a...
total population of 3.4 million) in 1999, when current president Jorge Batlle’s term began, the number reached 166,500 this summer. This reflects not only an alarming unemployment rate, but lowering quality of work. These official statistics are very conservative, according to Uruguayan experts; the situation is actually worse.

Joblessness and Uruguay’s deep economic recession have raised the level of poverty, especially among women and children. Around 31 percent of the people in urban areas here are considered poor. Between 1999 and 2003 the number of people below the poverty line doubled, from 408,120 to 849,100. Forty-four percent of the poor people in this country are under eighteen years old.

Both rich and poor Uruguayans seem to agree that the policies of the last thirty years—and especially in the last five years of this neoliberal administration—have seriously harmed the country.

The latest United Nations Human Development report puts Uruguay among the nineteen countries in the world that invest the least in education as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Only three countries—the Dominican Republic, Guatemala and Ecuador—invest less in education. The current government claimed it would raise investment in education to 4.5 percent of GDP, but it never did.

When the current administration came to power on November 9, 1999, it promised to defend the purchasing power of salaries and pensions, to increase the education budget, decrease the tax burden, lower public fees, create jobs, start a social dialog and get rid of unemployment. The government kept none of these promises, and its neoliberal model failed.

Thousands of Uruguayans living in foreign countries returned home for the general elections, in order to vote and support this new possibility. They arrived by plane, by bus, by car, by bicycle, and some even on foot to cast their votes for the left. It was an emotional moment as Uruguayans who had left the country for a better future were reunited with friends and family still at home. Several analysts have said that the vote of these returning Uruguayans was a determining factor in the elections’ outcome.

The approximately 2.5 million voters elected 226 officials, including the president, vice president, thirty senators, 99 congresspeople, and 95 electoral officials. The majority of these came from the Broad Front.

Lily Lerena de Seregni, wife of Broad Front founder Liber Seregni, declared that starting today there would not only be unity among Uruguayans, but among all Latin Americans struggling to confront their situation.

“This is a lifelong dream,” she said, “one I have had not just since the founding of the Broad Front, but all my life. Now we want a country that is truly for everybody, with liberty, harmony, and good jobs.”

Liber Seregni himself died three months ago at age 88, still yearning for victory on this historic day, dreaming of reclaiming the social equality of this country’s past and providing work and dignity to all.

**Goals for the Future**

Famed Uruguayan writer and journalist Eduardo Galeano, as he cast his vote, said he has many hopes that things will begin to change in his country to benefit the majority.

“For Uruguay,” he said, “this is the first time in history that the left will take power. What’s more, this election coincides with a very important continued on pg. 17
All Things American in Nicaragua

By Joanna Eng

I expected my summer in Nicaragua to be the most amazing experience of my life. And it was, but not in any of the ways I expected.

I didn’t know that my host family would have three television sets with more cable channels than I have at home, and that I would spend one of my first nights there watching the Miss Universe pageant. I didn’t expect to hear Shaggy or Whitney Houston when I turned on the radio. I didn’t think I would meet people named Franklin, Harold, Shirley, and Allison. I didn’t expect anyone to ask me where I was when the “twin towers” fell on September 11th.

At first, I delighted more in, and was intrigued more by, the things that seemed the most different from my own place and culture. The coconuts, mangoes, avocados, and limes growing in abundance on trees right in the patio in the middle of the house. Men making adobe blocks out of earth and water. The custom of kissing people on the cheek upon meeting them for the first time. Receiving generous armfuls of harvested vegetables free of charge from the poorest women I knew. The bright turquoise, pink, purple, and blue of the walls. Meetings and events starting hours late.

Soon, I came to see that the first set of unexpected observations I mentioned were not just the products of some recent Americanization or contamination of Nicaraguan culture, and that as a norteamericana I was not just a random foreigner. Nicaragua’s relationship with the United States ran a lot deeper than I had imagined.

We learned from Profesora Rosita in history class that in 1856 an American, William Walker, invaded Nicaragua and declared himself president, hoping to make the small country into a slave state to support his political party back at home. We learned that Augusto Sandino was a national hero because in 1927, he fought against the United States military, the yanquis, who were intervening in Nicaragua to forcibly change the president to one who was more favorable to U.S. interests. In fact, burned revolutionary music and silos full of food. Another Nicaraguan, whose family was on the opposite end of the political spectrum, told us that Reagan was a hero who had saved the country.

It seemed that everyone I met had at least one family member living and working in Miami, Houston, or somewhere else in the U.S. Because of the extreme scarcity of jobs, Nicaragua has become the least densely populated country in Central America, as a mass migration of people to Costa Rica, Honduras, El Salvador, and especially the U.S., to find work, continues. Students asked me how to get scholarships to study in the U.S.; and all sorts of people, even people I had just met, asked me if I would take them back with me. Nicaraguans openly joke about becoming mojados, wetbacks, the same way they openly talk about being ugly, pretty, fat, skinny, stupid, smart, light skinned or dark skinned.

North American products, styles, and values have become a large part of Nicaraguan culture and everyday life over the decades, and have been adopted and adapted in interesting ways. The country’s public transportation buses are old American or Canadian school buses past their safety expiration dates, often repainted with eye-catching colors and unique designs, decorated on the inside with festive fringe and images of Jesus Christ or Tweety Bird, and given names like El Jalapeño or El Ángel del Bien Amado. In addition to salsa, Latin pop, and Nicaraguan folk and revolutionary music, Nicaraguans listen to old and new mainstream American pop, with a special affinity for melodramatic love songs from the ‘80s, even when they don’t understand any of the English lyrics. Their cable TV channels show a mix of telenovelas and game shows from Miami and various Latin American countries, American movies dubbed into Spanish, American cartoons not dubbed into Spanish, American professional sports, American music.

When Ronald Reagan died in June, the news carried perhaps more meaning for some Nicaraguans than for a lot of Americans.

When Ronald Reagan died in June, the news carried perhaps more meaning for some Nicaraguans than for a lot of Americans. When news of his death hit the front page of the newspaper, Profesora Martha, our politics teacher, told us all about how Reagan was responsible for the Contra army that killed and tortured her students, friends, and family members, and...
Seeds vs. Greed: CAFTA and the Future of Sustainable Agriculture in Guatemala

Written by Andrea Nill

On Tuesday, October 19th, Guatemalan agronomist Carlos Humberto Muralles spoke to an engaged audience of students, professors, and other interested locals in Ithaca, NY as part of a Fall Speaking Tour entitled “Globalizing Justice,” sponsored by the Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala (NISGUA). Muralles is responsible for the coordination of a team of 20 people in the Production Department of the Association for the Promotion and Development of the Community (CEIBA).

CEIBA began as a nongovernmental Guatemalan organization in 1992 that was formed to address topics of health, agriculture production, women’s involvement, and education. The organization focuses specifically on the marginalized communities of the northwestern highlands of Guatemala, the area most plagued by instability.

CEIBA has particularly studied the effect that the introduction of transgenic products into the Guatemalan market has had on these poor rural farming communities. CEIBA is also part of a growing movement to stop Plan Puebla Panama (PPP). The PPP is a $10 billion plan of development that was first proposed by Mexican president Vicente Fox. The purpose of the plan is to open up the southern half of Mexico and part of Central America to private foreign investment in the hopes of attracting industry and expanding natural resource extraction. It is essentially setting the foundation for the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) through its dependence on multi-lateral development bank support and private investment aimed at commercially connecting southern Mexico with the rest of Central America.

Proponents of the PPP claim that it will improve the quality of life for Mexican and Central American inhabitants, however critics have pointed out the magnitude of negative consequences associated with the implementation of the plan. These costs include the exploitation of the region’s cheap labor force and natural resources. Half of Guatemala’s 21,000 miles of rich rainforest would be threatened by the building of dams, oil pipelines, and the activities of the biotech industry. Additionally, land privatization, a key component of PPP, would lead to the displacement of indigenous populations whose land would be sold to powerful multinational corporations. These problems are all exacerbated by international trade laws that provide loopholes allowing these transnational corporations to deliberately disregard national labor and environmental laws.

The Guatemalan presidential elections held in January 2004 saw the coming to power of the new administration of the moderately conservative president Oscar Berger. Berger has cited the fight against crime, corruption and poverty as the top priority of his new government. This echoes the repeated broken promises of every administration that has come to office since the signing of the 1996 Peace Accords, which ended Guatemala’s 36 year Civil War. It is still too early to determine whether Berger’s presidency will see the long awaited realization of these noble propositions.

Berger has reduced the size of the Guatemalan military from 27,000 to 15,500. In addition, he has sought to cap the once bloated Guatemalan military budget. One of the administration’s greatest efforts to fight crime and corruption has been its expressed support of the proposed Commission of Investigation of Illegal Groups and Clandestine Security Forces, better known as CICIACS. CICIACS is intended to investigate...
Guatemala’s illegal armed groups and their association with the State and organized crime. It would grant the United Nations the power to prosecute crimes in a member country for the first time. The proposed commission faces staunch opposition from powerful mafia heads, military officials, extreme rightists, and most importantly, the legislative and judicial branches of the Guatemalan government who must first approve its formation. Berger’s call for transparency is commendable. However, his administration has yet to convince a corrupt congress and national court backed by a skeptical citizenry to accept the proposal. In a private conversation with Muralles he expressed his support of CICICAS but added that he did not believe that Guatemala would ever see its implementation.

Muralles was much more critical of Berger in terms of his position on agrarian issues. President Oscar Berger is a wealthy farmer whose candidacy was backed by the agriculture and banking elite of Guatemala. After his defeat in the 1999 elections he retreated back to his farm only to be convinced to reenter politics by some of Guatemala’s richest and most powerful interests. As part of his 2003 presidential campaign, Berger promised to find solutions to the widening agrarian crisis and land conflicts in the countryside. During just the first few days of his term in office Berger broke this pledge by carrying out the first of over 40 land evictions. These land evictions have become increasingly violent. In early June they were marked by instances in which houses, crops, and animals were intentionally burned by the Guatemalan police.

The signing of the Peace Accords in 1996 did not have the effect of instantly rectifying the difficulties that the country has faced throughout the years. Guatemala is still inundated with a plethora of serious social, economic, and political issues. These problems are confronted with continuous obstacles that largely prevent a complete resolution any time in the foreseeable future. Faced with these enormous difficulties that are further amplified by a nation’s slow recovery from an even bloodier past, Carlos Humberto Muralles, together with CEIBA, seeks to heal these wounds while cultivating the conditions necessary for a better future that every Guatemalan deserves.

Excerpts from an October 19 lecture by Guatemalan agronomist, Carlos Humberto Muralles

Interpreted by Ann Peters
Transcribed by Laura MacDonald

Good afternoon. I’m so glad to be here with all of you and to be able to share with you a little bit of our experience with the Central American Free Trade Agreement and particularly the impact it has had on our communities...

...For a number of years, we’ve been extremely interested in the topic of globalization and free trade agreements. We have been looking at the texts which have been developed in the Central American Free Trade Agreement between the Central American countries and the US. This agreement has already been signed and remains to be ratified. This agreement has a negative impact on a number of areas for the lives of people in Central America. One of the most heavily affected sectors, and the one in which I’m going to focus my talk today, is the sector of agricultural production and animal husbandry. This agreement most heavily affects both agricultural and other small producers in our country, and in particular makes it hard for us to continue with projects in sustainable agriculture which we have been developing in recent years.

An Unfair Advantage

One topic which we see heavily affecting our countries is that of agricultural production subsidies. The governments of our countries do not have the economic power to support
small farmers in our countries unlike the US, which regularly subsidizes agricultural production... So what happens with the elimination of duties on imported products coming in to Guatemala, is that the lack of capacity to subsidize farmer production inside of the country results in the automatic bankruptcy of the large majority of Guatemalan producers, who are competing directly with products from the United States. So what we see is that those products which are associated with food security and food self-sufficiency in our country and the traditional agricultural products which we requested to be set aside from this liberation of customs duties have not been. They are included, within a five to ten year period when these duties will be removed from these products.

We predict this will lead to an increase in hunger, poverty, and unemployment in our country. In Guatemala today, the basic production of corn and beans is the single largest source of employment in the country. When Guatemalan

producers are forced to no longer produce for the Guatemalan market the products are going to be bought from outside the country and which leads to massive rural unemployment. These measures are in fact part of a very well-designed plan put forth by representatives of the United States. However, this plan has not been perceived or taken into account by those who’ve been representing Guatemala.

Incorporated in the plan is the massive entrance of maquiladoras (sweatshop) type factories in Guatemala using low-cost labor. And so, what you see in this situation of massive rural unemployment is people basically willing to give away their labor at any price to the factories coming in from outside. You see this burst of profit-generation within the maquiladoras. The official measures that are set up for the labor law is that each country can establish its own labor laws, and that in case there would be a conflict between two countries the WTO has a commission which would resolve the conflict. However, what we’ve seen in the actual situations that arise is that each country tries to protect the foreign investors that have come in to the nation rather than to protect their own citizens. And at the same time the United States is taking measures to further clamp down on the border and close off the border for immigration from Central America so in a situation of massive unemployment in Central America the option of migration to the United States is cut off, causing greater chaos and suffering.

We expect that these kinds of practices are going to heavily affect biodiversity in our country, as the area known as Mesoamerica- the south of Mexico and the Central American region- is one of the regions of the world with the highest biodiversity. And we also know that what these companies do is they patent the seeds that they have genetically modified, converting them into something which the producers around the country are not allowed to reproduce themselves, attempting to create a situation of dependency. These seeds also come together with a package- that they have to be used with certain kinds of fertilizer and certain kinds of pesticides. So, therefore, our own producers, who are currently working with locally generated, organic fertilizers, would no longer be able to do this.

A grave concern of ours is specifically that of corn, since corn is a crop of open pollination, that is to say that pollen from one plant can cross freely with other plants in the region. It can travel by water or by air. Therefore, since the genetically modified corn has the characteristic of being extremely aggressive in its pollination and

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Nicaragua
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videos, CNN en Español, the local news, and all kinds of soccer games.

So with all of this, and more, in the history of Nicaragua-U.S. relations, how did people treat me, the norteamericana? Some made fun of me, and some asked for money. But most people were friendly, hospitable, and interested. They asked me questions and talked about some of their perceptions about life allá (over there). Dredis, a boy I worked with in a rural community, wanted to know about flying in airplanes. A man on the bus asked me whether the women are “hot” or “cold” where I come from. Uncle Eduardo, who lived with my host family, asked me if there was much racism where I live. A woman in the countryside told me she imagined that Americans are only canned food. Many people told me that they had always thought that everyone allí had very light skin and blonde hair, but they guessed they were wrong. My host father, Julio, thought that Americans in general were very upright, unfriendly, and uncaring, compared to Nicaraguans. He also loved to tell me about Nicaraguan traditions and celebrations, and then say that we didn’t have anything so bonito in the U.S., did we?

North American influence aside, Nicaraguans already view their culture as a unique blend of the Spanish and the indigenous. Even before the conquest, the area was made up of an unclear mixture of various indigenous groups. Mixture and change don’t seem to be anything new or radical for Nicaraguans. The North American influence is not simply one of domination or power; it plays into the lives of Nicaraguans in sometimes imperceptible, inseparable ways. Rather than being disappointed by the pieces of North American culture embedded in Nicaraguan life, or ashamed at my country’s history of violence in theirs, I like to think about how the complex Nicaragua-U.S. relationship can grow in more constructive ways, and how important cultural exchange experiences, like mine, are to that process.

However, such thoughts are always met with irony when I realize, again and again, how privileged I was just to be able to travel to Nicaragua. For most Nicaraguans, obtaining a visa to travel to the U.S. would be nearly impossible; but I was able to make the trip relatively easily. I could leave whenever I wanted to, and I didn’t have to deal with any problems there if I didn’t want to. All the people I met in Nicaragua were aware of the ironic sense of inequality built into our relationship, as they said things like, “You’re going to forget us.” “You’re never going to come back, are you?” “Don’t forget us and our poverty.” “Tell your friends and family back home that we Nicaraguans are not bad people.”

Joanna is a senior in the College of Arts and Sciences. She participated in the Centro de Idiomas program and lived in Ocotal, Nueva Segovia, Nicaragua, for three months.

A New Beginning for Uruguay
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referendum on the issue of water. The people will be able to be heard on a fundamental issue: the ownership of water, which is tomorrow’s petroleum.”

The question on the ballot concerned the Constitutional Water Reform, which would change the constitution to guarantee that water, as a natural resource and human right, remain a public good out of the reach of large profit-seeking corporations. Many have predicted that the wars of the 21st century will be fought over water. More than sixty-two percent of the population rejected water privatization and supported the reform.

There is no doubt that the Uruguayan people began to write a new history on October 31 – a history based on the reconstruction of their economy and social fabric deteriorated by years of bad government, the dignity of the people and above all the hope for a better future.

“Celebrate, Uruguayans, celebrate,” said future president Tabaré Vázquez, on the day of his electoral triumph. May the celebration go on and on…

This report appears on the internet at http://www.narconews.com/Issue34/article1100.html

CUSLAR Newsletter 17 Winter 2004-2005
Once upon a time, many years ago, a baby was born in Espirito Santo, Brazil: Vanderlei, a simple peasant's son. His father lived off the land, but it was not his own. Therefore, when the government offered land in a national development plan, the family uprooted to journey on a quest for land. Vanderlei was eight years old. The journey took them far away, to the vast region of the Amazon, where the land was said to be bountiful. Indeed it was, but the large landowners, who already had been there for 20 years, occupied the best territory. Yet the family remained in this new place.

The Landless Workers Movement (Movimento Sem Terra - MST) started in 1985 as a response to Brazilian social inequality. Brazil is the world's fifth largest country, and 30 percent of the population lives on less than one dollar a day. Many migrant workers are trapped in a life of poverty, without land and credit to start farming for themselves; they are exploited by large landholders who pay little and need fewer and fewer workers each year as they industrialize export crops such as sugar, cotton, coffee, and soybeans.

For eight years, Vanderlei's family lived off the fruits of only half of their labor; the other half was paid in kind to the owner of the land. Vanderlei saw the plight of his people: the old and the young worked side by side every day, and as he worked with his family, he also worked with the Workers Party and the Catholic Church. Noticing parallels between Bible stories and the plight of Brazilians, Vanderlei strove to bring awareness to the community about the changes needed for social justice. At the age of twelve, he joined the MST.

The MST has roots in the social justice and liberation theologies of the Catholic and Lutheran church, but the importance of land is not limited to any one religion, so the MST formed as a secular organization. Though originally land was the primary goal, as time went on more widespread goals were seen as necessary to really address the problems of the people. The three main goals are now land for individual families, land reform in Brazilian law, and socialism as a political ideal. In this spirit, the movement has a collective form of organization, without a president and with active participation.
by women. The family nuclei are officially headed by men and women; each settlement has a couple as its leaders.

Finally, Vanderlei’s family had enough money to buy their own plot of land. They were fortunate, for many of their neighbors remained as sharecroppers or migrant workers. But the family’s land was humble, and there were many more who needed land, so Vanderlei left the homestead and moved on to accompany the MST full time. He lived in many encampments and many cities, moving up in leadership and assisting in organization.

The MST organizes groups of migrant workers to invade and settle land that large landowners are misusing. Brazilian law allows for takeovers if the land is unproductive, is environmentally mistreated, or is burnt forest land. The government prefers that the land be near the city, so when it does become productive, it will supply food for urban dwellers. Landowners, of course, are against takeovers, and since many of them have influence in the government, the encampments are slow to be recognized. Another stalling technique is registering land as an ecological reserve of virgin forest so that it will be protected from invasion. However, profitable wood is often absent from these landscapes. Landowners have also threatened and used violence against workers to deter them in their struggle. It is not uncommon that landowners’ private security forces abuse workers into compliance. Neither has the media helped. Again, with influence from the landowners, they are biased against the MST and have at times portrayed the MST as a terrorist threat to Brazilian society.

Vanderlei developed a deep respect for women; he concluded that their participation is crucial to sustain the movement. Men often want to leave the encampment and abandon the effort, but their wives refuse to do so; they want to improve their own lives and those of their children, for the women are those who suffer most and are most exploited. Thinking of the influence a woman has over her children, husband, friends, and parents, Vanderlei declares that “sim a mulher, a luta val para a mitade” (without a woman, the fight is only half fought).

As Vanderlei matured, his dreams came true. He married, and also received a title to land in his and his wife’s names. This land was not his as property, for it could not be sold. But it was rightfully his to live and work. As he did, he did not forget about the plight of his fellow Brazilians. He continued to participate actively in the MST and eventually decided to move to the city to participate in another venue. He left his land to a friend, merely passing through a legal formality of transferring the title and not receiving remuneration; he acted in accordance with the law.

With the election of President Lula, a notably leftist figure from the Worker’s Party, the MST hoped for progress in land reform. With his election, Lula himself called for more attention to this matter. His ministers, however, have not been pursuing such a policy. Many perceive that they prioritize the IMF and external debt, rather than internal issues.

Soon the MST planned a march to Brasilia, the capital, to pressure Lula and his cabinet. They were well received and Lula promised to settle 3,000 families immediately, 60,000 in the first year, and many more following. The MST thought this to be a reasonable goal, since over 20 years 350,000 families were settled under their efforts. The government reports, however, that last year only 20,000 received titles, while by MST accounts, only 13,500 families received land. Looking at either statistic, the government is far under its expected target, yet still claims success in the project.

Vanderlei is now 30 years old and a 12-year veteran of the MST. In October

Vanderlei Scarabelli presented a lecture at Cornell University on October 27. Shown here with former CUSLAR coordinator, Hannah Wittman.

Despite its challenges, the MST has achieved much. Members participate in twenty-three of Brazil’s twenty-seven states. Communication among the groups ranges from email to community radio in the areas without electricity. Local groups have pressured municipal governments to provide education, and volunteers from the encampments construct their own schools. Many universities work in cooperation with the MST, providing teachers-in-training, and at times helping students to continue their education. Technicians arrive to teach sound agronomical practices. Furthermore, the MST founded its own agricultural institute so that the youth can continue and improve their work into the future. The federal government also has improved health care for these workers due to their insistence. The MST established a hospital where Cuban doctors train workers in community health; a medicinal garden provides alternative medicines.
he journeyed for the first time to the United States to share his experiences. Many asked for his wisdom about what we can do here to support the MST and Vanderlei responded that solidarity is key. Political, financial, and written support are clearly options, but he also suggested educating others, denouncing violence, and visiting the MST. When asked about the possibility of fair trade, he thought it was appropriate for strengthening solidarity between countries, but reminded his listeners that the MST’s priority in food production is for the people of Brazil.

The MST must continue as a movement, for much inequality remains in Brazil. Their challenge will be maintaining momentum. Some families lose interest after receiving their title; the land was their goal and they received it, so they do not continue in the movement. Over the long term, the settlements must learn how to function together as a community, buying capital and sharing its use. The youths must stay active in the countryside and learn about farming, rather than migrating to urban areas. To discourage this migration, they must have land in the future as well, for the land of their parents will not be able to sustain all growing generations. In the short run, the MST is planning another march for next year, with a hoped-for 200,000 people arriving to either Rio de Janeiro or Sao Paulo. The 30-day event (though perhaps not all shall participate throughout the entire month) will call noticeable attention to the movement and thus their message will be heard: they urge to government to relocate agrarian reform as a priority, and call for Brazilian society as a whole to support change.

Vanderlei is in awe of the flaming fall leaves in the Cascadilla gorge, but smiles at the waterfall, “We have places reminiscent of this in Brazil, too.”

Sarah, a Chicago native, learned to dance merengue in Honduras, salsa in Colombia, and forro in Brazil. She dreams of writing novels after completing her graduate degree in economics.

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Guatemala continued from pg. 16

transformation of other corn varieties, what we expect to see is a tremendous loss of the many races of corn that exist in Guatemala. Approximately 590 different types of corn in Guatemala which have all been developed by farmers themselves, over the centuries.

**Medicinal Plants and Patents**

We are also very concerned about the issue of medicine. In our countries, the use of medicinal plants is extremely well-developed, and not only is there great local knowledge in the use of medicinal plants, but also these are medicines which are available to communities, which are available for everyone. However, under the conditions of the free trade agreements, we run an increased risk that pharmaceutical companies will come in to our countries, extract local knowledge and extract the plants themselves, take them to their labs and reproduce the active ingredients, and sell them back to us in the form of extremely expensive medicines which are no longer accessible to the communities. They are even able to patent the ingredients of these medicines and become owners!

Another thing that is included in the arrangements of the free trade agreements is a proposal to extend the patent rights for medications. Therefore, these pharmaceutical companies, instead of being in the situation they are in now, where the pharmaceutical company identifying and patenting a compound has a twenty-year exclusive right to its production, they are now proposing an extension of this right. What this means is that the company which has the clearance through the patent process to be owners of a particular chemical formula which they have identified from a medicinal plant can have an even longer period where they have an exclusive right to the production of medicine. They can therefore keep it at a much more elevated cost for the consumer which means effectively for people in our countries that, especially in the case of chronic ailments such as AIDS or cancer, it creates medicines of extremely high cost, which would never be available to our populations...

**Who Really Benefits?**

...The free trade agreement has been sold to the Central American countries on the premise that Central American producers would be able to sell to the large US market, particularly agricultural products. However, what we've seen is that the US has quotas for the import of each of these agricultural products. And these quotas are already filled and they are already designated which types of agricultural products are being bought from which countries. Therefore, this promise of increased markets for Guatemalans could be seen to be a lie.

According to a study made in Guatemala, we’ve found that the United States sells 17.6% of all agricultural exports. It is the principal agricultural exporter in the world. The United States is the country in which the eight principal international agricultural companies are based. This includes: Cargill, ConAgra, Kraft Foods, ADM, IBP, Tyson Foods, Kellogg, and Dole. These eight companies alone reported in 2001 annual sales of $162 billion, which is equivalent to 61 times all of the agricultural exports of Central America combined towards the US. So what we’ve seen is that the negotiations on which these free trade agreements are based have been carried out in a situation of extreme inequality of power. And that the principal benefits of the free trade agreements accrue to the United States and to the large agricultural businesses which are located here...
Haiti continued from pg. 10

intervention of Haiti’s Agency for
International Development is widely
credited with keeping the U.S. minimum
wage at 15 cents an hour, contrary to
Bush’s radical populist efforts to
double the wage to 30 cents. The low
minimum wage has led to a
multiplication of jobs in America’s
assembly industry, the one bright spot
in the country’s moribund economy.
Others point to “Operation Santa
Claus”, which inundates the US with
discarded toys harvested from the
garbage bins of the world’s wealthy
countries each January.

Two men stand out among those being
sucked into the power vacuum
generated as Bush is hastily flushed
out of his failed nation. First is
millionaire businessman H. Ross Perot,
whose goofy southern idiom and
politics of reform resonate with many
of Bush’s Republican supporters.
Unlike Bush, however, Perot eschews
anti-Haitian rhetoric and advocates
policies more favorable to Haitian
billionaires.

The other leading figure is Timothy
McVeigh, representing Bush’s more
militant opponents. The former soldier
has received training at Haiti’s Western
Hemisphere Institute for Strategic
Headbusting and is on the payroll of
Haiti’s Service Intelligence National
(SIN). McVeigh only weeks ago
returned from Canada, where he was in
hiding following allegations of his
involvement in the bombing of the
Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma
City. McVeigh denies involvement in
the bombing, though, saying that it was
actually orchestrated by Bush to
provide an excuse for a crack down on
his political opponents.

Will the political opposition come to
terms with these rebels, who might be
linked to human rights abuses but are
now seen by many Americans as
liberators? “They have no place as
future leaders of the United States”
early intoned one Haitian official.
“They should lay down their weapons
and pursue careers as talk radio hosts.”
Cynical observers are calling this
stance hypocritical, since the weapons
in question have been shown to be
Haitian-made assault rifles and grenade
launchers provided to the Arctic Shield
Defense Aid to Canada program
(ASDAC).

Haiti’s Ministry of Immigration and
Hospitality, which has a policy of
repatriating all boat people, anticipates
a wave of economic opportunists from
the US. “The gradient of economic
opportunity is just too steep” claimed
a Hospitality spokesperson. “While the
USA ranks first on the UN’s index of
human misery, Haiti, with it’s
unchallenged commercial and military
empire, enjoys the world’s highest
standard of living.” The spokesman
denied that the boat people were
entitled to asylum in Haiti, saying: “The
alleged wholesale slaughter of Bush
supporters in America has nothing to
do with this exodus. They are simply
taking advantage of this situation for
their own selfish greedy purposes, to
take jobs away from hard working
Haitians.”...

...Unsurprisingly, some members of
Bush’s fundamentalist Christian base
refuse to get with the program and
accept the judgement of history on their
wayward leader. These naive believers
tend to take Biblical passages literally;
for example, they quote a verse which
reads “Woe to you who are now rich,
for you have already received your
reward” in denouncing Haitian policies.
Typical of these extremists is firebrand
preacher Alexander Gentile, who had
this to say in a recent interview: “Jesus
told us that we must do to others what
we would have them do to us. How
would you like it if the tables were
turned, if your country, your president,
were treated this way?”
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Ithaca's First Alternative Gift Fair

Saturday December 11, 2004
11am-4pm
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