

# Report

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## IMMIGRATION: Protests Turn the Tide

By Laura Carlsen, Americas Program, International Relations Center

The immigration demonstrations held recently across the country marked an historic mobilization of one of the nation's most silenced sectors. They also turned the tide on a national debate that threatened the basic values and cohesion of US communities.

Millions of people poured into the streets in early April and their cries of protest went beyond whether or not to enact a certain piece of legislation. The fundamental demand of the marchers was for recognition within the country they call home.

Recognition is a word with many nuances. To recognize is first to see the other person, and then to register both likeness and difference. To recognize rights is to grant that person the respect and protection afforded other members of society. To recognize a shared humanity is to regard the labor, family, values, and culture of others on a par with your own.

For the past several years a movement has grown that claims that those who enter this country illegally forfeit not only rights of citizenship but also universal human rights. They may be hunted by armed vigilantes, denied basic necessities even in dire need, barred from health services, and treated in some cases as virtual slaves—all for crossing the international border without papers. This is a treatment we do not even reserve for prisoners who have committed heinous crimes.

Restrictionists build on legitimate fears. A nation must control its borders. Terrorism is a reality. But from there they leap to non-sequiturs. Migrants are not terrorists, nor are they an invasive species. Migrants are people who seek employ-

posting record profits.

The immigration debate before this month seemed to run only within the channels etched by seal-the-border restrictionists or businesses seeking to guarantee a cheap and pliable labor force. The solutions posed on both sides were punitive: felony status or guest worker programs; that is, criminal procedures or a situation of exception that welcomes migrants' labor but cuts off all other aspects of human development. The latter is an improvement over the former, but still not a solution.

The rivers of people in the streets April 10th broke through the banks and cut a new channel. The national debate will not be able to ignore those marchers or their demands for immigrant and labor rights. New proposals will have to take into account paths to citizenship. Many migrants'

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*Between half-million and a million protesters march against HR 4437 in Los Angeles*

*Photo: Marcus, la.indymedia.org*

ment in another country because they cannot find decent work in their own.

As in Mexico, where unemployment has risen and real wages fallen since NAFTA, this is often due to the same economic policies that have enabled the US economy to grow and offer them a significantly higher standard of living. US corporations often employ a three-tiered labor source: rock-bottom wages to workers in developing countries, below-standard wages and benefits to undocumented workers from those countries who have migrated to the United States, and an ever-eroding legal wage/benefit base to US workers. With the flexibility and cost saving of this system, many corporations are

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## Blame NAFTA

By David Morris, *Institute for Local Self Reliance*

The debate about illegal immigration rarely mentions NAFTA. That's regrettable, since the flood of undocumented Mexicans in 2006 empirically challenges the economic philosophy that guided NAFTA's design.

The slogan of those who championed a North American Free Trade Agreement was, "Trade, not aid." NAFTA would solve our problems, they insisted, with little or no transfer of funds from richer Canadians and Americans to poorer Mexicans. By raising Mexican living standards and wage levels, Attorney General Janet Reno predicted NAFTA would reduce illegal immigration by up to two-thirds in six years. "NAFTA is our best hope for reducing illegal migration in the long haul," Reno declared in 1994. "If it fails, effective immigration control will become impossible."

Well, NAFTA succeeded, at least on its own terms. As Jaime Serra Puche, Mexico's former trade minister and chief NAFTA negotiator maintained in 2004, "When you look at NAFTA in terms of what NAFTA was made for, which were trade flows, investment flows, and in general technological transfer and so on, you can say that NAFTA has been a successful enterprise."

Trade volume has soared, from about 30 percent of Mexico's Gross Domestic Product in 1990, to about 55 percent in 2005. Foreign investment has increased by over 225 percent. Yes. When you look at NAFTA in terms of what NAFTA was intended to do, based on what those who wrote it said it was intended to do, it has been a smashing success.

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At this point bringing up an old medical adage might be appropriate: "The surgery was successful, but the patient died." NAFTA achieved its intended goals. But the flood of illegal immigration is up, and the standard of living of the average Mexican is down.

Real wages for most Mexicans are lower than when NAFTA took effect. And Mexican wages are diverging from, rather than converging with US wages, despite the fact that Mexican worker productivity has increased dramatically. From 1993 to 2003, worker productivity rose by 60 percent. In the same period, real wages declined by 5 percent.

As NAFTA intended, Mexico has become an export-dependent economy. But this has not benefited most Mexicans. Sandra Polaski of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace points out that Mexican manufacturing is increasingly based on a production model in which component parts are imported, then processed or assembled and then reexported. In the maquiladora sector, which accounts for most exports, 97 percent of components are imported; only 3 percent are produced in Mexico. The spillover effect of such operations on the broader economy is very limited.

Ironically, one could argue that illegal migration is the only thing saving Mexico from the ravages of NAFTA and preventing it from collapsing into economic and social chaos. Illegal migration serves as an important safety valve. In the past 10 years, Mexico's working age population increased by a little over 1 million per year, but the number of jobs expanded by only half as much. The annual exodus of 500,000 to 1 million Mexicans keeps unemployment to at least manageable levels.

Migration serves another even more important salutary function: national financial safety net. In 2005, Mexicans in the United States remitted some \$20 billion home, about 3 percent of Mexico's national income. Remittances now exceed tourism, oil and the maquiladoras as the country's top single source of foreign exchange. NAFTA boasted that trade, not aid, would boost the lot of Mexico and Mexicans. But the only thing that has kept the wolf from Mexico's door is aid from Mexicans living in the United States, not trade.

It didn't have to be this way. The European Union approached economic integration from a very different philosophical orientation

and has produced dramatically different results. "The EU realized from the beginning that you can't have a community unless you lift the poorest up," notes Robert Pastor, director of the Center for North American Studies at American University in Washington and President Jimmy Carter's former national security advisor.

Europeans realized that the flow of migrants increases when the income gap between countries widens. As it moved toward a common market, the European Union invested hundreds of billions of dollars in its poorer countries to improve their economies, reduce intra-European tensions between farmers and workers, and decrease internal migration. This massive investment enabled the EU's four poorest members — Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Spain — to boost their per capita GDP from 65 percent of the overall EU average in 1986 to 78 percent in 1999 and even higher today.

Raul Hinojosa, director of the North American Immigration and Development Center at the University of California, Los Angeles, instructively notes that 40 years ago Mexico and Spain were at the same economic level. He estimates the EU's special funds added 2 percent to Spain's annual GDP growth.

Unlike Americans, Europeans knew that both trade and aid are needed to make economic integration work. I would add only one further ingredient to this recipe for success: internally generated development. Sustainable economic development comes from within, from expanding internal markets and internal production that can satisfy those markets. Sustainable economic development comes from strengthening, not weakening, local and regional trade networks. And this in turn depends on strengthening and not weakening, local and regional social networks. People don't leave their communities, their friends, their families and their cultures because they want to. They leave when they have to.

NAFTA's designers promised it would keep Mexicans at home. Yet its very objectives undermined that possibility. Now leaders in all three countries are trying to pick up the pieces. One hopes they will use this opportunity to revisit their original premise and model as well.

Source: *April 13, 2006, printed April 16, 2006 on <http://www.alternet.org>*

## HAITI: Abandoned by Progressives

*By Brian Concannon Jr., Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti*

Ed. Note: *Excerpts of the author's Remarks at the Trans Africa Forum Annual Foreign Policy Conference, Washington DC, April 1, 2006. President Preval's victory on February 7, 2006 was won with the ballot, no the bullet, and with meager resources. The Haitians won without the most basic structure considered necessary to successfully organizing. But despite all the obstacles, Preval won a landslide victory with four times more votes than his nearest competitors. The new legislators, elected on April 21, will swear him in May 14.*

When we in the progressive movement talk about Haiti work, it is important to start with the shameful recognition that two years ago we let Haiti down in its hour of need. By "we" I mean the International Community, and specifically the United States, but I also mean the progressive movement in the US.

As the US-supported rebellion swept across Haiti in February 2004, Secretary of State Colin Powell first declared that the US "cannot buy into a proposition that says the elected President must be forced out of office by thugs and those who do not respect law and are bringing terrible violence to the Haitian people." But 12 days after that speech Powell's State Department forced President Aristide onto a plane for the Central African Republic, which allowed "thugs and those who do not respect law" to bring two years of "terrible violence to the Haitian people."

Secretary Powell did a shameful about face, but so did many American progressives. The response to Haiti's coup in the progressive community was, at best, muted. There were a few notable exceptions, including TransAfrica, which condemned the coup both before and after it happened, and a few congressional leaders, especially representatives Maxine Waters, John Conyers and Barbara Lee. But for the most part, organizations that claim to support Haiti's poor remained silent as Haiti's poor were shot, beaten and starved. Organizations that claim to support Africa and the African diaspora remained silent as the 14 diaspora countries of the Caribbean Community and the 53

countries of the Africa Union unequivocally condemned the overthrow of a President from the diaspora. Organizations that protested the Bush administration's removal of an Iraqi dictator acquiesced in the Administration's removal of Haiti's popularly elected President.

Many of those who did not speak up for Haiti's embattled democracy talked about "confusion," or "complications." Certainly, the messages coming from the mainstream media, the "Haiti experts", and the Haitians likely to have access to Americans were confusing and complicated in early 2004. But the message from the Haitian voters was not complicated: President Aristide won 92% of the vote in the 2000 elections. Haiti's Constitution was not confusing: it provided that President Aristide should have remained in office until February 2006. Haiti's grassroots movement was clear: they recognized their elected government's imperfections, but they knew from brutal experience how much worse the unelected successor would be.

This question about confusion or complication is absolutely vital to anyone who wants to help Haiti over the next five years, because things are going to get more complicated, and more confusing. President Preval was able to overcome the obstacles and win an overwhelming Presidential victory. But progressive candidates with less name recognition and less of a record to run on had more trouble. Although we will not know for sure until the runoff elections in three weeks, it looks like Parliament will be fragmented. Progressive parties, if they can make an alliance, might have a slim majority in the Senate, but probably not in the House of Deputies.

As a result, Preval's government will likely be a compromise government that will include people who do not necessarily subscribe to his progressive ideals. So there will be confusing signals from the executive branch. There will be confusing signals from the police and the courts. The Interim government persistently infiltrated its people into the police force and onto the bench. These judges and officers were chosen for loyalty rather than competency, and many could not have cleared the bar under a democratic regime. But they are there, they will be hard to remove, and in the

meantime they will do immense damage to human rights in Haiti.

There will also be confusing messages from our own government, our mainstream media, and even from self-defined progressive sources. These messages will make the case for limiting Haiti's sovereignty. They will advocate transferring power over the police to the United Nations to an extent that would not be tolerated in a wealthy country. They will advocate the International Community taking control of strategic government services. Most dangerously and persistently, the messages will advocate transferring power to a predatory private sector, and limiting the Haitian government's ability to provide the basic services that the Haitian people desperately need, certainly deserve, and unequivocally voted for.

We need to respond to the attempts to sow confusion in two ways: we need to critically evaluate the information we receive, and we need to find ways to support the grassroots movement in Haiti. The first way of evaluating information is to heed Harry Belafonte's advice, as he said yesterday, we need to stop letting the master tell us who we can trust.

The second way of evaluating information is to keep one eye on history. This history includes the manufactured acquiescence in the coup of 2004, but it also includes 300 years before that of the International Community's support of the brutal exploitation of Haiti's people and its land. The government, the press and even the religious leaders of the US enthusiastically supported slavery, enthusiastically supported the 1915-1934 U.S. occupation of Haiti, which reinstated slave labor, and enthusiastically helped make the case for the bloody coup d'etats of 1991 and 2004. Finally, the history includes a long tradition of calling Haiti a "failed state" to cover-up 300 years of racist and exploitative policies.

The third way of evaluating information is to get good information. Good information on Haiti is unlikely to be thrown onto our doorsteps or stream out of CNN, but it can be found with a little effort. The Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti has a website, [www.ijdh.org](http://www.ijdh.org), TransAfrica has a website, so does the Institute for Policy

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## BOLIVIA: Good Economic Prospects

By Dan Beeton, Center for Economic and Policy Research

Ed. Note: *New report explains why external indebtedness pressures are unlikely to change government's agenda.*

Bolivia's new government, led by President Evo Morales, has a good chance to deliver on its promises to reverse the country's long-term economic failure and help the poor, according to a new report by the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR). The paper, "*Bolivia's Challenges*," focuses on the country's external sector and assesses its vulnerability to pressures associated with external public debt and debt relief, grants and foreign borrowing, and trade.

Bolivia's new government took office in January with a strong mandate for reform — to increase economic growth and alleviate poverty. Real GDP per capita in Bolivia is less today than it was 27 years ago and 63 percent of the country lives below the poverty line, despite the country having completed numerous structural reforms advocated by multilateral lending institutions and operating under IMF agreements almost continuously for the last 20 years.

"There is no doubt that the policies of the past have failed," said Mark Weisbrot, co-author of the paper and co-director of CEPR. "The main question is whether Bolivia's new government will be able to pursue economic policies that are potentially more successful — and I think the prospects are good." Among the reasons for a positive outlook:

An increase in revenues from natural gas have significantly improved Bolivia's fiscal situation, due to a controversial hydrocarbons law passed last year that increases royalties paid by foreign investors and opens contracts up to re-negotiation. The federal budget deficit for 2006 is projected at 3.0 per cent of GDP, down from 8.8 percent in 2002.

The cancellation of debt from the IMF and World Bank eliminates 36 percent of the Bolivia's external debt. If the Inter-American Development Bank also cancels its debt, then about 70 percent of Bolivia's external debt would be cancelled. The country's current IMF agreement expired at

the end of March. For reasons explained in the paper, the IMF is unlikely to push its traditional structural adjustment policies

As a precautionary measure and to help smooth the country's transition to non-concessional and domestic borrowing, the report recommends that the Bolivian government try to arrange a line of credit with the Venezuelan government. Venezuela's lending from its surplus foreign exchange reserves to Argentina and Ecuador has been a very important source of financing for those countries, and will almost certainly be available to Bolivia should it become necessary. Opening a line of credit in advance — one that it is not expected to draw upon in the foreseeable future —

would significantly reduce some risks of financial instability.

Another move that could further improve the Bolivian government's short-term and long-term fiscal situation would be to reverse the privatization of the country's public pension system. As noted by the IMF, this privatization has created very large, long-term transition costs, as the income from current payroll taxes is not available to pay current retirees. By returning to a "pay-as-you-go" system as the United States has, the government's fiscal deficit could be substantially reduced.

Source: [http://www.cepr.net/publications/bolivia\\_challenges\\_2006\\_03.pdf](http://www.cepr.net/publications/bolivia_challenges_2006_03.pdf)

*Haiti, continued from page 3*

Studies. Some newspapers, especially the San Francisco Bayview, have consistently good Haiti coverage. We need to support the outlets that are covering Haiti responsibly, and encourage others to follow suit.

The grassroots movement in Haiti understands the country's complexities, but it does have a clear, and simple plan of action for us to support their objectives. First, it wants us to support the leaders that the Haitian voters elected, because they elected them and not because we would or would not have voted for them. Second, it wants us to support Haiti's sovereignty.

I'll give four things that we can all do to ensure a better future for Haiti's poor: 1) stay engaged; 2) stay informed; 3) get the word out; and 4) provide direct support to the organizations of the grassroots movement.

First, we need to stay engaged, as citizens of our countries, and as members of organizations. We need to write our elected representatives, and insist that our organizations stand up for Haiti's poor. Second, we need to stay actively informed. We need to get good information, and urge our sources of information to cover Haiti fairly. Third, we need to get the word out. We can post messages from the grassroots movement on our websites, in our organizations' newsletters. We can write our own articles about Haiti, for our networks but

also for broader distribution. Fourth, we can provide direct support. Grassroots groups in Haiti have many needs, and we have much to offer. We can provide much-needed help with organizational development, direct action tactics and communications. We can provide things- computers, office materials, etc. And last, but not least we can provide money.

There is no question that Haiti's grassroots movement will make sure that the tree of liberty keeps growing. The only question is whether it will keep growing from the trunk, or will need to resprout again from the roots. The answer to this question lies as much in the US as in Haiti, it lies as much with the people in this room as with the activists of the September 30th Foundation. Because until we make our country safe for democracy in Haiti, everything that they grow can be chopped down when their leaders displease ours.

Brian Concannon Jr., Esq., directs the Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti. The other participants in the panel were actor/activist Danny Glover, grassroots activist Lovinsky Pierre-Antoine, Coordinator of the September 30th Foundation in Haiti, and Nicole Lee, project manager for TransAfrica Forum's Haiti Programs.

Source: [www.ijdh.org](http://www.ijdh.org)

## MEXICO: Lajat Wokers Win!

By Maria Robinson, MITF

Ed. Note: *Excerpts of press releases and reports by Martha Ojeda and Judy Ancel, Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras. MITF was among the groups that pressured Levi to make Lajat follow Levi's Code of Conduct.*

On March 28, after two days of intense negotiations, Lajat Manufacturing and union workers reached an agreement regarding their yearlong dispute. The agreement represents the first union victory in the Maquiladora sector in Durango, Mexico since NAFTA passed in 1994.

Lajat Manufacturing agreed to pay 100 percent of what it owed to IMSS (Social Security) and INFONAVIT (grassroots housing program). It also agreed to pay overtime owed the workers along with 100 percent of severance pay in lieu of rehiring the fired workers in accordance with provisions of Mexican Labor Law. Finally, the company agreed to drop all criminal complaints against Lajat workers and remove their names from the black list circulated to other companies and registered at the National Chamber of Industry. In return the workers agreed to withdraw all criminal charges against the company regarding

threats, harassment, intimidation and assaults. The workers will receive \$4,250,000 pesos or approximately \$425,000 US dollars.

What made the victory possible was an enormous number of actors who played their parts well in Mexico, US and other countries. It's a very interesting story that starts with Lajat Manufacturing, a major jeans maker with 12,000 employees in plants in the Mexican states of Durango and Coahuila. Levi Strauss is one of its biggest customers. When Lajat workers attempted to organize a union a year ago to address their unjust treatment and many complaints, the company fired the workers, and moved operations to another plant.

In an unprecedented ruling on January 24, the Mexican Federal Labor Tribunal ordered the labor Board of Gomez Palacio (Durango) to recognize the independent Union of Workers of Lajat Manufacturing. After some resistance, the Labor Board complied on February 10 and the first independent maquiladora union whose entire leadership is women, was officially recognized.

On February 16, the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras (CJM) organized a demonstration in front of Levi Strauss' headquarters in San Francisco. CJM mem-

bers were supported by Sweatshop Watch, MITF, Global Exchange, San Francisco Labor Council, Campaign for Labor Rights, National Network for Immigrant and Refugee rights, Asian Law Caucus and the Industrial Workers of the World. This was the culmination of a postcard and letter writing campaign that was endorsed and supported by all the groups. All urged Levi to lead the way and enforce its Code of Conduct for manufacturing and finishing contractors working with the company. Levi Strauss agreed Lajat had violated its code and promised to send representatives to Mexico to initiate negotiations between Lajat and the workers union. In Mexico, Levi representatives made it clear to Lajat company officials that failure to negotiate in good faith could result in Levis ending all future contract orders and leaving Mexico. That pressure appears to have carried the day and led to successful negotiations.

Also playing an important role in the struggle was CJM's coalition for justice in the La Laguna region of Mexico that built alliances with local social forces to support the Lajat workers. This group included labor, farmers, indigenous and organizations: The Popular and Social Front of the La Laguna Region, the Union of Health Workers of IMSS in Gomez Palacio and popular mobilizations of Cuquita Orona that is affiliated with the CJM. The fired women workers were not alone, many stood in solidarity with them.

Levi Strauss lived up to its claim of being, "the first worldwide company to establish a comprehensive ethical code of conduct for manufacturing and finishing contractors working with the company." All they needed was a little prodding by local activists in the Bay Area in order to do the right thing.

The union leaders are now active in organizing women workers in the other Lajat plants. CJM and its CJM Laguna members won a place at the table as recognized parties in future negotiations. This too is a first. Now, more and more women are being trained in union organizing and strategic skills. A Worker Center is now formed that will continue to support maquiladora workers and help them organize. •



*Demonstration in front of Levi Strauss' in San Francisco*

*Photo: Maria Robinson*

## Latin America: Unchained

By Mark Engler and Kate Griffiths,  
*Foreign Policy in Focus*

For decades the International Monetary Fund (IMF) served as one of the key pillars of the “Washington Consensus.” Dominated by the White House, the Fund allowed successive administrations to control the economic policy of poorer countries in this hemisphere and beyond. Those nations wishing to buck a US agenda of corporate globalization risked having their access to international loans cut off. The brutish IMF not only handled its own funds but also played gatekeeper for money from other creditors, such as the regional development banks. This power made the institution as hated throughout the global South as it was celebrated inside the Beltway.

Maybe it’s not surprising, then, that an increasingly progressive Latin America is starting to say good riddance. In recent months, major countries in the region have moved to pay off their loans to the IMF ahead of schedule and free themselves of direct oversight from the Fund. Announcements in December from Argentina and Brazil, which are paying off \$9.8 billion and \$15.5 billion respectively, inaugurated the trend in the region. In addition, Bolivia was relieved of its outstanding obligations to the IMF by last year’s debt relief agreement at the G8 summit. The country’s newly elected president, Evo Morales, has indicated that he may let his standby agreement with the IMF expire at the end of the March 2006.

The motivation for cutting ties has been explicitly political. The Latin American electorate is fed up with policies like privatization and curtailed social spending; these policies, hallmarks of IMF “neoliberalism,” have hit the countries’ poor majorities hardest.

It would be one thing if the Fund’s prescriptions worked in creating economies that served their people. But in country after country, neoliberal economic mandates have produced lackluster growth at best and often have resulted in catastrophe. Argentina was once a poster child of IMF economics; that is, until its economy collapsed in 2001 under neoliberal guidance. As voters throughout the region demand change and put left-of-center governments into power, leaders like Argentinean President Néstor Kirchner proclaim that throwing off the chains of IMF debt constitutes an overdue victory, a move toward “political

sovereignty and economic independence.”

Interestingly, within the domestic political debates of Argentina and Brazil, the left has been critical of the decision to repay. Social movement activists argue that the debts, some of which had been accumulated by past military governments, were unjust and should be renounced outright. In Argentina, critics contend that the IMF should have to pay for a crisis it was largely responsible for creating. Instead, billions of dollars that could have been used for needed social programs are going back into the Fund’s coffers.

The activists may have had a solid argument. But now that the deals are going forward, it’s time to assess their impact: Will freedom from the IMF lead to a truly independent economic path?

On the face of it, distance from the IMF will provide poor and middle-income countries with room to chart a more autonomous course. Still, there are complicating factors. Remaining debts to institutions like the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank can be used to leverage governments to impose neoliberal policies. In Brazil, where Lula da Silva’s ostensibly progressive government has mostly adhered to the orthodox economic prescriptions of corporate globalization, political will to change may be lacking. Finally, the IMF will be able to continue giving its recommendations to other creditors.

The power of such advice, however, is not what it once was. The IMF has lost a lot of clout in recent years, due in no small part to Argentina. Since taking power in the wake of the country’s economic crisis, Kirchner has played hardball in negotiations with the IMF and private creditors. The strategy worked, allowing his government to negotiate a very favorable restructuring of its loans. Argentina standing up to the IMF was like an underdog knocking down the schoolyard bully. The aura of invincibility surrounding the Fund was dispelled, and the institution will likely never again inspire the same begrudging awe. Furthermore, as the failures of neoliberalism grow increasingly evident, creditors like the World Bank have been compelled to moderate their once-stringent conditions on loans.

In a final critical development, the oil-rich government of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela has stepped forward to provide other Latin American leaders with financing they might otherwise have needed to beg from Washing-

ton. Venezuela already bought up \$2.4 billion worth of Argentina’s debt to help the country break free of the IMF, and Chávez has expressed a willingness to do more. This source of backup funds makes the governments of the Latin American New Left considerably less susceptible than before to threats of capital flight.

Cutting ties with the IMF is not just a regional phenomenon. Russia and Thailand have pursued strategies of early debt repayment, and Indonesia and Pakistan are among those now contemplating the move. Asian countries that were burned by the region’s neoliberal financial crisis in 1997 are building up large cash reserves so that they will not have to go back to the Fund in times of economic downturn.

These policy trends are producing funding shortfalls for the IMF. Since Argentina, Brazil, and Indonesia represent three of the Fund’s four largest clients, a lack of interest payments from these countries will make a serious dent in the institution’s operating budget. Currently, the IMF expects to be \$116 million short in fiscal 2006. Not that the Fund is going broke. Among other assets, the institution sits on more than \$56 billion worth of gold. Nevertheless, Managing Director Rodrigo de Rato has initiated a strategic review of the IMF’s activity, and the institution is contemplating a future of reduced global influence.

The bigger trial may be for the United States. As the administration’s command over its Southern neighbors declines, its rhetoric will be put to the test. The White House has long proclaimed that promoting democracy and reducing poverty are key foreign policy goals, even while it has limited its support to governments willing to toe the neoliberal line. Democratically elected leaders in Latin America are calling the bluff. They are refusing to defer to self-serving US prerogatives, and instead they are seeking economic policies that can reverse the failures of corporate globalization.

Washington now has a choice: It can redefine its sense of national interest, cheer democratic renewal in the region, and acknowledge that the rigid economic program once forced into place by the IMF cannot fit all countries. Or it can become an ever-more-despised adversary for citizens throughout the Americas.

Source: [www.DemocracyUprising.com](http://www.DemocracyUprising.com)

## Closing the School of the Americas

By Lisa Sullivan

Ed. Note: *The author has led several delegations to Venezuela with MITF.*

Last November I stood before the fence at Ft. Benning and placed the Venezuelan flag that my 17-year old daughter Maia had carried throughout the procession. On it we had written: "Venezuela, the only country to withdraw its troops from the SOA". As we stepped back its bright colors stood out against the sea of white crosses, each with the name of a victim of one of the graduates of the SOA, which lay beyond the fence. Unexpectedly, we were overcome with emotion and tears flowed as we embraced.

Maybe it was nostalgia for a country, which had been my daughter's only home, or the image of so many crosses representing only a tiny fraction of the lives stolen by this school. But I believe it was actually a sense of awe in the face of so much love. Standing on this holy ground between a place of so much destruction on one side and the uncompromising love of 20,000 strangers for people they had never known on the other, we were overwhelmed by the power of this love.

It is this deep connection to those who suffered at the hands of the graduates of the SOA that drove the movement from its onset. For many years, those who knew and loved these victims personally were unable to speak themselves, without risking the same fate. And so others spoke in solidarity with them – grandmothers from California, students from Philadelphia, nuns from Iowa, teachers from Maine. Meanwhile, transformations were taking place in Latin America, including countries where some of the gravest atrocities learned at this school were carried out. Voices that were silenced were being raised, and in many cases those who had suffered atrocities were now part of their country's leadership.

Recognizing these emerging voices, Roy Bourgeois and others responded to an invitation to visit Venezuela in early 2004, a country where I worked for 20 years as a Maryknoll lay missionary. Graduates of the SOA helped to orchestrate a coup eighteen months earlier, leaving behind a trail of bloodshed. They did not have the final word, however, as Venezuelans poured down from

the populous hillside barrios of Caracas to turn the coup around. After being restored to power by those who had elected him, however, Hugo Chavez continued to send troops to the SOA, where over 4,000 Venezuelan officers had attended through the years.

We met with Venezuela's vice president early in the trip, and Roy wasted no time in making his request: "We ask that you consider no longer sending troops to the SOA which has brought nothing but tragedy to your country and to all countries in Latin America." I remember translating Roy's words and being a bit surprised by the boldness of such a request. More surprising,



Roy Bourgeois, Evo Morales, & Lisa Sullivan  
Photo: Carlos Mauricio

however, was the vice president's reaction. He picked up his cell phone and dialed the defense minister and before long, we were sitting in President Chavez's office deep in dialogue. Within weeks we had an answer to our request. Venezuela was removing all of its students from the SOA.

This victory for the movement made a clear statement to all of us. The time had come to join hands with those people who directly suffered at the hands of the SOA. If there were no more students, there would be no more school. With the support of the movement, Roy, Carlos Mauricio, and I set out in early March to visit Bolivia, Uruguay and Argentina to attempt this same request: no more troops to the SOA.

It seemed appropriate that this journey begin in Bolivia where Roy served as a Maryknoll priest and was detained and expelled by the military dictatorship of General Hugo Banzer. Banzer not only was a graduate of the SOA, but a member of its Hall of Fame. I also worked in Bolivia a few years later when elected governments continued

the practice of jailing their opponents, such as my young friend Juan Carlos. I last heard from him in a moving letter written from jail. Learning of our visit, he invited us to give a talk on the SOA at his workplace - the office of vice president, to whom he was now an advisor. Like Juan Carlos, more than half of the government officials with whom we met in Bolivia spent time in jail as political prisoners, many of them at the hands of SOA graduates such as Banzer and Luis Arce. They were as open and anxious to meet with us as we were with them, affirming that a new moment had arrived in their country.

The term we heard most repeated to explain this new moment in was that of "dignity" which we witnessed in the Aymara people of El Alto who celebrate their language, dress, and traditions. They also had no need for lengthy explanations about the SOA, having lived first hand its consequences in the 2000 and 2003 battles called the "water war" and "gas war" where repression at the hands of SOA graduates brought tragedy. After learning of our proposal, they leaped ahead to organize press conferences, radio shows, newspaper articles, talks and campaigns to push the idea of withdrawing Bolivian troops from the SOA. Likewise, human rights activists in the city of Cochabamba organized for weeks to host a series of events on the SOA, even facing abuse and threats from employees of the current governor whose attendance at the SOA they made public.

The most powerful symbol for the Bolivian people for this new moment, however, is their new president Evo Morales who like the majority of the population is indigenous and from a very humble background. In spite of our positive meetings with other government officials, we felt it was essential to meet the president, a feat we were able to achieve helped by the fact that he shows up to work every day at 5 a.m. The meeting was positive and Morales showed great openness to looking into Bolivia's involvement at the SOA. He asked for more information and committed to meeting with military leaders to discuss this possibility. We now hopefully await his response.

Immediately after our visit with President Morales, we flew to Uruguay where the hard work of Andres Thomas Conteris opened up dialogue with many human rights groups and

*Closing, continued from page 7*

government officials. Andres was part of a coinciding delegation to Uruguay and Argentina that was organized by the Marin Interfaith Task Force on the Americas and Non-violence International. Uruguay, this tiny country which was once considered the “Switzerland of Latin America” had gone on to achieve the unfortunate fame of holding the record for more political prisoners per capita than anywhere else on the planet. During the late 70’s and early 80’s more than one in every 50 Uruguayans were detained, deemed by the military government as a threat. To nobody’s surprise, many of these officials learned their art of torture and repression at the SOA.

One person who was clear about the military’s involvement in human rights abuse is Azucena Berrutti, a former lawyer who had defended numerous political prisoners and now was Defense Minister under Uruguay’s President Tabare Vazquez. A gentle woman in her mid-seventies, she received us warmly into her office. Since Vazquez’ inauguration a year ago, Uruguay had not sent troops to the school. Until our visit, this had not been made public. However, a week after we left Minister Berrutti made her announcement: no more Uruguayan troops to the SOA.

Crossing the wide Rio de la Plata by boat, we entered Argentina the day after the 30<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of a military coup that led to unequalled brutality on the continent. Shortly after arriving we joined thousands of Argentines in marching for the first time into the notorious Campo de Mayo military base, where 6,000 people were tortured and killed. Tears flowed from mothers who were looking for the first time upon the place where their children had spent their last moments. Nobel peace laureate Adolfo Perez Esquivel spoke to the crowd with words that we might have chosen: what happened here was not happenstance, but planned at a place called “the School of the Americas”. We raised our banner high that said “cierra la Escuela de las Americas”. Young and old Argentines hugged us and thanked us for coming so far to share this moment. Nunca más - never again - was their theme.

For me, it was hard to sleep above the busy streets of Buenos Aires, as I tried to make sense of how so many people, 30,000 by most accounts, could have been murdered at the hands of their own countrymen. At the time, in the late 70’s and early 80’s, it was

impossible to even denounce what was happening. With trepidation, mothers of the disappeared began to gather at the large Plaza de Mayo in front of the government palace to gather information about their missing children. Wearing a white scarf to identify themselves to one another, they began to meet secretly. One place was at Santa Cruz church, where Roy was asked to celebrate a mass on Sunday. It was there that the founder of this movement was picked up along with a nun from the church. They were tortured, and then thrown from an airplane into the Atlantic, the likely fate of most of the disappeared. Their bodies, washed up shortly afterwards were buried in unidentified graves. In recent months, with new DNA testing, they were identified and now buried in this small churchyard where we gathered on this brisk fall morning in the Southern Hemisphere.

It was thanks to the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo that we were able to bring good news back from Argentina. With their leader Hebe de Bonafini, we were able to meet with the Argentine Defense Minister, Nilda

Garre. Like Uruguay’s minister, she has a personal experience of the previous repression of her country’s military, as her own husband was one of the many who “disappeared” at their hands. During the meeting, it was hard to say who was more excited: Minister Garre at the news that so many US citizens had mobilized to close this school, or ourselves upon learning of her decision. She was able to share the good news with us. After the lone Argentine currently at the school finishes his course, Argentina will be sending no more military to this school.

This November I will return to the gates of Ft. Benning where like all of us I dream that there will be no School of the Americas and Maia and I will shed tears of joy and dance in the street. But, short of that ultimate dream, I hope that the flags of Uruguay and Argentina, and perhaps Bolivia and others, will join that of Venezuela on the fence, and in their bright colors we may feel the strength and solidarity and unity of their people as we join together in this struggle for justice in our Americas. •

*Immigration, continued from page 1*

children were born and grew up American. The presence of tens of thousands of these young people in autonomous actions such as feeder marches and school walk-outs marked their willingness to stand up for their identity, their rights, and their communities.

Members of Congress are already beginning to do the math. These children vote or will soon vote. The marches mobilized many of the estimated 12 million undocumented workers in the nation, but they also awoke the sleeper indignation of church people and plain citizens who disagree that discriminatory barriers and pogrom like purges are what are needed to save their communities. After the massive display of public sentiment, there are already signs that the immigration policy debate has shifted away from the draconian anti-immigrant measures proposed by the hard-line restrictionists. In the days following the mobilizations, for example, congressional leaders stated that the provision of HR 4437 that makes illegal immigration a felony would no longer be considered.

The marches also broke old stereotypes of immigration. It may be that the

largest demonstrations took place in the traditional immigration hubs—Los Angeles, Chicago, New York. But they also took place in hundreds of cities around the country. Mexican forestry workers in Oregon, meatpackers in the Midwest, tomato-pickers in Florida, and service workers in just about every major city joined in. Their sudden visibility illustrated that immigration to the United States has not only intensified in recent years but it has also diversified until it affects every state and most sectors of the economy.

Congress is still far from coming up with a truly comprehensive immigration reform—one that will repair communities, grant workers rights, and bring order to the border. Nobody knows exactly what such a bill would look like yet. But one thing is clear: the debate on immigration has changed course. The peaceful protestors who bore huge banners reading “We are America” were not taunting, demanding, or excluding anyone. They were simply stating a fact.

Source: [www.americaspolicy.org](http://www.americaspolicy.org) and [www.irc-online.org](http://www.irc-online.org)

## ARGENTINA: 30 Years After the Coup

By Marie Trigona, journalist based in Buenos Aires

Ed. Note: *Members of the MITF delegation to Argentina and Uruguay met with the author who contributes regularly to the International Relations Center Americas Program. They participated with the masses that took to the streets for the first time in decades.*

This March 24, Argentines commemorated the 30-year anniversary of the nation's 1976 military coup and the brutal nightmare of state terror that followed. Throughout the week, human rights groups remembered the 30,000 people who were disappeared with a series of rallies and cultural events. Massive crowds could barely squeeze into the Plaza de Mayo and tens of thousands spilled over into the connecting avenues during the demonstration on the 24<sup>th</sup>.

The military coup took power at exactly 3:20 a.m. on March 24, 1976. The military dictatorship immediately released an ultimatum warning that if military or civil police witnessed any suspicious subversive activity they would administer the "shoot to kill" policy. In the days leading up to the coup, representatives from the Catholic Church met with leaders of Argentina's armed forces and witnesses report they left each of these meetings smiling. Two days after the coup then-US Secretary Henry Kissinger ordered his subordinates to "encourage" the new regime by providing financial support, according to newly declassified US cables and transcripts relating to the coup. Washington approved \$50 million in military aid to the junta the following month. The coup's first dictator was Jorge Rafael Videla. During his official visit to Washington in 1977 President Jimmy Carter expressed his hope for Argentina's military government. Kissinger said in a television interview, "Videla is an intelligent man doing the best for his nation."

The 1976-1983 military dictatorship ushered in unimaginable methods of terror—drugging dissidents and dropping them from planes into the Atlantic Ocean in the "vuelos del muerte," using electric prods or "picana" on the genitals of men and women who entered the clandestine detention centers, raping women and forcing husbands, wives, par-

ents, brothers, and compañeros to listen to the screams of their loved ones who were being tortured.

According to Manuel Gonzalez, who since the age of 19 suspected that his military parents abducted him as a baby, the dictatorship used disappearances not just to terrorize the opposition but also to put the current neoliberal economic model in place. "It has been 30 years since a bloody dictatorship took power in our country. Where 30,000 men and women were tortured, shot, killed, and disappeared—and also 500 babies. The military junta used the sinister mechanism of terror to implement the neoliberal economic model in our country. And this is why they needed to disappear our parents. They tortured them in clandestine detention centers. They made our mothers give birth to us in places like this. They gave birth to us in this hospital, a clandestine and illegal detention center."

Rodolfo Walsh wrote the "Open Letter to the Military Junta" on the first anniversary of the military coup in 1977 reporting the tortures, mass killings, and thousands of disappearances. He also reported on the planned misery of the neoliberal model. The political writer was murdered on March 25, just one day after publishing his famous letter. "With its economic policy this government is not only looking to explain its crimes

but also the worst atrocity it has committed—punishing millions of human beings with planned misery."

"In a year the real salary of workers has dropped 40%. (They are) freezing salaries with the butts of rifles while prices are going up at the point of a bayonet, destroying any form of collective demands, prohibiting internal labor assemblies or commissions, making work hours longer and raising unemployment to the record level of 9%. When the workers protest, the dictatorship characterizes them as subversive, kidnapping entire delegate commissions. In some cases the bodies turn up dead and in other cases they never turn up."

In factories and workplaces unionists were sorted out and disappeared. At the Ford Motor plant 25 union delegates were detained and disappeared inside the plant's very own clandestine detention center for days, weeks, or months until they were secretly transferred to the local police precinct transformed into a military cartel. Pedro Troiani was a union delegate for six years in the Ford plant in the Greater Buenos Aires district of Pacheco until the 1976 coup. "The company used the disappearances to get rid of unionism at the factory," said Troiani.

At least 46 workers from the Buenos Aires Provincial Bank offices were disap-

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March 24th commemoration in Buenos Aires

Photo: Linda Panetta, opticalrealities.org

## VENEZUELA: Challenges Continue

By Ruth Hunter, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Santa Cruz, CA

Ed. Note: *The author was the senior member of the MITF delegation to Venezuela in January 2006. She is a wonder to old and young alike!*

President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, former lieutenant colonel in the army, is the bad boy on the Western Hemisphere block; a thorn in the side of the Bush Administration. He has challenged neoliberalism which touts policies, those of the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and privatization of institutions.

One of his challenges to the capitalist system of developed countries is instigating a series of social programs to aid the poor using profits from the sale of oil; partnering and bartering with Cuba selling oil at a discount in exchange for 20,000 doctors and health workers; beef for oil with Argentina and communication technology with Brazil. In addition, he has had a leftist influence upon Bolivia which recently elected the indigenous Evo Morales to be their president. Trends in Uruguay, Argentina and Brazil are also to the left.

Spending two weeks in Venezuela recently was an eye-opener. I witnessed thousands in the huge stadium shouting and applauding as Chavez addressed the large audience. It is difficult to convey the outburst of devotion

and emotions that continued as he welcomed the Social Forum and then, hugged Cindy Sheehan who was seated on the podium, honoring her efforts to bring the troops home from Iraq.

The enthusiastic response of the Venezuelans for their President was a sharp contrast to the turmoil surrounding Chavez since 2002. The attempts of the opposition to discredit his presidency have been politically battered three times. As a result, the Bolivarian Revolution,

named after the South American liberator, Simon Bolivar, has been reinventing itself each time. The first attempt of the opposition began with a coup, the arrest of President Chavez, and ended with the outrage of hundreds of thousands of his supporters who succeeded in demanding his return to the palace as their democratically elected leader.

The failure of the dissident military opposition was due to the support of the military loyal to Chavez. They were instrumental in restoring Chavez to power. The opposition railed against the Bolivarian Constitution and its poverty programs. In an aggressive response, President Chavez turned to the people and helped organize Bolivarian Circles, building a grassroots movement to educate and support the constitution. Neighborhoods were



*The author meets young activist in Monte Carmelo, state of Lara  
Photo: Roger Harris*

activated by patrols of seven to ten community leaders who went from door to door to explain the government initiatives designated to help Venezuela's 80% poor population. One of the initiatives included micro loans to cooperatives like fishing cooperatives, small coca and organic farms and endogenous enterprises. Enthusiasm for the Bolivarian Circles quickly spread throughout Venezuela. These government edicts challenged the power of the oligarchy supported by the US

and sparked the first of their three failures to overthrow Chavez.

After the coup, President Chavez initiated aggressive measures against the opposition by cleansing the military of dissidents against the government. He also held out the olive branch by restoring the director of the petroleum industry and established an opening which proved to be in vain. In December 2002, following the April coup, the opposition, striving to undermine the economy, called for a general strike and halted production and distribution of oil. The workers refused to strike. Their support resulted in the second defeat for the neoliberal forces in their attempted economic assault against the government.

The strike attempt continued through February 2003. In the interim, the government took over the petroleum industry. Each time civil society gained increasing political awareness of the role of the opposition, especially when the strike began to cripple of the economy. Once again the people rallied to support the government. Finally, the opposition called for a constitutional mandated referendum to challenge the presidency of Venezuela.

To resolve the divisiveness in the country, the government agreed to hold a referendum, the legal instrument in the Bolivarian Constitution. The people would have the final voice in deciding the future of their government. This was the third attempt by the opposition to unseat the President. Chavez immediately went on an aggressive campaign encouraging voters to organize a grassroots offensive. They answered his call, activated the neighborhood patrols. Six million voters attested to the popularity of their President giving him a clear victory and a third failure to the opposition. The Bolivarian Revolution is firmly established in Venezuela for now. However, the opposition, though fractured by their defeats, may turn to their allies, Colombia and the US to support attempts to turn the country back to the oligarchy. •

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## Venezuelan Supreme Court Justice Defends Independent Judiciary

By Roger Harris, MITF

Venezuelan Supreme Court Justice Fernando Ramon Vegas Torrealba defended the independence of their judiciary at a luncheon sponsored by the Marin Interfaith Task Force on the Americas in San Anselmo on April 15. Susan Scott from the National Lawyers Guild, sponsor of the judge's national speaking tour, introduced Justice Vegas.

Justice Vegas described the difference between today's Venezuelan judiciary and the judiciary that existed before the 1998 election of Hugo Chavez and the 1999 national referendum approving the new Bolivarian Constitution. Whereas 80% of the country's judges were provisional (and therefore not independent), over 60% now have permanent status, an important sign of an independent judiciary.

A committee of civil society and the "moral" or citizen's branch of the government now nominates Supreme Court justices, formerly appointed by the ruling political party, with the Venezuelan National Assembly making the final choice. (Unlike our system, the President of Venezuela has no control over the nomination or selection of members of the Supreme Court.), Vegas cited the record of decisions that have been unfavorable to the Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez as proof of the judges' independence. Recently the courts ruled against a close advisor of President Chavez.

Vegas described the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela as creating an economic space where all can grow. The Chavez government is "paying attention to the 80% of the population" that was excluded from the economy and the political process before 1998. For the last eight semesters, the Venezuelan economy has exhibited strong growth. More and more citizens are supporting the revolution, while the opposition shrinks and grows increasingly bitter.

Admitting that there is a serious crime problem in Venezuela, Vegas noted that the situation is improving as evidenced by decreasing homicide rates. Government "missions" have improved the material conditions in the poor neighborhoods or barrios with free medical care, education, and housing programs. At the same time, grassroots leadership has developed in the barrios serving both



*Justice Vegas and Susan Scott*

*Photo: Jan Bauman*

as a deterrent and as an alternative to anti-social behavior.

Last year the penal code was modified to increase sanctions for crime. Vegas was critical of the change, urging thorough and more comprehensive reform. "As people get more attention (from government support programs)," Vegas commented, "the barrios will organize" and crime will be reduced.

Land reform legislation adopted under the new constitution has created a way to

transfer unused state land and illegitimate latifundias to co-ops and peasant farmers who are eligible for loans and equipment. The government hopes to reduce the current percentage of food importation (70%) and eventually provide true food security to the Venezuelan people.

Justice Vegas made many friends among the progressive legal community in the US and he intends to return to attend the National Lawyers Guild convention in October. •

*Argentina, continued from page 9*

peared, singled out for their union organizing activity. Workers who today are organizing an internal union commission outside of the traditional union held an act to commemorate the 46 disappeared from the Buenos Aires Provincial Bank. They read the names of the 46 and inaugurated a plaque reaffirming the struggle that the disappeared workers left behind.

Over 1,500 workers from the Rio Santiago Ship Yard in Buenos Aires commemorated the shipyard's 48 disappeared. "This is the first time in 23 years that the

workers have come together to commemorate the 30,000 disappeared. I want to thank the compañeros who in the 70s gave everything, even their lives to defend their ideals that were little more than improving the work and social conditions of workers," remarked a worker during this year's commemoration. The workers built a massive sculpture and inaugurated a plaque with the names of each of the 48 workers.

During the "Dirty War" in Argentina, much of the population remained silent due to the censorship imposed by the military

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## Venezuela Solidarity Network Formed

By George Friemoth and Dale Sorensen, MITF

In spite of the Bush Administration's destabilization campaign against Venezuela, support for President Chavez and the Bolivarian process is growing nationally and internationally. We are convinced of this after three MITF delegations to Venezuela, the last being to attend the World Social Forum in Caracas in January 2006. The increasing support was confirmed when we attended the recent National Venezuela Solidarity Conference held in Washington DC on March 4-6 at George Washington University. The call for "Hands Off Venezuela," "No US Intervention," heard first at the Social Forum in Caracas was transformed in Washington into developing a concrete strategy for dealing with the US's hostility to Venezuela.

The conference drew 500 people from across the US, Canada, Latin America and even Europe for a series of workshops (40), plenary sessions, cultural events, and demonstrations. Activists gathered in front of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) in the largest-ever demonstration protesting its funding of opposition groups' efforts to overthrow President Chavez. A smaller crowd marched to the headquarters

of the AFL-CIO to protest its channeling of NED funds to the anti-Chavez labor/management union that closed down Venezuela's national oil company (PDVSA) for over two months in December 2002-February 2003 causing damage to the Venezuela economy and hardship for the Venezuelan people.

Overall the conference was an exhilarating and informative event. It was the first movement-wide gathering in support of the Venezuelan process. Activists pledged to intensify their efforts aimed at defending, and respecting the independence of the country and to educate people throughout the US to the dangers posed by the Bush Administration with its aggressive and hostile policies towards the Bolivarian revolution.

All of the attendees called for a pro-Venezuela government policy, one that respects the Venezuelan democracy and sovereignty. A national coalition in solidarity with Venezuela was formed. MITF is one of many organizations that joined the Venezuela Solidarity Network. The network is spreading across the US, Canada, Europe and Latin America.

The proposal to build an Emergency Response Network (ERN) was approved by acclamation at the final plenary session.

The ERN would coordinate email, phone and letter campaigns in response to false accusations by US officials, media disinformation, and inflammatory rhetoric against Venezuela.

Also, the ERN would issues calls for and the organization of public demonstrations in response to critical provocations and interventions such as a coup, assassination attempts, electoral manipulation, economic sabotage, or invasion by either the US or one of its proxies like Colombia.

For example, if Pat Robertson were to again call for Chavez's assassination, we would coordinate a massive email/fax/phone/letter-to-the-editor response. If there are more serious provocations, we will have a network and plan in place in order to mobilize on the streets against it.

Readers and supporters interested in the Emergency Response Network or want to learn more about it in order to be part of the response to any provocation against Venezuela should contact [ern@ushov.org](mailto:ern@ushov.org). To keep yourself updated and informed on Venezuela issues you can check the MITF website for articles and websites like: [venezuelanalysis.com](http://venezuelanalysis.com) or get on the once a week list-serve of the Venezuela Information Office. Contact MITF if you have questions. •

*Argentina, continued from page 11*

government. Those who did not stay silent risked being disappeared themselves. This year, in factories, universities, high schools, and barrios, activists organized local events to keep history alive and defend human rights so that history doesn't repeat itself.

Events to mark the 30 years since Argentina's military junta kicked off with an *escrache* or "exposure" protest against the dictator, Jorge Rafael Videla. Over 10,000 people participated in the protest in front of Videla's home, where he is under house arrest in connection with numerous charges of human rights abuse. Human rights group HIJOS (Youth for Identity, Justice and Against Silence) brought a crane and gave the ending remarks directly in front of Videla's fifth floor apartment.

Nora Cortiñas, one of the founders of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, said that the same leaders responsible for illegally detain-

ing, torturing, and killing 30,000 activists during the military junta dictatorship from 1976-1983 now benefit from state-sponsored impunity. "We are here because we don't forget, we don't forgive, and we don't reconcile. The struggle will continue for as long as necessary. Until they tell us what happened to each one of the women and men who were disappeared. Until all the children who were snatched from their detained mothers find out their true identity. Until all the killers are put in regular jails with life sentences. Until those murderers responsible for this genocide are truly punished. Until the dreams of the disappeared and everyone who continues to fight today for social justice come true."

Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo and HIJOS have worked for over 10 years to find the whereabouts of the estimated 500 babies born while their mothers were in illegal captivity. Pregnant women were tortured

and forced to give birth while blindfolded. In front of the Buenos Aires military hospital, one of the 375 clandestine detention centers used during the dictatorship, sons and daughters who recuperated their identity demanded that military nurses and doctors who participated in the forced confessions be punished.

In front of Videla's home, Marta Vazquez from Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo sent a special message to the crowd of young people. She asked them never to give up the fight for justice and human rights, the legacy that Argentina's some 30,000 have left behind for future generations. Many of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo are now in their 80's, working to prevent a chapter in the fight for human rights from closing. They have taught their children and grandchildren to never forget, never forgive, and never give up a fight.

Source: [www.americaspolicy.org](http://www.americaspolicy.org)

## **EL SALVADOR: FMLN Wins San Salvador by a Hair**

On March 12 citizens of El Salvador went to the polls to vote in municipal and congressional elections. Violeta Menjívar of the FMLN won the race to become the mayor of San Salvador in a close race that was on the verge of ending up in electoral fraud. A mere 59 votes in the capital city where 274,800 citizens are registered to vote won the election. President Antonio Saca aggravated and polarized the election results by declaring that ARENA was the winner on March 12. This provoked thousands to take to the streets bringing San Salvador to the brink of riots on March 15. After a recount, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, controlled by ARENA, finally announced the FMLN the winner on March 16.

In other races, ARENA won 34 seats in the Legislative Assembly; FMLN won 32 and the other three parties won a total of 18 seats. The FMLN lost in number of municipalities formerly headed by FMLN mayors.

MITF's Sue Severin observed the elections in San Pedro Perulapan and noted that there was a larger number of ARENA votes cast in a predominate FMLN area. Thus the ARENA candidate defeated the FMLN incumbent. Concern was expressed that voters, directed by ARENA, obtained their Universal Identity documents using fake addresses so as to change the outcome in FMLN communities. Charges were also heard that Guatemalans, Hondurans and Nicaraguans were brought to the targeted areas to vote for ARENA.

Source: *CIS Election Observer Team, March 16, 2006, cis\_elsalvador@yahoo.com; Tanya Snyder, Voices on the Border, www.votb.org*

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## **HONDURAS: Colonel Found Responsible for Torture**

On March 31, federal Judge Joan Lenard in Miami ordered Colonel Juan Lopez Grijalba, a former military intelligence chief of the death squad Battalion 316

and notorious police DNI, to pay \$47 million to torture survivors and relatives of victims murdered by Honduran military forces in the early 1980s.

Judge Lenard held Lopez Grijalba legally responsible for torture, extrajudicial killings and disappearances of four Honduran civilians, stating that his conduct was "highly egregious." Lopez Grijalba lived in Miami from 1998 to 2004 when US Immigration authorities deported him for human rights abuses while his case was still pending.

The lawsuit was filed in 2002 on behalf of the plaintiffs by the San Francisco-based Center for Justice and Accountability (CJA), an organization that works to end impunity by bringing to justice human rights violators who live in or visit the US. The case marks the first time a Honduran military leader has been held responsible for human rights abuses. CJA Litigation Director Matt Eisenbrandt stated, "The courts ruling provides a powerful condemnation of Colonel Lopez Grijalba's barbaric behavior and complete disregard for the lives of Honduran civilians. Our courageous clients are happy that he has finally been punished for his crimes. We again call on Honduran authorities to take this judgment and the evidence we have gathered and bring criminal charges against Colonel Lopez Grijalba in Honduras."

Source: *CJA press release, April 3, 2006, www.cja.org*

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## **Jubilee USA: IMF and World Bank Cancel Debt**

On December 21, 2005 the International Monetary Fund (IMF) canceled the debt of 19 countries as agreed at the G-8 Summit last summer. The 19 countries, including Bolivia, Honduras, Nicaragua and Guyana, received a total of \$3.3 billion in debt relief.

On March 29, the World Bank approved \$37 billion in debt relief, naming 17 countries that would qualify for 100% debt cancellation, effective July 1. Again, Bolivia, Honduras, Nicaragua and Guyana were included.

The Inter-American Development Bank

(IDB) has yet to cancel its \$1.4 billion in outstanding loans to the previously mentioned Latin American countries. Jubilee USA calls for the total debt cancellation of debt owed to the IDB and adds Haiti to their demand for debt relief. The IDB meets in Brasilia, Brazil in early April to decide the debt issue. As long as countries remain indebted they are subject to the imposed structural adjustment policies.

Source: *Spring 2006, Jubilee USA News, www.jubileeusa.org; Financial Times, March 29, 2006*

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## **PERU: Populist Wins First Round**

On April 9, Ollanta Humala, former army officer, maverick nationalist and acknowledged protégé of Venezuela's Hugo Chavez won the first round of the presidential elections. The win set alarms off in Washington and sent the stock exchange in Lima tumbling.

A furious smear campaign by the opposition supported with US funding (NED and USAID) failed to dent Humala's popularity. On the contrary, the more the establishment pounds him, the more popular he becomes.

Humala, charismatic and forceful, is clean-cut, fit, 43 years old with an attractive wife and two children. He served 20 years in the army, holds a masters degree in political science, and he and his wife are enrolled as doctoral students at the Sorbonne. In October 2000, he and his brother led a failed military coup against former president Alberto Fujimori who fled from Peru for Japan the same year.

Source: *Juston Vogler, "Ollanta Humala: Peru's Next President?" April 11, 2006, www.OpenDemocracy.net*

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## **CHIAPAS: The "Other Campaign"**

On January 1, the Zapatistas (EZLN) kicked off what they call their, "Other Campaign," a clear reference to the electoral contest currently going on in Mexico, with tens of thousands of indigent supporters at a rally in San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas MX. Two days later, EZLN commanders were

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# NEWS BRIEFS

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greeted by thousands of supporters in Palenque, a popular tourist center and home of ancient Mayan temples. Subcommandante Marcos, the well-known EZLN spokesperson adopted a less military title of "Delegate Zero," and called for "change that comes from below and from the left."

The Other Campaign offers a poignant counterpoint to the campaigning of Mexico's traditional political parties leading up to the presidential elections in July. It represents an ambitious effort to build an anti-capitalist opposition rather than competing for state power. "No one is excluded from the Other Campaign," said Marcos, "except Mexico's corrupt political classes." The goal of the EZLN campaign is to create an anti-capitalist movement throughout Mexico. The Zapatistas are visiting every state in

Mexico to consolidate this movement.

Source: *Mexico Solidarity Network's Weekly Updates, January-March, 2006*;  
[www.mexicosolidarity.org](http://www.mexicosolidarity.org)

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## COLOMBIA: SOA Grad Heads Army

In February, Colombian President Uribe appointed SOA graduate General Mario Montoya to be the new head of the Colombian Army. Montoya attended the SOA as a guest instructor in 1993, after his implication in paramilitary activities in 1978-1979 became public. Over 10,000 Colombian soldiers have received training at the SOA, and 256 are projected for training this year, making Colombia again

the largest SOA client in 2006. SOA Watch has documented cases in which graduates, instructors and guest speakers have been involved in massacres, killings of striking workers, assassinations and torture.

The recent report by the UN High Commission on Human Rights in Bogota is the most critical such report on Colombia in recent years. It details a series of abuses and violations by, or with the help of, Colombian government forces that civil society and NGO's have been denouncing for quite some time. In March, 59 US congressional representatives urged Secretary of State Rice to withhold aid to the Colombian military.

Sources: *SOA Watch, April 22, 2006*;  
[www.SOAW.org](http://www.SOAW.org); Full text of UN report:  
[www.hchr.org.co](http://www.hchr.org.co)

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