

Report

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HAITI: Latin American Solidarity?

By Mario Joseph, Bureau des Avocats Internationaux, Haiti and Brian Concannon, Director of the Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti

Venezuela's President Hugo Chávez found a hero's welcome when he visited Haiti on March 12. People from Port-au-Prince's poor neighborhoods lined the streets of the capitol to cheer, to chant, to dance and to sing, with the infectious enthusiasm of Haitian celebrations. President Chávez returned the affection. He jumped from his motorcade and joined the party, marching, even running with the crowd. At the National Palace, Mr. Chávez climbed up on the perimeter fence to shake and slap hands, like he had just scored a World Cup goal. He publicly thanked the Haitian people for their hospitality and enthusiasm, and for their historic support for liberty in the world.

President Chávez and the Haitian people hit it off so well for reasons of principle and of practice. Haitians consider Chávez a leader in the global fight against the global power inequalities that keep people in Haiti, Venezuela, and the rest of Latin America poor, hungry and uneducated. They see him standing up to the most powerful leader in today's world, President Bush (whose name was frequently invoked that day, not charitably), and to the World Bank and other powerbrokers. Even better, unlike their President Aristide (whose name was frequently and charitably invoked), Chávez keeps getting away with standing up to the powerful.

President Chávez in turn knows that the Haitian people have been relentlessly standing up to inequality and other oppression for

more than 200 years. He knows that Haitians won their own independence in 1804 by beating Napoleon- the most powerful leader of his day- and that Haiti became the first country to abolish slavery. Mr. Chávez knows- and acknowledged at the National Palace- that Haiti played a critical role in his

and Cuba do not condition their largesse on Haiti decreasing social spending or restructuring its economy to benefit multi-national corporations.

This public display of mutual affection contrasted sharply with the Haitian poor's relationship with other Latin Americans in Haiti, a relationship that is hostile for reasons of principle and practice. A few days before Chávez' visit, Edmond Mulet of Guatemala, the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General, dwelled on the negative when he told Brazil's *Folha* newspaper that "a photo of Haiti today would reveal a horrible situation: poverty, the absence of institutions, debility, and the absence of the State." Brazil's Ambassador to Haiti, Paulo Cordeiro Andrade Pinto, told the newspaper that President Préval was "passive" and "sluggish."

Ambassadors Mulet and Andrade Pinto do not jump from motorcades to join the infectious enthusiasm of Port-au-Prince's street celebrations. They travel quickly between homes and of-



UN soldiers in armoured personnel carrier with belt-fed machine gun. Photo: John Carroll

own country's independence. He also understands that the Haitian people are still fighting for their sovereignty, and will keep fighting as long as necessary.

President Chávez was also welcomed because he came bearing much-needed, tangible gifts. At the Palace, he signed a \$100 million agreement with Haiti's President Préval to provide Venezuelan oil, development assistance, and financial support for the Cuba/Haiti partnership that maintains over 800 Cuban medical professionals in Haiti's poorest areas, and is training the same number of Haitians in Cuban medical schools (Fidel Castro joined the Chávez-Préval meeting by phone). These gifts are particularly welcome because unlike the North American and European donors, Venezuela

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H A I T I

fices in wealthy neighborhoods, with armed escorts in large cars, windows tinted and rolled up, air-conditioning on. Their employees, the soldiers of MINUSTAH, the United Nations (UN) “peacekeeping” mission that Mr. Mulet directs and Brazil leads, do go to poor neighborhoods, but they stay in armored personnel vehicles, their automatic weapons, rather than their hands, extended to the Haitian people.

Too often, MINUSTAH troops do more with their guns than just point. In December, January and February, they conducted repeated assaults on the crowded, poor neighborhood of Cité Soleil. MINUSTAH spokespeople claimed the troops were pursuing gang members, but their automatic rifles shot enough high-powered bullets into Cité Soleil’s thin-walled houses (MINUSTAH estimates it shot 22,000 bullets in one 2005 raid) that killed dozens of people—women, children, the elderly—with no possible connection to gang activity.

Mr. Mulet diplomatically refers to the civilians as “collateral damage.” They are collateral enough that MINUSTAH did not transport any of the civilians wounded in the December and January raids to hospitals. UN ambulances were on the scene, but for soldiers only.

The neighborhoods MINUSTAH hits hardest, Cité Soleil, Bel-Air and others, supplied the crowds that greeted President Chávez with such enthusiasm. They are also the urban base of Haiti’s *Lavalas* movement, which supplied the votes that brought landslide victories to Presidents Aristide and Préval in 1990, 1995, 2000 and 2006. The neighborhoods never accepted the February

2004 overthrow of their constitutional government, sponsored by the United States, Canada and France, or the forced exile of President Aristide, banished to Africa on a U.S. Government plane. Nor have they accepted MINUSTAH, the only peacekeeping mission in UN history deployed without a peace agreement.

MINUSTAH’s mission was to consolidate George Bush’s coup d’etat. It originally supported the brutal and unconstitutional Interim Government of Haiti (IGH), led by Prime Minister Gérard Latortue, a Bush supporter and television host flown in from Boca Raton, Florida. The mission included backing up the IGH police force’s campaign of terror against *Lavalas*, but it also included MINUSTAH’s own attacks in the poor neighborhoods. After Haiti’s return to democracy in May 2006, the Haitian police stopped their murderous raids in places like Cité Soleil. But MINUSTAH, under frequent pressure from the Bush Administration and Haitian elites to take a “hard line” against the poor neighborhoods, keeps shooting.

People in Cité Soleil do not minimize gang violence. Like the poor everywhere else, they bear the largest burden of street crime. But they understand that the violence will never be defeated by violence; that their violence can only be successfully attacked with healthcare, jobs, and dignified living conditions. Those are the weapons deployed by President Chávez, and by their own President Aristide, who was criticized for providing too many jobs to Cité Soleil’s youth. So week after week, Haitians take to the streets, to call for MINUSTAH to leave and for President Aristide to come back. On March 12, along with “*Viv Chávez, Viv Aristide*”, they chanted “*Aba Bush, Aba MINUSTAH*.”

MINUSTAH at least understands the appeal of President Chávez’ generosity. After negative publicity following the December and January raids in Cité Soleil, the mission’s communications department started stressing its efforts to “win the hearts and minds” of Cité Soleil by providing healthcare, water and food in areas where they dislodged gang members. In March, Cité Soleil residents brought us to a basketball court, near a suspected gang headquarters. That same day, glowing press reports were posted on the Internet, complete with photos of MINUSTAH’s humanitarian

work. Brazilian Colonel Afonso Pedrosa bragged that MINUSTAH had provided 200 bottles of water and 1000 plates of food to the people, to show that things had really changed with the gangs’ departure.

The basketball court had been one of the heralded sites where MINUSTAH demonstrated how things had changed in Cité Soleil. The day the peacekeepers took over, the court was quickly transformed into a busy humanitarian center, with water distribution, food and a field hospital. But the Cité Soleil residents told me that the humanitarian center lasted only a day. After the photographers, reporters and PR specialists had documented MINUSTAH’s largesse, and returned to their hotel rooms, the whole operation was taken down. The humanitarian center quickly reverted to what we saw: a hot, dusty, basketball court. MINUSTAH soldiers reverted to patrolling Cité Soleil from armored personnel carriers, guns pointed out.

The Haitians we spoke with felt that MINUSTAH’s “hearts and minds” campaign targeted the hearts and minds that read newspapers and watched televisions in South America and the United States, while messages to Cité Soleil were delivered by automatic rifle. They reciprocate the antipathy and the cynicism of Ambassadors Mulet and Andrade Pinto, and MINUSTAH, calling the mission “TOURISTAH.”

President Chávez and MINUSTAH are taking two different paths of solidarity to Haiti, both pioneered by Simon Bolivar, South America’s *Libertador*. After Bolivar and his followers arrived in Haiti on Christmas Eve 1815, having been expelled from Venezuela, then pushed out of Jamaica, Haiti’s President Pétion welcomed the freedom fighters, providing them shelter, guns, ammunition and a printing press. On his way out to start an uprising in Venezuela in April 1816, Bolivar asked how he could repay Haiti’s generosity. Pétion replied the best thanks Haiti could receive was the liberation of all the slaves in the Spanish colonies. Once in Venezuela, Bolivar the idealist freed the 1500 slaves his family owned, and on July 6 printed a proclamation, on Pétion’s printing press, abolishing slavery in Spanish America. Presidents Chávez and Préval commemorated this cooperation by placing flowers at Port-au-Prince’s monuments to Pétion and Bolivar.

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ECUADOR: New Government, Continuing Struggles

By Roger Stoll, MITF

Ed Note: *Author participated in the MITF/Global Exchange March 2007 delegation to Ecuador.*

In power just three months, Ecuador's new government under President Rafael Correa has already tried to place itself at the center of the country's national, political and economic struggles. The government has clearly progressive goals. First, national independence from military and economic domination by the great powers, within a regional alliance led by Venezuela. Second, democratic revival through a Constitutional Assembly to restructure the government in order to reduce political corruption and better represent the majority. Third, revision of economic priorities to improve the health, education and housing of Ecuadorians - most of whom live in poverty - through increased social spending, job creation and reduced payment of foreign debt.

On April 15, the government achieved what is perhaps its greatest victory since election, with an 80% yes-vote in a plebiscite calling for a Constitutional Assembly. Indeed, President Correa saw this plebiscite as essential, having threatened to resign if it failed to pass. This summer, voters will elect 130 delegates to begin drafting the new constitution.

Much of the attention drawn by Ecuador's new government has focused on the charismatic and popular Correa. Who has aligned himself with Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution, calling for the construction of "21st century socialism" in Ecuador. He has also vowed to close the U.S. military base in the coastal city of Manta, to pull Ecuador out of detrimental trade agreements pushed on it by the great powers, to expropriate California-based Occidental Petroleum, and to free the country from the control of the international financial institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.

But Correa came into office at the head of a party coalition only a year old, facing a resistant legislature dominated by the two traditional parties, which don't support his program. Ecuador suffers from massive unemployment, and two-thirds of the population lives in poverty. It has one of the greatest disparities of wealth on the

continent. Since the early nineties the country has suffered from intensified neoliberal and "austerity" policies, dollarization of the economy in 2000, and crushing foreign debt (up to \$17 billion in 2006). Yet Ecuador also has what may be the continent's most organized and politically influential indigenous movement (40% of the population is indigenous). Still, the indigenous and other social movements have not been effective at achieving fundamental changes in government policy and people's material conditions.

Mayor Auki Tituaña of Cotacachi told us: "I don't have much hope that this government will be much different. But governments come and go, while the indigenous movements are on a different track. For one thing, Correa has a very young political party structure, with no national structure at all. There are a lot of businessmen in his group, and there are contradictions between his speeches and the facts. He is a politician. He asked me to be his vice presidential candidate but I refused. I just hope he does a good job. Instability won't help Ecuador. In ten years we've had nine governments. So, let's give him some time."

Auki Tituaña is the first mayor of Cotacachi of indigenous descent, one of only seventeen in a country with an indigenous population of 40%. Elected in 1996, he is now in his third term of office.

Significantly, Mayor Tituaña studied economics in Cuba, and his administration has created a new governing model blending Cuban and indigenous practices. The result is "participatory democracy," a system in which the municipal budget is determined annually in a series of about 120 meetings involving more than 18,000 citizens. Although a similar process is used in Porto Alegre, Brazil and Cordoba, Spain, those cities apply it to only a fraction of the municipal budget.



Trip leader and translator Yury Guerra with Mayor of Cotacachi. Photo: George Friemoth

Ecuador's previous governments have failed to promote literacy, health or basic water, sewage and electrical services for much of the population. Cotacachi is the first municipality of Ecuador to sue the state over this neglect. Uniquely, the municipality has also addressed these issues directly, most notably through its extraordinarily successful literacy and health projects developed with Cuban assistance and advice.

Mayor Tituaña seeks a different development path for Ecuador, radically different than one emphasizing oil and mineral extraction. The mayor noted, "It has been shown that oil exploitation has not benefited Ecuador. Just the opposite: it increases poverty." As to all of Ecuador's mining concessions for copper, gold and molybdenum, Cotacachi seeks a mining moratorium, and that Ecuador's Constitution be changed so that a popular consultation decides whether mining should take place at all. The mayor and his government insist that, "forests be cared for, agriculture be sustainable, tourism be ecological."

Mayor Tituaña's intent is that Cotacachi's participatory democracy and social programs be an example of an alternative development model. To explain Cotacachi's role in this larger, global project, the mayor told us an indigenous legend about a hummingbird. "There is a big fire in the forest. The tiger, the bear, all of them are running away. The hummingbird asks them where they are going. They say, 'don't you see there's a fire? We have to flee.' But the hummingbird answers, 'No,

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we have to do something to put out the fire.' The hummingbird looks toward the fire. 'I'm going to do my part,' he says to the other animals and flies back to the fire, stopping to pick up a drop of water with the tip of his beak."

In the Intag region of Cotacachi, a number of communities are threatened by large-scale copper mining. Mayor Auki Tituaña summarized the struggle for us: "It has been a ten year struggle, first a Japanese company had the concession, then an English company, then a Chilean one, and now it's a Canadian company (Ascendant Copper). The government concession violates Article 88 of the Ecuadorian Constitution, requiring consultation with the community. The consultation never happened, therefore the concession is illegal and the Cotacachi government is asking the government to terminate it. Under the concession the Ecuadorian government gets nothing at all of the profits. The only thing the government will get out of it will be a little bit of tax money. So aside from the damage to the community and the environment, it's robbery."

The mining effort began in the 90's with a World Bank-funded project designed to promote mining in Ecuador and many other "developing" countries. This project included stripping countries of laws that could cut into international mining corporation profits. Consequently, Ecuador's mining laws now allow foreign companies 100% repatriation of profits and rights to use any natural resources needed, including the great quantities of water used and polluted in mining operations.

There are many reasons to oppose mining in the region. Ascendant Copper's mining concession in Junín is a biological "hotspot," so designated for its exceptional biological diversity and great numbers of endemic species. World famous biologist E.O. Wilson has noted this fact in a supportive letter to the leading Intag anti-mining organization, Defensa y Conservación Ecológica de Intag (DECOIN). Further, mining in the rural concession would entail expulsion of more than 100 families, and would introduce a mining town of 5000 with all its attendant ills. The area also holds archaeological sites including earthen pyramids and tombs, and Ecuador law bars mining in such places. Yet all the copper depos-

its at Intag would not even amount to what the US uses in a single year.

In attempting to overcome community resistance to mining, Ascendant Copper has resorted to criminal tactics. There have been paramilitary attacks on mine resisters, repeated death threats against mining activists, and with the help of corrupt police, the framing of leading activist Carlos Zorilla with false charges of robbery and narcotics possession. Tellingly, one past associate of Ascendant Copper is General César Villacís, a graduate of the notorious School of the Americas/WHINSEC. The situation in Intag has drawn the attention of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Amnesty International and Global Witness.

The affected communities have rejected the mining plans. Instead, they've chosen to pursue sustainable, ecologically sound development, including organic coffee production, handicrafts and other enterprises within a Fair Trade model. And resistance to the mining concession could not be more widespread, including the express opposition of every single local, municipal and county government, as well as 90% of the NGO's working in the area. In 2005 the struggle reached a critical point with the burning down of Ascendant Mining's mining camp. Three hundred residents from the surrounding communities took responsibility for this collective act of resistance, in which no one was injured and nothing of the mining company's was taken. Recently, members of the community blocked Ascendant Copper employees from entering a portion of the mining concession. President Rafael Correa has also expressed opposition to large-scale mining in Ecuador, and seeks to reform the mining laws.

We also visited the Quito offices of Oilwatch and Acción Ecológica (AE), which have carefully studied the human and environmental effects of the fairly recently stepped up US/Colombian aerial fumigation along the Ecuador-Colombia border. The stated purpose of the fumigation is to destroy Colombian coca crops used in cocaine production, but the spraying also affects other crops, livestock and people.

We spoke to Adolfo Maldonado, an activist and physician with AE, who explained the fumigations and their effects. The fumigations cause fever, intestinal

bleeding, eye problems including blindness in young children, vomiting and diarrhea. Even US Senator Patrick Leahy, quoted in 2002 in the New York Times, said, "Spraying a toxic chemical over large areas, including where people live and livestock graze, would not be tolerated in our country."

The fumigation that reaches into Ecuador is a project of the US's Plan Colombia and integral to the war directed against Colombia's peasant communities and the guerrilla insurgency. In the last several years, this plan has resulted in increased poisonings and death from the fumigation, and increased paramilitary attacks on both sides of the Ecuador-Colombia border. Under Plan Colombia, Colombian farmers are attacked and driven off. Some flee across the Ecuador border, where the same military machine and its death squads attack them again, presumably because the farmers might grow coca there (although there is no evidence of it) or feed a hungry guerilla straying across the border. Five hundred thousand refugees have crossed the border from Colombia into Ecuador in the last few years. It's the largest human migration in the hemisphere. Where the farmers once were, the US/Colombia military places troops and bases, new outposts in a war decades old.

For Ecuador, there is some reason to hope President Correa's government will succeed in stopping Colombia's spraying and military attacks along the border. Although diplomatic efforts with Colombia's president Alvaro Uribe have failed, in April President Correa declared, "Every time they cross the border, launch a mortar or spray glyphosate (the fumigant), we send protest letters and they answer, 'It wasn't me' or 'it was on our own side of the border'... Ecuador will not take it anymore." Correa plans to use a multifaceted strategy, seeking the support of international organizations and bringing criminal litigation against Colombia.

To learn more check these websites:

www.cotacachi.gov.ec, www.sarayacu.com,
www.amazonwatch.org,
www.chevrontoxico.org, www.decoin.org,
www.accionecologica.org,
www.oilwatch.org

No Military Bases Conference

By Marc Becker Latin America historian

Activists gathered in Ecuador the first week of March in an International Conference for the Abolition of Foreign Military Bases. The conference began in the capital city of Quito with 300 activists from 40 countries discussing how to strengthen their organizing efforts. On Thursday, March 8, International Women's Day, activists joined a Women for Peace Caravan from Quito to Manta with intermediary stops demanding the closure of foreign military bases. The week culminated with a march calling for the withdrawal of United States troops from the Eloy Alfaro Air Base in Manta, and a festival celebrating the successes of the No Bases Campaign.

Delegates drafted a declaration that condemned foreign military bases for their role in "wars of aggression [that] violate human rights; oppress all people, particularly indigenous peoples, African descendants, women and children; and destroy communities and the environment." Delegates demanded a closure of existing bases, cleanup of environmental contamination, and an end to legal immunity for foreign military personnel. The statement concluded with support and solidarity for "those who struggle for the abolition of all foreign military bases worldwide."

Ecuador was selected as the location for the conference because of a growing movement to evict United States troops from Manta. Since 1999, the United States has used the Manta base as a so-called Forward Operating Location, purportedly to halt drug trafficking from neighboring Colombia. Critics charge that the presence of U.S. troops in Manta is dragging Ecuador into a growing regional conflict, and that the mission has expanded into other unrelated activities—especially that of providing surveillance on Colombia's internal political conflicts and interdiction of immigrants leaving Ecuador.

A Transnational Institute study documents Manta as just one of about one thousand foreign military bases around the world. The majority of these bases are United States institutions. The United States disputes these figures, claiming instead that they only have 34 permanent bases, and that the rest are just bilateral cooperative agreements that allow

for a small military presence. In addition to the United States, several European countries also maintain extra-territorial military bases. Activists criticize foreign bases for their violations of human rights and negative ecological impacts. United States bases in particular have become targets for strong anti-imperialist sentiments.

The conference was planned well in advance of left-populist Rafael Correa's election last fall to the presidency of Ecuador. The timing, however, proved to be very convenient for the success of the conference. Correa rode a rising tide of anti-imperialist sentiment into office, including campaigning on promises to close the Manta base. He once famously quipped that it would be okay with him for the United States to maintain a military presence in Manta if in exchange Ecuador was allowed to have a base in Miami. Officials at the conference reiterated the decision not to renew the lease for the base when it expires in 2009.

Activists debate whether efforts to terminate foreign military bases are better directed at local host governments or at United States policy. Some argue that the United States government needs to be targeted since it pressures host governments to accept the agreements. Others point to the examples of Vieques and Ecuador, where determined local movements could evict bases, and say that efforts are better targeted there. The cause of the creation of foreign bases is not only imperialism, but also domestic neoliberal policies.

At the conference, Filipino anti-base activist Baltazar Pinguel argued that the movement needed to build on both levels: targeting U.S. policy as well as pressuring local host governments to terminate military agreements. The two struggles are directly linked on a variety of levels, including the cost of the bases to people on both foreign and domestic fronts. Pinguel also pointed to the importance of international coalitions and meetings such as the World Social Forum to build a strong movement. This sentiment echoed throughout the conference.

"The problem is global," Corazon Valdez Fabros, from the International No Bases Committee, emphasized, "and we need to fight it globally." Fabros saw this

meeting as a step in the right direction. However, some participants cautioned against jumping from national to global struggles and ignoring work on a regional or continental level that could also significantly strengthen the movement.

Miguel Moran, from the local Ecuadorian organizing committee, noted that this was the first international anti-imperialist conference of the new century. He emphasized the importance of the conference as a meeting of peoples, rather than governments, to plan the future of humanity. Chilean activist Javier Garate echoed the necessity of attacking the no-bases issue on various levels and through various strategies, including engaging issues of pacifism and economic profiteering. Baltazar Pinguel noted that the caravan was an effective tool which allowed international and local activists to connect with each other to build a stronger movement. He also encouraged increased anti-base activism in the United States in order "to become an active force for peace right in the eye of the storm."

Throughout the conference, delegates connected their local struggles with Manta. For example, Nilda Medina from Puerto Rico noted the common links between the struggle at Manta and in Vieques, Puerto Rico, where local pressure forced the United States Navy to withdraw from its base in 2003. Women organized against the base, Medina emphasized, and the government could not stop them. However, "evicting the military is only half the struggle," Medina emphasized, because recovery and cleanup remain as unfulfilled tasks. "We have to keep walking together," she declared, "because victory will be ours."

Despite the apparently overwhelming presence of foreign military bases around the world, delegates seemed far from defeated. Rather, activists pointed to the fact that foreign military bases are being met with oppositional movements worldwide. The examples of Vieques and Manta illustrate that, through the use of a variety of tactics, foreign military presences can be overcome.

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Cowboy in Caracas: A Book Review

By *Chuck Kaufman, Venezuela Solidarity Network and Nicaragua Network*

I met Charles Hardy, author of “Cowboy in Caracas: A North American’s Memoir of a Democratic Revolution”, Curbstone Press, 2007 in October 2006 when he arranged the appointments and logistics for a delegation I led with MITF to investigate US interference in Venezuela’s presidential election. I believe the delegation members learned as much about Venezuela and the Bolivarian revolution from Charlie as we did from all the meetings combined. This cowboy is no cowboy!

The cowboy in the title refers to the fact that Charlie is from Wyoming. It’s a bit of an unfortunate title since the word cowboy is identified with Ronald Reagan and the Ramboesque foreign policy that the US has pursued in Latin America and beyond. Charles Hardy embodies the opposite qualities of Ronald Reagan; so don’t let the title prevent you from picking up the book.

I highly recommend “Cowboy in Caracas” for people who want to understand the vast changes in Venezuela and the hope the Bolivarian revolution offers for the construction of that better world we often talk about. Fr. Charles Hardy arrived in Caracas in January 1985 as a Maryknoll missionary. For the next eight years he lived in a cardboard and tin house in a government project on the edge of Caracas. The book covers the big and the small changes in Venezuela up to the present day, but it explains them from the perspective of a barrio with no running water, sewers, or public transportation, and few, if any, other government services.

Charlie is no longer a priest and the barrio he has lived in has been replaced with decent housing by the Chavez government. Nevertheless, the story of the last 23 years is told from the eye level of the people who never received any benefit, or even acknowledgement of their humanity from the old governments. It is told from

the perspective of the people who in 1989 spontaneously flooded the streets in a paroxysm of rage and violence when President Carlos Andres Perez implemented neoliberal economic policies and the price of bread and gas skyrocketed. Those same people spontaneously flooded down from the barrios on the hills surrounding central Caracas in April 2002 to demand the return of their president, Hugo Chavez, who was kidnapped on April 12 and returned to power on April 14 thanks to the actions of those millions of barrio dwellers.

The riots of 1989 and the state violence and repression that followed them is what radicalized a young officer named

that story and tells it evocatively as seen from the barrio.

And then came the election of 1998. Charlie writes that on election night the music that was heard were the songs of Ali Primera, a Venezuela protest singer who died in a suspicious automobile accident in 1985. The hatred and anger of the forty percent who didn’t vote for Chavez were masked on that night of December 6 by the sounds of celebration from the sixty percent majority, but “forty years of concentrated power and corruption do not end with a single election,” he wrote.

Most of the last half of the book, which covers 1998 to the present, examines the

efforts of the Venezuelan elites and their US corporate and government allies to turn back the clock to the days when they had unchallenged control of political and economic power. This includes a look at the media, labor and business groups, civil society, and US “democracy building” projects run out of the US embassy.

The most emotionally compelling chapter is the first person account by his former wife, Suzanna. She was one of many people trapped on the bridge near the presidential palace when snipers fired on Chavez supporters and opposition demonstrators – the event that caused the pretext for the April 12, 2002 coup. I felt like I was there with her.

While the actions of Hugo Chavez figure prominently in this era of Venezuela’s history and therefore feature prominently in “Cowboy in Caracas” as well, the book is not about Chavez. It is about the millions of previously marginalized Venezuelans who are changing their country. Near the end of the book Charlie writes, “Love him or hate him, Chavez is not the problem. It is what he represents. An old and evil way of life is dying and those who enjoyed it so abundantly are fighting its death all the way.”

Source: *Nicaragua Monitor*, March-April 2007



Charlie Hardy signs books at Book Passage, Corte Madera Photo: Mark Silva

Hugo Chavez and many of his fellow young officers. The coup in 1992 failed “por ahora” [for now] as Chavez said on television when he appealed to his fellow rebelling military units to lay down their arms. Most of us in the United States know nothing of what was happening in Venezuela from the 1989 riots to the 1998 election of a military officer named Chavez who we heard was a leftist.

It’s impossible to understand the social progress under the Bolivarian revolution and the hatred of it by Venezuelan elites, US government officials, and corporate executives without understanding the period that preceded it. Charles Hardy tells

GUATEMALA: Rigoberta Menchú Bursts onto Electoral Stage

By Juan Hernandez Pico, SJ, Envio correspondent in Guatemala

Ed. Note: *The following article was excerpted*

"I want to open the way for a new direction in Guatemala," said Rigoberta Menchú on accepting presidential candidacy and introducing her new social movement.

A strong jolt has rocked Guatemala's electoral stage in the lead-up to the presidential, congressional and local elections to be held in September. Rigoberta Menchú, the 1992 Nobel Peace prize laureate and current Goodwill Ambassador for the Peace Accords, announced the formation of the "Winaq" social movement, which could become a political party and support her presidential candidacy. In Quiché and in other Mayan languages *winaq* means "persons" or "people."

It has proved as difficult as expected for *Winaq* to negotiate a political-electoral alliance with MAIZ, the broad leftist movement centered on the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) that includes many small parties of the independent Left and the Gathering for Guatemala (EG), a movement led by Representative Nineth Montenegro that is on the verge of becoming a recognized political party.

On February 21, the national media announced that Menchú had declined an alliance with URNG and decided to run for the EG. Two women, one indigenous, the other *ladina* who experienced personal tragedies during the armed conflict, Menchú and Montenegro united their respective movements, *Winaq* and the EG.

When the news of Rigoberta Menchú's candidacy was first announced, the immediate reactions on the radio were profoundly racist. As one *ladina* woman exclaimed: "Me, governed by some Indian woman? Never!" Press editorials advised Menchú not to get involved because her prestige would suffer and her aura as Nobel Laureate would be tarnished if she entered the lions' den of Guatemalan politics. To a fanfare of racism and advice, the electoral stage suddenly changed, bringing gloomy, threatening clouds for some and bright auroral colors for others.

In Guatemala no one can run for President or Vice President without the backing of a political party. Nor can anyone be an independent candidate for Congress; all names must appear on a political party's national or departmental slate, which the voter either chooses or not. There is no selecting names from different slates.

Political parties are "owned" by those who take over the general secretariat and dominate the national leadership body. The



Rigoberta Menchú fielding questions from the press during the 4th World Water Forum in Mexico City March 17, 2006. Photo: www.iisd.ca

party's identity is politically feudalized to such individuals. For example, the Guatemalan Republican Front (FRG) is under the undisputed leadership of retired Army General (and past president) Efraín Ríos Montt. The FRG is stained with the blood, disappearances and tears caused by its elderly leader Montt. Spain's Supreme Court recently issued international arrest warrants for genocide, torture, and illegal detention for Montt and several other former high-level officials. Montt is attempting to run for Congress in order to avoid extradition to Spain or trial in Guatemala, under a law that grants immunity to elected officials.

There is a multitude of political parties in Guatemala. Nine are on the right or center-right representing wealth, elites and the oligarchy. Three on the left are socialist leaning and represent the interests of the poor, dispossessed workers, peasants and to some extent the indigenous population.

But when the main political parties (ex-

cluding the left) mount an electoral campaign and run candidates, their real interests are hidden from the public. Their parties' masks are as impenetrable as those of the animals, ancestral heroes or colonial characters that cover the faces of dancers honoring religious promises during patron saint festivals in Guatemalan indigenous municipalities. This is completely different from El Salvador where there are no masks. The voting public knows where the three main parties' interests lie and what the issues are.

Drug trafficking has helped develop the most important emerging wealth in Latin America, including Guatemala. There are warnings of the drug cartel's infiltration of various candidacies in the upcoming elections, and illegal arms dealers and perpetrators of other forms of prohibited trafficking have infiltrated alongside the drug money.

To say the least, democracy is still under construction in Guatemala. In hopes of consolidating their control of the state or aspiring to a piece of it, these parties (other than the small leftist ones) dance on the political stage in masks that mysteriously hide the interests for which they are really fighting. On this stage, the ideology of the biggest parties is almost identical, it is the ideology of wealth. This explains why democratization and fulfillment of the Peace Accords are advancing so slowly, why political ideas lack consistency and why the candidates are like chameleons that blend in with the color of the vegetation sheltering them. It is onto this stage that Rigoberta Menchú and the *Winaq* social movement is bursting, in search of alliances to become a movement as plural as Guatemala in cultures, languages and ethnic groups.

The Supreme Electoral Tribunal is expected to recognize EG as an official political party. EG submitted 15,000 certified signatures and established party assemblies in 13 of the country's 22 departments. The remaining 9 departments are mainly indigenous so Menchú and the *Winaq* social movement should be able to carry these departments.

One thing we can foresee is the unleashing of all the demons of racism if Rigoberta Menchú's candidacy not only consolidates, but also threatens to be successful. Many more demons will be unleashed if, as has

been announced, Bolivian President Evo Morales sets up an advisory council for Menchú's presidential candidacy. She has as much right to such advice as the several governing Guatemalans who have requested and received advice from various US administrations.

Much of the strength of Rigoberta Menchú's candidacy will come from her multiple international relations with indigenous movements in the Americas and the rest of the world, in the community of the United Nations and in many western governments, which makes sense in this already globalized world.

The fact that such a candidacy could have jelled between an indigenous movement and a ladino one (EG) is perhaps a candle lit by the flame of a new future. The

horizon could be aural, but to stop the dark clouds covering these weak rays of sun, the alliance's two female candidates and all the other candidates, will have to be more humble than perceived up to now.

Has Rigoberta Menchú thought about whether her candidacy is the best and most responsible way to serve Guatemala in general and the indigenous people in particular? Does she have a national project to begin her government if elected? There's still time to respond. The campaign leading up to the September election doesn't officially get under way until May.

Source: *Envio*, March 2007, *Central America University, Managua Nicaragua*.

Haiti continued from page 2

But Bolivar had another setback, and by September he was back in Haiti. Pétion again provided shelter and supplies, and Bolivar launched another attack in December 1816. This time he was successful, liberating a wide swath of territory from Venezuela to Bolivia. But this time the freedom he sought was more limited. *El Libertador* had become a "realist," willing to compromise his most fundamental ideals to satisfy his allies. This time he did not print out an emancipation proclamation, and Venezuela retained slavery and its horrors almost as long as the United States did, until 1854.

Bolivar also passed up other opportunities to thank Haiti for making his revolution possible. He declined to recognize Haiti (Venezuela did not send an Ambassador until 1874). When in 1826 the new Republic of Colombia organized the Congress of American States to bring together all the newly independent countries of the Americas, the "realists" acquiesced to the United States' request that Haiti, the country that had sheltered their freedom fighters in their hour of need, be excluded.

Many of Haiti's neighbors have taken the path of Bolivar the idealist. Cuba does not have Venezuela's oil and money, but it does have doctors, so for the last decade it has supported a team of over 800 Cuban medical professionals, deployed to Haiti's poorest and most remote areas. About the same number of Haitian students, many of them from poor families that could never afford medical

school, are studying under scholarships in Cuba. The Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) stood up for Haiti's democracy when it was under attack in 2004, calling for international support for the democracy and refusing to recognize the illegal replacement. CARICOM gave the rest of the world a civics lesson, by sticking to its democratic principles while the United States, Europe and most of Central and South America (but not Venezuela) embraced the dictatorship.

Many of Haiti's other neighbors—generally the more powerful ones—have followed the path of Bolivar the "realist" and compromised their fundamental ideals to satisfy potential allies. The Organization of American States (OAS) is a successor to the Congress of American States in more ways than one. In principle the OAS has stronger democracy requirements than CARICOM, but in practice the organization accepted Haiti's 2004 unconstitutional regime change without flinching. Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay have sent soldiers to join Brazil in MINUSTAH.

MINUSTAH's participants do know what they are doing, and it does trouble them. Lieutenant General Urano Bacellar, the Brazilian Commander of MINUSTAH, committed suicide in January 2006, apparently because he was unable to reconcile his duty to fulfill his "mission" of taking a hard line in poor neighborhoods with his moral convictions. His predecessor, General

Augusto Heleno Ribeiro, complained to a Brazilian congressional commission that "we are under extreme pressure from the international community to use violence" in Haiti's poor neighborhoods. But General Heleno Ribeiro's concern did not extend to poor Haitians who did not deserve to live, as determined from his Armored Personnel Carrier. He told Haiti's Radio Metropole in October 2004 that "*we must kill the bandits* but it will have to be the bandits only, not everybody."

A year ago, Brazil's *Folha* interviewed returning Brazilian soldiers. One said, "the name 'Peace Mission' is just to pacify the people. In reality no day goes by without the troops killing a Haitian in a shootout. I personally killed at least two..."

So far Latin America's "realists" have been able to live with their consciences, confident that the advantages of participating in George Bush's idea of a peacekeeping force will yield benefits to compensate for what they are doing to the Haitian people. For Brazil the benefits include an improved chance of a permanent seat on a potentially expanded UN Security Council. For other countries, it is money for cash-strapped government budgets (the UN reimburses the countries several times a poor soldier's salary), or a chance to appease the Bush Administration without compromising on trade issues or opposition to the Iraq War.

But the "realists" should see that the winds in Latin America are changing. The Bush Administration's approach to the world, that MINUSTAH embodies, is losing credibility and failing, and not just in Iraq. While President Chávez was basking in the crowds' energy in Port-au-Prince and other cities of Latin America, President Bush was traveling the region too. Mr. Bush was not caught up in the infectious enthusiasm of street celebrations. His itinerary was carefully orchestrated to avoid the large protests held in every single country he visited. In the last two months, citizens of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador and Peru have taken to the streets to protest their country's complicity in MINUSTAH's brutality. The MINUSTAH countries may soon find that in pursuing George Bush's Haiti policy, they have tied their destiny to a sinking ship.

Source: *International Relations Center's Americas Program*; www.ijh.org/bureau.htm

Colombia and Panama: SOA Watch Delegation

By Lisa Sullivan, SOA Watch

Our small group of four: Roy Bourgeois, photographer Linda Panetta, Chilean Pablo Ruiz and I, were in Colombia as part of the SOA Watch's initiative on Latin America visiting the countries that send students to the School of the Americas (SOA) at Fort Benning Georgia. We had already visited seven countries of South America where we met with several government leaders who agreed both to the immediate removal of their troops from the SOA (Venezuela, Argentina and Uruguay) or to a gradual withdrawal (Bolivia). In the other countries we met with civic organizations and members of Congress who joined forces in calling for withdrawal of their country's troops from the SOA. We knew that as we moved north it was unlikely that we would encounter the same openness as we did in those countries with a renewed commitment to sovereignty. And of all countries yet to be visited, Colombia would be the most challenging. Not only does Colombia hold the record for most SOA graduates – over 10,000, it also has the largest current enrollment. More importantly, the abuses taking place by SOA graduates in Colombia are currently taking place.

Our formal requests to meet with government officials went unheeded. Our purpose in coming to Colombia was to hear first-hand from those living in conflict zones, and to understand what role the United States was playing, especially in regard to the School of Americas.

While a visit to a small jungle military outpost wasn't really in our plans, we found ourselves in a canoe deep in the lush river area of northern Colombia in the company of our guides from a Christian Peacemaker Team. The team brought us to the village of Puerto Matilde, a community of 25 displaced families whose new wooden houses were huddled together at the edge of the river.

Unlike the majority who had fled the rural violence for the cities, those in Puerto Matilde were determined to remain on the land. Many of the nearby villages were reduced to three families due to the armed conflict. Their land was usurped by large landowners who converted it to the production of African palms for palm oil.

That night we gathered around the only light bulb in the village, and were each served

a different plate of food, each collected from different households. It was a communal way of hosting us, and in the same way, mattresses and mosquito nets were later collected and neatly laid out. Over dinner we batted mosquitoes and considered the request the community had made. They wanted us to accompany them the following morning to visit a military installation in a nearby town.

They spoke of neighbors being killed weekly for crimes such as buying food. Regular war taxes were openly demanded in the port city of Barrancabermeja by the paramilitary for every kilo of rice and beans that was taken by boat or canoe. Too many kilos meant death upfront and outright. How could we say no to their request.

After a morning's journey past cows, parrots, eagles, egrets, and crocodiles we docked at the little town of San Francisco. Soldiers armed for what looked like an assault on Guadalcanal met us. After having us frisked upon arrival, the commanding officer, Sgt. Ruiz, smiled and said that he would be glad to meet with us, that he personally thought that all guns should be converted to guitars. It was a bit hard to believe given the amount of hardware draped from his shoulders, but we managed to smile. As we sat down in the reprieve of shade, Sgt. Ruiz ceremonially took off his machine gun and laid it on the table, but his young soldiers stood armed and alert.

One man from the village of Puerto Matilde told of his neighbor who had gone to buy food and never returned. His horse was found hung from a tree. A young woman with a three-year old girl told of the paramilitary showing up and threatening members of their village who then had to flee. One was a nurse and her skills would certainly be missed. The sergeant indicated that he could not guarantee her safe return because of her crime: she had tended a wounded guerrilla. "And so have we all," stated the young woman. "Who can turn down a request when a gun is being pointed at one's child."

I looked around the circle and wondered. What would happen to these people of Puerto Matilde who were being so forthright. Almost reading my mind they added: "We are able to say these things today be-

cause of these visitors from the US. They are our guarantees that nothing will happen to us. Do you agree, Sergeant? Can we be sure that we will be safe?" "Why of course," said the sergeant, who clearly wanted to be on our good side and kept talking about converting guns to guitars.

And what does the SOA have to do with this? Everything. According to the human rights groups with which we met, top commanders in the war zones are SOA grads. They also told us that the SOA is not only in Georgia, it is in Colombia as well. The thousands of US military who have passed through Colombia are teaching those same skills, far outside the spotlight we have shined on the SOA. When we brought up the SOA with Sgt. Ruiz, he seemed to have misunderstood our Spanish and said, yes, he would love it if we could get him a scholarship to the SOA. What a great place it is, so he is told.

Shortly after leaving Puerto Matilde we traveled to Panama. We found a very different country linked to Colombia by a common border. While the strongest presence of the SOA is currently in Colombia, it had its beginnings in Panama. From 1946-1984 the school was located there. We had a long visit with the former president of Panama, Jorge Illueca, who shared with delight his story of booting the school out of the country. He had previously served as the Secretary General of the UN, but is told that he will be more remembered for his role in closing the SOA than for heading up the UN. Now in his nineties, Don Jorge shared hugs and congratulations for our efforts to close down the "School of Assassins," a term he coined when ousting the school.

After its removal from Panamanian soil, the SOA received no students from Panama for 18 years. However, slowly and quietly, Panama's two recent governments began sending police there (Panama has no army). We discovered after meeting with the Attorney General and even the president's brother and advisor, that even they weren't aware of this, much less the public. We quickly provided the public with information through the major media outlets. We poked the beehive sharing what Panamanians discovered to be the shocking news that their police were once again attending an institution that was de-

NICARAGUA: Challenges to Washington Consensus

By Katherine Hoyt, National Coordinator, Nicaragua Network

Ed. Note: *President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela has pledged \$400 million in investments to Nicaragua and enough aid to guarantee the new government's social programs. The first two generating plants supplied by Venezuela went on line to alleviate Nicaragua's severe energy crisis. Every 15 days 50,000 barrels of diesel and 10,000 of gasoline, sold by Venezuela at discount prices, arrives in Nicaragua. President Daniel Ortega who won the presidency with 38% of the vote now enjoys a 60% favorable rating in the polls. These factors put Ortega in a good position to negotiate with US institutions.*

The recently elected administration of Nicaragua's President Daniel Ortega is challenging long-standing "Washington Consensus" economic policies that have put the Central American country in the backseat when it comes to setting its own economic agenda.

The World Bank, International Monetary fund (IMF), and Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) have imposed harmful conditions on loans and debt relief over the past 17 years. Some observers believe that the relationship between Nicaragua and these international financial institutions (IFIs) is coming to an end. Or, in the words of Nicaraguan economist Nestor Avendaño, "Nicaragua will be able to talk *'tú a tú'* with the IMF and the IMF will have to listen." Avendaño's use of "tú" is, a reference to the use of the informal form of the pronoun "you" in Spanish, meaning the government and the banks will now talk as equals. It is indeed a new day in Nicaragua.

Recently appointed Minister of Education Miguel de Castilla abolished school fees upon taking office. Ruth Herrera, a long-time privatization foe, was named president of the national water and the sewage company, which was being prepared for privatization with an IDB loan. Orlando Núñez, champion of economic development based on small farmers, is now the head of the "Zero Hunger Program." In spite of these open challenges to neo-liberal

economic policies that have emphasized "cost recovery" for primary education and health services, privatization of public utilities, and prioritization of agricultural financing for large growers, IFI representatives have expressed a willingness to work with the Sandinista administration.

Programs such as the "Zero Hunger" Program and full funding for public elementary schools are expensive and new funds will be necessary if they are to go forward. Some of that new funding will come from the IFIs (the World Bank just announced a \$50 million loan), but Nicaragua will also benefit from money freed up by recent debt relief.

The president of the Nicaraguan Central Bank, Antenor Rosales, announced in January that the IDB would cancel \$984 million of Nicaragua's debt. Rosales explained that the Governing Counsel at the

IDB meeting in Guatemala March 16-20 would finalize the cancellation of this debt. The cancellation will be retroactive and take effect from January 1, 2007.

Rosales noted that the average annual savings for Nicaragua will be about \$26 million from 2007 to 2044, freeing up close to \$22 million that otherwise would have gone to the IDB. He added that the total debt with the IDB would be reduced from \$1.535 billion to \$749 million, thus reducing Nicaragua's external debt from \$4.525 billion to \$3.739 billion.

This money, invested in strategic programs, will go a long way toward equalizing economic and educational opportunities for the people of Nicaragua.

Source: Spring 2007, "Drop the Debt," Jubilee USA Network; www.jubileeusa.org

SOA continued from page 8

spised in their land. Even after we left, debate continued in the press and other organizations joined together to look at ways to pressure the government to reverse this situation.

We knew that we couldn't leave the country without visiting the former site of the SOA, now converted into a hotel. Our tour guide, the former bishop of Colon, showed us how the lobby has been transformed into a peace monument. A huge marble star adorns the floor surrounded by a marble compass calling for peace to be spread to all parts of our earth. The beauty of the grounds took our breath away, and we wondered how a house of horrors could have possibility existed amidst such loveliness. As we were about to leave, the hotel matron invited us into a stairwell, the only place which had been left untouched. As the door closed behind us, I felt an eerie sensation. Gone were the plants and marble floors, instead there was a narrow cement staircase leading down to a dark basement. Our Chilean friend Pablo, a former political prisoner and torture survivor under Pinochet's regime, stepped down towards the basement. I wondered what he felt.

The transformation of a place of violence into a haven of beauty was repeated on our last night in Panama. The Maryknoll sisters

invited us to visit their project, a retirement home for low-income Panamanians. We found that the Sisters' project was located in the former US military base where tens of thousands of troops were stationed before the canal was returned to Panama. Upon their departure, Sister Gerri suggested to authorities that a wonderful use of the land would be that of a new site for a retirement home for needy elderly Panamanians. They agreed for the sum of one dollar.

As the sun went down and brought a welcome cool to the surrounding tropics, we visited the former bunker transformed into a center for total care. Four-foot walls had been whitewashed and were covered with butterflies painted in all colors. Inside, gun vaults were converted to closets holding pink and turquoise dresses and straw hats. The lookout room was filled with several dozen brightly dressed elderly who took our hands firmly and kissed our cheeks, welcoming us to their home.

It was the death of two Maryknoll sisters at the hands of SOA grads 27 years ago that shed light on this school of assassins, and led to the huge movement that now demands an end to this school. It seems fitting that their fellow Maryknoll sisters were showing us one of the many ways we can transform a place of war and violence into one of beauty and welcome. ●

COSTA RICA: Referendum on CAFTA

On April 13, Costa Rica's president Oscar Arias announced that his government would hold a referendum on the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). Arias said, "For the first time Costa Ricans will be able to decide directly the future of a very important law for the country." Under Costa Rican law the referendum will be binding if 30% of Costa Rica's voters (781,000) participate.

While Arias is a strong supporter of CAFTA, he acted after the Supreme Electoral Tribunal authorized the referendum if opponents would collect signatures from 5% of the country's registered voters (130,000) within nine months.

Earlier on February 26, some 500,000 people took to the streets of San Jose to demand that the country's Legislative Assembly not ratify CAFTA. The protest was the largest one yet in Central America against the trade pact and one of the largest protests ever in Costa Rica.

Since Costa Rica signed CAFTA last year there have been demonstrations against it in several cities. The Assembly was unable to debate or pass the treaty on February 26 because it lacked a quorum.

Source: *La Nacion (Costa Rica)* from AEP; *Boston Globe* from Reuters, April 13, 2007

HOME FRONT: Terrorist Goes Free

On April 19, Luis Posada Carriles, a Cuba-born longtime CIA operative and darling of the extremist Cuban-Americans in Miami, was released from prison in El Paso after posting a \$350,000 bond and flew to Miami. Posada, 79, Cuban-Venezuelan exile, had been in US custody since 2005 when he was arrested for entering the country illegally. On May 8, a federal judge in El Paso, Texas dismissed immigration fraud charges against Posada, citing a federal translator's botched English-Spanish interpretation of Posada's naturalization interview in 2005.

For over two years, the US has failed to act on Venezuela's extradition request concerning Posada's alleged masterminding of the 1976 midair bombing of a Cuban airliner in which 73 died in the explosion. Posada, a naturalized Venezuelan citizen, was living in Venezuela when the bombing was planned.

He escaped from a Venezuelan prison while awaiting trial for the bombing.

In 2006 the US Department of Justice argued in federal court that Posada should be left in detention because of his own admission of acts of terrorism in Cuba, in Operation Condor in South America in the 1970s and the Contra War in Nicaragua in the 1980s. But the Justice Department never brought charges of terrorism against him and the Bush Administration refused to extradite him to Venezuela or Cuba, claiming he would be tortured!

Releasing Posada on the streets of the US exposes President Bush's hypocrisy in his stated. "Mission against terrorism." Posada clearly meets the criteria for charging him with terrorism under the US Patriot Act of 2001.

Lacking US cooperation on extradition, Venezuela plans to petition the UN Security Council to determine whether the US violated Resolution 1373 which calls for all UN member states to bring to justice "any person who participates in the financing, planning, preparation or perpetration of terrorist acts."

Sources: *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 10, 2007.

HOME FRONT: Farm Workers Win

On April 9, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) won its two-year campaign against McDonalds USA. Beginning with this year's growing season McDonalds will pay through its produce suppliers an additional one-penny per pound for tomatoes picked by farm workers in Florida. McDonalds also agreed that its produce suppliers would work together with CIW to develop a new code of conduct for Florida tomato growers and implement a credible third-party verification system. Two years ago the CIW won its campaign against Taco Bell. Their next campaign will target Burger King that turned down a similar request in February.

The penny-a-pound raise is significant. It means farm workers will get 72 to 77 cents for every 32-pound bucket of tomatoes they pick for McDonalds' restaurants, up from 40 to 45 cents per bucket. Picking 100-125 buckets per day translates to earning \$72 to \$94 a day, up from \$50 to \$60 before the raise, for lifting two tons of tomatoes each day.

Understandably, the Immokalee workers

were elated. They came to Chicago to mount a giant protest at McDonalds' headquarters and ended up with a grand "Concert for Fair Food" with 2000 of their friends from Chicago and across the county.

Source: *Orlando Sentinel*, April 17, 2007

HOME FRONT: ICE Raids in Marin

At dawn on March 6, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents raided the low-income Canal neighborhood of San Rafael in Marin County, California. The raids, part of ICE's national "Operation Return to Sender," were supposedly based on 30 warrants for people who had prior deportation orders. The ICE agents returned to the neighborhood early on March 7 and carried out more arrests. On March 15, aides from Rep. Lynn Woolsey's office revealed that ICE arrested 65 people in Marin County during the week of March 5, and had deported 23 of them. Canal Alliance Director Tom Wilson noted that for every one with a warrant that was picked up, 12 were arrested without a warrant.

In the pre-dawn hours of March 9, about 75 people held a three-hour candlelight vigil in the Canal neighborhood, spreading out in teams at several intersections in order to protest the ICE raids, show support for immigrant residents, and witness and document any further early morning ICE actions. Later that afternoon more than 100 people protested in San Rafael. On March 12, hundreds of people again protested the raids with a march from St. Rafael's Church to a "know-your-rights" meeting in the Canal neighborhood.

On March 30, MITF members were part of a group of 60 or more human rights activists who confronted a like number of "Minutemen" at the corner of A and 2nd street in San Rafael. The Minutemen, an anti-immigrant rights group, were from chapters in Fremont, Redwood City and Alameda. The immigrant rights activists were more vocal, beating drums, blowing whistles and chanting. Jim Geraghty, who lives in San Rafael said, "We need to change the debate from immigration to foreign policy. The causes are more related to US foreign and economic policies..."

Source: *Marin Independent Journal*, March 2007

MITF Delegations

MEXICO

Oaxaca: July 7-14

Chiapas: July 17-22

During 8 days in Oaxaca we will meet members of the popular movement APPO and victims of the repression. In order to understand the root causes of the popular uprising we will travel to the Mixteca region and the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. This trip is organized by the Oaxaca Solidarity Network who has organized the recent emergency delegations to the region.

Cost \$700, includes all in country transportation, translation, accommodation and most meals.

During 6 days in Chiapas we will be updated on the current situation in which the government is trying to retake lands that the Zapatistas seized in 1994. We will also attend the opening international meeting between the EZLN and the world in Oventic. Arrangements can be made to attend the rest of the meetings taking place in the other Caricoles.

Cost \$600, for information and an application visit www.mitfamericas.org/trips

VENEZUELA

Labor and Ecology, October 6-16

We will travel from Caracas to eastern Venezuela with experienced trip leader and long-time activist Lisa Sullivan. We'll see the sweeping changes taking place in the "Bolivarian Revolution" and learn about the new experiments in citizen participation, cooperatives, and worker-run factories.

After meeting with government and oil industry officials in Caracas we will travel, via the Barlovento region to Guayana in the southeast, home to Venezuela's most important natural resources and industry. We will also visit indigenous Warao fishing communities in the Orinoco river region. Under the Orinoco lie the world's largest oil reserves. This region is the jumping off point for visits to Angel Falls and the Gran Sabana.

Cost for the 10-day trip is \$1450 and includes all transportation even a return flight from Ciudad Guayana to Caracas on the 25th for flight back to the US.

For information and application contact: lwlaura@yahoo.com or MITF 415-924-3227.

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