

Report

WINTER 2008

PUBLISHED BY MARIN INTERFAITH TASK FORCE ON THE AMERICAS

ARGENTINA: The President's Wife Wins

By Dale Sorensen, Task Force on the Americas

The first *elected* woman president of Argentina, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, who succeeded her husband President Nestor Kirchner was sworn in on December 10, 2007. Previous wives of General (President) Juan Perón, Evita and Isabelita were never elected. Fernández de Kirchner, an experienced politician in her own right, was a senator in Argentina's national legislature representing Buenos Aires. She won the presidency with 45 percent of the vote nationwide in a field of 14 candidates. Her main two rivals, center-left congresswoman Elisa Carrio, won 23 percent of the vote and former finance minister Roberto Lavagna, won 17 percent. Her party also won big around the nation, consolidating its control of both houses in Congress and securing 19 out of 23 provincial governorships.

Knowing that her victory was assured because the opposition was divided, Fernández de Kirchner did not campaign hard or publicly debate her opponents, preferring to travel abroad, having her picture taken with foreign leaders like German Chancellor Angela Merkel. While abroad she stressed that if elected she would make Argentina an attractive place in which to invest.

In contrast to her husband who had been described as "rather dour" and proudly provincial, Fernández de Kirchner is "more flamboyant," a fiery speaker who some say has adopted the style of the idealized Evita Perón. The new president is a 54-year-old mother of two, a lawyer by profession and a veteran politician who ran as a candidate of the Peronist movement. She will be the most powerful woman in Latin America, as President Michelle Bachelet of Chile, the region's other female head of state, heads a much

smaller economy. Fernández' supporters see her as having built a career on her own merit. She once said, "I don't want to inherit anything from Eva or my husband. Everything I've got is a result of my own achievement and my own defects too."

Cristina Fernández was born into a middle-class family. Meeting at law school, she and Nestor Kirchner shared similar ideals. They married in 1975 and moved to the most southern tip of Patagonia after many left-wing students, including some of their friends, were kidnapped and disappeared during the 1976-1983 military dictatorship. They set up a law office in Río Gallegas and Mr. Kirchner became mayor and later governor of Patagonia. Cristina moved up through the local legislature before running for office in the national senate.

In her stirring inaugural speech on December 10, she cited impunity as the greatest failure of past governments and committed her presidency to aggressively bring to justice all those responsible for the atrocities of the "Dirty War" (the disappearance of tens of thousands of Argentines during the dictatorship). She warned all those who attempt to slow the justice process or threaten witnesses and victims seeking justice. The prosecutions of military officers and police agents for crimes committed by the dictatorship started under President Nestor Kirchner (2003-2007) and are expected to continue under Cristina Fernández. This will not be an easy task. A key witness to the crimes,



President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner

Jorge Julio Lopez, disappeared in September 2006. One day after Fernández Kirchner's inauguration a former navy officer, Hector Febres was found dead, two

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Fear and Hope in El Salvador

By *Martha Olson Jarocki, Sister Mountain Steering Committee and Roger Stoll, Task Force on the Americas*

A delegation of the Task Force on the Americas visited El Salvador in October at the invitation of the Ciudadela Guillermo Ungo, a village founded by 'Farabundo Marti' National Liberation Front (FMLN) guerillas after the 1992 peace accords. The Sister Mountain School (a project of the Task Force) has supported teachers at the school in the community for 15 years. Several members of the delegation were family and friends of two Marin County Sister Mountain founders memorialized by the Ciudadela with the Hannah Creighton Middle School and the Lynn Rolston Library.

The village and the school are remarkable success stories. The school now serves students K-12 from all over the region with a student body of 515. All 18 students of last year's high school graduating class passed the entrance exam for university. Some graduates now attend the University of El Salvador (the nation's only public university) and several are in Cuba receiving medical training.

The students were highly motivated and charmed us all. One twelve year old, when asked if she looked forward to school holidays, said she would rather be in school. When we visited the 8th grade math class they solved differential equations with such élan that the college level math teacher in

our delegation marveled, "These kids are more fluent with the material than the students I work with!"

This is an astounding success in a nation where most students never complete 5th grade and only one in 100 attend college. What is more, it has been carefully built over the years, with foreign support and volunteer labor by dedicated community members. The wealth of the nation remains controlled by an oligopoly so entrenched that its numbers have shrunk from the historic fourteen families to seven. Poverty is widespread. 60% of the population lives on less than \$2 a day, half of them on \$1 a day. One fifth of the population has left for the US, where they work to send home remittances that amount to 16% of El Salvador's gross domestic product.

This economic picture of poverty and inequality is the result of long domination by the US and Salvadoran elites. Through recent free trade agreements such as CAFTA (Central American Free Trade Agreement), as well as historical patterns, the tiny country of six and a half million has been ruled by neoliberal dogma, suffering dollarization (a surrender of national monetary control) and attempts to privatize essential services such as water and health care. As in much of Latin America and the Caribbean these economic policies serve US corporate interests. The violent state apparatus necessary to enforce them is, in fact, the long political footprint of the US.

El Salvador's history is a case study of US imperial practice and the popular resistance it engenders. By the late 1970s, El Salvador was in a full-scale civil war funded and directed by the U.S. through a puppet Salvadoran government. In 1980 the five opposition parties and their related guerilla forces joined together in the FMLN. The brutality of the government's prosecution of the war is legendary, including the systematic massacres of civilians, disappearances and political killings.

When the government and the FMLN signed peace accords, the war ended and the FMLN became a political party, but political repression and assassination continued. While in the country, we learned of recent killings of journalists, politicians and

political activists. Impunity persists for such crimes committed during and after the war. The right-wing ARENA party itself, which holds the presidency, is implicated in the notorious 1980 murder of San Salvador's Archbishop Oscar Romero, following his denunciation of the government.

Continuing resistance to neoliberal economics showed itself last summer in peaceful protests against water privatization. The protest took place on the day the ARENA government rolled out a new plan to privatize water services. The plan was announced in Suchitoto, a city that has elected FMLN governments for more than a decade. It is a colonial city that has come back from devastation during the war and is now attempting to sell tourists on the charms of its cobblestone streets, tile roofed houses and achingly beautiful lake in a tropical setting. The ARENA government seeks to privatize water systems in a country where 85% of the people do not have access to potable water and where, in the words of a human rights official, "each generation must walk one kilometer farther than their parents to find potable water."

The "Suchitoto 13" were arrested on July 2nd simply for demonstrating against the water privatization plan and jailed for over a month. In February of 2008 they will be tried before special tribunals under new "anti-terrorism" laws (modeled after the new US military tribunals) directed against political dissent. El Salvador solidarity groups in the US have urged US citizens to contact the US Ambassador, their Congressional Representatives, and the head of El Salvador's Supreme Court to object to this threat to civil liberty. [See Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES) www.cispes.org].

At the Ciudadela Guillermo Ungo we met two of the Suchitoto 13. One had been beaten before he was arrested and still suffered from the effects of a concussion. He was flown in a helicopter over the reservoir near Suchitoto where national police threatened to throw him out. This was an infamous method of political execution during the war. He told us that he was not given medical care until the next day, after a US Congressman expressed concern for the welfare of the demonstrators to Salvadoran officials. We also met an FMLN

MITF on the Americas Report is published quarterly by the Marin Interfaith Task Force on Central America.

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party regional official, who had been arrested and held in jail for weeks. Her long jail stay had caused her to lose her job with the national, ARENA-controlled government.

During the visit we were struck again and again by the juxtaposition of two futures in El Salvador. The FMLN has won political control of local government for more than half the population, yet the national government is in ARENA's hands. Grassroots organizations are gaining strength among labor unions, the unemployed and the streetsellers or "informal economy," yet the economic power of the seven families appears unchecked. President Tony Saca's ARENA government passes his anti-terrorism law and clamps down on journalist access to prisons under the guise of fighting gangs.

From the rain-slicked streets of San Salvador to the mud paths on the sister mountain, Guazapa, we saw the hope and the threat of these two futures. We noticed it in the town of Ayutuxtepeque, (hill of armadillos in Nauha, an ancient indigenous

language) which was once a separate municipality but is now surrounded by the city of San Salvador. The mayor and council are FMLN members and struggle to repair city streets and provide basic services with no funding and a great many emergencies. Emergency number one: a well-kept day care center free to low income children sits in the shadow of an unreinforced masonry wall (in earthquake country) belonging to Wal-Mart, under management of the seven families and the multinational corporation. Emergency number two: the town has a youth program to counteract the enormous gang presence but no soccer field. Their hopes to build one on public land (remember the hill of armadillos) is captive to money and the pressure from the seven families to sell the public land for a housing development.

Everyone we met in Ayutuxtepeque, San Salvador, Suchitoto and Ciudadela Guillermo Ungo considers the Winter 2009 elections to be crucial for the Legislative Assembly, mayors and president. The FMLN has set its sights on winning.

Their candidate, Mauricio Funes, is a widely respected journalist. On a visit to the national FMLN campaign headquarters, we heard deep concerns that the elections would not be fair. Already the FMLN found discrepancies in the ARENA controlled voting lists. The numbers of eligible voters claimed by ARENA are not demographically tenable. And, tragically, Funes' son was recently murdered under circumstances strongly suggesting a political killing.

Election fraud and US manipulation on behalf of the Salvadoran elite has long warped the country's elections. The FMLN has been successful in local elections, but it has never won the presidency. There is a widespread view that the 2004 presidential election was won by ARENA due to fraud at the polls and US economic threats against El Salvador. Perhaps the most electorally effective of these threats suggested that if the FMLN candidate (Shafik Handal, former guerilla leader) won the presidency, the US would interfere with the ability of El Salvadorans working in the US

to send remittances home to their families.

Understandably, the FMLN urged us to return to be election observers in 2009. In fact, whenever we met with Salvadoran activists or local FMLN government officials, we asked what was most needed from internationals. The answer was invariably the same: come be election observers in 2009. [To find out how to become an election observer in El Salvador, see Centro de Intercambio y Solidaridad, www.cis-elsalvador.org/]

Our delegation left El Salvador in awe of the courage and determination of the people we met there. As a student at the University told us, Salvadorans know that democracy, literacy and human rights, "are the fruit of the struggle waged by the people. They are never gifts from the state." ●



Students at school entrance with sign saying, "To awaken and educate the mind on what it is to be human in relationships with others and the world" Photo: Caitlin Rolston

Understanding the Venezuelan Revolutionary Alternative

By Larry Shoup, historian and author

Ed. Note: Former California Secretary of State candidate Larry Shoup was part of a Task Force on the Americas delegation that visited Venezuela for two weeks in October 2007. He was inspired by the experience and wrote this article to explain what he sees as the origins, meaning and significance of this ongoing revolution

Margaret Thatcher's statement that "there is no alternative" to global free market private neo-liberal capitalism has been with us for several decades now. During the same period, Francis Fukuyama promoted a related view of the world, namely "an end of history," in the sense that Western liberal democracy as practiced in the United States and Western Europe was the final form of human development. The purpose of these ideas was to promote fatalism and immobility among the people, the view that resistance to privatization, "free" trade and corporate dominated globalization was futile and doomed to failure. While alternatives to this view have existed throughout the last several decades, the ongoing Venezuelan revolution has definitely ended any illusion of credibility for these ideas. An understanding of and support for this revolutionary alternative for the people is vital for humanity's collective future.

Any real understanding of Venezuela today requires an understanding of the "social debt", the social and economic situation created by the former ruling class or oligarchy. A small part of the population, largely Euro-Venezuelan (white), owned and still owns a large percentage of the national wealth, having everything and living in luxury. On the other hand, the great majority of the people, mainly of mestizo or African ancestry, despite working hard every day, owned little, had very small incomes and lacked decent housing, healthcare, education and sometimes even adequate food. Poverty rates were as high as 86% by some estimates. A peoples' movement, called "Bolivarian" after the great 19th Century liberator and led by Hugo Chavez, formed in the 1980s and 1990s to change this situation. Collective study/discussion groups, called "Bolivarian Circles," were developed in communities all over the country. Three key events stand out during this period. The first



Bolivarian government funded factory, in the Barlovento region, to assist local cocoa cooperatives in processing their product for value added sale on the world cocoa market.
Photo: Mark Silva

was a mass uprising in 1989, which was brutally suppressed by leaders of the oligarchy, resulting in the murder by police and the army of an unknown number, possibly many thousands, of people. Second, Hugo Chavez led and accepted responsibility for a failed military coup in 1992, but stated that the attempt to create a different and more just Venezuela was only over "*por ahora*" (for now). This made him a hero to the exploited and excluded poor majority. Finally, Chavez was elected President of the country in 1998.

One of the first tasks facing the new President was to create the legal basis for a new and different economy and society. A process was started to democratically produce a new constitution, reflecting the current needs of the majority. A new constitution, passed in 1999 by a 72 % vote of the people, stressed that "overall human development," "a just wealth distribution," and the "values of mutual cooperation and solidarity" — not exploitation of people and the environment to accumulate wealth for the few — were to be the overall goals of the society. The new constitution called for a presidential term of six years, so Chavez ran and won a new term in

2000. His next focus was to bring under control the Venezuelan state oil company, the PDVSA, which was a "state within the state," answerable only to itself and its often corrupt managers. Only by asserting national control could the PDSVA and the vast wealth it generated be made to serve the interests of the majority of the people. Chavez also moved to strengthen the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and pushed it to raise oil prices to increase the income for his nation. These moves, while partly or wholly successful and only progressive in political and social content, created stronger opposition within Venezuela.

In 2002, the oligarchy, in alliance with corrupt labor "leaders" and the old, out-of-power political parties, launched a massive attack to destroy the promise of a new, more just economy and society. This included lock-outs and strikes, mass demonstrations, a coup and an attempted recall during these three years of crisis. President Chavez and the Bolivarian Revolutionary process survived these challenges, and the revolution emerged radicalized and with additional mass support. It was the revolution's strength in the poor

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barrio communities all over the nation that pulled Chavez and his program through this time of troubles. The April 2002 coup attempt was foiled, for example, when the people poured out of the barrios like a massive river demanding that the army coup-makers bring their president back. This sparked those in the army who supported the constitution and Chavez to counterattack and capture many of the coup leaders, although others escaped and are still plotting their return.

Surviving the best or worst that the oligarchy and its allies could throw at him; Hugo Chavez emerged as a more radical leader in 2005. He and his supporters had decided that the very nature and logic of the Venezuelan capitalist system would cause a destruction of their attempts to create a just society focused on human, instead of wealth, development. Capitalism itself had, therefore, to be overturned; step by step the economy and society had to be transformed from capitalism to what they call "21st Century Socialism," a form of democratic socialism. The process is ongoing, but so far has had these key aspects:

- Missions: These are designed to bring material aid and education to the excluded and exploited of Venezuela, especially in the poor barrios. Free health care and education, as well as low-cost subsidized food, make up the core of

the missions.

- Land Reform: The oligarchy holds a very high percentage of the nation's land. Under Chavez almost nine million acres of unused land (some purchased, some state land) have been given to cooperatives and poor families to farm. This provides food for the missions and livelihoods for those who had been excluded.
- Cooperatives: There were only 800 plus cooperatives when Chavez took power in 1998. As of September 2006 there were almost 160,000 cooperatives registered with the government. These have had a high failure rate, and it is unclear how many are actually functioning, but it is estimated that between 700,000 and 1.4 million people are currently working in cooperatives.
- Worker Control: The national government has established "socialist factories" under worker control. Many state-owned enterprises are run by "co-management," worker-government cooperation. In cases of abandonment by the owners, workers have also taken over and are running specific factories with the help of the government.
- Community Councils: In 2006 a law

was passed allowing groups of several hundred families in every community to form community councils to discuss and decide on the needs of their community. The national government provides funds to these councils, so that they can build roads, provide water or sewage systems, etc.

- Socialist Ecological Towns: Two small towns are now under construction that will run on alternative energy and be free of cars.
- The PSUV: A United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) formed in early 2007. By the summer, 5.75 million people had signed up to be members, and 1.5 million are said to be active and involved. The purpose is to unite the parties, groups and people who have supported Chavez and the revolution into one democratic people's organization that will institutionalize the ongoing revolution.

The Venezuelan revolution is putting a real alternative on the world's agenda, propelled by the creative power of human beings and mass participation. It is a new model for the world, beyond neo-liberal corporate exploitation. Goodbye to global free market capitalism, goodbye to "an end to history" and hello to a new historical hope. ●

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days before he was to be sentenced for participation in torture and other crimes, including the theft of babies from dissident women during the dictatorship. There were suspicions that Febres had been about to make revelations about the theft of babies and that this led to his death. Even though he apparently died of a heart attack, traces of cyanide were found in his body.

On the economic front, Cristina Fernández has promised to safeguard and continue the economic successes that have been credited to her husband who steered Argentina out of its worst economic crisis in 2001, when it defaulted on \$80 billion in loans. Since then the economy has rebounded with an average annual growth rate of about 8 percent, enabling the government of Nestor Kirchner to pay back \$9.5 billion in debt to the International

Monetary Fund in 2006 with the help of Venezuela's Hugo Chávez buying some of the debt in bonds. General poverty levels have been significantly reduced from a high of 57 percent in 2002 to the current levels of 23 percent, which is still considered high.

The main source of criticism of the past president is that Argentina still has an inequitable distribution of earnings due to a decade of neoliberalism and this will most likely become a central issue in the Fernández presidency. In 2003, the poorest 20 percent of Argentine society earned only 4.1 percent of national earnings, the current figure is just 4.6 percent and all this while Argentina Central Bank international reserves has risen to \$45 billion. Other economic problems remain from the previous administration. Inflation is over 9 percent, due to the devaluation of the Peso, with increases in the

price of basic foodstuffs going up on a weekly basis. And despite negotiating a 65 percent reduction in external debt, Argentina still owes \$6.3 billion to the Paris Club of creditor nations. High unemployment (11 percent), corruption and crime remain issues to be grappled with by the new president.

On the international scene, Cristina Fernández faces the task of maintaining strong relations with Venezuela's president Chávez who has poured billions of dollars into Argentina. With the political atmosphere in the hemisphere growing more and more polarized due to the unhealthy attitude of the Bush administration towards Venezuela's administration, Fernández must develop a foreign policy skill which can balance ties with these two disputing powers while working to

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Letter to: Dr. Rafael Correa Delgado, President, Republic of Ecuador

Ed. Note: This letter was developed by members of the Latin America Solidarity Coalition (LASC) and endorsed by 18 national and 24 local or regional organizations in the US, including the Task Force on the Americas. It was presented in October 2007.

Dear President Correa:

We write to you to express our strong support for your actions to demilitarize Ecuador's relations with the United States, including the decision to close the U.S.-operated military base in Manta, known as a Forward Operating Location (FOL), when the agreement for it expires in 2009.

US officials have defended the Manta base, asserting that drug traffic in Ecuador and the eastern Pacific has grown in recent years. But if drug traffic has grown since the base began operations in Manta in 2000, it suggests – at the very least – that it has been ineffective. The FOL commander has also stated that the base is "very important" for Plan Colombia, which is described as a counter-drug program. But Plan Colombia's military emphasis, its inaction against drug trafficking by paramilitary groups allied with the Colombian army, and its trivial impacts on the amount of coca leaf grown indicate that it is more accurately described as a plan for war – war that has displaced millions of Colombian civilians and killed many thousands. A US military base in Ecuador helps neither of our countries.

The militarized approach to reducing traffic of illegal drugs represents a tragic decision that has not affected the availability or price of these drugs in our communities, nor addressed the poverty and lack of infrastructure that lead some Latin American farmers to enter the illegal economy. A study by the Rand Corporation showed that spending on interdiction of the sort conducted from the Manta base is 23 times less effective in reducing illegal drug use than treatment of drug users. To paraphrase President Dwight Eisenhower, every dollar spent on military approaches to drugs represents a theft from programs for at-risk youth in the United States, for investment in reducing the United States' carbon emissions, and for payment of other debts our country owes to the world.

We applaud your administration's publicly stated decision not to renew the agreement for the FOL in Manta, and to withdraw from the UNITAS naval exercises that were held in June, led by the US military. In the absence of any credible external military threat to the region and the ineffectiveness of military actions in stemming the supply of illegal drugs, these exercises serve only to militarize the seas, waste resources, and antagonize peaceful international relations.

We represent US. sectors concerned not only about the US military base in Manta, but also about other ways the U.S. government violates Ecuador's and other Latin American nations' sovereignty through military intervention. We are working to shut down the U.S. Army's Western Hemispheric Institute of Security Cooperation, also known as the School of the Americas, by cutting funding in the U.S. and urging progressive Latin American governments to send no more troops to train at that Institute, which has a long and persistent history of training soldiers who later commit human rights atrocities, and of inviting officers who already have such histories to serve as instructors.

We also want to highlight other ways in which the US government seeks to maintain control of Latin American military and police forces, including the 2005 opening of negotiations for another "International Law Enforcement Academy" (ILEA) to "train" all of Latin America. We do not believe the United States has a place in teaching other nations the practice of war or policing, while its government is blatantly violating international law and refusing to ratify international pacts that could protect civilian populations and sovereign nations from further violence, such as the Rome Statute for the creation of the International Criminal Court. That is why we are working to change U.S. military policy.

In the struggle to demilitarize our country's relations with yours, you may count on us. We look forward to further dialogue with you on these issues.

Bolivia: New Constitution, Polarization

By George Friemoth, Task Force on the Americas

Two major developments marked the close of the year in Bolivia: the passage of a new constitution in the assembly that will have to be approved in a national referendum later this year, and a worsening of political polarization. The new constitution reflects the socialistic policies advocated by indigenous president Evo Morales. At the same time racism, regional and political divisions threaten to push Bolivia into a larger conflict.

Meanwhile, the US government is not sitting by and twiddling its thumbs. It is actively engaged in destabilizing and, if necessary, overthrowing the government of Evo Morales, the first democratically elected indigenous president of Bolivia. Publicly available information, documents obtained through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and interviews with recipients of US aid and training in Bolivia reveal that the US government has spent millions of dollars to rebuild discredited opposition political parties, to undermine independent grassroots movements, to bolster malleable indigenous leaders with little or no popular support, and dissuade Bolivians from talking about whether they should have greater ownership rights over national resources and land. The US funds are distributed under the guise of "democracy promotion," a central plank of US foreign policy since the early 1980s under Ronald Reagan's presidency that has become increasingly prominent in recent years in Cuba, Haiti and Venezuela.

The new proposed constitution paves the way for many changes the government has been working toward since Morales was elected president. The document gives the state greater control over natural resources and the economy, and guarantees expanded autonomy for departmental governments and indigenous communities. It calls for a mixed economy, where the rights of private, public and communal industries are protected. Indigenous community justice systems are clearly recognized through the new constitution. The document establishes that Supreme Court judges are to be elected instead of appointed by Congress. The constitution lifts the block on second consecutive terms for the president. The change would allow Mo-

rales to run again for two more terms in a row, in addition to his current term in office.

In the upcoming national referendum on the constitution, which is scheduled to happen sometime before the end of 2008, the article on land reform is still in dispute. This controversial article limits private ownership of land to 100,000 hectares (247,000 acres). Such a policy would greatly impact large land holdings in the eastern department of Santa Cruz and other regions. A separate referendum on this crucial issue of land reform will take place before the national referendum on the constitution as a whole.

In an effort to strengthen his own mandate and reduce intense divisions, Morales announced and scheduled a third referendum in 2008 on his presidency and all the governorships. Morales said that he had to receive 54% of the vote. If not, he would hold new elections in 90-120 days. Also, if the governors do not receive more votes than they did in the 2005 elections, then Morales would replace them with an interim governor of his choice until the next elections. A recent credible poll showed that 56% of the people currently approve of Morales' performance.

In reaction the right wing leaders in Santa Cruz declared autonomy from the central government. Leaders announced the creation of Santa Cruz ID cards, a television station and its own police department that would no longer recognize the Bolivian national police. This declaration of autonomy establishes that 66% of taxes from the oil and gas industry will remain in the department of Santa Cruz, rather than going to the central government. Such expanded autonomy in Santa Cruz and the other three opposition led, resources rich, departments (Beni, Pando and Tarija) further threatens the stability of the Morales government.

Meanwhile, strikes, roadblocks and protests have been organized among all political factions and violence has often erupted throughout what has been a turbulent end of the year. There were eight bombings in Bolivia in 2007. Most of these incidents involved dynamite or grenades, and the majority of them were against leftist unions or Morales' MAS party officials. Four people were killed in the conflict and hundreds of others were injured.

The right-wing forces in Bolivia have the full support of the US government's USAID

program with its Office of Transitional Initiatives (OTI) and the National Endowment of Democracy (NED). The US program supports autonomy for the four resources-rich departments (Santa Cruz, Beni, Pando and Tarifa) in Bolivia. It promotes separatism to destabilize the Morales government and ensure the continuation of its capitalist model that is pro-US and anti-socialist. The US's current ambassador in Bolivia, Philip Goldberg is an expert in issues of separatism, having been the head of the US mission in ex-Yugoslavia that was divided into two countries: Bosnia and Serbia. Goldberg recently said that the Morales government's policy of promoting traditional coca growing while cracking down on cocaine production ran counter to the US drug war model that centered on militarization and fumigation programs.

US corporate-controlled media has been particularly vicious in attacking Morales and his government. The *Wall Street Journal* has taken the lead in Evo-bashing, portraying him as a pawn of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and as a nefarious drug lord. This demonization of Morales is expected to continue with US government blessing.

The Morales administration has broken more than one tie to the US. It withdrew from sending officers to the US-run School of the Americas (SOA/WHINSEC); it also withdrew from the World Bank's International Center for Settlement of Investment Disputes; it opposed the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Mexico as well as an FTA with the US, and it opted out of renewing its standby agreement with the IMF. The response of the Bush administration has been hostile and somewhat guarded.

On the other hand, several Latin American nations have stepped up to support Bolivia following its approval of a new constitution. Brazil's President Lula de Silva visited Bolivia and announced a \$1 billion investment in the country's state-owned petroleum company in oil and gas. Brazil and Chile's President Bachelet negotiated a \$600 million highway from Brazil across Bolivia to the seaports in Chile. Morales cut a deal with a South Korean company to extract copper from a mine outside of La Paz, and China has several proposals for investments in Bo-

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Zapatista Code Red

By Naomi Klein, author

Ed. Note: *In December, Task Force members Dale Sorensen and George Friemoth attended the Zapatista conference and the 10th Anniversary Commemoration of the Acteal Massacre*

Nativity scenes are plentiful in San Cristóbal de las Casas, a colonial city in the highlands of Chiapas, Mexico. But the one that greets visitors at the entrance to the TierrAdentro cultural center has a local twist: figurines on donkeys wear miniature ski masks and carry wooden guns. It is high season for “Zapatourism,” the industry of international travelers that has sprung up around the indigenous uprising here, and TierrAdentro is ground zero. Zapatista-made weavings, posters and jewelry are selling briskly. In the courtyard restaurant, where the mood at 10 pm is festive verging on fuzzy, college students drink Sol beer. A young man holds up a photograph of Subcomandante Marcos, as always in mask with pipe, and kisses it. His friends snap yet another picture of this most documented of movements. I am taken through the revelers to a room in the back of the center, closed to the public. The somber mood here seems a

world away. Ernesto Ledesma Arronte, a 40-year-old ponytailed researcher, is hunched over military maps and human rights incident reports. “Did you understand what Marcos said?” he asks me. “It was very strong. He hasn’t said anything like that in many years.”

Arronte is referring to a speech Marcos made the night before at a conference outside San Cristóbal. The speech was titled “Feeling Red: The Calendar and the Geography of War.” Because it was Marcos, it was poetic and slightly elliptical. But to Arronte’s ears, it was a code-red alert. “Those of us who have made war know how to recognize the paths by which it is prepared and brought near,” Marcos said. “The signs of war on the horizon are clear. War, like fear, also has a smell. And now we are starting to breathe its fetid odor in our lands.”

Marcos’ assessment supports what Arronte and his fellow researchers at the Center of Political Analysis and Social and Economic Investigations have been tracking with their maps and charts. On the fifty-six permanent military bases that the Mexican state runs on indigenous land in Chiapas, there has been a marked increase in activity. Weapons and equipment are being dramatically upgraded, new battalions are moving in, including special forces—all signs of es-

calation.

As the Zapatistas became a global symbol for a new model of resistance, it was possible to forget that the war in Chiapas never actually ended. For his part, Marcos—despite his clandestine identity—has been playing a defiantly open role in Mexican politics, most notably during the fiercely contested 2006 presidential elections. Rather than endorsing the center-left candidate, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, he spearheaded a parallel “Other Campaign,” holding rallies that called attention to issues ignored by the major candidates.

In this period, Marcos’ role as military leader of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) seemed to fade into the background. He was Delegate Zero—the anti-candidate. Last night, Marcos had announced that the conference would be his last such appearance for some time. “Look, the EZLN is an army,” he reminded his audience, and he is its “military chief.”

That army faces a grave new threat—one that cuts to the heart of the Zapatistas’ struggle. During the 1994 uprising, the EZLN claimed large stretches of land and collectivized them, its most tangible victory. In the San Andrés Accords, the right to territory was recognized, but the Mexican government has refused to fully ratify the accords. After failing to enshrine these rights, the Zapatistas decided to turn them into facts on the ground. They formed their own government structures—called good-government councils—and stepped up the building of autonomous schools and clinics. As the Zapatistas expand their role as the de facto government in large areas of Chiapas, the federal and state governments’ determination to undermine them is intensifying.

“Now,” says Arronte, “they have their method.” The method is to use the deep desire for land among all peasants in Chiapas against the Zapatistas. Arronte’s organization has documented that, in just one region, the government has spent approximately \$16 million expropriating land and giving it to many families linked to the notoriously corrupt Institutional Revolutionary Party. Often, the land is already occupied by Zapatista families. Most ominously, many of the new “owners” are linked to thuggish paramilitary groups, which are trying to force the Zapatistas from their newly titled land. Since



Ceremony commemorating the 10th Anniversary of the massacre in Acteal, Chiapas.

Photo: Sharon Friemoth

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Puerto Rico: FBI on Fishy Fishing Expedition

By **Juan Gonzalez**, New York Daily News

Ed. Note: Puerto Ricans in the US and many in Puerto Rico believe they are still a US colony. In 2008, the UN General Assembly will enter into discussions on whether Puerto Rico is truly an independent and sovereign country, in compliance with its mandate under Resolution 1514 to decolonize any nation that has not gained its independence. While a UN resolution in favor of decolonizing Puerto Rico would not be binding, it would mark the first time a majority of nations rejected the US grip on Puerto Rico.

A few days before Christmas, two men walked into Julio Pabon's sports memorabilia store on East 149th St. in the South Bronx. One of them identified himself as an FBI agent; the other was from the Joint Terrorism Task Force of the NYPD. "We're looking for Julio Pabon," one said. "Which one, father or son?" replied the store's employee. They wanted to ask the younger Pabon "some questions," the men said before leaving a business card.

A few days later, Julio Antonio Pabon, a 27-year-old budding filmmaker and graduate of Wesleyan University in Connecticut, called the phone number on the card and arranged a meeting. He was accompanied by his mother. This time there was one detective and two FBI agents, including one from San Juan. They showed the young man 20 photos of Hispanic-looking individuals and asked if he knew any of them. Pabon told them he recognized only one, a poet named Hector Rivera. Years ago, when Pabon was president of the Latino club at Wesleyan, he asked Pedro Pietri, the celebrated New York poet who has since died, to arrange a performance for the students. Pietri sent Rivera and a group called Welfare Poets up to the school. That was the first and last time Pabon met Rivera. The agents immediately handed the young man a subpoena to appear in federal court on January 11.

He is one of at least three young Puerto Ricans in this city who have been subpoenaed to appear Friday before a Brooklyn federal grand jury investigating local links

to the Macheteros, the three-decade-old violent Puerto Rican independence group. "There must be some mistake," the older Pabon told me this week. "My son has never been a member of any political group, unless you're counting the Yankees' traveling fan group." Sure, more than 30 years ago, Pabon the father was a well-known Bronx community organizer and fervent advocate of Puerto Rican independence, but he never advocated terrorism. For the past few decades, he has been a respected businessman and promoter of Latino sports events and is known by virtually everyone of influence in the Bronx.

"I've known Julito the son since he was born," said Rep. Jose Serrano (D-Bronx). "What could he and these other young people possibly know that helps the FBI?" In addition to the young Pabon, Tania Frontera, a graphic designer and Christopher Torres, a social worker, have been subpoenaed. Frontera and Torres were active several years ago in the successful movement to end the Navy's use of the Puerto Rican island of Vieques as a bombing range, acquaintances say. Protests over the grand jury investigation are expected Friday here and in Puerto Rico. Serrano fears the federal government is once again using grand juries and law enforcement surveillance to intimidate Puerto Ricans engaged in legitimate dissent.

Back in 2000, at the congressman's request, former FBI director Louis Freeh de-

classified and released thousands of internal agency documents about the FBI's activities in Puerto Rico. These documents revealed a massive campaign by the agency to disrupt and persecute independence groups from the 1930s to the late 1970s. The surveillance even targeted longtime governor of Puerto Rico, Luis Muñoz.

Spokesmen for the FBI and the Brooklyn US attorney's office refused to confirm or deny any new grand jury investigation. Reports in Puerto Rico and this city's Spanish-language *El Diario-La Prensa* have claimed for weeks that the grand jury is part of a new probe of the Macheteros, the underground Puerto Rican group best known for a \$7 million Wells Fargo robbery in West Hartford, Conn., in 1983. In September 2005, the legendary founder of the group, Filiberto Ojeda Rios, was killed in a shootout with the FBI on a small farm in the hills of Puerto Rico. His death sparked a huge controversy on the island because Ojeda Rios, who was gravely injured in the shootout, bled to death when agents waited until the next morning to rush his farmhouse. Puerto Rico's Justice Department has tried ever since to obtain FBI records of the incident and the identities of the agents involved, but has been rebuffed and is suing the agency in federal court.

Source: *New York Daily News*, January 9, 2008; *NACLA*, November-December 2007

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strengthen better relations with trading bloc neighbors in Mercosur (South American trade accord).

Lastly, Cristina Kirchner is known to have a keen eye for detail and has a reputation for sometime being bossy and quick-tempered. On December 14, the fourth day of her term, she appeared on television to report on what she called an example of "the garbage dump of international politics," referring to a US allegation that the \$800,000 discovered by Argentine customs officials in the bag of a business man entering the country was money sent by Venezuela to fund her campaign. The new president was visibly

perturbed and she adamantly denied the US accusation. She reiterated her right to friendship with Venezuela, emphasizing, "I'm not going to be pressured." Referring to Washington again, she said, "This way of making regional politics is not going to work in Argentina. Argentina has never needed to be told who its friends should be. We have a profound belief in self-determination."

Sources: *Diego González*, *Americas Policy Program*, *Upside Down World*, October 24, 2007; *Montana James*, *Council on Hemispheric Affairs*, October 11, 2007; *New York Times*, December 14, 2007

Human Rights in Grave Danger in Haiti

By *George Friemoth*

On January 10, Amnesty International USA (AIUSA) reported that Haitians human rights activist Wilson Mesilien and his family are in grave danger and repeated its urgent request that the Haitian government protect them.

Mesilien has said that Haitian authorities have not heeded Amnesty International's repeated requests to provide him with protection. He has been running the September 30th Foundation since his predecessor Lovinsky Pierre-Antoine was kidnapped in August 2007. The Foundation is an organization, which has worked to defend the rights of victims of the 1991-1994 military coup.

On December 19, a man posing as a journalist went to the Mesilien family

home, seeking to confirm a supposed report that Mesilien had been kidnapped. Fearing for their lives, Mesilien, his wife and four children fled and remain in hiding.

"Haitian authorities have an obligation to protect their own citizens," said Barbara Joe, a Haitian specialist with AIUSA. "The threats against Mesilien and the disappearance of Lovinsky Pierre-Antoine will have an intimidating effect on civil society in Haiti unless the crimes are investigated thoroughly and those responsible for them are brought to justice."

Days before he was kidnapped, Lovinsky Pierre-Antoine had announced his intention to run for election as a senator for the Fanmi Lavalas party. He is feared to have been abducted by people connected with the army disbanded by

President Aristide in 1995 because he was publicizing human rights violations committed during the 1991-1994 military government and gathering signatures on a petition calling for a change in the Constitution that would eliminate all provisions for the existence of a Haitian army. Lovinsky-Pierre Antoine's whereabouts are still unknown.

There is an international campaign appealing to Haitian authorities to protect Mesilien and redouble efforts to find Pierre-Antoine. You can contact the Embassy of the Republic of Haiti, 2311 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington DC 20008; Tel: 202-232-4090, Fax: 202-745-7215, email: embassy@haiti.org.

Source: *Amnesty International USA press release, January 10, 2008*

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livian telecommunications, transportation, hydrocarbons and minerals.

On New Years day the government announced that in 2007 the Bolivian economy grew by 4.2%, which is more than the 1.7% growth in 2001 of the government prior to Morales. This growth was in spite of US intervention in the sovereign affairs of Bolivia.

The Morales government has officially denounced US efforts to destabilize the country. It has given notice to the US government that it must start respecting the laws of the country or choose to leave, referring to USAID/OTI funding of the opposition and promoting separatism in regional departments. "The door is open," declared a spokesman of the government. Recently Morales had harsh words for the US, which provides Bolivia with more than \$100 million in development and anti-narcotics aid each year. He lashed out at the US Embassy in Bolivia about how much of its development aid was being channeled to the political opposition. But he stopped short of escalating a public dispute with the US Ambassador on the issue.

President Morales is aware that a separatism movement could trigger a civil war and possibly result in a US or UN occupation of his country. But he is convinced

that there is no turning back for Bolivia's poor indigenous majority after centuries of colonialization and now neo-liberal colonialization. Bolivia matters to everyone seeking more just and stable societies, for the two reasons that Bolivian Vice President Garcia Linera describes as the "two conquests of equality" – political justice and economic justice. As Bolivia enters the New Year, tensions between the haves and have-nots will be greater

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September there has been a marked escalation of violence: shots fired into the air, brutal beatings, Zapatista families reporting being threatened with death, rape and dismemberment. Soon the soldiers in their barracks may well have the excuse they need to descend: restoring "peace" among feuding indigenous groups. For months the Zapatistas have been resisting violence and trying to expose these provocations. But by choosing not to line up behind Obrador in the 2006 election, the movement made powerful enemies. And now, says Marcos, their calls for help are being met with a deafening silence.

Exactly ten years ago, on December 22, 1997, the Acteal massacre took place. As part of the anti-Zapatista campaign, a paramilitary gang opened fire in a small church in the village of Acteal, killing forty-five in-

than ever. But Bolivia's indigenous majority deserves a chance to succeed.

Sources: *Benjamin Dangl, www.upsidedownworld.org, January 3, 2008; Laura Carlson, January 7, 2008, Americas Program Center of International Policy, www.americaspolicy.org; Reed Lindsay, November-December 2005, NACLA Report on the Americas; Eva Golinger, Venezuela Analysis, Sept. 13, 2007*

digenous people, sixteen of them children and adolescents. Some bodies were hacked with machetes. The state police heard the gunfire and did nothing. For weeks now, Mexico's newspapers have been filled with articles marking the tragic ten-year anniversary of the massacre.

In Chiapas, however, many people point out that conditions today feel eerily familiar: the paramilitaries, the rising tensions, the mysterious activities of the soldiers, the renewed isolation from the rest of the country. And they have a plea to those who supported them in the past: don't just look back. Look forward, and prevent another Acteal massacre before it happens.

Source: *www.thenation.com/doc/20080107/klein, January 7, 2008; www.naomiklein.org*

VENEZUELA: Chávez' Referendum Loss

On December 2, the Venezuelan people voted on constitutional amendments proposed by President Chavez and the National Assembly. The National Electoral Council reported the next day that the reform proposals were defeated by a close vote of 50% to 49%, with voter turnout only 55%. Chávez immediately conceded defeat. The people of Venezuela peacefully accepted the election results.

While the US government and corporate media charge or insinuate that Venezuela is not a democracy, the reality of this election should put to rest any suggestion that the electoral process in Venezuela is not free and fair. This election shows clearly that democracy is alive and well in Venezuela.

In the referendum the people were invited to vote on reforms affecting 33 of the 250 articles of the 1999 Constitution. The purposes of the reforms were generally described as the following: 1) to speed the redistributions of Venezuela's resources to benefit the poor, 2) to de-centralize political power to grant citizens more direct say in their affairs and 3) to move Venezuela towards a new more equitable model of development, known as "Socialism for the 21st Century."

Tibisay Lucena, president of Venezuela's National Electoral Council, a separate branch of government, called this election process "the calmest we've had in the last 10 years," and said it "shows the entire world that we are a democratic country."

International observers such as the NAACP and the National Lawyers Guild stated that the voting proceeded according to norms and praised the Venezuelan system for the enviable efficiency.

Source: *Peter Graham Cohn, The Sun Reporter, December 6, 2007*

ARIZONA: Another School of Torture

In November over 300 activists protested at the US Army Intelligence training center in Fort Huachuca, Arizona. The protests were organized to coincide with the annual November mobilization to close the School of the Americas (aka WHINSEC) at Fort Benning GA where an estimated 20,000 held a vigil. Fort Huachuca training center is the site where interrogators receive training in "tech-

niques" long recognized under international and domestic law as constituting torture.

In November 2006, about 200 people protested at the Fort, calling for the US military to halt the teaching of torture. Two protestors, Father Louis Vitale (Franciscan) and Father Steve Kelly (Jesuit) were arrested and sentenced to five-month prison terms for trespassing on Fort grounds in an act of civil disobedience. In November 2007, three persons were arrested for peacefully entering onto Fort property.

Researchers found Fort Huachuca was identified as the source of torture techniques and training used in Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib detention camps, as well as the site of the origin of the infamous "torture manual" used as a textbook at the School of the Americas/WHINSEC. The manual became public in 1992. Four Task Force members protested at Fort Huachuca in 2007.

Source: *www.soaw.org*

HONDURAS: Workers Win Big

Thanks to the National Labor Committee (NLC) members who contacted Nike and reported the illegal firing of 48 workers for organizing a union at STARSA factory in Honduras' free trade zone (owned by US Anvil, a t-shirt company). To its credit, Nike immediately sent a representative to Honduras who concluded the workers were unjustly and illegally fired. The 48 workers were reinstated to their jobs with back wages and legal recognition for their union.

Thanks also to the United Steelworkers Union, anti-sweatshop legislation is moving fast in the US Congress. Senator Byron Dorgan (D-ND) and Congressman Michael McCaul (R-TX) introduced the Decent Working Conditions and Fair Competition Act (S-367) and (HR-1992), with 152 co-sponsors in the House and 18 in the Senate. The bill would make corporations legally accountable for basic worker" rights, including: no child labor, no forced labor, freedom of association and the right to organize unions. Products found to be made under illegal sweatshop conditions would be prohibited from entry into the US and sale or export from the US would also be banned.

Source: *National Labor Committee, December 21, 2007*

CUBA: UN Condemns the US Embargo, Update

On October 30, the General Assembly of the United Nations voted 184-4 to end the US embargo on Cuba. This was the 16th consecutive year that the UN condemned the embargo.

In late July, the House of Representatives voted 185-245, defeating an amendment by Congressman Charles Rangle (D-NY) to facilitate the sales of US farm products to the island.

In June the House and Senate passed an amendment to increase the mismanaged "democracy promotion" funding from \$9 million to the \$45 million level that the Bush Administration had requested.

The Latin America Working Group (LAWG) is working with other national organizations in Washington to put together a presidential candidate scorecard to rank candidates' overall positions on Cuba. The scorecard is not an endorsement of any candidate, but it is a source of information to evaluate candidates' positions.

Source: *www.LAWG.org*

NICARAGUA: Banana Workers Win in Court

On November 5, the Los Angeles jury in the Tellez vs. Dole and Dow case awarded \$3.3 million dollars to 6 of 12 Nicaraguan workers who accused Dole and Standard Fruit Company of acting negligently and attempting to hide its use of the pesticide DBCP (debromochloropropane) during the 1970s. DBCP is the chemical that was banned in California in 1977 when the pesticide was found to cause sterility among workers. The pesticide was used in banana producing countries including Nicaragua in the 60s, 70s and 80s. Dow Chemical and Shell Chemical Company produced it.

On November 15, the jury ordered additional compensation payments for 5 of the 12 plaintiffs, increasing the sum due the workers by \$2.5 million from Dole for hiding the negative effects of the chemical from workers. Amvac Chemical Corp (Shell) settled before the case went to court paying workers \$200,000. Dole Chemical is appealing the court decision.

Source: *Nicaragua Monitor, Nov.-Dec. 2007*

Delegations for 2008

Venezuela: March 21-30

Experience the hope, energy, creativity and controversy of the Bolivarian Revolution! This 9-day delegation will be led by Lisa Sullivan who has lived and worked in Venezuela for over 20 years. Participants will spend time in the urban areas of Caracas, Barquisimeto and in the rural area of Sanare, in the foothills of the Andes. Meetings will include government and opposition leaders, local communities, cooperatives, community media as well as dancing to the rhythms of Afro-Venezuelan drums. Cost: \$1200, includes all in-country expenses. Co-sponsored by the Task Force and SOA Watch. Contact: geodale1@earthlink.net

Nicaragua: May 24-June 1

Daniel Ortega and the Sandinistas are back in power. Does this mean the second coming of the Revolution or more disappointments? Join this co-sponsored Task Force and NICCA delegation to find out what has happened since January 2007 by visiting different sectors of society. Based in Managua at the Kairos Center, we will also spend 2 days in Matagalpa to look at issues of rural poverty. Cost: \$850, includes all in country expenses. Contact: Dale at geodale1@earthlink.net or call 415-924-3227 for an application.

Brazil: August 3-17

Join the Task Force and trip leader Brazilian- American Ericka Omena Erickson as we build solidarity ties with Brazilian social movements while experiencing the beauty and culture of Brazil and grassroots social and environmental justice projects. Destinations include Rio de Janeiro and Salvador, Bahia and visits will include MST (Landless Workers Movement) encampments and cooperatives, barrios, reforestation projects and others. Cost \$1,950, includes within country flight, accommodations, 2 meals/day, guides and translation.

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