

Buenaventura
football massacre
12 dead and still no justice
 We speak to the mothers of
 Colombia's lost sons
page 13



Liberation
of Mother Earth
 Indigenous peoples and
 the battle of Cauca Valley
page 19



Reviews
 and more...

FRONTLINE

LATIN AMERICA

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Police or thieves? US soldiers are deployed on every continent to defend Washington's financial interests

Jacob Bailey

US out of Colombia and Middle East!

The failure of Plan Colombia

Robert Green

Plan Colombia, the US sponsored 'war on drugs' launched by then president Bill Clinton in 2000, was supposed to halve cocaine production within five years. Yet six years and \$5 billion dollars later (the biggest spending US military programme outside the Middle East) it is very obvious that in its declared counter-narcotics terms the Plan represents a fundamentally flawed strategy. Concern that things are not going to plan is reflected in the mainstream media in the US

and in Britain.

The *New York Times* (19 August 2006), a long time supporter of intervention, pointed out that there is the same land area under coca cultivation today as when Plan Colombia started. A clear indication of continuity of the supply is that cocaine prices are falling in the US and Europe. Only the coca fields are now smaller, dispersed and in more remote areas. To destroy the same number of coca plants as before, requires three times more hectares need to be sprayed. What is not reported is the consequent and accumulating environmental degradation.

There is an awkward point in BBC World's *The Cocaine Jungle*, when William Wood US Ambassador in Bogotá is presented with the

evidence that Plan Colombia is exacerbating the displacement of farmers and entire villages. He has nothing to say. What could he say when he knows it is true but indefensible, nearly four million internal refugees forced from their homes. The programme reports that right-wing paramilitary group the AUC (United Self-defence of Colombia) controls 70% of Colombia's cocaine production, more than half of world supplies. The AUC has agreed with President Uribe to 'demobilise', in exchange for immunity from extradition to the US, and with guarantees that they keep their fortunes to become civilian drug barons.

Plan Colombia has not failed, rather its real objectives have become clear.

SINALTRAINAL offensive sharpens

Edgar Paez in Colombia

A series of attacks against the very existence of SINALTRAINAL have occurred in different regions of Colombia; ranging from a raid on the union's national headquarters in Bogotá, to the assassination of one of our activists.

These incidents are an example of President Álvaro Uribe Vélez's policy of 'democratic security' and take place at a difficult moment due to labour conflicts with the transnationals Nestlé and Coca-cola.

These are some of the violent incidents against the lives and security of our members:

Raid on union headquarters

At approximately 12:15 a.m. on 3 August 2006, uniformed men who identified themselves as members of SIJIN, the Judicial Police, entered into the headquarters of SINALTRAINAL located at No 35 - 18, 15th Avenue in Bogotá city and proceeded to search the union building stating it was a preventative operation for the upcoming 7 August, the inauguration day of president Álvaro Uribe Vélez. That morning SIJIN agents were seen filming the outside of the union's headquarters.

This raid was carried out without a judicial order, being classified curiously as an "act of voluntary registration".

The raid took place at the very moment that we were informing the world of the good results of the campaigns against Nestlé and Coca-Cola and public protests against the permanent threats and possible judicial actions against our members.

continued on page 5



pages 10-11

Campaign contacts on page 25

COLOMBIA
 SOLIDARITY
 CAMPAIGN

FRONTLINE LATIN AMERICA

Contents

3-5 News

6 Our America

7 European Plunder

8 Comment and Analysis

The division of Latin America

9-11 Boycott Coca-Cola!

12 Environment

BP finally pay-out to *campesinos*

13 Racism and Murder

Buenaventura football massacre

14-15 Aguablanca special

16 Barrancabermeja

17 Arauca

18 Kankuamo

19 Liberation of Mother Earth

Indigenous peoples of
the Cauca Valley

20 Election Analysis

21 Deep trouble

Monterico Metals in Peru

22 Brazil's debt

24 Reviews and culture

25 Get involved

Spanish Section:

E1 Evo Morales y TLC

E2 Desplazados

E3 Eventos



FRONTLINE LATIN AMERICA

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Editorial

War in the east, war in the west

"Let's be honest, the foreign policy of a British government does not change a great deal within a party, or even between parties...because our national interests are continuous and permanent"

Lord Powell, former adviser to Mrs Thatcher, John Major and Tony Blair

"Solidarity is the tenderness of the peoples"

Ernesto 'Che' Guevara

If changing Prime Minister does not change our country's policy, as Powell admits with complete frankness, what then is the point of elections? It would seem that people in Britain have no say over what 'our' government does round the world.

If not the people's will, what then is the guiding principle of UK foreign policy? From just about every angle, the alliance with the US is the touchstone of establishment consensus. And this 'Atlanticist' orientation is itself underpinned by the interests of British multinational corporations: the most profitable being the oil corporations (BP and Shell), the banks and insurance conglomerates, the mining sector (BHP-Billiton, Anglo-American and Rio Tinto), telecommunications, pharmaceuticals and agro-industry. A

striking characteristic of this economic core is the degree to which their profitability relies on continuing super exploitation of the peoples of the 'Third World', that is the majority of citizens of the world.

In this context the only way to exercise democracy and to express our human solidarity is to mobilise against the new colonial occupations being carried out in our name, by whatever governing party, and against the multinationals whose rapacious interests fundamentally drive British war policy. Then we'll see how 'continuous and permanent' their domination really is.

The Colombia Solidarity Campaign was founded five years ago to protest against US military intervention in Colombia. As an anti-imperialist campaign we join in the rightful condemnation of the occupation of Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon and the threatened invasion of Bush's current *bete noir*, Iran.

As part of the international movement to stop the war on the peoples of the Middle East we draw attention to 'America's other war', the USA's prolonged, sometimes open but more often covert dirty war against the peoples of Colombia and Latin America. They need our support as well. Join us in solidarity with them, and in hope for the future that shines out from the real American continent.

**US Out of Colombia and the Middle East!
No More War for Oil!**

Stupid for oil

Andy Higginbottom

Analysing how the invasion of Iraq serves broader US policy, the oil industry monitoring group Platform makes a vital point:

"Iraq is seen by many as the frontline battle in a global push for multinational companies to retake control of oil production, much of which they lost to nation states in the 1970s."*

This historical insight, the multinationals are on the offensive to regain from producer states the lion's share of oil's super-profits, aptly frames contemporary developments in Colombia and South America.

Bear in mind some of the factors that dominate the supply and demand equation. Firstly, the US consumes about one quarter of world oil production but it only has 2% of reserves, hence the US imports about 60% of its petroleum products from abroad. Secondly, just five countries (Canada, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria and Venezuela) provide 65% of these supplies. Thirdly, although oil production in Iraq has plummeted, the country's reserves are massive, third to Saudi Arabia and Russia. Fourthly, even allowing for transport costs, the cost of crude oil production is several times higher in the US than in Iraq.

All of these factors add up to compelling reasons why the US not only wants to control Iraqi oil as the world's 'swing producer', but why Western oil corporations want to take direct possession of the oil fields, and limit the state's revenues from oil production.

In a groundbreaking publication, Platform earlier revealed the character of the long term 'production sharing agreements' being secretly set up in Iraq: they will effectively privatize oil revenues. PSAs

"have existed in the oil industry since the late 1960s. Oil experts agree that their purpose is largely political: technically they keep legal ownership of oil reserves in state hands, while practically delivering oil companies the same results as the concession agreements they replaced."**

These apparently technical points are profoundly important for the geopolitics of Latin America. The US and UK hope that the outcome of their occupation of Iraq will act as

a lever to squeeze down the revenue share of other state oil corporations. As measured by income, the South America's two biggest corporations are Brazil's Petrobras, nominally a state oil corporation, followed by PDVSA, Venezuela's state oil corporation. Petrobras is in fact largely privately owned, leaving PDVSA as probably the single biggest source for state revenues in the region. Venezuela's sovereign right to dispense with the benefits of its oil production thus stands right in the way of the oil multinationals' expansionist drive.

Colombia's oil policy stands in stark contrast to Venezuela and Bolivia, dovetailing neatly with Bush. President Uribe's development model depends entirely on foreign investment, and on removing obstacles to it. No wonder the *Financial Times* congratulates him, "Uribe is to foreign investors what Chávez is not". Indeed so. Through a new corporation created in 2003 called ANH (National Hydrocarbons Agency), the Colombian government offers potential oil investors similar contracts to those being imposed on Iraq.

Colombia's US embassy promises that at 50%, the 'state take' of oil revenues will be "well below the world average of 67%". Colombia's two principal oil fields are already operated by Occidental and BP, and ANH's role is to put all future production into private hands. In August 2006 ANH sold off the Cartagena refinery to the Swiss-US-Israeli corporation Glencore; it is currently seeking bidders for offshore fields in the Caribbean

and it is planning that higher international prices will allow it to open heavy oil fields in the Llanos region that borders Venezuela.

Thus Uribe's privatization policies to let in the oil multinationals are not only sacking and repressing Colombia's oil workers, throwing indigenous peoples off the land and imposing a reign of terror on communities in the production zones, by encouraging a race to the bottom they are a strategic threat to state ownership and control of oil production in neighbouring countries as well.

Defending human rights in Colombia, keeping imperialist hands off Venezuela and campaigning for an end to the occupation of Iraq are all inextricably linked as expressions of the right of nations to self-determination.

* *George's Oil Dubya-speak*

** *Crude Designs: The rip-off of Iraq's oil wealth*

both available at: <http://www.platformlondon.org/carbonweb/>



Occidental front

US military penetration of the Americas

Max Fuller & Robert Green
with thanks to Alexis Ponce

The physical hub of US military penetration into Latin America was strategically located in the Panama Canal zone, for over five decades the launch pad for destructive operations against progressive governments. When the US had to give up its Panama bases in 1999, it developed a new infrastructure, relocating its Southern Command operations according to their function. Training, the infamous School of the Americas, was relocated to Fort Benning in Georgia, and in 2001 renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Co-operation.

US aerial surveillance and rapid deployment capacities became wrapped up in the 'war against drugs', with direct intervention in the Andean region being a key factor. Under 'Plan Colombia', in 2000 the US supplied 80 helicopters and three new battalions to the Colombian armed forces. The Pentagon set up a string of bases - Forward Operating Locations - in Manta, Ecuador; in Aruba near to Curaçao in the Netherlands Antilles; and a third Central American FOL in Comalapa, El Salvador with the line that US and allied aircraft could more readily interdict flights smuggling cocaine.

Whatever the problem, the US pushes towards a military response, whether that be its repeated failed attempts to overthrow Fidel Castro in Cuba, or the \$6.7 billion spent on 'border security' along its frontier with Mexico. The extra impulse of Bush's 'war on terror' post 9/11, plus the social explosions in Argentina and Bolivia and the consolidation of Hugo Chávez's radical government in Venezuela, have all led the US military to seek deeper penetration into South America.

The shift towards the neoconservative 'forward leaning' policy inclined to intervention was made clear in early 2002 when Washington assigned \$98 million and US marine units to assist the Colombia's 6,500 man 18th Brigade guarding Occidental Petroleum corporation's oil pipeline in Arauca, near the border with Venezuela. As Senator Leahy observed, Bush had crossed "the line separating counterinsurgency from counter-drug assistance", sending troops to impose corporate interest against the wishes of the indigenous U'wa people and social movements - who mounted a 30,000 strong demonstration against the decision. The US global war for oil had arrived in the Americas.

Ecuador's Forward Base

Colombia's Uribe government is a vital Bush ally on the occidental front. Uribe promised Ecuador in January 2006 to suspend fumigations in the two countries' frontier region. He did, but only after saturating border department Putumayo with 60% of all fumigations in 2005, causing untold damage, including to neighbouring Ecuador's flora and fauna.

US regional drugs strategy is seriously dented given that Evo Morales government in Bolivia denies entry to the US military, and the Ecuadorean government of Alfredo Palacio is against fumigations. So when the new US commander of the Forward Operating Location base at Manta in north-west Ecuador let slip this August

that his orders are to execute Plan Colombia in the Andean region there was an outcry.

For Ecuador is the scene of deadly confrontations between indigenous peoples and US oil corporations such as Texaco and Occidental, French company Perenco; BP and Shell have been involved too, and most recently Petrobras from Brasil. There were mass urban mobilizations earlier this year. These social movements are to the forefront in defending national sovereignty against the depredations of the multinationals, but all are threatened by the US military presence.

gency, fused with corporate looting of natural resources - could easily be played out again in the Triple Frontier, where the forward positioning of US forces brings them close to the world's biggest hydroelectric project, and the pipelines that export Bolivia's gas.

Popular solidarity

If US militarization is most acute in Colombia, it is becoming a huge issue hanging over all progressive movements in the Americas. But this does not mean that they are silent or cowed against this threat. Students led street demonstrations in Paraguay against



An Arizona National Guard Soldier stands watch on the U.S. border with Mexico

US Intervention in the Triple Frontier

Under heavy US pressure, the governments of Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay have agreed to the establishment of a joint intelligence apparatus to oversee the so called Triple Frontera region, where the three countries' borders meet. The US has since 2001 alleged that the region serves as a hub for Islamic terrorist activities, including drug and arms smuggling, and insisted on forming a special commission for the region known as the '3+1'.

The headquarters of the new Regional Centre for Intelligence will be by the police in Foz de Iguazú, Brazil's most important city in the region. Brazil has a large Muslim community and the country has seen large demonstrations over the US-backed Israeli assault on Lebanon. Washington (the '3+1') demands a significant role within the Regional Centre and is likely to use that presence to build relationships with senior police and intelligence officers from the three countries.

On 22 August the US unveiled a new 'anti-narcotics' base in Paraguay, near the city of Ponta Porá on the border with Brazil. The base has two helicopters and facilities for 50 US personnel.

The trajectory of US intervention in Colombia - that has morphed from the pretext of anti drugs to counter insur-

the US bases, and in many other cities against US backed Israel's aggression.

An advanced example of Latin American social movements' capacity to think and act independently of their more servile governments comes from the Mothers of the Disappeared in Argentina, Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo. Their Radio AM 530 sent correspondent Tamara Lalli to cover occupied Palestine and the Lebanon. She was detained at the border on 22 August and interrogated by the Israeli intelligence service Mosad before being deported to Jordan. Although thwarted on this occasion, the Mothers' initiative signifies how the common cause of the oppressed is growing across continents.



US Forward Operating Locations

New army chief appointed

On 15 August 2006 newly re-inaugurated President Uribe appointed General Nelson Freddy Padilla as new chief of the armed forces.

From 1993 to 1995, Padilla headed the Colombian Army's feared 20th Brigade, which consolidated military intelligence activities until 1998, when it was abolished, in part due to strong human rights concerns. The US State Department's 1997 human rights report noted, "Government and military officials give credence to reports of isolated killings during the year conducted by members of at least one army unit, the 20th Intelligence Brigade." A 1998 Human Rights Watch report added, "The 20th Brigade is also implicated in the killing of human rights defenders, among them Jesús María Valle, president of the "Héctor Abad Gómez" Permanent Human Rights Committee of Antioquia, and Eduardo Umaña, a noted human rights lawyer."

In 1998, Padilla replaced Gen. Jaime Uscátegui as chief of the army's 7th Brigade, based in Villavicencio, Meta. Uscátegui is still being tried for his role in allowing a massive paramilitary massacre in Mapiripán, Meta in 1997. Mapiripán was the AUC's (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia) first real foray into the guerrilla-dominated coca-growing areas of southern Colombia, and the paramilitaries'

takeover of major towns in the 7th Brigade's area of operations continued during Padilla's tenure in 1998.

From 1998 to 2000, Padilla headed the 2nd Brigade, with responsibility over the cities of Barranquilla and Santa Marta, and surrounding areas along Colombia's Caribbean coast. During this period, paramilitary leaders Rodrigo Tovar ("Jorge 40") and Hernán Giraldo strengthened their dominance over territory and drug trafficking in the brigade's area of operations, with little or no opposition from the armed forces.

In letters to President Uribe written in 2004 and 2005, the Catholic Diocese of Quibdó, the capital of Chocó department near Panama, denounced a consistent pattern of "obvious tolerance, connivance and complicity" between the armed forces and paramilitary groups. The armed forces responded late last year by sending a special commission to Chocó to investigate the allegations of collaboration with paramilitaries. The commission was headed by Gen. Padilla. It found nothing - which is sort of like going to Las Vegas and finding no evidence of gambling.

This record speaks volumes about Colombia's supposedly "reformed" military institution that a career path like Gen. Padilla's can still guarantee a quick promotion to the very top.

From CIP Colombia Program, 26 August 2006 (abridged)

Iraq: The US-Salvador connection

Max Fuller

The recent deaths of two Salvador soldiers in Iraq have increased domestic pressure on the government of El Salvador to withdraw its forces. El Salvador is the only Central American country still committing troops to Iraq, with Nicaragua, Honduras and the Dominican Republic all having rapidly withdrawn their limited contingents in early 2004. But instead of heeding public opinion, the Salvadoran government has committed a further 380 troops to Baghdad.

Whilst the government claims that it is discharging a debt to the international community for its support in El Salvador's terrible internal conflict of the 1980s, in reality it is simply playing the loyal servant to Washington. The most important reason for El Salvador's subservience is entrenched in its neo-colonial relationship with US imperialism. Not only is the US El Salvador's foremost trading partner (El Salvador was the first country in Central America to enter into a free-trade agreement with the US), Salvadoran migrants in the US contribute \$2.5 billion per year, equal to around 17% of the country's GDP. The lack of parity in their relationship is to be best understood in El Salvador's adoption of the dollar as its national currency in 2001, cementing its total subordination.

The second reason for El Salvador's continued involvement in Iraq is to be found in the debt that important sectors of society, and especially the Salvadoran Armed Forces, owe to the US for its support in the in the civil war. Whilst the far-right ARENA party (currently in office) was officially blamed by a UN Truth Commission for 96% of all atrocities, the extent of US involvement has gradually become increasingly clear. According to US military historians, a handful of strategically placed US personnel essentially ran the war on behalf of the Salvadoran state. We now know that units like the notorious Atlacatl Brigade responsible for the massacre at El Mozote received

extensive US assistance; that torturers received theoretical instruction from US trainers; and that executioners shared desk space and information with US intelligence officers.

In Iraq there is little indication that Salvadoran troops are engaged in frontline combat roles. Instead, it has been reported that Salvadoran soldiers are primarily engaged in support functions, including the supervision of supposed humanitarian reconstruction projects. However, with unemployment in Iraq at socially catastrophic levels, mass homelessness, vast internal displacement, children reduced to working on the streets, continuing lack of electricity, sanitation and medicines, it must be assumed that such projects are taken at best.

The real Salvador connection lies in the intellectual authorship of two genocidal counterinsurgency campaigns. While the military doctrine for counterinsurgency is well established, the symbolic link between the two wars could not have been made more clearly than with the appointment of former US Army Col James Steele as Counsellor to the US Ambassador for Iraq Security Forces. Steele had led the US military mission in El Salvador from 1984-1986 when he oversaw the implementation of killer squads within the Salvadoran Army, specifically selecting the 'baddest asses' at battalion level and giving them special dispensation to take the war to the FMLN. In Iraq it was Steele that was most heavily involved in the establishment of the so-called special police, paramilitary units designed to provide the Ministry of Interior with its own counterinsurgency capability and which have subsequently been linked consistently with the waves of extrajudicial killings sweeping Iraq.

The continuing presence of Salvadoran troops in Iraq is just one more indication that counterinsurgency wars can be won if you are prepared to apply sufficient violence and the world is prepared to look away.

Drummond strike continues

Emilitoh Habana

22 May saw the beginning of a strike involving 3500 workers at Drummond's coal mining operations in La Loma in Cesar Department and in La Mina and Cienega in Magdalena Department. The workers are demanding increased safety regulations and social investment in their communities, particularly education, health care and housing for their families. Workers are also demanding an increase in pension working hours which often reach 12 or even 18 hours a day.

The response from the company, and from the Colombian government, has been entirely predictable; aggression, violence, death threats and attempts on the lives of SINTRAMINERGETICA union spokesmen and negotiators. The company has been trying to sabotage the strike and impose even more miserable conditions on its workers. On 13 June, hired killers attempted to murder union representative Alvaro Mercado in his own home in Valledupar. On the same day, well known paramilitaries in the same town, arrived at the home of union leader Estivenson Avila. Fortunately Estivenson was not there

Dan Kovalic, the lawyer leading the case against Drummond in the USA, recently visited Rafael Garcia former head of the DAS (Colombian Security Police) who is currently in prison awaiting trial on charges of embezzlement and complicity with the Valle drugs cartel. Garcia previously went public to denounce the links between then chief of the DAS, Jorge Noguera and paramilitary groups who he claimed were in overall control of the government operation. Uribe later rewarded Noguera for his work within DAS by naming him consul in Italy.

Rafael Garcia gave testimony under oath, that he had been present at a meeting when Augusto Jimenez, President of Drummond in Colombia, handed over a suitcase containing US\$200,000 to known paramilitary leaders in Valledupar for the assassination of two union activists, Lacom and Orcasita, President and Vice President of the mine workers union at Drummond's operation outside Valledupar. On 12 March, five days after this meeting, 15 armed men, some dressed in camouflage, stopped the company bus taking workers to the mine,



SINTRAMINERGETICA members on strike

and the killers left a short while later. Officials from Drummond called workers at home, pressuring them to return to work and to de-recognise the union negotiating commission.

After 88 days of negotiations and 32 days on strike, despite the violence that had been unleashed against the Drummond Coal Company agreed an 8% pay rise for this year and 1.5% for next. According to the company, the rise is worth 12% and also includes provision for basic social investment and other essential services for the workers.

Drummond Coal is a US company, which along with its owner Gary Drummond and Colombian representative (current Presidential Adviser) Fabio Echeverry have been on trial in Alabama since 2003, accused of "assisting paramilitary groups which assassinated 3 union leaders who were working in the mine". Gary Drummond and Echeverry are also defending a corruption trial in Florida, USA, along with President Uribe Velez and current and former bosses of Ecopetrol Isaac Yanovich and Alberto Calderon Zuleta.

forced Lacom and Orcasita to get off, beat them and then shot Lacom in the head, in full view of all the other workers. Orcasita was dragged to a nearby wood where he was later found tortured and killed. Garcia also stated that he had not testified in the Colombian courts as the authorities had refused to guarantee protection for him and his family. He also accused former DAS chief Jorge Noguera of working very closely with paramilitary boss Jorge 40 on various projects including the assassination of trade union leaders, a plan to destabilise the government of Venezuela, and electoral fraud in favour of Alvaro Uribe during the 2002 election.

These declarations by Mr Garcia are yet another example, along with those of Coca-Cola, Chiquita Brands, Anglo-Gold and BP, of the complicity of the multinationals with paramilitary groups and the Colombian state itself in their rush to finish off all resistance to their neoliberal globalising policies. The case against Drummond is likely to start in earnest towards the end of the year.

For more information:
www.drummondwatch.org

The free trade deal

Gearoid O'Loingsigh

The King is dead! Long live the King! That was the US slogan after its free trade agreement for all of the Americas (FTAA or ALCA by Spanish acronym) floundered. Still smarting from the failure it set about negotiating bilateral and multilateral agreements with individual countries or groups of countries. Each free trade agreement (TLC) would set the starting point for the next. In this way the US hoped to achieve the same aims as under ALCA. The Colombian elite were only too eager to please.

When negotiations became bogged down President Uribe himself flew up to Washington to take charge, conceding even more than the US technocrats were asking for. The agreement is, naturally, one sided. This should not surprise us. Henry Kissinger is not a man that the left like to quote, however, he has been known to speak clearly. According to Kissinger "What is termed globalisation is in reality just another word for the dominant role of the US". Quite.

The TLC signed by Colombia in February 2006 reaffirms this dominant role. According to the Trade Department "US farm exports to Colombia... will receive immediate duty-free treatment include high quality beef, cotton, wheat, soybeans, soybean meal; key fruits and vegetables including apples, pears, peaches and cherries; and many processed food products including frozen french fries and cookies." They go on to say, "US farm products that will benefit from improved market access include pork beef, corn, poultry and rice, fruits, vegetables, processed products, and dairy products." What did they leave out? Colombian agricultural is looking into the abyss.

In the department of Boyacá alone, 35,000 families who depend on potato cultivation risk losing their livelihood due to the effects of the TLC! The US is to be allowed to dump the hind quarters of chickens on the Colombian market (US consumer demand for this part is limited).

And what will Colombia get in return? Very little. Improved market access for certain tropical crops that already enjoy reduced or zero tariffs. Under the Andean Trade Pact 5,600 Colombian products already enjoy



The cookie crumbles for Colombian food producers in new US trade deal

tariff preferences. However, this has had very little impact on the economy and the companies concerned saved US \$24 million in tariff payments per year. Under the TLC, US companies will save anywhere between US \$500 and 900 million per year!

The new agreement is not just about agriculture; it also affects industry, pharmaceuticals and services. The legislation on patents will affect the supply of cheaper generic medicines, adding a further US \$777 million per year to the pharmaceutical bill of Colombians.

According to the US, "Colombia will accord substantial market access across its entire services regimes, subject to very few exceptions", to that end "Colombia agreed to exceed commitments made in the WTO, and to dismantle significant services investments barriers".

Colombian governments have been preparing for the TLC for a long time, with new mining legislation passed in 2001, a new Water Act, Forestry Act, etc. - all of which make it far easier for foreign corporations to seize hold of natural resources without state regulation.

Colombia will be prohibited from enacting legislation that 'discriminates' against US companies. US corporations may sue for future loss of earnings resulting from changes in legislation that affect their investments.

The agreement doesn't just affect

Colombia. The Inter-American Bank calculates that up to US \$5,600 million could be lost in inter-regional trade. Bolivia alone will lose US \$180 million in soya exports to Colombia, which will now be sourced from the US. According to Senator Robledo of the Polo Democratico, Colombia is the main loser as it accounts for over half of inter-regional trade. Further, over 80% of its inter regional exports are processed products whereas the same percentage of its trade with the US is made up of primary products.

Although Uribe rushed to sign the TLC deal, he received two slaps in the face. The first was a sleight of hand by the US technocrats who drew up a version in English where the translation of the agricultural chapter did not quite coincide with the Spanish version. Uribe had to go begging for that to be sorted out. He is now faced with further embarrassment; the US government has not presented the document to Congress for its approval. That process will take at least two months from the moment it is presented, and with elections in November it is now unlikely that it will be presented before January 2007. The US Congress may even reject it, not because it doesn't serve US interests but because Colombia hasn't surrendered enough. When you prostrate yourself before the empire the next step is to lick its shoes, as Uribe may yet find out.

Ecopetrol

Brendan Davidson

Riot police beat and pushed demonstrators and fired tear gas during a peaceful community protest against the privatisation of Colombia's national oil company, Ecopetrol, on 25 August near Barrancabermeja, witnesses said.

The heavily armed and body-armoured ESMAD (Mobile Anti-disturbance Squadron) officers, accompanied by police and military, fired tear-gas and, alleged protesters, pushed a woman to the ground and beat people, including an elderly man. A child was allegedly also burnt on the leg by a tear-gas grenade during the ESMAD reaction to what remained a peaceful, calm and broad-based community protest.

The ESMAD officers, with their black Robo-cop style body-armour,

black balaclavas, ammunition belts and high-powered weaponry, made for an incongruous sight as they scrambled and slipped on the high concrete curbs in their efforts to stop the calmly marching crowd of about 500.

The protesters, who included elderly people, people in wheelchairs, many children and teenagers, a live band in the back of a 4WD, Ecopetrol workers, trade unionists from several different unions, and social organisations including the Organización Femenina Popular, were eventually halted by a line of police with clubs, firearms and riot shields, just short of Ecopetrol's head office.

Inside, probably within earshot of the demonstration, high-level talks were taking place. The talks were about the sale of 20 per cent of Ecopetrol, which had already been put in train by the government, and of 51 per cent of the corporation's Cartagena refinery, which was announced that day. Both stakes are to go to foreign investors.

Ironically, the day marked the 55th anniversary of the nationalisation of Colombia's oil industry. Following a massive strike by oil workers in 1948, on 25 August 1951 the Colombian Government bought out the US-owned Tropical Oil Company with the aim of securing the vast profits of their oil concession for the nation.

Now, 55 years later, the government appears bent on handing back the national wealth to foreign corporations.

Another demonstration marched from the main gate of the Ecopetrol refinery in Barrancabermeja later the same day, attracting about the same number of protesters. Many banners denounced the sale of other formerly publicly owned assets in the area, such as the city's last surviving public hospital and the city's water supply.

A protester, who asked not to be named, said: "The government is determined to sell this country and we are here to defend what belongs to all Colombians. People have had enough."

EMCALI management:

Accused of corruption - again!

Mario Novelli

Carlos Alfonso Potes, the state appointed Director of EMCALI, the Cali based public services company that supplies water, electricity and telecommunications services to Colombia's second biggest city, is once again accused of corrupt practices and dirty dealings.

Readers of FLA will recall the role of Sintraemcali, the company's trade union, in fighting against the company's privatization from the mid 1990s onwards. During these mass struggles workers occupied the CAM tower, the headquarters of EMCALI, on several occasions. The most famous episode took place in December 2001 when they spent 36 days inside the CAM Tower until the then government of Andres Pastrana eventually backed down and vowed to keep EMCALI in public hands.

Central to Sintraemcali's defence of public services has been the argument that it is not public services that are inefficient, but that the publicly appointed management of EMCALI over the years have been responsible for looting the company through a myriad of corrupt practices. These corrupt practices took the company to the edge of bankruptcy in 2001. The

workers resistance and the continued revelations of corruption also led to fierce state and parastate repression which led to the assassination of 18 Sintraemcali leaders and activists and countless more were forced to leave the city under threat of death.

Despite the agreements signed in 2002 there has been a slow creep towards privatization through a range of public-private partnerships. The current corruption case dates back to 2005 when Potes sought to sign a multi-million dollar contract with El Parque Tecnológico del Software (Parquesoft) to implement a new 'technological platform' without putting the contract out to competitive tender. The practice was challenged and in response Potes set up a consortium of lawyers to investigate whether the contract practices were legal or not. EMCALI was allowed to proceed after the consortium agreed that Parquesoft were the only company that had the capacity to deliver on a project of that scale. It has now been revealed that Felipe Piquero Villegas, one of the leading lawyers for the consortium now works for Parquesoft - and began his new employment just one month after completing his work for the consortium!

The second irregularity relates to the fact that despite Potes claiming that Parquesoft were the only company

capable of delivering on a contract of that scale it now turns out that several months after signing the contract in 2005, 6 of the 12 components of the contract were subcontracted to Swedtel, the Swedish multinational. While the capacity of Swedtel to deliver is not under question, the multi-million dollar subcontracting raises questions about the 'real' capacity of Parquesoft to manage the contract.

The third irregularity refers to one more piece of subcontracting this time to Open Systems. Here, the corrupt practices appear far less opaque. It has now emerged that the President of Parquesoft was also the founder and major shareholder of Open Systems and is also currently the vice-President of its affiliate company in Panama. All these irregularities point to a common practice amongst the business elite in Colombia - as the contracts get passed down, each interested party takes its slice. Potes, it appears, is continuing in that long tradition.

Alexander Lopez, the ex-President of Sintraemcali, and now a leading opposition Senator denounced all these irregularities in a public debate in the Senate and stated that: "We cannot continue to allow the local community to suffer from the poor delivery of public services...and from disproportionate price increases that arise as a result of dirty contracts".

SINALTRAINAL *continued from cover*

DEATH THREAT AGAINST UNION LEADER

In the morning hours of 18th August 2006 a condolence card was left at the home of comrade Héctor Jairo Paz, a worker at Nestlé De Colombia S.A., and a leader in the Bugalagrande Branch of SINALTRAINAL. The condolence card was signed: "Death to Trade Unionists/ Muerte a sindicalistas."

Just ten days previously another member of the Executive Comitee of the same Branco was threatened, at the time when we were carrying out peaceful protests in front of the Nestlé plants in Bugalagrande and Bogotá against the unjustified sacking of ninety provisionals [temporary workers] and four workers with indefinite contracts who are SINALTRAINAL members.

TRADE UNION ACTIVIST ASSASSINATED

Comrade CARLOS ARTURO MONTES BONILLA was assassinated at approximately 11:00 p.m. on 17th August 2006. He leaves his partner Maria Elvia Álvarez Delgado and 7 orphaned children. His killing took place near to their home, located to the north of the city of Barrancabermeja.

CARLOS ARTURO had worked for nearly 30 years in the Infants Club for the workers of ECOPETROL [state oil corporation] and he used to participate in protests against the Coca-cola multinational and other trade union activities in this oil port.

Our comrade was a member of SINTRAHOCAR and of SINALTRAINAL; a double membership that he had as a legal mechanism to protect the existence of SINALTRAINAL, due to the attacks

on it by corporations like Coca-cola, that have been implementing a revoking policy against the union, by removing the union's statutes, impeding the membership of executive committee members, lifting trade union conventional rights and activating a judicial plan to block our right of association under the so-called "abuse of the law thesis".

We ask that social organizations and defenders of human rights demand these threats and assassinations against our people stop.

We demand that the competent authorities punish those responsible and the immediate cessation of so-called "voluntary registrations", given that these are actually a cover-up for raids that put at grave risk the lives of our men and women and the existence of our organizations.

Edgar Páez M.
National Leadership
SINALTRAINAL

Javier Correa, SINALTRAINAL President adds:

Sub-contracted workers have decided to join SINALTRAINAL and the union is presenting demands on their behalf. They are subject to work 12 hour days, having to reach between 80 and 100 customers... they are obligad to organise the customers' yards, fill the freezers which prejudices their health, stick up adverts, elaborate exclusivity and fridge contracts. They have to charge the customer and if they cannot pay risk their own Money to pay Coca-Cola, so as to avoid being sacked. They are obligad to work Sundays and holidays without rest .. there is a long list of abuses that they are subject to.

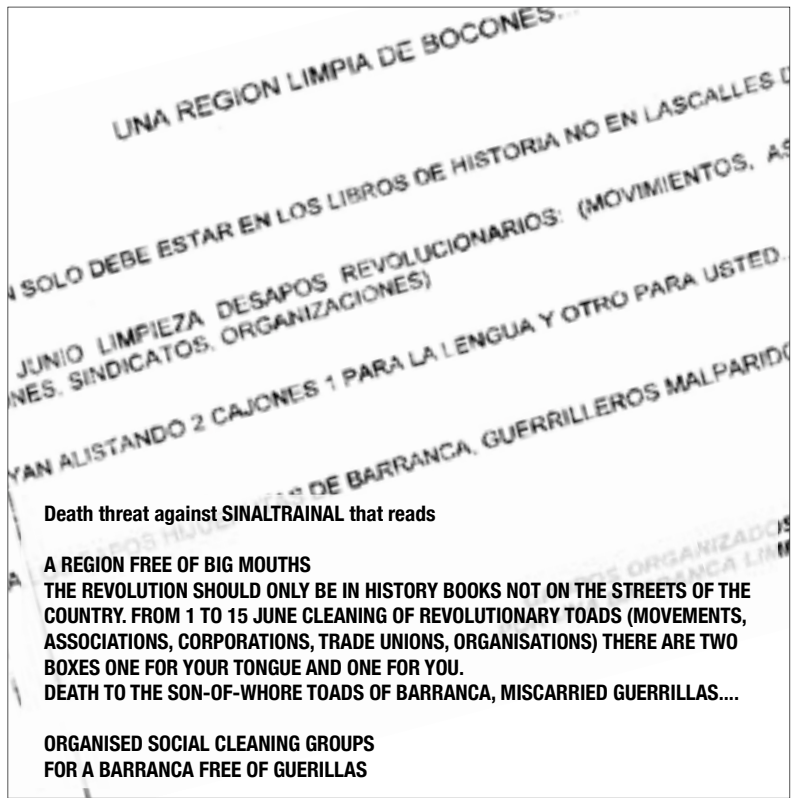
Anti trade union violence in Colombia

Domingo Tovar Arrieta
CUT- Director of Department of
Human Rights and Solidarity

Violence against the trade union movement in Colombia is the product of a model of capitalist development and economic strategy that favours multinational companies and existing national big business which have traditionally viewed the organisational activities of workers as a source of enmity. This has led to the systematic violation of the constitutional right to association, and the financing of war and its application to labour disputes.

The use of violence against the Colombian trade union movement is one of the most distinct features in the history of trade unionisms in this country. The prolonged existence and insidious manifestation of violence has bought trade unionism to the brink of a dramatic and alarming humanitarian crisis; it is know secret, thanks to the myriad reports on the situation by human rights organisation, that Colombia is the most dangerous country in the world in which to exercise the right to trade union association. This desolate panorama continues to victimise trade unionists, continues its terror and guarantees the systematic implementation of impunity and silence. Since 1991, 2201 trade unionists have been assassinated, 3172 have received death threats and 187 workers have been disappeared.

In cases of disappearance of trade unionists, outside the armed conflict, that is when the worker is killed while at home, at work or in the street, 83.54% (of cases where the author is known) are attributable to agents of the state; 1.74% through direct involvement and 81.88% through omission and the tolerance of or assistance to paramilitary groups. 16.37% are attributable to



the guerrilla. During the first term of government of current President Alvaro Uribe Velez, 356 trade union activists, leaders and members were murdered. The monthly average of killings or disappearances of trade unionists has also increased from 3 to 5 monthly. It is worth mentioning the extrajudicial execution of 3 leaders of the CUT trade union section in Arauca, which took place on 5 August 2004 at the hands of army soldiers, a situation that was completely opposed to the various discredited versions and set-ups of the government which attempted to cast the victims as members of an insurgent group.

Women and children have also paid a high price. Traditionally these victims have been seen as the victims of indis-

criminate violence or as accidental victims of violence that was directed towards the trade union movement. However, this increase in human rights violations against women, the greatest of which is forced displacement, must be seen within the framework of deliberate violence against entire families and not just of violence against people who are not directly members of a trade union.

extract from report: DERECHOS HUMANOS, SOLUCION POLITICA, ACUERDOS HUMANITARIOS VS SEGURIDAD DEMOCRATICA - IMPUNIDAD (Human Rights, Political Agreements V Democratic Security and Impunity)

Detentions in Casanare

Robert Green

Officials from the Administrative Security Department (DAS) have been detaining community activists in Yopal, Casanare, the centre of BP's oil field.

Luis Alejandro Moreno Barahona, president of the Community Action Junta of Retiros Milagro, was arrested during a lunch event sponsored by BP. Juan de Jesús Rodríguez, Maria Fernanda Hurtado Burgos and Edgar Vitalina Fula were arrested at their homes in Triunfo village, as was José Epaminondas Rodríguez Martínez from his home in Cunamá village. Jeffrey Martínez was arrested at the hospital emergency room where his wife was giving birth. This is the sixth time that a group of civilians has been similarly arrested by DAS officials; in the past, residents have been arrested, taken to Yopal for questioning, and handed over to the Fiscalía investigators who, realizing there are no grounds to continue

holding them, eventually release them.

Cunamá in Aguazul, Casanare is made up of five villages. Since 1996 when BP's production started they have been stigmatised and subject to all types of abuse and cruel treatment: 26 people disappeared, 18 assassinated, torture, death threats, forced displacement and massive detentions that have affected all the inhabitants of the zone. At 5am on 7 September 2006 units of the 16th Army Brigade arrived at the house of Zaul Ferrucho, detaining him and Omar Alvarez, another farmer from the area. This brings to 40 the number of detentions of Cunamá inhabitants in the last three years, the majority without judicial order.

Write to Álvaro Uribe Vélez, Presidente de la Republica, E-mail: auribe@presidencia.gov.co and Francisco Santos, Vicepresidente de Colombia, E-mail: fsantos@presidencia.gov.co

Army abuses in mining zone

Robert Green

The peasant mining communities of South Bolivar held a Public Hearing on Transnational and Paramilitarism on 15 and 16 August in Santa Rosa. It became clear that mining corporation Keshada has been seeking contracts to buy up the whole mining zone. (Keshada is a subsidiary of the UK/South African conglomerate Anglo Ashanti - see 'Preliminary findings will be fed into the national

Tribunal on the mining sector taking place in Medellin 11-13 November.

In operations starting on 17 August Army Battalion Antiaéreo Nueva Granada has been carrying out mass detentions and inhuman treatment of civilians in the mining zone of Mino Gallo in South Bolivar. Women have been abused, selected inhabitants led into the woods and shot, their corpses are paraded as trophies suspended from poles or on muleback.

Our America

In brief

García Regains Presidency in Peru

ALAN GARCÍA Pérez, candidate of the social democratic APRA party, was elected President for five years on 4 June, in the second round run off against radical nationalist Ollanta Humala of the UPP. García's previous presidency from 1985-1990 was marked by flagrant human rights violations and economic collapse, and ended with charges of corruption. His re-election was made of the right, whose candidate Lourdes Flores Nano went out in the first round of voting.

García had promised in his campaign to tax foreign mining companies for their windfall profits (only two of the 27 biggest mining companies operating in Peru currently pay royalties). But once elected the new president discovered that existing contracts prevent this, and in his very first announcement on taking office, García declared on 28 July that there will be a voluntary fund administered by the companies themselves.

The second consequence of García's victory is that Peru is going ahead with ratifying the Free Trade Agreement negotiated with the US by outgoing president Alejandro Toledo, formerly a technocrat employed by the World Bank.

Oaxaca's dangerous teachers

THE BINATIONAL Front of Indigenous Organizations (the Frente) is organizing in Mexico's southern state Oaxaca and across the border in the US... in the recent presidential campaign, the Frente supported the PRD candidate, former Mexico City mayor Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador.

Violence has escalated again in Oaxaca. In early May, the state's teachers struck for higher salaries and an end to human rights violations. Thousands of teachers occupied the main square in the state capital. Over 120,000 Oaxaca residents joined them in the largest rally in the state's history. On June 11, Ruiz promised business owners he would use a heavy hand to put down the protest. As parents woke their children, billowing clouds of tear gas filled the cobblestone streets. Hundreds of police charged in. Within minutes, scores were beaten, and one pregnant woman miscarried. But Ruiz underestimated the teachers. They retook the square at the end of the day, and the following morning 300,000 people marched through Oaxaca demanding Ruiz's resignation...

On July 2, Mexicans went to the polls. The results gave a microscopic 200,000-vote majority to PAN candidate Felipe Calderon. DEMANDS for a recount and accusations of fraud were immediate. A million people rallied in Mexico City's main square on July 16, and two million on July 30, to demand a recount.

Despite the demands of thousands of people encamped for weeks in downtown Mexico City, and continued rallies in the zocalo, Mexican election authorities refused to make a complete recount, and certified Calderon as Mexico's next president. Nevertheless, millions of Mexicans see a clear difference in political direction between the party and the social forces that support it, and the current political establishment.

More importantly, they are challenging the lack of human rights that keeps that establishment in power.

For full report see http://www.truthout.org/docs_2006/090206F.shtml

David Bacon



A 'penguin' making a peaceful protest for educational reform in Chile

Penguin revolution

A youth movement in Chile

Pilar Parra in Santiago

The revolution of the penguins has been called the student movement with the biggest impact for the last decade, and since May it has kept the whole of Chilean society, from the highest authorities to the common people, attentive to its demands.

Who are the penguins?

They are secondary students between fourteen and sixteen years old that have provoked a great impact by putting all the issues that directly affect them but have not been resolved onto the public agenda: public education is the emphasis in this unparalleled youthful effervescence. The students have made themselves heard through class stoppages, college occupations, street demonstrations and a national strike.

What do the youth ask for?

They demand the withdrawal of the constitutional law on teaching instruction (LOCE by its Spanish acronym) that is inherited from the dictator General Pinochet, who passed it two days before departing office, leaving behind many of his party supporters in important education posts, some of which they still occupy.

Another aspect that troubles the students is the freedom of teaching that has permitted the multiplication of private colleges and universities removing State responsibility for education, and facilitated a small group of entrepreneurs profiting from education as a business.

The students demand forms of education that are egalitarian, delivered with quality and equity, and that the State assumes responsibility of investing in the most dispossessed social sectors.

They also demand that the school day is constructed with new programmes of study and that youth stay inside the



so many students. The strongest demand of the last few years has been for free inscription in the university selection test (PSU) that is now paid by the families. But what happens for the socially marginal who cannot afford to pay? The youth say "Free PSU tests".

educational establishments. In Chile it used to be until a few years ago that schooling lasted half a day, but in 2000 this was changed and a new system called JEC was implemented in which a pupil has to be at school for 8 hours

and what has happened with public school transport? How many families can pay for other educational costs on top of the PSU when the minimum wage is 120 thousand pesos (£119) a month? The government has not listened properly to the youth, the tension of conflicts and repression of the students has been evident, with the police using water cannon and physical aggression against youth demonstrations.

The lack of commitment by the authorities is evident. There are many examples such as the minister who promised to come to meetings but never did, or as happened when the government set up an advisory council to the president made up of 74 members, only 12 of whom are young people. Young people have been denied their right to be heard, yet they are arguing for what is stated in Article 19 of the Chilean constitution, the free expression of an egalitarian education where the poor as well as the rich are respected. And as is happening when the President (Michelle Bachelet - see report in FLA No. 3) promised to make millions of dollars available for education, but solutions have still not arrived.

The students will not give up the initiative, they feel responsible for future generations, so this movement has been continuous and permanent. This September the youth demonstrations are already starting again.



Cesar Valezuela, one of the main voices of the student movement

In brief

Bolivia: Reform and nationalisation



EVO MORALES government has announced a programme of land reform, in a country where just 300 families own 71% of the land there is mass pressure for radical change.

The 255 representatives of Bolivia's new Constituent Assembly met together for the first time in Sucre on 5-7 August, to start the process of drafting a new constitution. The need for political reform was soon illustrated on 23 August when the right wing opposition parties in the Senate voted together to censure Andrés Solís Rada, minister for Hydrocarbon and leader of the oil and gas nationalisation process.

See <http://www.boliviasec.org.uk/>

Mapuche resistance



LONKO MAPUCHE Jose Domingo, 71 years old, was assassinated in the early hours of 28 August in the Bollilco Grande community in Chile. Waikilaf Cadin Calfunao of the Juan Paillalef Mapuche community was detained on 17 August after the community had opposed tree felling to make way for electricity pylons. When Waikilaf was detained in 2005 he suffered torture by boiling water being poured on his back, it is feared that he is now being tortured in Temuco prison.

See <http://www.mapuche-nation.org/>

Fidel



REPORTS THAT Fidel Castro is recovering from the illness that prompted the transferring of executive powers to his younger brother Raúl were confirmed when his conversation with Hugo Chávez was broadcast on Cuban television on 2 September.

Colombian author Gabriel Garcia Marquez has published an article giving incite into Fidel's remarkably energetic personality in *Granma International Review*. See <http://www.granma.cu/ingles/2006/agosto/lun7/33gabo.html>

Crimes of the Multinationals

PIRATES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION



PEOPLE'S TRIBUNAL MAP OF EUROPEAN PLUNDER

A People's Tribunal on European Transnationals and the power of corporations in Latin America and the Caribbean took place in Vienna 10-13 May 2006 as part of 'Linking Alternatives 2', a breakthrough event in strengthening solidarity links that was held in parallel with the official heads of government summit. The final Linking Alternatives session was a tumultuous rally with Presidents Hugo Chávez, Evo Morales and Vice President Carlos Lage from Cuba.

The Tribunal heard from social movements and NGOs concerning thirty two cases. The jury concluded that their evidence amounts to a serious accusation that EU corporations threaten the integral human rights of Latin American peoples including: their access to basic essential services, their right to land, their right to sovereignty and food security, their labour rights, the rights of indigenous peoples, and civil and political rights.

For more information on continuing social struggles against exploitation by European multinationals in Latin America contact the Colombia Solidarity Campaign or see

<http://www.alternativas.at/English/indexenglish.htm>

KEY

- TOURISM**
RIU RESORTS, IBERO STAR, MELIA, OASIS, GALA (SPAIN)
VIVA (ITALY)
• HOTEL SERVICES AND ASSOCIATED ACTIVITIES IN LA RIVIERA MAYA, MEXICO.
- FISHING INDUSTRY**
CALVO (SPAIN)
• DISPUTED LABOUR RIGHTS IN EL SALVADOR
- TELECOMMUNICATIONS**
TELEFONICA (SPAIN)
• DISPUTED LABOUR RIGHTS IN PERU
- ELECTRICITY**
UNION FENOSA (SPAIN)
• PRIVATISATION IN COLOMBIA, GUATEMALA, EL SALVADOR, NICARAGUA
- HYDROCARBONS**
REPSOL (SPAIN)
• OPERATIONS IN ARGENTINA, BOLIVIA, ECUADOR
- WATER**
SUEZ (FRANCE)
• DISTRIBUTION OF DRINKING WATER AND SANITATION IN ROSARIO, ARGENTINA
• WATER CO-OPERATION IN EL ALTO, BOLIVIA
• DISTRIBUTION OF DRINKING WATER AND SANITATION URUGUAY.
• PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC SERVICES AND DISTRIBUTION OF WATER AND SANITATION BRAZIL
• PRIVATIZATION OF WATER IN HERMOSILLO, MEXICO
AGUAS DE BARCELONA (SPAIN)
• PRIVATIZATION OF WATER IN HERMOSILLO, MEXICO.
• WATER CO-OPERATION IN EL ALTO, BOLIVIA
GTZ- COOP AGENCY (GERMANY)
• WATER CO-OPERATION IN EL ALTO, BOLIVIA
- MINERALS**
MONTERRIO METALS (ENGLAND)
• OPEN CAST MINING IN PERU
- SALMON INDUSTRY**
HARVEST MARINE (NORWAY)
• DISPUTED LABOUR RIGHTS IN CHILE
- LAND**
BENNETTON (ITALY)
• PURCHASING OF LAND OF THE MAPUCHE PEOPLE IN LA PATAGONIA, ARGENTINA
- FOOD AND CLEANING PRODUCTS**
UNILEVER (ENGLAND - HOLLAND)
• DISPUTED LABOUR RIGHTS IN BRAZIL
- FORESTRY, PULP AND PAPER**
ENCE (SPAIN)
BBVA (SPAIN)
ARACRUZ CELULOZA (NORWAY)
BOTINIA (FINLAND)
ANDRITZ AG (AUSTRIA)
ING (HOLLAND)
• CASES OF FOREST AND PULP PLANTATIONS IN ESPIRITO SANTO, RIO GRANDE DO SUL, URUGUAY
- FOOD AND AGRICULTURE**
BAYER-BAYER CROP SCIENCES (GERMANY)
• COMMERCIALIZATION OF AGRICULTURAL TOXINS, CONSUMERABLE PRODUCTS AND GM SEEDS IN TACCAMARCA, PERU
CARGILL AND BUNGE (HOLLAND)
• COMMERCIALIZATION OF SOYA PRODUCTS IN BRAZIL
HENDRIX-NUTRECO (HOLLAND)
• SOYA FEED PRODUCTION IN BRAZIL
VION FOOD GROUP (HOLLAND)
• PROCESSING OF MEAT PRODUCTS IN BRAZIL
RABOBANK (HOLLAND)
• SOYA INDUSTRY CHAIN PRODUCTION IN BRAZIL
BRITISH TOBACCO (ENGLAND)
• CHAIN PRODUCTION OF TOBACCO IN BRAZIL

Latin America

The big split

Latin America divides into two camps

words Diana Raby

Venezuela's entry into Mercosur and Cuba's approach to the South American economic bloc confirm the alliance between revolutionary and reformist regimes in the region, while right-wing victories in Peru, Mexico and Colombia consolidate a pro-imperialist chain along the Pacific coast.

The geopolitical map of Latin America, in flux during the 2005-6 period of quasi-simultaneous elections in many countries, appears to be settling down into two quite distinct blocs: a progressive alliance of the Mercosur countries (Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay) with Venezuela, Bolivia and Cuba, and a pro-imperialist neoliberal bloc of Mexico, Colombia, Peru and the small Central American republics, with Chile wavering uneasily between the two camps. By neat geographical coincidence, the progressive bloc has an Atlantic orientation while the conservative bloc runs along the mountainous cordilleras of the Pacific coast from Mexico to Chile.

Of course on closer examination the picture is more complex. The progressive bloc consists of two quite distinct groupings, a trio of popular revolutionary regimes in Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia as opposed to reformist governments in the original Mercosur states. The neoliberal Pacific chain has weak links in Nicaragua (where a Sandinista victory in the forthcoming elections seems probable) and Ecuador (where the political situation remains very unstable and even the current Palacios government is making overtures to Venezuela), and above all in Mexico where the apparently fraudulent imposition of the right-wing PAN candidate Francisco Calderón and its contestation by López Obrador and his supporters may produce a situation of chronic instability.

Class conflict

In reality the geopolitical division is a product of intense political and social confrontations in each country, caused by twenty years of neoliberal policies and the popular response to them. In some countries (Venezuela, Bolivia) this has led to revolutionary or near-revolutionary ruptures in which radical regimes based on the organised strength of the social movements have come to power. Ecuador has also been on the brink of such a breakthrough more than once in the past six years.

In other countries (Brazil, Uruguay) left-wing parties and candidates have come to power through elections within the confines of liberal parliamentarism, or in the case of Argentina a President identified with one of the traditional governing parties has adopted nationalist and progressive positions which go some way towards meeting popular demands. The reformist governments of Lula, Kirchner and the Uruguayan Frente Amplio have been unable and/or unwilling to take more radical measures, above all because in these

countries the political, juridical and economic power structure remains intact, with none of the ruptures which have shaken the edifice of bourgeois authority in Venezuela and Bolivia.

It is the threat of such ruptures and of political breakthroughs by the popular forces in other countries (Ecuador, Peru, Mexico) which has led the local oligarchies (with the active support and indeed barely disguised intervention of Washington) to resort to electoral fraud and questionable legal and constitutional manoeuvres in order to prevent popular manoeuvres. Open dicta-



torship remains a solution of last resort which imperialism is reluctant to adopt after the experience of the seventies and eighties (although they did attempt it in Venezuela in 2002), just as for the popular forces armed struggle remains off limits since it would destroy the legitimacy gained in two decades of peaceful constitutional participation.

In this context it is significant that Colombia, the one country in which armed insurgency continues, remains the lynchpin of US hegemony in the region and the country in which popular forces have had most difficulty in making constitutional and electoral progress. Uribe's repressive policies, continuing the anti-popular practices of the Colombian oligarchy, have gained electoral ratification through the rhetoric of "democratic security" and counter-terrorism. In these conditions the relative advance of the legal popular forces with Carlos Gaviria and the Polo Democrático Alternativo is encouraging but inadequate, in dramatic contrast to the victories or near-victories in neighbouring countries.

ALBA: the Bolivarian Alternative in practice

Those who identify with popular anti-globalisation and anti-capitalist struggle may well question the meagre results of electoral participation in many countries, and the disappointing achievements of leftist governments in Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay. But the real (if still incomplete) breakthroughs in Venezuela and Bolivia show that a genuine political alternative exists in which popular power can become a reality at state level.

In order to defend the popular revo-

lutionary power which exists, however imperfectly, in these two countries and in Cuba, it is essential also to defend (although from a more critical stance) the reformist regimes of Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay (and possibly others) which provide a cushion and a tactical alliance to buttress the revolutionary trio against the aggressive plans of Washington and the neoliberal "transition" projects of Brussels.

In this respect a very significant and encouraging development was the recent Mercosur summit in Córdoba, Argentina, with the participation of Hugo Chávez and Fidel Castro. Not only was Venezuela's full membership ratified, but Cuba for the first time signed agreements to begin formal relations with the southern economic grouping. In addition the existing members and Venezuela, under the evident leadership of Chávez, signed a pact for economic equalisation and integrated social justice measures. This pact has the potential to transform Mercosur from a mere customs union into an integrated politico-economic bloc with a clear alternative project to neoliberal globalisation, along the lines of the Venezuelan ALBA proposal (the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas). Although not explicitly anti-capitalist, this represents the biggest direct challenge to imperialist hegemony in the region since the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua. In Chávez' words, "ALCA [the FTAA] is dead, and a new Mercosur has been born!"

However the obstacles to the materialisation of this new Mercosur project are considerable. The two smallest members, Uruguay and Paraguay, are weak links in other respects than size: Uruguay is still considering a bilateral Free Trade Agreement with the US and has signed agreements with several multinational corporations and paper industry, and Paraguay is the site of a major US base for espionage in the entire region. The dilemma of the Uruguayan government is understandable: a small country with few natural resources and little industry, it has few economic alternatives. But over a year ago Venezuela provided the Uruguayans with the beginnings of an alternative in the spirit of ALBA by agreeing to supply cheap oil and to purchase Uruguayan products, in particular cement (one of the few industrial products in which the country has an advantage) in return. This surely is the path which the Broad Front government ought to pursue rather than submission to US hegemony.

With US-Venezuelan tensions increasing and with the threat of destabilisation in Bolivia, the dangers for the alternative project are enormous. But the possibility of further advances for progressive forces in Nicaragua and Ecuador cannot be discounted, and Latin America continues to offer greater hope than any other world region in the struggle to build an anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist alternative.



Hugo Chávez has fierce loyalty in 23 de enero

Jess Hurd/Reportdigital.co.uk

Health revolution in 23 de Enero

words Andy Higginbottom

El 23 de enero is a *barrio* on the west of Caracas that took its name from the day in 1958 when its people joined the rising to overthrow dictator Marcos Pérez Jimenez. This *barrio* is considered a bastion of *chavismo*, in fact this reputation is based on the area's independent tradition of resistance, it has lost dozens of activists to the repression of earlier regimes, and in 1993 local people set up the Coordinadora Cultural Simón Bolívar to build a network of grass roots initiatives.

Despite the modern, French designed, apartment blocks at its centre, that the people occupied in 1958, 'el veinte-tres' suffered decades of government neglect. Things have changed dramatically since the election in 1998 of Hugo Chávez, whose initiatives have earned fierce loyalty from the people. The local police station where youth used to be tortured was recovered and now serves as a social centre and the home of a community radio station, an emblem of fundamental changes in the relation between state and society.

It was *el veinte-tres* that welcomed one of Chávez's first Robinson programmes, Mission Robinson, staffed by Cuban volunteers. Then in May 2003 doctors arrived from Cuba

and started giving medical and dental services, working and living in the community. This was the first time in their lives that residents had been able to visit a doctor without travelling, because middle class Venezuelan doctors had never even entered *el veinte-tres*.

These two initiatives are being brought together in the Mission called 'Barrio Adentro' / Into the Neighbourhood in which local activists are working part-time as assistants to the Cuban doctors, meanwhile they are studying to become doctors, preparing to takeover the service in 6 years time. Their education is through the highly decentralised and participative Bolivarian University. Three trainees told us that since middle class doctors would never come to the *barrio*, the only solution is for the *barrio* to create its own doctors. This is evidence of a real cultural revolution taking place within Venezuela's working class.

Under the slogan, "We will never return to the past", the community has a vibrant website in Spanish at <http://www.el23.net/>.

Community activists are keen to open up an English language section, if you can help with translations contact them through the website.



Local volunteers training to be doctors through the Bolivarian University

Jess Hurd

Accused of crimes against humanity: Coca-Cola, Nestlé and Chiquita

Marianne Aeberhard and Lara Coleman in Bogotá

On 1 and 2 April in Bogotá, the multinational companies Coca-Cola, Nestlé and Chiquita Brands were put on trial in the first of six hearings of the Colombia Chapter of the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal. The testimony presented led the jury to the conclusion that the companies are responsible for serious human rights violations, the casualisation of work, and for policies that contribute to the low standard of living and hunger that face much of the Colombian population.

The campaigns that have been working against Coca-Cola and Nestlé for the last few years in England and Switzerland respectively, took part in the Tribunal.

The Permanent Tribunal of the People was established in 1979 as a successor to the Russell Tribunals on Vietnam (1966-7) and the dictatorships in Latin America (1974-6). It is a mechanism of alternative justice which seeks to reveal the true causes of the crimes, to establish the corresponding legal responsibilities and to propose a policy of integral reparation for the damages caused in areas where the mass violation of fundamental rights finds no institutional recourse. This is the second time that Colombia has been under the Tribunal's gaze, following the 1989-91 session that investigated impunity for crimes against humanity in twelve Latin American countries.

Fifteen years later, the Tribunal is once again examining the violation of the fundamental rights of the majority of the Colombian population, this time fixing their gaze on the multinational companies which operate in the country and have been involved, in the words of the judges, in a "network of violence rooted in a State strategy and incentivised and controlled by hemispheric policies that seek to legitimise security imperatives for large investors and big business." The current session will be made up of a series of hearings between 2006 and 2008 which will examine the themes of mining, biodiversity, oil, public services and indigenous peoples as well as agri-food which was the theme of the first hearing.

Multinationals operating in the Colombian agri-food sector over the last few years have been the subject of campaigns by European organisations and movements. The Coca-Cola boycott has been growing among student and grass-roots social organisations, particularly in Italy, the UK and Ireland, since its launch in July 2003 and despite strong opposition from sectors of the trade union movement that enjoy close links with transnational capital.

Cases against Coca-Cola

We heard testimony from friends and family of some of the 9 murdered workers and other victims of crimes against humanity. One of the witnesses was Martin Gil, brother of Isidro Gil who was assassinated on 5 December 1996 inside the Coke plant in Carepa, Antioquia on the orders of the plant manager during negotiations between the trade union and employer. Martin told us how on the day his brother was murdered, he too had to flee the town after his name appeared on a paramilitary death list, thus leaving the entire family destitute. Gil could barely contain his tears as he recounted how his mother had died from the pain of the murder, and how his sister-in-law had been murdered 4 years after the killing of her husband following her constant denunciations of his death. Ten years later, Isidro's murder remains in impunity, and the company has provided no social security for his orphaned children.

The second case against Coca-Cola, presented



by Domingo Tovar, head of the CUT department of human rights, focussed on the criminalisation of social protest. We heard testimony from various trade unionists that have been harassed by Coca-Cola and branded as guerrillas. One such leader had been imprisoned with no evidence against him, and others had been tortured or suffered attempts against their lives because of this stigmatisation.

The hearing also revealed very clearly the effects of casualisation of work within Coca-Cola, which was the third case. While this violence against their workers and criminalisation of protest have been in full swing, the company has been carrying out a process of restructuring, enabling them to accumulate capital "more efficiently." The company has a share valuation equivalent to US\$ 628 million, despite never having invested a single dollar of their own capital in the country.

Coca-Cola has reported production cost savings of US\$ 118 million during the 1990s. These savings have come at a high human cost through lay-offs, cuts to rights and benefits such as access to health care, and through a policy of sub-contracting labour to agencies which pay workers the minimum wage, provide no health care and charge employees for their work uniforms and equipment. Workers also have to work up to 16 hour days without overtime.

We also heard evidence from three disabled workers with serious infirmities, for whom Coca-Cola have refused to accept any responsibility. An example is the case of Manuel Torres, 68 years old, who lost his sight in an industrial accident in the Bucaramanga plant when he was 22. Coca-Cola continued to pay his salary until 1990, until a verbal assurance from the company that they would continue with this financial assistance and would possibly assist him to buy a house. However, the house never materialised and the company stopped paying any money 8 years ago, forcing Manuel to beg outside the factory and to sell lottery tickets in order to cover his basic requirements.

Chiquita Brands

The links between Chiquita Brands and paramilitarism were even more shocking. Recent evidence was presented of the company's financial support to paramilitary groups, including the company's 2001 trafficking of 3,000 AK-47 rifles and 5 million bullets to paramilitary groups in Cordoba and Urabá who are responsible for thousands of crimes against humanity in these regions of the country. We heard very powerful testimony from a number of individuals and groups including the Peace Community of San José de Apartado who have become victims of a continued persecution due to their refusal to collaborate with any armed groups.

Nestlé

The Nestlé cases were introduced by Carlos Olaya, who confronted the economic strategy of profit maximisation, and above all the policy of importing and exporting prime materials from other countries while at the same time the corporation carries out an anti-trade union policy that leaves the workers in a precarious situation. The first presentation was moving, as witnesses testified to several assassinations, arrests, raids, investigations without just cause and threats to current and former Nestlé workers since the foundation of SINALTRAINAL in 1982. In the 1990s the union and the Nestlé workers realised many of their demands through hard struggles, strikes and factory occupations. Héctor Daniel Useche Berón, a Nestlé worker and one of the most important SINALTRAINAL leaders, was assassinated. Today the campaign against Nestlé has a mural of the city wall of Bugalagrande to record the cruel assassination by unknown men of Héctor Useche whilst walking home with his small daughter. In very moving words the widow of Nestlé worker Luciano Romero tried to relate what happened when he was assassinated by paramilitaries on 11 September 2005. All of the cases that were presented are in impunity i.e. with no charges or convictions against the perpetrators.

The case of the Cicolac Ltda. factory in Valledupar best reflects Nestlé corporation's anti-union policy. Between February 2002 and September 2003 negotiations on the workers demands culminated in the liquidation of the collective agreement and union organisation, with just one unionised worker left in the factory. This trade unionist, Alfonso Barón, explained how nine other workers, including seven union committee members, were sacked after an imaginary strike - that only ever existed in the head of the bosses and an official from the Ministry of Social Protection - had been declared illegal by the employer. On 17 September 2003, the leaders of the SINALTRAINAL branch in Valledupar were called to a meeting with Nestlé in Bogotá. Meanwhile the workers were called together in hotels in Valledupar, where they had to renounce "voluntarily" their work contract. If the workers did not accept they were pursued to their homes and violently pressured with death threats. In the end more than 180 workers "accepted" their own resignation. Today the employer continues production with workers contracted under very precarious conditions and with minimum salaries through another Nestlé company called Dairy Partners Americas Manufacturing Colombia Ltda.

The case of Nestlé's repackaging of powdered milk was presented. The corporation had imported this milk under the brand name

CONAPROLE from Uruguay to mix with fresh powdered milk and re-label it with another expiry date, ready for re-export a part to Venezuela and distribute the rest in Colombia. The Department of State Security (DAS) confiscated this milk before it could be re-exported. Onofre Esquivel, the union leader who denounced the re-labelling of powdered milk and other cases of contaminated food and water was afterwards declared by Nestlé to be an enemy of the corporation. In the Colombian context, declarations of this type put trade unionists in danger for their life.

Evidence and ruling

In addition to the oral evidence, lawyers presented mountains of written proof to the judges. In summing up the cases, the judges mentioned the quality of the evidence and underlined the role that paramilitarism has played as a mechanism for carrying out the illegal actions of the State and transnational companies in reducing worker's rights. Responsibility for 10 murders of Nestlé workers and 9 Coca-Cola workers was placed firmly at the door of the multinationals. The jury condemned Coca-Cola, Nestlé and Chiquita Brands for "serious and massive violations of workers' rights and specifically the freedom to organise in trade unions; for undermining the dignity and lives of workers and their communities; for defrauding their consumers" and finally the jury affirmed "that any individual linked with these corporations shares legal responsibility as an author or accomplice to the crimes against humanity in which the companies were involved."

The ruling of the judges also underlined the fact that these crimes remain in complete impunity, and that those who have denounced them have themselves been prosecuted. The jury condemned the Colombian State for "failing to comply with their obligations to prosecute crimes against humanity, and in particular the violation of the right to an effective legal recourse and internationally recognised rights of the victims of such crimes, due to the absence of any genuinely independent judiciary."

The judges emphasised the links between the activities of transnational corporations in the agro-alimentary sector and hunger, underlining that "the effects of the Colombian state's agro-alimentary policies, coupled with the strategic control by the transnationals of this sector, have resulted in high levels of malnutrition and hunger in the majority of the Colombian population."

Resisting the global system

On 3 April, the day after the Tribunal, a conference named "Peoples' Voices on the Transnationals" took place, the aim of which was to analyse the problems of the agri-food sector in Colombia, as well as the violation of human and trade union rights in the sector and the serious problem of malnutrition of a large proportion of Colombians living within a global system where food is a business controlled by the multinationals in every stage from the seed to food distribution.

The second part of the conference provided a platform for indigenous and campesino (peasant farmer) groups to speak of their experiences of resistance and construction of alternative production and consumption processes - processes that seek not only to overcome problems of malnutrition, but also to reassert peoples' sovereignty over their food culture, so that this culture is not destroyed in the same way as workers and their families, by a homogenising tendency in the current food chain which seeks a world where we all eat Kit Kats and drink Coke.

UKSAC

One narrow defeat

...a few wins and a whole new country

Claire Hall UK Students Against Coke

The campaign to boycott Coca-Cola products suffered a narrow defeat at the National Union of Students (NUS) conference in Blackpool 28-30 March. Before the conference started, eleven student unions had policy for the boycott. The organisations working against UKSAC were: Coca-Cola, trade unions AMICUS, GMB, T&G, Justice for Colombia (JFC) and the three best organised factions in NUS - Labour Students and the Organised Independents, as well as the Fletcherites (protégés of NUS President Kat Fletcher).

Coca-Cola had hired Douglas Trainer, a former Labour Students president of NUS, now a publicist with Luther Pendragon, to work against us. He had been to speak to all the big unions, and to JFC (who refused their support), and to the NUS bureaucrats as well.

The motions came up on the last day of conference - which is spread over three days. Since the bureaucrats shortened conference, there has been less time to discuss things: this meant an additional emergency motion of ours, arguing for a shortened contract for Coke, didn't get discussed at all.

The general Colombia motion was spoken for, in a speech that included an attack on our amendment. It then came to the anti-boycott amendment. We had a speech against - but only one minute, not enough time. That amendment passed, with scarcely further debate.

Our amendment (pro-boycott) came up. Had it passed, it would have deleted the anti-boycott text already passed - everyone knew this, so the fact that the previous amendment had passed didn't mean so much. Unfortunately, it got hit right away with a procedural motion, to remove all the stuff worth having in it (i.e. for the boycott), and which made it such that no one (including us) would really have wanted to vote for it. Unfortunately, someone not involved with the campaign got the speech against the procedural motion, and the arguments we wanted to be heard were not. The speech in favour was taken by Fletcher, a very good speaker who commands a lot of respect. The procedural motion passed, 300 to 259.

It was popularly believed that we were going to get absolutely hammered on conference floor, and when the hands were raised on each side of the debate, it was obvious that we'd achieved much more than our opponents had given us credit for.

It's worth giving a summary of which arguments were used. They said (amongst other things):

- UK trade unions, JFC and CUT don't support the boycott
- SINALTRAINAL is just one among 13 Coke unions in Colombia
- the boycott will cost us money
- Hernando Hernandez asks you to vote against the boycott

At the opening of conference Hernando Hernandez a member of FENSUAGRO, the Colombian farmers union had spoken, orchestrated by Fletcher. He gave a generally good speech, and then called for support for the general motion on Colombia, and the anti-boycott amendment (although in subsequent correspondence FENSUAGRO assure us that their representative had no intention of influencing the vote).

We believe that Fletcher had sought and achieved NUS's affiliation to JFC shortly after our campaign came on the radar, so as to make it look like she cared about Colombia. During her speech she used sickening rhetoric to present herself as the active solidarity activist who really cared for Colombia and that us 'boycotters' were passive and not helping anyone.

The voices of SINALTRAINAL and Indian women were not present in that conference room, only the ambitions of politicians.

However, they were present outside the conference. We held a great fringe meeting. The preparing for the speeches, the leafleting, the talking to students was where the magic energy was. There was trust, interesting and respectful debate that was full of real emotion and truth, in contrary to the empty fake speeches we heard by the bureaucrats.

The national contracts between NUSSL, the commercial arm of NUS, and Coke have been signed for another 3.5 years, but individual universities can now get full dispensation. This means that with a democratic mandate we can remove Coke from our campuses.

We feel that while we marginally lost in their space, a whole

Der Ball ist rund.



World cup anti-Coke poster by German group Kolombien Kampagne

new space can be created within our student unions. This will bring the campaign very much back to the grassroots level and many more students will be challenged by the campaign to think about what Coca-Cola actually is, and their own complicity in the crimes of the company.

A few of the Win's

Coke banned from Indian State of Kerala

The State of Kerala has ordered Coke and Pepsi to cease production after yet another study showed that the level of pesticides in their products make them very harmful. The study by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), found a "cocktail of between three to five different pesticides in all samples" of Coca-Cola and Pepsi products they tested in India. On average the pesticide residues were 24 times higher than European Union (EU) standards.

Coca-Cola and Pepsi have now been banned in government and educational institutions by many states in India, including Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Chattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and Delhi.

The Supreme Court of India has ordered Coca-Cola and Pepsi to reveal the ingredients in their products, or face a potential national ban. In the seventies the same demand was made, which contributed to Coke being banned nationally. They were allowed back in towards the late 1990s but will Coke be kicked out of India soon? Maybe 2006/07 is going to see the communities win their campaign.

(see India Resource Centre <http://www.indiaresource.org/>)

Coke dropped from a Social Choice Account

Coca-Cola was ejected from the \$8 billion (£4.38 billion) TIAA-CREF Social Choice Account, a fund which invests according to social criteria, in July 2006. The fund has more than 430,000 investors and is billed as the world's largest social fund for individual investors. As of 31 March, the Social Choice Account had 1.2 million shares of Coca-Cola. The fund's consultants said the soft-drink maker did not meet requirements in areas relating

to marketing to children, and overseas worker rights and environmental issues.

(see <http://www.killercoke.org/>)

Sussex University Students ban all Coke products

Sussex University has become the first campus in the country to ban all Coca-Cola products from its students' union in protest at the company's unethical practices. Dan Glass, the president of Sussex University's students' union explains:

"We had objections to Coca-Cola on the grounds of health but the really big things were the anti-union practices in Colombia and the environmental damage they have done in India ... Our ultimate goal is to make Coca-Cola accountable for the crimes it has committed, but by banning all its products from the campus, we can hit them where it hurts them most - in the wallet."

Students at other universities, including Edinburgh, Middlesex, Leeds, Portsmouth and the University of East Anglia, have voted to either students against these purchases or to remove products from their campuses.

Latvia Bans Coca-Cola, Pepsi in Schools

The Latvian government banned schools from selling food and beverages it considers unhealthy, including soft drinks made by Coca-Cola and Pepsi-Cola. The ban covers all products that contain artificial food colourings, flavourings, sweeteners and caffeine.

In July, former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright sent a letter to Latvian President Vaira Vike-Freiberga asking that sales of Coca-Cola should not be banned in Latvia's schools. Albright is a director of the Albright Group LLC, whose activities include brokering agreements with governments and businesses and building strategic relationships with opinion leaders, according to the group's website. Coca-Cola is one of its clients. The ban will come into force on 1 November.

One New Country

Kolombien Kampagne is a German group which is part of the European Network of Colombian Solidarity Groups, as is CSC. Coca-Cola's sponsorship of the 2006 World Cup gave them a focus and the campaign started to move. A combination of fantastic art work, public meetings and direct action has meant that people in Germany have started to learn about the dark side of Coke. The image of the bullet sponsored by Coca-Cola makes the link between paramilitaries and Coca-Cola all too clear and people are responding.

During the World Cup, protests took place during the Colombia-Germany game, huge advertising by Coke was ripped down in Berlin and hundreds of people collectively poured Coke down the drains.

A Kola Konferenz was held before a packed audience, with Coke's reps daring to turn up. In the UK they no longer attend public meetings as they cannot defend the facts. Instead they choose to send a standard letter. Well-informed participants successfully challenged the Coke reps and they left early when they realised that their usual selective and empty facts weren't sticking. Coke are getting wiser with the tactics and it is unlikely that they will be showing their face in an open public space in Germany again, a shame because it feels like a win for SINALTRAINAL and the Campaign every time they get walked all over in a debate.

Six days after this conference the University of Arts voted 10 to 1 to ban the sale and marketing of Coke's products from their campuses. A few weeks later the Student Parliament of the University of Cologne decided to boycott all beverages of the Coca-Cola Company in the college's common areas and cafeterias. The Students Unions at Wuppertal University has also decided to support the Campaign and more new groups are forming around the country, vowing to wage campaigns.

Branches of the public services "Verdi" are starting to get Coca-Cola out of their cafeterias after an article about the Campaign was published in the union magazine which has readership of more than 2 million workers.

All these tremendous efforts put the scandalous manoeuvring at the NUS conference into better perspective.

Coca-Cola

Coke's agenda

The corporate whitewash of paramilitaries

words **Andy Higginbottom**



Tracey Moberly and Raquel Chávez (right) in Mexico.

Coke repeating

Tracey Moberly

Mexico is home to 104 million people and growing by 2 million each year. The demand for water has outstripped supply in many states. In the agricultural state of Guanajuato, for example, the water table is falling by 1.8-3.3 meters a year. More Coca-Cola products are consumed per person in Mexico than any other country, and the company has 70% of the nation's soft drinks market.

In the Chiapas region of Mexico, the import of Catholicism by Spanish missionaries has been twisted and braided with the shamanism, herbal lore and mythology passed on in traditional Mayan culture. The Chamulan Catholics depend on the consumption of a ceremonial alcohol brewed from corn called *posh*, an essential component in the practice of their faith. The incorporation of *posh* into the spiritual life of Chamula began in the 1940s. People drink *posh* to kill the evil spirits inside, and then they burp the spirits out. Coca-Cola, recognized as the most efficient way to burp, has

thus become an integral part of the practice of Chamulan Catholicism. It is drunk nearly every time they consume *posh*. "Coca-Cola is the most dynamic merchandise in the highlands of Chiapas - more than beans, or corn, or coffee."

One day a year, El Dia de San Juan (St. John's Saint's Day), the town consumes over 100,000 Coca Colas -- almost three per person.

The Coca Cola Nazi Advert Exhibition' curated by Mark Thomas and Tracey Moberly has amassed over 400 artists on it's national and international tour. The French author William Reymond has recently written about the exhibition in his No.1 French non fiction best seller 'The Forbidden Investigation' by Editions Flammorion (see <http://www.williamreymond.com/>)

See also: (<http://www.sanderswood.com/>) for Tracey's reports on the WSF in Venezuela, the Zapatistas and Finding Raquel Chávez in Mexico. Tracey takes the Nazi Coke Advert Exhibition to Moscow on 10 October, from where it will tour throughout Russia. See next FLA for report)

How much money does a corporation need to spend to get away with murder?

Corporate whitewash has taken a massive leap into outright brazenness with the publication of a report entitled *Development, Peace and Human Rights in Colombia: A Business Agenda** by the The Prince of Wales International Business Leaders Forum (IBLF), in association with the Fundación Ideas para la Paz / Fundación de Ideas para la Paz (FIPAZ) and UN Global Compact. The product of this aristocratic alliance - a blue blood British NGO, a front for Colombian business, and the UN's notoriously toothless corporate responsibility scheme respectively - shows just how far business establishment attempts have reached to co-opt the language of human rights whilst denying their substance.

A big clue to how seriously to treat this apparent conversion to human rights lies in the following: "Funding for this publication and the associated leadership dialogues in Colombia, Europe and the United States is kindly provided by The Coca-Cola Company".

The report notes that "Colombia is ...the most dangerous place in the world to be a trade unionist. As well as the devastating impact in lives lost and families affected, employer/employee relations suffer added barriers to efforts to build mutually beneficial relationships". Quite, so why doesn't Coca-Cola have a 'leadership dialogue' with SINALTRAINAL, the very trade union that has had eight of its members assassinated?

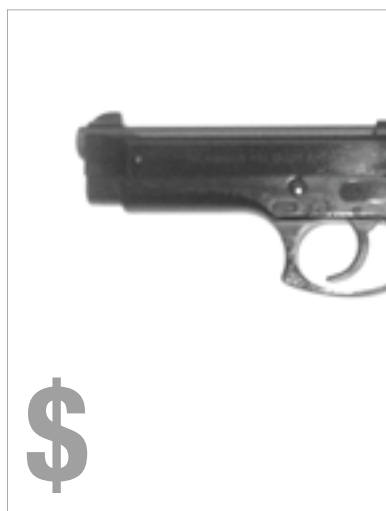
The report urges "Colombian companies and international corporations with operations in Colombia ...to take a proactive role in helping to mitigate the impact of the conflict, support humanitarian efforts and human rights, and contribute to more equitable social and economic development". If so, instead of forking out for the international jet-setting needed to produce this report, why doesn't Coca-Cola pay compensa-

tion to all the worker victims and their families to 'mitigate the impact' of its own aggressive policies?

Despite the corporate social responsibility gloss, the report cannot but betray that the core mindset remains 'how best to carry on exploiting,' as represented in what the authors call the 'spheres of influence' model: the conflict is presented as a situation pre-existing the corporation's presence, in which the responsible corporation must do good by all the actors it comes into contact with. The problem with this model is that the realities

la Espriella Otero, Colombia's best paid lawyer, and founder of this report's co-publishers FIPAZ two years ago. De la Espriella has been pressurising for a referendum so that all armed actors be accorded political status, and for the Constitution to prohibit extradition "two points that are exactly the same as the paramilitaries have been seeking", as *Semana* says. And FIPAZ's first forum took place at Santafé de Bogotá, the gathering point for 'demobilised' paramilitaries, and consisted of 600 students who received free transport and lodgings. Appearing as special guests alongside de la Espriella were paramilitary leaders Salvatore Mancuso and 'Ernesto Báez', an alias for Iván Roberto Duque.

De la Espriella is well connected with the business world and politicians as well as top paramilitaries. He is 60% shareholder of the firm Lawyers Enterprise Ltda. which will charge US \$800,000 for advice concerning Bogotá's international airport, called El Dorado, aptly enough for him. El Dorado is being planned for privatization. *Semana* reports that other members of FIPAZ's board have similar links with paramilitaries and the *uribista* far right. Looks like the Coke money is being well spent on FIPAZ.



of neo-liberalism have been made invisible, yet corporate profit-making is itself a fundamental driver of the social conflict, providing the incentive to force people off their land, submit independent communities and exterminate militant trade unionists. Indeed, the very term 'spheres of influence' has deep imperial connotations, harking back to the time of the colonial Great Powers dividing up the world into territorial zones under their control.

In Colombia corporations employ dirty methods systematically, but the connections usually stay well buried. The nasty reality behind this latest whitewash endeavour has however been revealed in a *Semana* magazine article (20.8.06) concerning one Abelardo de

With FIPAZ involved, only the gullible can take the IBLF report at face value. Nonetheless its publication underlines the need for civil society to create monitoring of corporate operations that is independent of commercial interests, with research that is rooted in the experiences of the workers and communities, and that stays accountable to them. This is the significance of the programme of Public Opinion Tribunals that the social movement in Colombia is holding over a two year period. It is important that we support them, not only as one-off events but as part of a permanent, organic and credible alternative to the well funded lies of multinational corporations.

*<http://www.iblf.org/docs/ColombiaEng.pdf>

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Killer Coke at Global Village

John Smith

Four thousand five hundred young people, one third of whom had travelled from more than 40 countries around the world, recently joined in a 10-day camp hosted by the Woodcraft Folk, an internationalist and ecology-minded organisation for young people in Britain. The main theme of Global Village 2006 was to struggle against global poverty by mobilising young people to achieve the UN's millennium development goals, which aim to halve the number of people living in extreme poverty by 2015. Israel's war against the Palestinian and Lebanese people aroused a lot of debate and activity,

with widespread opposition to US/UK/Israeli policy clashing with the wishes of the leaders of some European social democratic youth groups not to 'take sides'.

The international committee organising the camp decided before the event to support Sinaltrainal's call for a world-wide boycott of Coca-Cola and ban its products from sale at Global Village. By the end of the camp, everyone had heard about the reasons for this decision. Amy N., 15 years old and from a township in South Africa's Cape province, appeared on the popular nightly GVTV news programme pouring what appeared to be blood from a bottle of Coca-Cola as she explained why Colombian trade unionists and

Indian farmers call for a boycott and publicising a workshop on Coca-Cola in Colombia. (This is contained within the movie that can be downloaded from http://www.globalvillage2006.org/en/festival/gv_tv/gv_tv_monday_7_august.) A stall set up one afternoon sold 50 copies of the Killer Coke magazine and sold out of t-shirts; 1,500 campaign leaflets were distributed. Two workshops were held on Coca-Cola, each attended by several dozen youth of different nationalities, resulting in a decision to continue campaigning within Woodcraft by setting up an e-mail list to coordinate anti-Coke activities by Woodcraft members (who can join by visiting http://lists.riseup.net/www/info/wcf_cocacola_action).

Environment



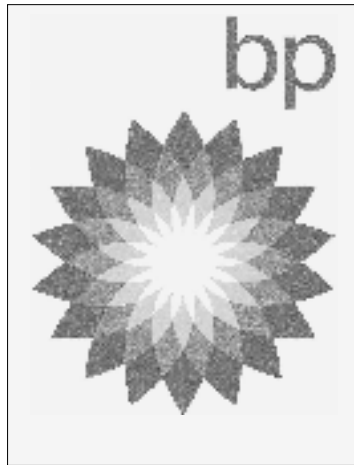
Campesinos speak out about the destruction caused to their land Jorge Mata/Surimages

BP pipeline pain

BP has finally paid out money to over 50 farms that used to support several hundred campesino families in Antioquia, some ten years after the OCENSA pipeline was built under the control of the London based oil company.

The terms of the settlement are covered by a confidential agreement insisted on by BP, but are believed to be worth a total of £1.6 million for the farmers and an equal amount for their lawyers from Leigh Day and Co. What is known is that BP would not accept liability in order to make payment under a cleverly disguised "Social Fund".

BP was responsible for the construction of the OCENSA pipeline, which caused widespread damage to land and water sources in the farms in Zaragoza and Segovia, Antioquia. Prior to its construction, BP commissioned an Environmental Impact Assessment which predicted the same problems that



occurred during and after construction, including widespread erosion and damage to water sources. It was also BP that sent its representatives to the farms to get each of the landowners, largely illiterate peasant farmers who at the time were not legally represented, to sign lengthy agreements to give Right of Way for the pipeline to run over their land, on the basis that they would be compensated.

The majority of the peasant famers were displaced from their land by the pipeline's construction. The environmental problems were compounded by a deterioration in the security situation brought about by the presence of the pipeline. Many went to live in nearby Zaragoza whereas others reached Medellín, where they built rickety shacks on top of the rubbish tips of Morabia.

So, why have these farmers had to endure 10 years of hardship and

suffering in order to receive compensation from a company that parades its commitment to the environment and human rights?

Can we really believe BP's spin about its commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility? BP's executive board ignored years of campaigning by the Colombia Solidarity Campaign; our interventions at the BP AGMs and even a meeting with its chairman, Peter Sutherland in December 2003 and a meeting with BPXC and OCENSA in Bogotá. BP also received written complaints from Marta Hinestroza, the campesinos' lawyer, who was forced to flee the country. The only reason BP has paid money out to these long suffering people is because the threat of legal action in London's High Court was imminent. The evidence provided by the Leigh Day lawyers showed overwhelming environmental damage caused by the OCENSA pipeline. Had the case proceeded, BP

would have been proved to be liable for the damage caused to the farms and the company had to act in order to save the ethical image it has built up over many years and with many millions of pounds which dwarves the figures paid out in this case.

With the money received, we hope that the campesinos can start to rebuild their lives although they will never regain the peace or freedom they once had. Those that left the country can finally afford to move out of the shanty towns and invest in a form of micro empresa. Those still in Zaragoza hope to repair water sources and find alternative crops to replace the main source of income they lost from mining. However, in an area of Colombia where the security situation is acute and armed groups are undoubtedly aware of their success, one can't help but worry about the next hurdle these people might face.

La Guajira

Uribe and Chavez's business

words Emilith Habana

Relations between Presidents Uribe and Chavez, since the arrival to power of the Colombian president, have apparently been tense. Remember the "Granda Case" where agents from Colombia's Security Police, the DAS, entered Venezuelan territory where they then kidnapped a member of the FARC in Caracas, took him back to Colombia and then extradited him to the USA. Previous to this, 50 Colombian paramilitaries were arrested on a farm outside Caracas where they were planning a coup d'etat against Chavez's government. However, in matters of commercial relations and infrastructure projects, relations between the two Presidents have been entirely harmonious.

During his most recent visits to Venezuela, Uribe has acted as the spokesman of international energy capital, and of the Bush government itself, pushing their joint philosophy of Free Trade and regional projects such as the South American Regional Infrastructure Integration (IIRSA by its Spanish acronym) and the Plan Puebla Panama (PPP).

In August 2002, during a visit to Venezuela, Uribe pushed the proposal for the construction of an international bridge spanning the La Grita river, to be called "the Union Bridge", at a cost of US\$ 3.6 million, essentially to facilitate exports of coal from the Norte de Santander (Colombia) to the USA, via the Gulf of Maracaibo (Venezuela).

During a visit in 2004, he agreed the construction of "Port America" in the Gulf of Venezuela; a gas pipeline running from Maracaibo to Puerto Ballenas in the Colombian Guajira capable of transporting between 150 and 200 million cubic feet of gas (at a cost of US\$ 235 to 270 million); a multi-purpose pipeline between Maracaibo and the Colombian Pacific to open up energy markets in Asia and the western USA; as well as integrating Venezuela into the PPP. "I have invited President Chavez to visit us in the town of Monteria in October or November, and we will also invite President Torrijos [of Panama] to formalise our countries' entry into the Plan Puebla Panama."

Negotiations began in Maracaibo, Venezuela on 8 July. Presidents Uribe, Chavez and Torrijos welded the first symbolic join of the newly inaugurated gas pipeline. These deals fit perfectly with public pronouncements by Bush and Uribe, about global energy markets, as set out in IIRSA and the Electricity Interconnection System (SIEPAC) in which Colombian company "Interconexión Eléctrica, S.A." is already heavily involved.

But why is President Chavez aligning himself with this axis of evil? There are obvious commercial and economic benefits for the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, which contains the largest reserves of natural gas in the continent. The strategic role that Venezuela plays in meeting future

demand from the North American market has been strengthened with the construction of the pipeline. Through this infrastructure, Venezuela will supply gas to the entire NAFTA region (Mexico, USA and Canada) and to the Central American countries recently incorporated in the free trade agreement with the US. Commercial rela-



Hugo Chávez: President of Venezuela

tions with the Asian markets will also be opened.

One of the principle slogans of the Venezuelan Government has been "People Power", a system of participatory democracy where the people hold power through the Assemblies (Article 70 of the Bolivarian Constitution). This is not a "dictatorship of the proletariat" but an attempt to build a new political system "from below". However, who is listening to the Indigenous popula-



Alvaro Uribe: President of Colombia

tions of Perijá and La Guajira, to the campesinos and fishing communities of Lake Maracaibo, the Gulf of Venezuela and Cariaco, whose houses, farms, cemeteries, forests and rivers lie on the route of the pipeline?

In Colombia, on the other hand, Uribe could never boast to have listened to the people with regards to human, economic, social or environmental rights. The gas pipeline, the Panamerican Highway and the Electricity Interconnection are part of the three mega-projects that Uribe has pushed along with big agro-business (particularly African palm plantations)

that also include the building of a road to link central Colombia with Tribuga on the Pacific coast, and the construction of a deep water port to enable commercial links with China.

For many years the Indigeous Wayu and Uwa people of the Colombian Guajira have been and continue to be, the victims of torture, forced displacement and massacres through the paramilitary strategy of the Colombian State. Coincidentally, the gas pipeline will pass through Wayu and Uwa territory. Afro-Colombian and Embera Wounan indigenous populations in the Atrato have suffered the same repression since the start of Operation Genesis, led by the notorious General Rito Alejo del Rio in 1997. Until this day, these offensives against the people have ensured a steady depopulation of territories rich in bio-diversity, paving the way for big agrobusiness to implement the cultivation of African palm, cocoa and rubber, deforestation, road building and of course- the gas pipeline. It is public knowledge, although President Chavez seems to have forgotten, that the areas where state sponsored violence is most acute in Colombia coincide with areas proposed for mega-projects such as the gas pipeline. Colombian state violence is "assisting" Venezuelan commercial and economic expansion.

According to Chavez, "the priority of Latin America is integration." The Bolivarian dream of an American Nation as a catalyst for the IIRSA. Twelve countries with a single destiny-integration. The question that we must ask is "how does President Chavez propose to realise Bolivar's dream without listening to the voices of Afro-Colombian communities in Tribuga, Tumaco, Buenaventura, Truando, Cacarcia, Curvarado, nor to the Wayu, Wiwa, Wounan, Embera, Katios, Chami, Tule indigenous peoples, nor to the thousands of forcibly displaced people on Colombia's Pacific and Atlantic coasts."

We are seeing once again how on both sides of the border, the wishes of the people are being ignored in the name of progress built on the impunity of crimes against humanity, environmental destruction and the denial of the very rights to exist and to survive.

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Colombia

Racism & murder

Buenaventura football massacre: 12 dead but still no justice

words Andy Higginbottom



On paper at least the residential location could seem highly desirable, homes built over the ocean's edge with truly calm Pacific waters lapping underneath, but Punta del Este is a densely populated *barrio* on the outskirts of Buenaventura, cut off from the town centre by a busy dual carriage way road. Life for the African-descendant

inhabitants is harsh, brutish and, for some, very short.

At 2.00 p.m. on 19 April 2005 a man on a motorbike went to Punta del Este and invited the young men of the neighbourhood to play a football game, where the winners would have won 200,000 pesos (about £50). The only work the *chicos* (young guys) had was occasional labouring, they played football every day and were good, local

champions in fact. Unsurprisingly 24 youths aged between 15 and 22 volunteered.

Two days later the bodies of 12 of those youth were found. They had been atrociously slaughtered. The corpses showed signs of torture, they had been gagged, doused with acid, their eyes had been pulled out and they were given the *coup de grace* – a bullet in the head.

Fifteen months later, and we are visiting the mothers of ten of those young men with human rights defender Father Javier Giraldo. It is a very, very painful experience. The Father questions gently, but the bereaved mothers can barely speak, their chests heave with the loss, they weep for their sons. An auntie joins in, she remembers her nephew's cheeky ways fondly and her recollection triggers more memories for a while, but the mood soon descends again. It's tough for them to talk at all.

The women are desolate, abandoned. In one year and three months the mothers have had no support from the Colombian authorities, no information of a police investigation, no counselling, no financial support, no legal aid. They are the marginalised unpeople whose loss does not matter.

It is unclear if the mothers have a lawyer, Father Giraldo promises to check with Senator Alexander Lopez, to find a lawyer who will help them. We ask what could be the motive for this crime. One of the mothers says there could be no explanation for such a horrendous act, but others point out that two weeks previously, on 5 April 2005, a march was held by the people of the neighbourhood, in order to demand the construction of a pedestrian bridge across the dual carriage-way. But Buenaventura's mayor had declared Punta del Este a 'red zone'. The demonstrators were beaten up by the anti-riot police, who took pictures and filmed the community. Several of the young guys killed had participated in the protest.

This succession of events, human



from Buenaventura airport, which is patrolled by the Marine Corps.

The Process of Black Communities (PCN) points out that four of the nephews of Jorge Isaac Aramburo García, leader of the Community Council of the nearby Yurumanguí river, whose family has been systematically murdered and harassed, to the point that it was necessary to resort to the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights for protection. Five family members were killed in Las Palmas neighbourhood of Buenaventura in 2000. In all nine family members have been murdered, one disappeared and another jailed.

A recent NGO statement reports that there were 2,644 assassinations in Buenaventura between 2000 and 2005, plus on average of 80 to 90 disappearances annually. Up to 18 July there were 281 assassinations so far this year. The massacre of Africa's descendants in Colombia continues in silence.

Back in Punta del Este, as we say our good byes to the bereaved mothers we spot more youth having a kickabout on an ocean-side scrap of land. Ironically, the World Cup has just started and football fever is high, but while people round the globe tune in for the latest game, these women cannot bear to watch.

rights defenders later confirmed, fits the classic *modus operandi* of paramilitarism. A popular sector organises collectively and mobilises to demand basic rights. The response is twofold, official stigmatisation and confrontation backed up by unofficial paramilitary style intervention. Select groups are targeted, but with the intention of terrorising and demobilising the entire community.

Without a proper enquiry there is insufficient proof to be sure, but the indications conform to pattern. The footballers' bodies were found in Triunfo neighbourhood, a paramilitary controlled zone about five kilometres

Afro-colombians assassinated 19 April 2005

Rubén Darío Valencia Aramburo, 18 years old
 Pedro Luis Aramburo Cangá, 18 years old
 Pedro Paulo Valencia Aramburo, 17 years old
 Alberto Valencia, 18 years old
 Concepción Rentería Valencia, 16 years old
 Mario Valencia, 19 years old
 Iver Valencia, 21 years old
 Carlos Arbey Valencia, 17 years old
 Victor Alfonso Angulo, 20 years old
 Javier Borja, 15 years old
 Jhon Jairo Rodallegas
 Leonardo Salcedo García, 20 years old

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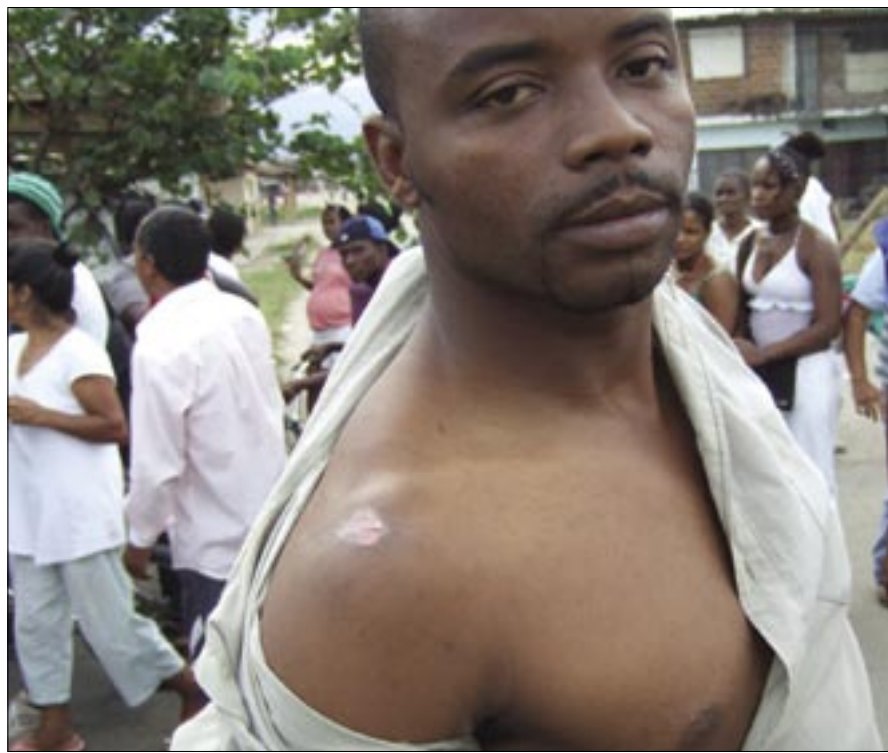
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Colombia

Violent eviction in Aguablanca

Colombia's poorest are driven from their homes by city leaders

words Caleb Harris pictures Johan Carlstedt



As we stood on a dusty street corner, two teenage boys sprinted by, one clutching a pistol. It was a shock to see it gleam in the hot sun. We were in one of the poorest neighbourhoods in Colombia, the Aguablanca district of the southwestern city of Cali.

Many of Aguablanca's neighbourhoods were originally invasiones - squatter settlements. These fringe most Latin American cities. They are populated by millions who can only dream of affording even the lowest rent. Buying a house is even less possible for the poor, unemployed, voiceless and often invisible majority in Colombia. So they choose some vacant, idle land and build simple homes for their families. Sometimes these squatter towns evolve over years into normal, officially recognised communities. But often they don't, as we were about to find out in disturbing detail.

There's occasional gang conflict in Aguablanca, as there usually is in poor areas where many young people have nothing to aim for except the fleeting power gained through drugs and guns. But there's another kind of violence, too, a more insidious and terrifying kind, because it wears a suit and tie instead of Nikes and a baseball cap (or camouflage gear).

I was visiting Aguablanca with Johan, a Swedish photographer, to find out about a recent example of this other, more official violence. Among all the grim effects of Colombia's stagnant and still bloody civil war is that the country has the world's second-highest population of internal refugees, after Sudan. They're known as IDPs, Internally Displaced Persons. Johan and I were

on our way to meet some of the people behind that deceptively neutral term: "displaced".

After building improvised homes on disused public land in Aguablanca, over 1,200 families, mostly displaced, had lived in their new settlement, called Brisas Del Bosque (Forest Breezes), for four months. Then Cali's city leaders decided they needed the land for development. So they instructed the Mobile Anti-disturbance Squadron (the riot police, ESMAD in its Spanish initials) to descend on the community at 2am on 16 June and to drive the people out into the street with tear-gas and clubs. The police then burned the houses to the ground, with everything in them, and bulldozed what remained.

During the raid, a six-month-old baby died from exposure to the tear-gas fumes, a young mother miscarried, and many men, women and children were injured. Johan and I arrived twelve days later. Some 300 families were still living under plastic and cardboard in the street nearby. I spoke to the leader of the community council, Gerson Alfredo Sanchez. He explained: "Everyone was sleeping. The riot squad threw tear gas. We fled, and they beat us with clubs. They arrested community leaders, to silence resistance, and released them without charge hours later. Many people were injured, and we lost everything we had." Gerson added: "The reality is that we had nowhere else to live, no money to pay rent - that's why we had to live here. And now we are in the street." The baby who died during the raid was named Luis Angel Riasco Cuero. His father, Harold Riasco, told me: "There was no warning

- nothing. Then we felt the tears coming from the gas and the baby began to asphyxiate. We thought that if we fled we might be beaten by the riot squad. So we put a wet cloth on his face and waited. At 11.30am he died here in the street." Over 50 men, women and children queued for several hours in the blazing afternoon sun to tell us their stories.

Yaneth Arollo Martinez has a three-year-old and twins aged one, and was pregnant with her fourth child before she miscarried during the raid. She said: "They caught me and hit me. They threw me on the ground. This is like a war on the people. I went to hospital, but I lost my baby." Jaer Antonio Urbano and his wife Diana Calbo Quintero have a seven-month-old son. Jaer said: "They hit my wife in the face. She fell in the canal with the baby in her arms, and the baby drank the bad water and got very sick. He nearly died." He said he had a message for the government: "Please don't attack the people. We are poor, but we are still human beings. We need homes and work."

It was a very moving and intense experience, to listen to story after story of all that can still be taken from you when you already have nothing.

Caleb Harris (calebdch@yahoo.co.nz) is a freelance journalist based in Colombia. For more photos and testimonies from the Brisas Del Bosque eviction, see the on-line exhibition at <http://www.accessallareas.org/aguablanca>

Aguablanca

The 'Marginal Zone' of Cali

words Johan Carlstedt

In Colombia under the government of president Alvaro Uribe the process to dislodge the people from the land in favour of large scale national and multinational agriculture and commercial ventures continues. According to an authoritative report by the NGO CODHES some 3.5 million of the country's 45.6 million strong population have now been evicted from their land and internally displaced. One million of these people have been displaced since the government of Uribe took office in 2002.

In the green and fertile Cauca valley, which stretches for 600 kilometers along the river Cauca between the western and central ranges of the Andes, the indigenous peoples, the campesinos and the large afro-colombian population are forcefully pushed away towards the hot and humid Pacific coast in the west and the poor neighbourhoods of the city of Cali to the east.

Colombia's second largest city of Cali (2.4 million inhabitants) lies in the Cauca valley. Aguablanca is defined by the authorities as the "Marginal Zone" and is home to around 600,000 people, mostly afro-colombians, who live in extreme poverty and substandard conditions. These are people who have been forcibly evicted from their rural land or who have fled natural disasters, misery and armed conflict. Left without alternatives they have illegally occupied government or privately owned land in the outskirts of Cali where they have created neighbourhoods by building shacks and basic houses without land titles. As more people arrive there is an ongoing battle between the people who are forced to create new neighbourhoods and the government who seek to dislodge the dwellers.

Over time many of the neighbourhoods have become permanent and some basic services have been provided but as a consequence of the illegal occupation there is often a lack of facilities, especially in the more recently created areas, such as schools, primary health care, water, sewage, electricity, roads and waste collections. Conditions are made further difficult by floodings, diseases and armed gangs. In the first six months of 2004 there were 1,225 assassinations recorded in Cali with an additional 8,500 wounded - a number that does not include those killed in the country's armed conflict.

Human Rights Watch reports that "In 2004, Colombia's Constitutional Court held that the government's system for assisting displaced persons was unconstitutional. In September 2005, the Court found that the steps taken by the government to comply with its ruling were insufficient in terms of both resources and institutional will."*

Aguablanca provides concrete examples of the Colombian government's human rights violations as reported by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights**. Although the areas are illegally occupied there are no alternatives made available for a majority of the inhabitants and when the police are sent in by the government in violent raids to evict people from recently occupied land, the men, women, children, the sick and the elderly are simply left homeless on the street without possessions or documents overlooking a field of burnt down and bulldozed shacks.

* "Human Rights Overview - Colombia", December 2005, Human Rights Watch

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Colombia

SOCIAL STRUGGLE

Barrancabermeja

Social Movement Under Siege

Andy Higginbottom

The Space for Human Rights Defenders meets in 'Barranca' every Thursday at 5pm. There are delegates from the Popular Womens Organisation - Organización Fémina Popular (OFP), various trade unions and grass roots NGOs. As usual, the meeting on 29 June had situation reports as the first item on the agenda. As we heard from round the table, it became clear that as of 3pm that day there had been at least four violent assassinations and three disappearances in the previous week. Barranca is in the midst of a human rights crisis, far worse than is presented in the official media, and it is the social movement that is bearing the brunt of the attack..

When I had arrived in the tropical oil port on the banks of the Magdalena Medio river the previous day, the OFP were in a state of high alert due to death threats against local organizer Gloria Amparo Suarez and her family, and the day before new threats arrived directed at Jackeline Rojas, regional coordinator and presenter of the OFP's daily radio and weekly television programme 'Mohana', a popular term for the river's spirit.

Jackeline toured Britain last year, and Gloria spoke at the Vienna counter-summit in May 2006. The persecution of Gloria and Jackeline, and against the OFP as an organisation, is directed at silencing the voice of women in society. We ate at an OFP dining hall in the north-east, one of five in the city. I saw how this initiative encourages working class women and the community in general. The OFP had just started a new campaign against the culture of militarization, discouraging young people from wearing army style clothes, and had set up a collection point in the dining hall for discarded combat fatigues. The OFP provides holistic services for women, the first point of contact again is at the local dining halls with referrals to specialists working out of the OFP's main centre, such as welfare lawyer or nutritionist. That afternoon we attended the inauguration of a project of 50 dwellings that displaced women had built for their families in the Alto de Paraíso neighbourhood. Despite their evident pride, celebrated in dance and music with just one or two speeches, the backdrop to the street party was fear.

Everybody was worried because of the recent increase in robberies and armed attacks. The families knew that the men responsible came from the nearby barrio called los Corrales, where they could be seen operating out of a house selling drugs. They were rumoured to be rightwing paramilitaries - organized under the umbrella of the AUC (literally translates as United Self-Defence of Colombia) - and supposedly disarmed by the government last year and 'reinserted' into society ... a pattern was beginning to emerge.

Barranca was built around exploitation of oil, from the 1920s onwards. Historically it has been a bastion of the left, the 'Red Clyde' of Colombia, centred on the militant oil workers union

USO. But in 2001 the paramilitaries took over Barranca, installing death squads in the city. Today USO leaders work from an armed compound, and it is only at great risk can they enter the oil installations. Despite this, the left tradition lives on, in May's presidential elections Barranca returned more votes for the candidate of the left-wing Polo Democratico Alternativa than any other party. Neo-liberal policies have bit deep into the ranks of organized labour. USO has a little over a thousand members amongst the seven thousand workforce in the state oil corporation Ecopetrol, whose refinery sits right on the edge of the city. The majority of refinery workers are indirectly employed through sub-contractors, and earn just a third (£3 a day) of their unionised colleagues. USO have resisted the creeping privatization programme, they went on strike in 2004, but this year privatization is pressing ahead. Once again the rumours say that supposedly disbanded paramilitary groups are raking a huge cut from the sub-contracted service providers.

Many USO members live in the zone called El Centro, and they are part of a community fight to keep their homes. Attracted by the rising price of oil, Ecopetrol is seeking to re-activate the long closed La Cira-Infantes oil field and has signed a new exploration contract with US corporation Occidental (Oxy-Andina). The only problem is that thousands of families have settled in the meantime. It is exactly this type of situation where unofficial violence is used to lever out communities that stand in the way of profitable investment projects, so concerns are growing.

Barranca's municipal water company EDASABA was liquidated by mayoral decree in September 2005, and a new corporation Agua Barrancabermeja set up in its place using the same plant, but with sub-contracted workers supplied through 'cooperatives'. Out of the workforce of 178 workers, 109 trade unionists in SINTRAEMDES lost their jobs.

Another 'Red Alert' concerns San Rafael, the city's only public hospital. Blanca Valderrama, local president of health-workers union ANTHOC, explained the consequences of sacking 80 workers, and the subcontracting of cleaning services: blood deposits and rubbish left in filthy corridors. "Dengue fever is increasing, the city risks an epidemic", she added.

Juan Carlos Galvis is the national Vice-President of Nestlé and Coca-Cola workers union SINALTRAINAL, and regional president of the CUT union federation, all of whose affiliates operate under permanent threat. SINALTRAINAL militant William Mendoza is a strikingly tall man. On 11 May 2006 two men accosted William's brother in the market, confusing the two, and later that day someone called the union branch office calling William a "son of a whore". Five days later there was a stranger spying the union office, and again phone calls

threatening William.

In early June a leaflet was distributed by a "social cleaning" group stigmatizing trade unionists and other social movements as "big-mouths", heightening the threat against them (see pg5 Anti Trade Union Violence).

Such threats are for real. Orlando Navarro, the brother of a community leader in nearby Ciénaga del Opón was assassinated on 28 June. Pride Colombia, an NGO of lesbians, gays and transexuals denounced the assassination of three homosexuals in Barranca in June alone.

There is a house of 'reinserted' paras in Provienda barrio. On 24 June as some young women passed by it, they were spoken to vulgarly by some men there. The women responded by calling the men "paracos" (paras), and the men threatened them so badly that they have had to flee the city.

One incident involved witnesses from the US NGO Christian Peacemaker Teams, whose volunteers had shown concern about the activities of a demobilized paramilitary leader. The man boldly came to visit them at their home, he was wearing what at first appeared to be a plain t-shirt. Except that the t-shirt was inside out, and on the other side could be made out the letters "AUC BCB" - which stands for Bloque Central Bolivar (Central Bolivar Block), the local paramilitary front.

There has been a widespread increase or armed attacks across the city. On 1 May there was a massive fire-fight, a plomaseira. Many of these attacks are attributed to a group known as The Black Hand. At 1.30am on 24 June armed men set up a road block in Chico barrio, they called themselves the "The Black Eagles". In fact Black Eagle Inc is a legally constituted security company that employs reinserted paras in Barranca.

So although the Justice and Peace law was meant to demobilise the paramilitary forces, what is happening is a restructuring in the form of paramilitarism: new networks are being built in urban areas, linking legal facades with illegal activities, sources of funding with operatives. This emulates the neo-liberal sub-contract model of doing business, cut costs and deny responsibility.

The official view is that while there are some individual violations with AUC reinsertados, there is no systemic problem, as I learnt from visiting the region's police colonel, the national (Defensoria) and local ombudsman (Personeria) offices to ask why there is not more rigorous investigation and control of the paramilitaries. The personero local ombudsman - a mayoral appointment - suggested that the reason for increased violence was common delinquency. He added that many people were not worried by a paramilitary presence, as it prevents a return of the left wing guerrillas. Such partiality amounts to a justification for the regime impunity for covert paramilitarism, through which the very existence of the social movement is threatened, and which is so conveniently beneficial to business interests.



A boy confronts police during a protest in Barrancabermeja earlier this year

Human rights statistics for Magdalena Medio region

The government of Uribe Velez continually asserts that according to the figures the human rights situation is improving in Colombia. This use of statistics to manipulate public opinion is too often repeated by the media and the UK government without any critical scrutiny of the claim. Detailed figures on human violations in the Magdalena Medio (MM) region, a flagship area where there are supposed to be 'peace laboratories' championed by the World Bank and funded by the EU, reveal a very different and more complex picture.*

Comparison of human rights violations between 2004 and 2005 has particular interest, because the paramilitary groups of the AUC were supposed to be demobilised in the second half of 2005.

Homicides attributed to political motives declined across the MM region from 346 to 303 between 2004 and 2005, there were however increases of such killings in the urban centres of Aguachica (from 49 to 64) and the city of Barrancabermeja (from 108 to 124).

The paramilitary AUC-BCB (Bloque Central Bolívar) is the principal author. In the second half of 2005 it was attributed with responsibility for 67% of political homicides, the guerrilla groups for 3%, with 30% unknown.

There was a slight decrease in death threats, but torture increased and there were marked increases in failed assassination attempts and political detentions. There were 7

cases of kidnapping attributed to guerrilla groups in the second half of 2005.

The broadest effect of the violent conflict on the population at large is forced displacement. Between 1995 and October 2005 88,265 people representing 10.2% of the entire population of MM were displaced. In 2004, 4,929 people were expelled from their homes, increasing to 6,354 people forcibly displaced in 2005.

Although the homicide figures do not reach the genocidal levels of 2000-2003, when human NGOs report that paramilitaries penetrating Barrancabermeja eliminated one thousand people, and while all figures need careful interpretation, it is evident that:

a) violence against the civilian population has changed in form rather than decreased, and

b) overwhelmingly, the perpetrators of human rights violations are still the paramilitary formations.

These are points that should be put to the Uribe government and its international backers.

* all figures are from the report *Informe semestral de la situación de violación de los DDHH, violencia política, infracciones de DIH, acciones bélicas y acciones colectivas por la paz en el Magdalena Medio Colombiano: Segundo Semestre 2005* by *Observatorio de Paz Integral*, Barrancabermeja, April 2006.

Arauca

Letters from Arauca

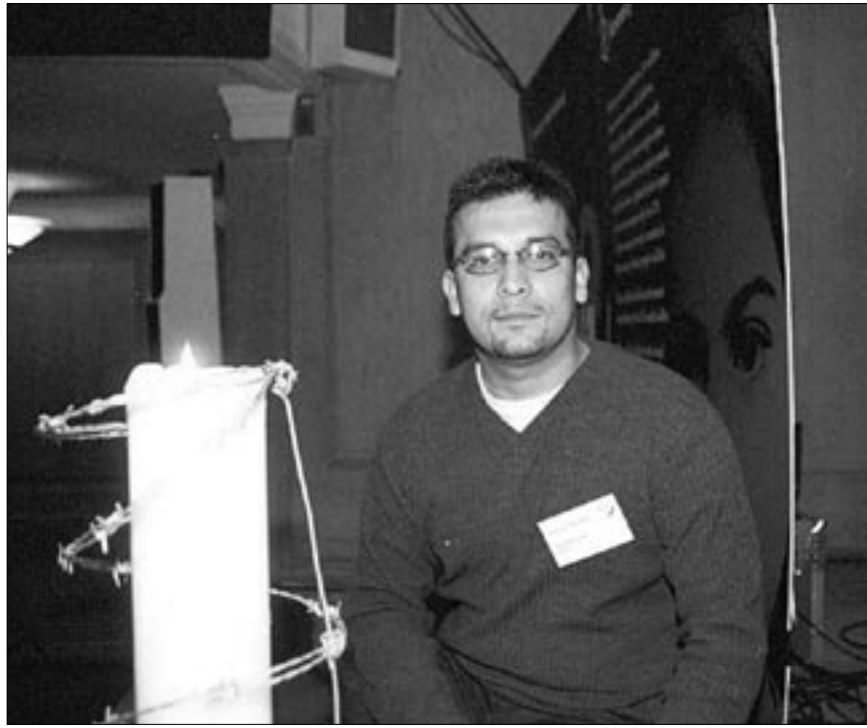
Free Samuel and Raquel!

words **Scott Nicholson** pictures **Jorge Mata/Surimages, Amnesty International**

Colombia's two main oilfields are located on the eastern Andes in the departments of Arauca and Casanare and are operated by Occidental and BP. Both departments are zones of appalling repression of the social movement, as eye-witness accounts show.



Protestors in Arauca have their banners destroyed by the military



Samuel Morales pictured here as a guest of Amnesty International UK is now in prison in Bogota

23 July 2006

Dear friends,

One of the most deadly professions in Colombia is education. I visited Arauca City (100 miles east of Saravena in the state of Arauca) from July 17 to 19, and I met with leaders of the Arauca Teachers Union. Jaime Carrillo, human rights coordinator for the union, gave me a list of the 28 teachers who have been killed in Arauca since 1980 - nineteen of those murders took place in the last five years. "I knew most of those people," said Jaime. Another 125 teachers have been threatened with death - 5% of the 2,456 teachers employed by the state of Arauca.

Jaime has been receiving death threats from the right-wing paramilitaries (which have close relations with the Colombian military) since 1991. In January 2004, anti-union graffiti was painted on a high school and the house of the union president, flyers with death threats against the union leaders were thrown in the streets, and a letter expressing condolence for Jaime's death was slipped under the front door of his house. Jaime fled to Bogotá for a while and then flew back to Arauca City on March 8. As soon as he arrived home from the airport, two paramilitaries came to the house asking for him. That same month, he received a message that stated, "Watch out for your children or you'll never see them again."

It wasn't safe for Jaime to stay in his home, so he spent the next six months living in the union office. My first trip to Arauca was with an international delegation in June 2004. We flew from Bogotá to Arauca City and had a brief meeting that evening in the union office - where Jaime was staying. One day, some of his friends invited him to leave the office to have lunch with them. As soon as Jaime sat down at the table, his cell phone rang and the caller told him, "We're watching you." On

May 18, June 18, and July 18 of 2005, threatening materials were slipped under the front door of his house.

Jaime told me that he is one of the five remaining members of the board of directors of the CUT, the Unified Workers Federation in Arauca. Samuel Morales (pictured), a teacher and the federation president, is in prison in Bogotá on charges of "rebellion." Alfonso Campino was released from prison last month for medical reasons - he was also held on charges of "rebellion." The federation auditor went into hiding to avoid arrest on charges of "rebellion." Leonel Goyeneche, a teacher and the federation treasurer, was murdered by the Colombian military on August 4, 2004.

The Arauca Teachers Union office has an armored door, bulletproof windows, and video camera surveillance; and Jaime moves around Arauca City with two armed bodyguards. He said, "I sense that I could be the victim of a bombing and I worry about my wife." Carmen has also been mentioned in the threats against Jaime. In spite of all this, Jaime says "I've lived all of my life here in Arauca and I'm going to continue forward with this work."

One of several inspiring educational projects in Arauca is the Parmenio Bonilla High School in Puerto Nidia. Parmenio was the director of the Puerto Nidia high school and he was killed on his way to the school in 1993.

The high school was created by the peasant families in the region and it provides a quality education for the children that come from "satellite" elementary schools in their communities. My friend Raquel Castro, who is in prison in Bogotá on charges of "rebellion," was the director of the school. When I visited her on July 1, she showed me an album of photos of the school and explained the improvements they had made while she was director. Eudoro, another friend, is the current director and I saw him again this afternoon - he said the school is

continuing to function very well.

In love and solidarity,

Scott

7 August 2006

Dear friends,

On the morning of August 5, Fray told me "We've got company." When I stepped outside of the social organizations' building here in Saravena, a tank and an armored personnel carrier were parked across the street. The cannon of the personnel carrier was pointed towards the building and the machine gun was pointed towards the corner of the building. It was an intimidating display of our tax dollars at work - \$3.8 billion in military aid to Colombia since 2000.

August 5 was the second anniversary of the massacre by the Colombian military of three social leaders here in the state of Arauca - Alirio Martinez, Jorge Prieto, and Leonel Goyeneche. Alirio was the president of the Departmental Peasant Association, Jorge was the president of the Arauca section of the health care workers union, and Leonel was a teacher and the treasurer of the Arauca section of the United Workers Federation.

On August 4, 2004, leaders of the Arauca social movement met in the community of Caño Seco. Alirio and Leonel spent that night in Jorge's house. The military came into the community early the following morning. A civilian informant led three soldiers to Jorge's house. The soldiers dragged the three men out of their beds, made them kneel down, and executed them. Later that day, vice president Santos and defense minister Uribe said that the three men were guerrillas who had fired on the soldiers, and the soldiers then fired back killing them.

The soldiers were members of the Revéz Pizarro military brigade based in Saravena. Colonel Francisco

Medina was the brigade commander. I met Medina in July 2004 and he told me he had just returned from a year of training at Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas.

Two other social leaders were eyewitnesses to the killings in Caño Seco. Samuel Morales is a teacher and the president of the Arauca section of the Unified Workers Federation, and Raquel Castro is a teacher and leader of the teachers union. Samuel and Raquel were detained by the military and flown to the Saravena military base. When Colonel Medina saw Samuel he said, "You're lucky that you saved yourself because the plan was not to bring you here." Samuel and Raquel were imprisoned in Bogotá on the charge of "rebellion." They've now spent two years in prison even though they haven't been convicted of any crime.

There was a national and international outcry in response to the killings. The three soldiers and the informant, along with the lieutenant in charge of the operation, have been charged with murder. The Procurator's office is also investigating Col. Medina who is suspected of having ordered the massacre.

Hundreds of people traveled to Caño Seco to commemorate the second anniversary of the murder of Alirio, Jorge, and Leonel. Aide, one of Alirio's daughters, gave the most moving remarks of the ceremony. She told us, with tears in her eyes and a tremble in her voice, "If my father was a criminal for working to benefit the community, then we're all criminals!"

The last time she saw Alirio was in March 2003 when she left for medical school in Cuba. "My father had asked me before what I wanted to do, and I had told him that I wanted to serve our community as a doctor."

Samuel wrote a letter that was read during the commemoration. "We feel proud of your legacy. With even greater commitment, we pledge to continue implementing our alternative plan for development - created with

the wisdom of the indigenous people, the experience of the peasants, the tenderness of the women, the tenacity of the workers, and the energy of the students and youth."

"Alirio, Jorge, and Leonel - Presente! Presente! Presente!" (They're here with us!)

In love and solidarity,

Scott

AI: Send a message of hope

Amnesty International UK has adopted the release of Samuel Morales (pictured) and Raquel Castro as a priority take action campaign for individuals at risk. For a Case Sheet and Urgent Action form and see http://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions_details.asp?ActionID=16

Local leaders assassinated

Gregorio Izquierdo Meléndez president of the public sector union SINTRAEMSERPA and a principal activist for the human rights committee was assassinated at approximately 6.30pm on 13 September 2006 on 17th street in the capital of Arauca. A few days before teacher German Eduardo Solano Andrade had been assassinated on the same spot.

Hearing on oil and human rights

The Colombia Chapter of the Permanent Peoples Tribunal (TPP) is convening a series of the multinational corporations and the human rights of the Colombian people.

The TPP will hold a preliminary hearing in Saravena, Arauca 11-13 December 2006. There will be sessions on: Latin American Resistance in the Energy System; Effects of Oil Exploitation in Arauca; Commemoration of the Eighth Anniversary of the Bombing of Santo Domingo - Tame.

The results of this hearing will be forwarded to the full tribunal which is due to take place 3-4 August 2007 in Bogotá.

Kankuamo

Sierra Nevada

Second mission of accompaniment and solidarity with the Kankuamo people

words and pictures Maggie von Heydebrand

The Second Mission of Accompaniment and Solidarity with the Kankuamo People took place this year between the 13 - 18 August in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, in the north eastern tip of Colombia. Over 50 people representing national and international organisations, including from the Italian Green Party, and journalists. We traveled with displaced Kankuamos who now live in Bogotá, some of whom are wanted by the police for crimes they are not guilty of. One reason for the mission was to allow these Kankuamos to visit their land and families which was only possible with accompaniment, a key strategy in Colombia for the protection of human rights.

There are four indigenous groups who inhabit the Sierra Nevada; Arhuaco (Iku), Wiwa, Kogi and Kankuamo. They are all protectors of this sacred centre of the universe, yet since colonialisation their land and culture has been under constant threat from outside influences. Once again the situation is at a critical phase as the human rights of these indigenous groups are consistently and systematically being violated. The Kankuamos have been subjected to 342 homicides and forced disappearances since the mid 1980's. These assassinations / massacres have intensified dramatically under the presidency of Alvaro Uribe and the increase in paramilitary action of the area. Approximately 400 families have been displaced, the majority in 2002 -04. The whole population of Kankuamos, 10 - 15,000 people, has been closely affected by the armed conflict of the country.

The Kankuamos have had a particularly difficult time, a perfect case study in assimilation. Since the arrival of the Spanish, followed by slave communities, marijuana and cocoa growers, and Colombian farmers, as well as the subsequent arrival of the armed groups, their traditional culture and identity has all but disappeared. Now they are facing a long struggle to regain the traditional knowledge and practices. Their language is all but forgotten, their cultural and spiritual knowledge has been kept by Kogi mamos (shamans/spiritual leaders) who are now re-teaching the Kankuamos their role in the Sierra. The Kankuamos are now at the complicated stage of rebuilding their roles and rituals, and reclaiming their ancestral knowledge. However due to the high level of assimilation it is an extremely difficult process of looking back at their traditions and redefining themselves as an indigenous group in a modern context.

The Kankuamos were originally considered extinct but in 1993 they reformed as an indigenous group and held their first council meeting; in 1995 the political body was formed, the Organización Indígena Kankuamo (OIK). The principal point was to reclaim their identity as the fourth indigenous group of the Sierra. In 2003 they were legally recognised as an indigenous people and were given the rights to their traditional land. During the 80's and the 90's the territory found itself in the middle of the conflict between the left-wing FARC and ELN guerrillas and the right-wing paramilitaries, and the whole region was more or less abandoned by the state. In 2002 - 2003 the situation was critical, as the army was in the area with the specific mission to terminate the guerrilla. This meant that there were periods when the population had to lock themselves in their houses after dark as anyone seen on the streets was shot by the army on charges of collaboration. These were the years where there was the most displacement as people fled from the terror. By 2003 the humanitarian crisis had reached such levels that it was recommended by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights that the state start to apply itself in the protection of human rights in this area and various measures began to be implemented, these measures were then intensified in 2004. The army has moved into the area and regained military control.

The state's 'dirty war' policy, executed through unofficial connection to the paramilitaries, has been responsible for many of the murders. The tactic of assassinating leaders is one of the most damning, and the role of the state representatives is one of the most alarming realities of the situation. There have been incidents of state functionaries accompanying ex-AUC (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia) to Kankuamo communities in shiny new jeeps with guns threatening the people, this is nothing short of state endorsement to the terror of the paramilitaries which is unacceptable and calls out for international and national condemnation, especially considering that these are now demobilised paramilitaries.

Kankuamo *gaita* (flute) players

The Mission visited communities in Ataquez, Chemesquemena, Gatapuri and La Mina, four of the twelve Kankuamo communities, as well as attending meetings with indigenous leaders and local institutions, and the local government representatives. We were all witness to the continued violation of human rights. I was incredibly touched by the power and perseverance of the many mothers I spoke to who had lost sons and husbands to the conflict. Some of the displaced Kankuamos from Bogotá had not been able to return to their territory in years, and it was emotional to witness the reunion of these sons and brothers with their families and mothers.

An increasing concern, intrinsically linked to a country at war, is the way in which the lives of the female population are affected. Kankuamo leaders are concerned by the presence of so many young men in their communities, first it was the guerrilla, and now the army, who are having sexual relationships with



Kankuamo women. There are army posts at schools, and there have been cases of soldiers having sexual relationships with the students as well as other women in the communities. This is against International Humanitarian Law and is a serious abuse of power as it involves the civilian population in the conflict to a different degree and puts them at greater risk as they become indirect informants. There are already a significant number of orphans, and now there are increasing numbers of fatherless children (as the father was a soldier).

27 indigenous Kankuamos have been arbitrarily detained in Valledupar Judicial Prison on charges of collaboration with the guerrilla. Part of the intention of the mission was to enter the prison and bare witness to the conditions inside. However despite a verbal commitment from the Secretary of the Governor, we were refused entry. Kankuamo territory has been a traditional passing point for the guerrilla and they were the main institution of law and order as there was no state presence, and now the people are facing the repercussions. The Kankuamo leaders are trying to educate the population to keep it's distance from all armed actors in order to protect themselves from this kind of accusation, however this is increasingly difficult due to the proximity of the army posts.

The government initiated a plan to build a dam in the river Guatapurí on indigenous territory at Los Besotes. This is all sacred land and considering that the indigenous population in this area sees itself as protector of nature and thereby guarding the survival of the whole of the human race, plans like these threaten their ability to fulfill this role. This state proposed mega-project is directly linked to paramilitary control over the area, as the water generated by this dam, though under the pretext of serving the population of Valledupar (the capital of Cesar), is also to provide water for the many new African Palm plantations which are springing up in the area and need insatiable amounts of water. These plantations are generally owned by paramilitary leaders. This mega-project is causing great alarm as the process has begun despite the protest of the indigenous population in the Sierra, and despite the Colombian Constitution which stipulates the right of indigenous people to make decisions about their territory.

Throughout the five days we were made to feel very welcome and it was apparent that these people are involved in a genuine struggle to create an identity which is very far removed from the reality of their situation. We walked the two hours between Ataquez and Chemesquemena, an uphill climb through outrageously beautiful scenery. It makes it so easy to understand the people's attachment to the land looking out over the near and distant triangular mountains... Slowly it begins to rain and we drink sips of *chur-inchi* the local alcohol made from *panela* (sugar cane) to warm ourselves and get energy rushes. There is a jovial almost party atmosphere... we pass a spring which takes fresh water down to the village, and then reach the highest point of our walk to the ridge between two peaks, with views in all directions, we stop to take a photo and spot the military base on the sacred platform.

We were in Guatapurí at the time of the festival of the *Gaita* (traditional flute) and were able to see the integration of the military in the area. In uniforms and with rifles the military danced and even made music with us, at the cock fights soldiers betted with us and even owned cocks. We arrived in La Mina, which was one of the worst affected places, at the time of the change of the troops which happens every three months, and the place was overrun by soldiers.

In line with the Kankuamo spiritual identity we took part in three rituals in *kankurumas* (spiritual houses made of traditional materials) involving visualisations of the Mother Earth. The Kankuamos need help and support in their struggle to regain their ancient knowledge. This is the only path left open to them for the survival of any kind of a life separate from the conflict which engulfs them and is always at every corner. The return to ancient practices is a wholly positive step, the challenge lies in keeping the youth interested and uniting a people that have been divided for so long. The Kankuamos are fighting against the injustice and terror that has surrounded and permeated itself into its people and are now looking to bring a stop to the situation by asking for the conclusions of investigations into the several massacres, and for a sentence against the perpetrators.

Cauca

Liberation of Mother Earth

Indigenous peoples of the Cauca Valley

Andy Higginbottom



"The soldiers even pissed in the cooking pots."

Johan Carlstedt

La María - Piendamó is a special place, designated a Territory of Coexistence, Dialogue and Negotiation by the indigenous people of the Cauca Valley. La María is a high meeting ground perched atop a steep hill overlooking the Pan-American Highway as it runs from south to north between Popayán and Cali. There is an open air auditorium flanked by a cluster of buildings to facilitate a large assembly - a makeshift radio station, stores, communal kitchen, computer room and so on. It's poignant because you can tell that these facilities have been constructed with little money but with much thought and love, they are collective property and part of a collective project, but now they lie ransacked and burnt out, only the kitchen is back in working order.

It is here that the Cauca Regional Indigenous Council (CRIC) convened a gathering of over 15,000 people from 15 to 20 May 2006. They blocked the highway, were confronted in battle by the army and riot police who tear gassed them from helicopters, killing 25 year old Pedro Pascue and injuring 70 more. La María, designed for dialogue, had become a battle ground. It was to this scene that we came to learn from the leaders and activists of CRIC the causes of the conflict and where they hope to go in the future.

Where to begin? With the land, Mother Earth, or with the people, the original inhabitants of this wonderful place? The point is they are inseparable. At least they are spiritually inseparable, but centuries of dispossession accelerated in modern times by neo-liberal capitalism have physically driven them apart, and this is the core of the problem to be addressed.

There are 260,000 indigenous people settled on 84 resguardos, reserves in Cauca. However there are 115 cabildos, that is council of leaders of a distinct identity group, meaning that 31 cabildos do not have a territory for their people. The cabildos are grouped in nine zones, and come together through their consejero, councillor, on the regional council, CRIC, which in turn a member of the national indigenous organisation ONIC.

Colombia's 1991 Constitution established the right of indigenous peoples to their ancestral lands, but the amount and quality of the terrain assigned in practice is another matter. On 23 December that same year twenty Paez people from the Nasa de Huellas reserve occupied the El Nilo farmstead and were massacred. Recognising the injustice, the government signed a compensation agreement that would grant 15,663 hectares within three years, but less half of this land was ever handed over.

By 1999 the social crisis of the indigenous communities in Cauca had reached emergency levels, the government passed a decree to consolidate the many unfulfilled agreements such as El Nilo. Just 17,635 hectares had been transferred over 8 years. The land shortage was desperate, but newly earmarked government money went



into further studies rather than actual land purchases. A report by state agrarian reform institute INCORA in 2004 found that the indigenous communities required 218,000 hectares to meet their minimum needs. In sum, after years of promises the indigenous peoples of Cauca had received less than one tenth of the land needed to

hours of rough track driving away from local markets.

What this means is explained by CRIC's main councillor José Buenaventura Díaz, "Our people do not own the land individually, the *cabildo* will distribute plots to families for their use. But the average holding is only two hectares, we need much more than that to survive", as verified indirectly by official figures that estimate the minimum survival level at around eight hectares per family.

The fight for land is the fight for survival. Tired of government deception to prevent the return of lands kidnapped and held by a few, on 12 October 2005 the CRIC launched a new chapter in the Liberation of Mother Earth; hundreds of families from the Huellas Calota reserve had already occupied La Empeatriz farm, then two thousand people in Caldono occupied a farm called El Japio, and seventeen other properties of absentee landlords. 500 armed police attacked the El Japio group, injuring 46 people

Awá massacre

On 9 August most Native Peoples celebrate World Indigenous Day, but early that morning a terrible tragedy was unfolding in Colombia. In Altaquer village, Nariño Department, nine heavily armed hooded men in camouflage conducted house-to-house searches, they dragged three men and two women from their homes, and shot them. The victims were part of a group of 1,700 Awá who had fled a month previously from heavy combat between the military and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrillas.

The National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC) reports 32 indigenous people murdered and 28 others forcibly disappeared in the first seven months of 2006.

Motilon Barí protest

On 27 April members of the Motilón Barí indigenous people from the Catatumbo rainforest region of northeast Colombia gathered in front of the Ministry of Environment in Bogotá to protest ECOPETROL's exploitation of the Alamo I oil well in their traditional territory.

The Bari are organising a Public Hearing on 12 October 2006 in Tibu, North Santander, to highlight the concerns of their communities in Colombia and Venezuela.



May 2006, La Maria became a battle ground

fulfil their constitutional rights.

Colombia's 'state of social right' has failed the indigenous people as citizens in so many other ways, only 49% of the population are covered by the health programme, and more than 28,000 children and young people are outside the education system.

Behind this state failure to honour its own constitution there is an alliance commercial interests reined against the indigenous people. The Cauca Valley is fertile, though large tracts of plain have been exhausted by generations of sugar cane the soils are still good enough to attract new investments by landlords and multinational corporations. The neo-liberal export model prioritises large scale agriculture over the needs of indigenous peasant farmers, who have been driven up into the remoter parts, poorer soil and

(four blindings, and fingers cut off with scissors) and killing 16 year old Belisario Camayo.

Although they lost these battles, it was clear that the indigenous people were justified and they kept the moral high ground, as the establishment press recognised. Back in La Maria, José Buenaventura Díaz tells how the government had finally agreed to send five ministers to negotiate with CRIC at their symbolic site on 16 May. The ministers were due but they never arrived, instead the government ordered a military assault on this sacred place. "The soldiers even pissed in the cooking pots" as Alice who had been feeding the gathering told us.

Their patience exhausted, it was clear to us that the indigenous people of Cauca have decided that the only way to recover Mother Earth, to preserve their lives and dignity, is



Riot police at an indigenous protest in Cauca

Colombia

Presidential election analysis

How did Colombia's neoliberal right hang-on to power?

Arturo García

Alvoro Uribe Vélez was re-elected as the president of Colombia for 2006-2010 on 28 May 2006 with 63% of the votes, a million more than he obtained when elected the first time in 2002.

Nevertheless, and despite the triumphalism with which the right has received the results, the real winner of the elections was abstentionism. 60% of Colombians did not vote. It was only a minority that elected both the executive (President) and the legislative (Senate of the Republic and Chamber of Representatives), which plainly denies the exercise of a real participative democracy and de-legitimises a government without the support of the majority.

Reasons for Neoliberal Right Win

The unexpected increase of votes in favour of Uribe could be explained by a surreptitious campaign from the beginning of his first mandate. Political spoils and favours abounded for members of Congress, ministers, high state officials, diplomatic bodies and other figures in national and regional politics - they were bought just like in any town market with public posts and pieces of the national pie.

Three cases illustrate the power of corruption. Horacio Serpa, twice previously candidate for the Liberal Party, accepted from Uribe the ambassadorship of the Organization of American States (OAS), and with that buried any real possibilities of becoming President, as he lost all political and moral credibility. Serpa came in third place in the election, far lower than expectations.

Exactly the same thing happened with the Conservative ex-president Andrés Pastrana, who from being fiercely critical of the policies of the policies of 'National Security' and the nefarious 'Justice and Peace Law' which armored the paramilitaries against the force of justice, was seduced overnight by the ambassadorship to the United States. Having sold his moral principles and his authority as leader of the Conservative Party for next to nothing in Washington, Pastrana's constituency practically disappeared from the political map as a party, and his principle national and local leaders slid without any shame or qualms, characteristic of occupational opportunists, into becoming Uribe followers.

And so not to doubt his grand capacity of political bribery, once more re-elected Uribe Vélez wanted to remove any last obstacles that remained in the listless Liberal Party around ex-president Ernesto Samper. Uribe offered Samper the position of ambassadorship in France, who eagerly accepted. It was only quarrels between the two ex-presidents Samper and Pastrana, a kind of mafia-like rivalry of the State, that made them both renounce the

bureaucratic banquet.

Another decisive factor in Uribe's landslide victory was without a doubt made possible by the excessive generosity to paramilitary groups that he demonstrated throughout his public life and particularly in his first four years as president. The 'Justice and Peace Law' is a mendacious law designed to legalize paramilitarism and happily guarantee impunity at the cost of the pain, suffering and total exploitation of the victims of massacres, torture, disappearances, forced displacement and other grotesque violations of the National Constitution and International Humanitarian Law. This has been carried out through systematic threatening and generalized terror tactics targeted at the civilian population, and the singling out of popular leaders, trade unionists, journalists, and human rights defenders as collaborators or sympathizers of the guerrilla.

If members of the popular movement are presented in the official media as delinquents and enemies of the people and they treat the genocidal likes of the Mancuso, Jorge 40 and other 'chainsaw experts' as heroes who can enjoy prestige within official national politics and ride freely in their own helicopters and presidential vehicles on the Atlantic Coast, then we are talking about a terrorism of the state that endorses its dirty work through paramilitarism so that it can run its armed political campaign in favour of its benefactor, obliging the population in areas under paramilitary influence to vote in his favour and impeding support for any opposition.

This was already denounced in the 2002 elections, when a fraudulent scandal had allowed Uribe to win the presidency in the first round and a good number of positions in the Senate and the Chamber of recognized representatives of narco-paramilitarism. A petition before the District Attorney and the Public Prosecutor demands that they annul the 2006 legislative elections, alleging a fraud of shameful proportions, resulting from the corrupt power of narco-trafficking and the election of paramilitary groups.

Finally, the great national press, which is dedicated to unconditional service of the Uribe campaign with a servility that borders on mediocrity. In practice almost all the communication media have been put into order so that they speak, write and teach the messianic image of the leader, and denied equal participation to all of the other candidates. The infallible myth was built, the virtual perception that Uribe was entrusted with the panacea. Uribe provided the media with crude remarks to disqualify his political adversaries, but he did not have the courage, bravery or capacity to confront them in televised debates. Uribe labelled Carlos Gaviria Díaz, the candidate

of the Polo Democrático Alternativo (PDA), a communist disguised as a democrat, who would deliver the country to the guerrilla.

It was in this way, through warped Machiavellianism and the art of lying, the fabrication of rigged statistics and despicable actions, that Uribe was re-elected for another four years of repression against the political opposition, violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, crimes against humanity and increased polarization of Colombian society. Four years more to finish his project of privatization of the national economy, and to finish his nefarious work of delivering national sovereignty to the USA and the multinational corporations with the definitive signing of the Free Trade Agreement, approved in a Congress passing all the laws that the government needs to effect its macabre delivery of the country and change the Constitution so as to allow the emperor to continue on his throne for evermore.

Left Gets Stronger

The democratic left PDA rallied unexpectedly in the elections, which enabled the recently founded party to establish itself as the second major political force in the country, displacing both the official Liberal Party and the Conservative Party.

The PDA's presidential candidate was Dr. Carlos Gaviria, who had against all forecasts had beaten off Polo Democrático Independiente Senator. Antonio Navarro Wolf, (the ex-leader of the former guerrilla movement M-19 demobilised in 1989) to become candidate.

Carlos Gaviria appeared on the Colombian political scene four years ago when he was elected to the Senate with the highest number of votes for the Democratic Alternative, an alliance of groups from the left. His life had been dedicated to the academic world, then he became a magistrate and president of the Constitutional Court. He became a controversial public figure for speaking in favour of drug legalization as the only way to deal with the issue of narco-trafficking, in favour of legalising abortion, and in defence of the rights of gays, women, indigenous peoples and black communities. As Senator, Gaviria became a stone in the shoe of President Uribe, and has been one of the most serious critics of the so-called 'democratic security', of antiterrorist legislation, of the Free Trade Agreement with the United States and of the 'Justice and Peace Law' that provides the guarantee of impunity to the genocidal paramilitary groups and condemns the victim groups to be forgotten and subjected to perpetual forced displacements.

After many setbacks the left managed to agree on basic principles of unity. The Polo Democrático



Wilson Borja, one of Polo Democrático Alternativo's leaders in conversation with Colombia Solidarity Campaign delegates in June 2006

Independiente and the Democratic Alternative came together to form the Polo Democrático Alternativo thanks to among other things, the insistence of Gaviria on the urgent necessity of a united left that could break the mould of the two party system, and in so doing avoid the indefinite prolongation of the authoritarian neoliberal power of Uribe.

In spite of all the obstacles and principally for lack of guarantees for the candidates in opposition, not only for lack of security in being exiled from the country and appearances in public places where all of the time they feel the hidden threats and other times openly shameless ones, but also for the insufficient media time for opposition candidates, Gaviria managed to demonstrate the merit of this surprising ascent; not only with the 2,609,412 of Colombians who voted for a 'New Colombia', but also in that the Uribist conspiracy came under pressure to deploy all of its paraphernalia of corrupt practices, including fraud and violent intimidation in many regions of the country.

The different groups that made up the uribista coalition, far from having a party structure with a coherent ideology, are from a variety of opposing groups and clientelist regional factions, united for an electoral juncture in which the most important aim is the repartition of the bureaucratic loot, which Uribe has sold and distributed generously amongst the beneficiaries, but which will fall apart on the day when the advantages, positions and million-dollar contracts run out. That is to say, there is a manifest political crisis in the Colombian right, which obliges Uribe to co-govern with the old and discredited political castes, and prop up the neoliberal project with the new narco-paramilitary ultra-right, that has succeeded without major setbacks to seize political, economic and military control throughout the country.

Notwithstanding the best electoral result in the history of the Colombian left which calls for optimism and some of the leaders from Congress who have been doing great work, like Navarro Wolf, Gustavo Petro, Jorge Robledo, Wilson Borja and Alexander López among others, and Bogotá's mayor Lucho Garzón, there is an important fact that cannot be inadvertently overlooked if the left wants to convert itself into a real possibility for political power: the majority abstentionism within the electorate. Neither uribismo with all of its capacity for corruption and intimidation and its neoliberal politics; nor the democratic left with its fresh positioning and projects for change that struggle for a more just and democratic society and a peace characterised by social justice for all, could dent the scepticism of the majority of abstentionistas. In this lies the great challenge for the left: to break the political scepticism of Colombians.

Deep trouble

British mining company set to destroy Peruvian communities in the race for profit

Richard Solly

Over the past two years, thousands of small farmers in the department of Piura in northern Peru have been protesting against the activities of a British-owned mining company.

Eight mineral concessions in Rio Blanco, covering 6,472 hectares, are being explored for copper and molybdenum. The Peruvian Ministry of Energy and Mines has granted the right to exploit the deposits to Minera Majaz SA, a wholly owned subsidiary of London-based Monterrico Metals. The concessions contain enough copper to support Peru's second largest copper mine after a planned 2008 start date.

On 22 April 2004, three thousand small farmers marched on the Minera Majaz mining camp to demand that the company withdraw. Police threw tear gas grenades and several protesters were injured. Reemberto Herrera Racho, president of one of the local farmers' committees (Rondas Campesinas), died. According to protesters, he was killed when a tear gas grenade hit him on the head.

After the failure of attempts to discuss the objectors' concerns, another protest march was planned. At the end of July, 2005, a group of 1800 people gathered around seven kilometres from the mining camp. According to participants, at 6.30am on 1 August the police raised a white peace flag around a kilometre from the mine and called for dialogue. Farmers who approached the camp were attacked with tear gas grenades and bullets, leaving several people injured. Four hundred police officers then set fire to the huts which protesters had constructed, injuring around 40 more people. Protest leader Melanio García Gonzales died.

According to a press dossier published in May 2006 by Belgian corporate responsibility NGO Network Vlaanderen, based on information from Peruvian organisation Vicaria del Medio Ambiente (Vicariate for the Environment, VIMA), Monterrico Metals has fuelled the conflict in a number of ways:

- Monterrico Metals has spread false allegations against protesters: Monterrico and the Sociedad Nacional de Minería, Petróleo y Energía (SNMPE) have tried to depict the protesters as communists and drug traffickers, spreading false allegations and demanding repressive measures against the peasant movements.

- The company is implicated in police repression: witnesses reported that police were stationed on the company property and received material help from Monterrico employees when police officers were committing human rights violations during the repression of the second demonstration in August 2005.

- Monterrico Metals employees provoke conflicts in local communities: On 12 March 2006, when a forum entitled 'Mining, Agriculture and Sustainable Development' was held in the city of Huancabamba, a group led by – extraordinarily – the Social Responsibility Manager for Monterrico Metals, Raúl Urbina, and journalist Duber Mauriola, violently entered the event, provoking a confrontation with the participants, and attacked the speakers. The confrontation left many injured, among them Vincente Zapata of the Development Front of Tambogrande.

Why the objection?

According to the Sustainable Development Front of the Northern Peruvian Frontier (Frente por el Desarrollo Sostenible de la Frontera Norte (Perú), FPDSFNP), mining at Rio Blanco would destroy or irreversibly damage:

- the biodiversity of the 'páramos', fragile cold Andean highland ecosystems, and the cloud forests growing on the mountain slopes, including unique and highly endangered species such as the Andean tapir;

- the river valleys and the river basins in the páramos, which are the main providers of water in the northern region of Peru, through pollution of the Canchas, Chinchipe and Huancabamba rivers, upon which thousands of people rely for drinking water and watering of crops; the use of large amounts of water by the mine will cause desertification;

- the current agricultural production system and further agricultural development, the main economic



A Peruvian farmer lies wounded following clashes with the police

Sources:

Mines and Communities website, www.minesandcommunities.org
 Monterrico Metals plc website, www.monterrico.co.uk

Financial Times 15 August 2006

Email correspondence from Cooperaccion, July and August 2006

Statement by Federación Provincial de Comunidades Campesinas de Ayabaca, Piura, 20 July 2006

Presentacion Majaz Principales Acusaciones, FPDSFNP, prepared for Vienna hearing of Permanent Peoples' Tribunal, May 2006

Report on Majaz prepared in April 2006 by FPDSFNP for Vienna hearing of the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal, May 2006

Press Dossier Monterrico Metals, Mathias Bienstman, Network Vlaanderen/CATAPA, 3 May 2006

activity of the inhabitants and a source of exports of, for instance, high quality organic coffee.

There is no ambiguity in the position of local communities towards the mine.

On 8 August 2005, the federation of local rondas campesinas declared that it would continue working against Monterrico Metals until the Rio Blanco project was cancelled.

On 15 August 2005, the mayors of many of the local municipalities declared their opposition to the Rio Blanco project and their support for agriculture as the best form of economic development for the area.

Two local Catholic bishops and the Church-inspired VIMA, based in Jaen, Cajamarca, have also made their opposition plain.

According to the FPDSFNP, the company's presence at Rio Blanco is illegal. It says that article 89 of the Peruvian Constitution gives Indigenous and small farming communities the right to decide how their land is used. If an outside entity such as a mining company wishes to operate on their land, it has to obtain a favourable vote in the General Assembly of the community. In the Minera Majaz case, says FPDSFNP, the company only has a document signed by the Directors' Board (Junta Directiva) of one community, but not from the General Assembly. The document signed by some members of the Directors' Board was in any case later specifically 'deauthorized' by the community General Assembly.

Local communities are being supported in their campaign by national NGO Cooperaccion and by CONACAMI, (the National Confederacion of Communities Affected by Mining in Peru). Representatives of VIMA and CONACAMI visited Europe in the Spring to raise awareness of the conflict being caused by the company's presence. Wilson Ibanez represented FPDSFNP at a hearing of the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal in Vienna in May.

The Government and the company have portrayed those who object to the mine as being intransigent. But members of the FPDSFNP have repeatedly called for dialogue. Community leaders were in Lima from 10 to 14 July this year in the hope of talking with representatives of the Government and the company. According to a 20 July statement issued by one FPDSFNP member group, the Ayabaca Community Provincial Federation, the company closed its offices and gave its workers the

day off when community representatives tried to talk to them on 11 July. On 14 July they met with the Vice Minister of Mines and the Director General of Mining but an agreement to continue dialogue was vetoed by a phone call from the Minister. The Federation reaffirmed its desire for dialogue with the State. But it refuses now to include the company in that dialogue on the grounds that its presence in Piura is illegal – while the State insists that the company be involved. Cooperaccion reported on 16 August that the company is now trying to set up 'parallel' community organisations with the aim of presenting the appearance of consent to the mine.

During his time as British Ambassador to Peru, Richard Ralph (who retired in April 2006) talked up the importance of the project for Peru's economic development. The 11 November 2005 edition of Piura newspaper La Hora reported on a visit to Rio Blanco by the Ambassador. 'Obviously Piura is not one of the poorest regions in the country, but this is an opportunity to overcome social deficiencies,' said Ralph. 'There are various possibilities for development: there is tourism, agriculture, agriculture and livestock exportation, but the fact is that Peru is a mining country. Piura has the wealth of minerals that the globalised world needs.' According to La Hora, Ralph explained that part of his job was to resolve problems generated by the mistrust of affected communities towards mining projects. He said that the members of communities who work in the mining projects should act as ambassadors. 'They can clarify the misunderstandings, the lies and all that is said about the implications of the project,' he said.

Ralph retired as British Ambassador in April 2006. On 14 August, Monterrico Metals announced that it had appointed a new Executive Chair – Richard Ralph. The company told the *Financial Times* (15 August 2006), 'In the next year, Monterrico has to secure vital government permits for the [Rio Blanco] project to go ahead, and Mr Ralph's diplomatic experience in Peru should be useful in this process.'

Doubtless it will be. But let us hope that victory will go not to the British corporate-diplomatic old boy network but to the small farmers of Piura and their allies, who have made their opposition to the Rio Blanco mine so unmistakably clear.

Finance



Brazil's debt crisis

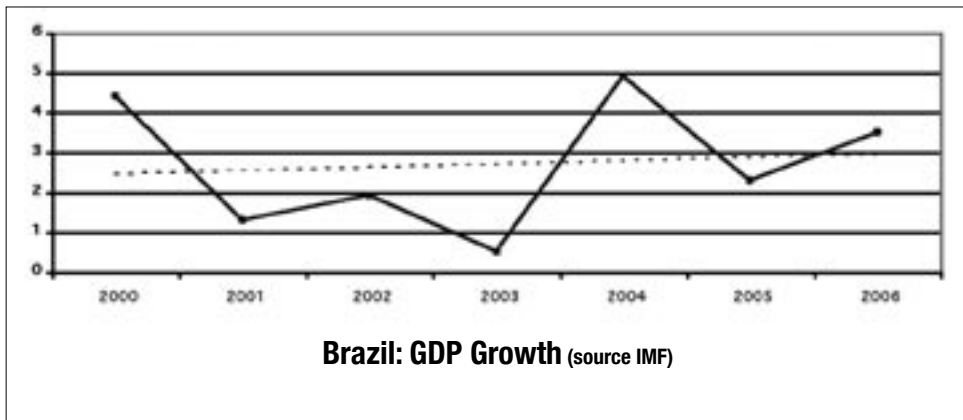
John Smith argues that to join ALBA, Brazil's government must repudiate its debts

Brazil is Latin America's largest country and accounts for around 40% of the continent's economic product. It suffers from all the notorious social diseases of Latin American capitalism, including extreme and rising inequality, staggering levels of public debt, ecological destruction, and endemic state violence and corruption. Widespread discontent with these ills propelled Workers Party (PT) leader Luiz Inácio da Silva ('Lula') to victory in the October 2002 presidential elections.

Da Silva's government is an important test of whether a reformist, social-democratic project is possible in Latin America. Is there a capitalist solution to the continent's problems? Can da Silva serve the interests of wealthy private investors and also of those who elected him? Brazil's political and economic direction has great significance for the efforts of Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia to construct a continent-wide challenge to imperialist domination, namely the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas, or ALBA. Does da Silva's social-democrat project converge with ALBA, or does it clash? What are the prospects of Brazil joining ALBA?

To answer these questions, we must understand the nature and the current stage of Brazil's chronic debt crisis, unquestionably the biggest constraint upon its national sovereignty and on its government's freedom of action.

Months before Brazil's voters gave da Silva a decisive victory in October 2002, investors in Brazilian financial assets voted – with their feet. Alarmed at the prospect of a Workers Party government, capital fled and Brazil's currency, the Real, fell 40% to an all-time eve-of-election low of 3.95 to the US dollar. Brazil's risk premium – the difference between the interest charged on loans to the Brazilian and US governments – rose from an already sky-high 7.85% to 24%. A melt-



down was only averted by an emergency IMF loan of \$30.4bn, announced in August, the largest single loan ever extended by the IMF. The FT explained who was actually being rescued by this 'rescue package': "US and European banks with Brazilian exposure have effectively won a get out of jail free card" (Financial Times 02/8/02).

The package also contained a straitjacket for da Silva to wear under his presidential sash. The IMF loan was "structured to induce the... presidential front-runners... to continue the conservative economic policies of the outgoing president" (Wall Street Journal 9/8/02). Its centrepiece was a promise to maintain a 'primary surplus' – a budget surplus before debt-servicing – of 3.75% of GDP, or 10% of government revenues.

Da Silva went along with this assault on Brazilian sovereignty, describing the IMF agreement as "inevitable... [It] allows the markets to calm, and with that, gives a chance for the country to return to growth if the right measures are taken." His meek consent meant that the debt crisis – the most important issue facing Brazil's people – did not even make it as an election issue.

Immediately upon winning the election da Silva delighted finance capitalists and dismayed his supporters by raising the primary surplus to 4.25% of GDP. His administration has exceeded this target: during 2003-2006 the primary surplus has averaged 4.5%. After interest and principal payments the government was left with a deficit averaging 3.5% of GDP – total public debt-servicing, the sum of these two, swallows an awesome 8% of GDP, over ten times government investment on infrastructure, which receives just 0.7% of GDP. This in a country where two-thirds of human waste flows untreated into rivers and coastal waters, and where tens of millions live in favelas (shanty-towns)!

Investors' doubts about da Silva's unswerving obedience were finally dispelled in 2003, when the Central Bank raised the benchmark overnight interest rate to 26.5%, crunching the economy to counter rising inflation. High interest rates discourage borrowing and divert spending from consumption to debt-servicing, reducing demand and dampening inflation. The outcome: spectacular profits for finance capitalists, a sharp recession among domestic producers, and infla-

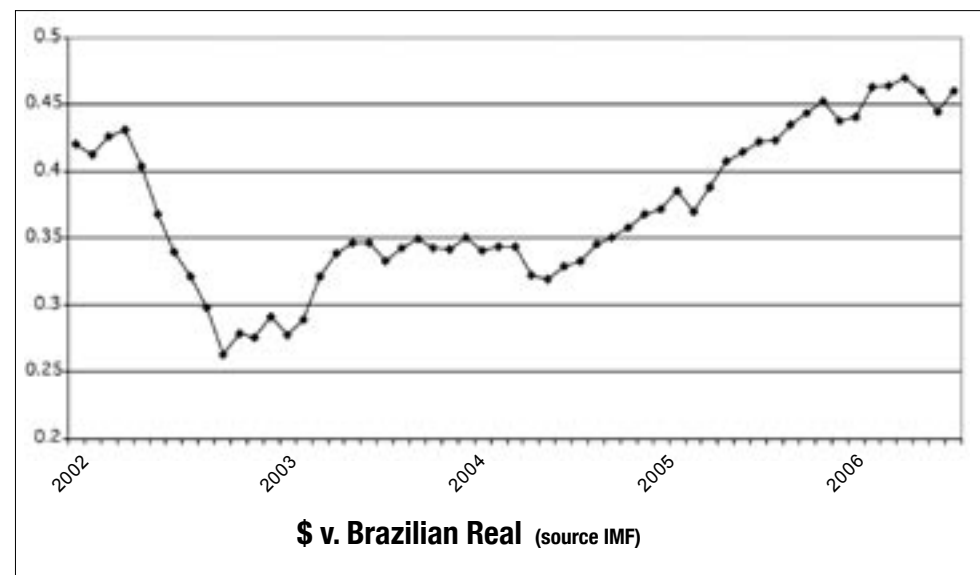
tion down from 12.5% in 2002 to 4.5% in March 2006.

Da Silva stated in July 2006 that "it is many, many years since Brazil has enjoyed the kind of tranquillity over the economy that it is enjoying now". Speaking after decades of crises and shocks, this is not such a bold claim. Brazil's 'tranquillity' is tenuous, and da Silva's servility to capital has produced meagre results: "In spite of enjoying what is probably the best combination of external conditions for at least half a century, Brazil's economy ... has expanded by an average of 2 per cent a year.... Bureaucracy, high interest rates and the overvalued Real are all casting a shadow over prospects... The only surprising thing is that none of this seems to have any effect on voters." (Financial Times 3/9/06)

Brazil has been favoured by two changes in external conditions: surging demand for Brazil's commodity exports such as iron ore, soya, meat and sugar; and foreign investors' hunger for high-yielding investments, a central concern of this article.

Who owns Brazil?

The Financial Times reported (17/08/05) that as a result of low interest rates in the US, "fund managers are desperate to obtain additional returns where they can. ... Brazil's overnight rates, currently at 19.75% and about 14% in real terms [i.e. after inflation]...are the highest in the world." Brazil has become, in one pundit's words, "the world's reigning beauty queen... everyone wants to own its debt"; another dubbed it "the poster child of hot money". The vast influx of finance capital, attracted by the superprofits to be made from trading in Brazilian debt, has caused the Real to almost double its value since 2002, producing huge capital gains for foreign investors and for wealthy Brazilians, 11,000 more of whom became dollar millionaires in 2005 alone.



\$ v. Brazilian Real (source IMF)

Boston Consulting Group (BCG) and Capgemini produce annual reports on the fast-growing wealth of the world's so-called 'high net-worth individuals' (HNWIs). BCG data indicates that half a million households (1.2% of the 45 million households in Brazil) possess net investible assets of \$250,000 or more, over \$1tr in all. According to Cap Gemini, 109,000 Brazilian households own over \$1m in financial assets.

As with other rich Latin Americans, the Brazilian elite keeps the great bulk of its wealth offshore, from where it is allocated to investments of various types around the world. Cap Gemini reported that "Latin America is the only region... in which HNWI's prefer to send their investments elsewhere rather than place them in domestic markets: wealthy Latin Americans allocate only 28% of their assets to domestic holdings and send 42% of their assets to North America." According to Capgemini, Brazilians with more than \$1m to invest saw their combined wealth grow by \$378bn from 2001-2006. During this period, Brazil's GDP rose by just \$77bn.. The rapid increase in the wealth of the super-rich, a world-wide phenomenon, is more the result of bubble-growth of asset values than it is of increased profits.

two. Through debt markets and stock markets, productive capitals are bound hand and foot to finance capital. Petrobras, Brazil's 'state oil monopoly' is an eloquent example. Just 32.5% of its shares are owned by the government, while 40% have been sold on Wall Street to foreign or expatriate investors. Petrobras also owes \$20bn in corporate bonds, reducing still further the real size of the government's stake. In 2005, the Brazilian private sector owed \$130bn to domestic creditors, up from \$50bn in 2001, while its external debt reached \$106bn. Foreign and offshore private investors also dominate Brazil's stock market and have made vast fortunes from the quadrupling of share prices during Da Silva's presidency.

As well as servicing their own debts, the cost of servicing public debt contributes to crippling rates of taxation on domestic producers. A recent World Bank survey of 13 Brazilian states calculated the average tax burden upon companies to be 147% of their gross profit. The result is endemic tax-avoidance and the pushing of many domestic businesses into the informal economy, estimated to provide 42% of Brazil's GDP and more than half of all jobs.

sovereign debt soared to \$409bn, equivalent to 50% of GDP, up from \$247bn two years earlier – a 30% increase, after adjusting for the appreciation of the Real. Total sovereign debt, the sum of the government's internal and external debt, totaled \$500bn at the end of 2005, virtually all of it owed to private investors.

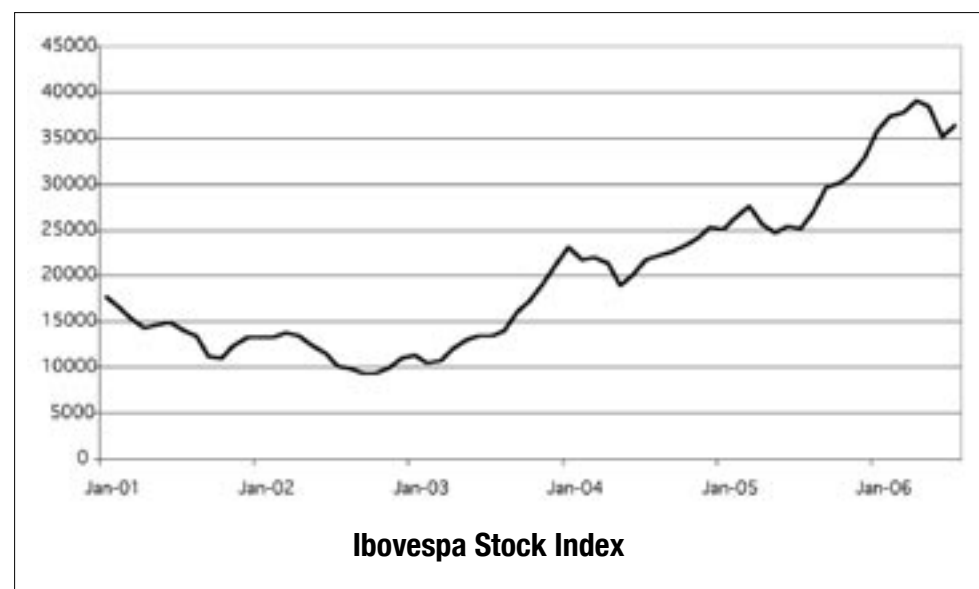
Brazil's domestic debt is exceeded among 'emerging nations' only by S Korea and China. S Korea's domestic debt exceeds 90% of GDP but most is owed by the private sector. Thailand and Malaysia have a similar profile, while Indonesia is like Brazil: 87% of its \$50bn domestic debt is owed by the government.

The Bank of Brazil reported in April 2006 that gross public debt equaled 72.3% of GDP; while net debt, obtained by subtracting official reserves and other financial assets, was 51.3%. Gross debt is important because each \$ and Real of it causes public money to stream into private purses, and because the rate of return on the government's assets is much lower than on the debts they're offset against. Furthermore, some of these 'financial assets' amount to little more

Conclusions

According to the IMF economists cited above, "the view that external debt is completely separable from domestically issued debt is dead wrong... foreigners hold increasingly large amounts of the domestically issued debt of governments of emerging markets, and their residents increasingly hold instruments issued by governments in advanced economies"

Brazil's wealthy residents expatriate profits from their investments in government debt, just as foreign investors. They keep their hoards beyond Brazilian sovereignty, and if they are to be Brazilian than their northern friends. Much of the literature on globalisation argues or presumes that inter-imperialist rivalry has been superseded by the emergence of a 'transnational capitalist class', a view belied by the increasingly sharp political and economic conflicts between the US and Europe. However, a very different process of 'transnationalisation of the capitalist class' is well underway in the 'emerging nations' – the transnationalisation of 'native' finance capital-



Ibovespa Stock Index

than accounting tricks, e.g. \$50bn in the Labour Assistance Fund is counted, while unfunded pension liabilities are left off-balance sheet.

Domestic debt 'earns' a much higher interest rate than external debt. This is because domestic debt is issued in national currency; interest rates therefore contain a 'currency risk' premium to compensate for erosion in the debt's value through domestic inflation and/or currency devaluation. But instead of devaluing, the Real has appreciated by 67% against the dollar since 2003. FTMandate reported in March 2006: "Brazil's interest rates are still phenomenally high... monthly inflation to 10 February at 0.17%... hardly justifies 17.25% interest rates." The Brazilian government has laid on a feast for finance capitalists, and has even waived the entry fee. A February 2006 decree abolished a 15% income tax on foreign investments in domestic debt, rubber-stamped by the Brazilian senate four months later.

Capital flight remains a permanent danger. Increased government reserves are modest compared to the growth in short-term 'hot money' inflows. As one commentator ('Brazil Back in the Clutches of Capital Flight', by JP Gundzik, 16 June 2006) explains: "Brazil's official balance of payments statistics are not capturing the enormous amounts of foreign portfolio inflows that are essentially being conducted "off balance sheet". He reports that the stock of foreign portfolio investment in Brazil increased from \$30bn in 2004 to \$83bn by April 2006. "About 25% ... can be attributed to rising equity values. The remaining \$40bn of inflows represent new foreign portfolio investment into Brazil's equity market."

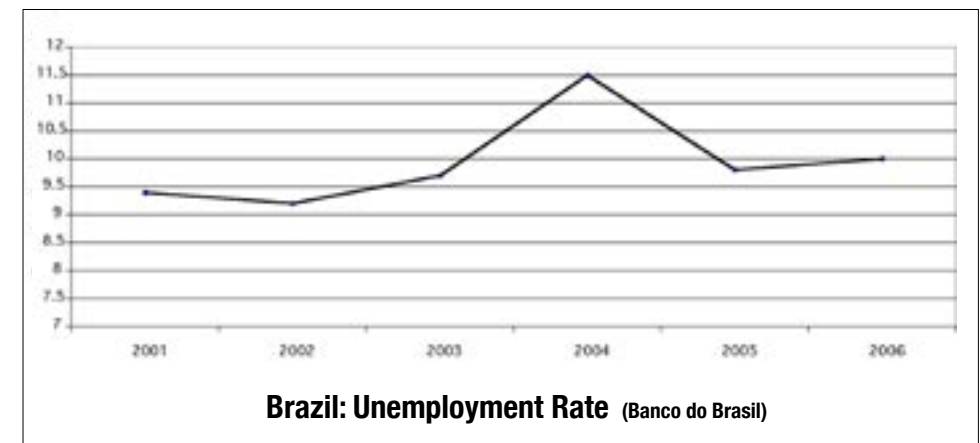
As foreign investors arrive by the plane-load, Brazil's internal asset markets are increasingly subject to their fickle moods. This is ironic, since the government has reduced external debt in order to decrease its dependence on these same foreign creditors.

ists, or more precisely their absorption into the imperialist finance capitals of US, Europe and Japan.

Brazil's debt now generates around \$1bn in weekly profits. But this is only one source of superprofits. As we have seen, foreign investors in Brazilian equities reaped \$13bn in profits from the increase in share prices in just one year, 2004. Dividend payments added billions more. The transnational corporations' \$200bn in direct investments generates at least another \$20bn in annual profits. And this takes no account of losses suffered by Brazil and other 'emerging nations' through unequal exchange in trade with the imperialist economies.

In 2002, da Silva was faced with a choice between submission to finance capitalists or a showdown with them. There was no middle road, no 'Plan B', as hoped for by da Silva's more radical supporters. Unlike in Venezuela, the gigantic size of Brazil's public debt far outweighed the capacity of any resources wind-fall to finance it. The alternative to submission was to suspend interest payments and demand debt 'restructuring', i.e. a write-off. The certain result: capital would have stampeded offshore, detonating a financial crisis of global reach.

A day of reckoning on the debt, and with the coalition of native and imperialist investors who rule Brazil, is both inevitable and necessary. Da Silva has succeeded in postponing this, but at the cost of demoralising and dispersing the powerful social movement which brought him to office and which could, under different political leadership, have provided Brazil's workers and farmers with the means to take possession of their country. Brazil's debt bondage negates its national sovereignty. Repudiating this debt is the prerequisite for Brazil's considerable weight to be put behind ALBA's challenge to imperialist domination of Latin America and the Caribbean.



Brazil: Unemployment Rate (Banco do Brasil)

Latin American HNWI's have invested 28% of their \$4.2tr, i.e. \$1.2tr., in their own countries, mainly in public debt. At the same time, Latin America is the destination for 7% of the \$33.3tr under the command of the world's HNWI's, or \$2.3tr. Non-Latin Americans, principally US, European and Japanese investors make up the difference, with some \$1.1tr in Latin American equities and government bonds.

Assuming that Brazilian HNWI's behave like others in the region, \$300bn of their \$1070bn is invested in domestic assets, most of this in government debt, indicating that around \$200bn of Brazil's domestic government debt, around half of it, is held by wealthy Brazilians. The remainder is held by foreign investors and by pension funds and other domestic institutions.

Our focus on the most parasitic and wealthy section of Brazil's ruling class, and the political power which ownership of debt and alliance with imperialist financiers confers upon them, shouldn't lead to a simplistic distinction between parasites and productive capitalists. 'Finance capital' is best understood as a fusion of the

The domestic debt explosion

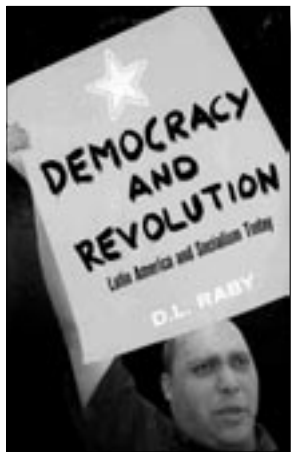
Domestic debt, public and private, in the 15 'emerging economies' that are home to more than 70% of the population of all such nations, has this year reached \$3.16tr, gaining 50% in two years. \$2.1tr of it is sovereign debt. This is almost exactly equal to the external debt owed by all 'emerging nations' which reached £3.2tr in 2006.

Three senior IMF economists (Reinhart, Rogoff & Savastano in Debt Intolerance, 2003) were the first to blow the whistle about "the rapid expansion in domestic, market-based debt" which in "a number of emerging market economies" has become "a trigger for generalized debt and financial crises". They warned that growing domestic debt "arguably overshadows progress... in containing their external debt burden", and concluded that "a wave of restructuring or outright default on domestic government debts looms large on the horizon for many emerging market economies".

In 2005, the Brazilian government's external debts drifted lower to \$88bn, while domestic

Reviews

Books



Democracy and Revolution: Latin America and Socialism Today
D.L. Raby
Pluto Press £18.99

This book stresses the originality of the Cuban and Venezuelan revolutions. Raby conceptualises Cuba and Venezuela as examples of "revolutionary states of popular power" (p65), her study combines empathy with deep historical knowledge, and for that alone it is worth careful study. But Raby's purpose goes beyond this, her ambition is nothing less than to displace the Russian revolution as the universal foundational experience of left wing politics, she seeks to find in the leadership, practice and ideology of the Cuban and Venezuelan revolutions a new paradigm for the 21st century.

The supporting argument is wide ranging, drawing theoretical support from four main sources: radical critiques of liberal democracy; the 'reformist' wing of the dependency school; discussion of populism as a

style of doing politics, and a democratic reading of Marx. The book considers aborted revolutions in Chile (realistic assessment), Nicaragua (excellent) and Portugal (contentious) to confirm:

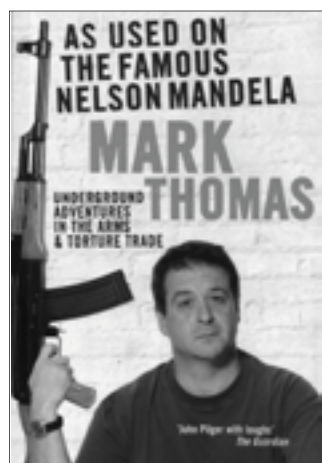
"the importance of broad popular unity, the need to overcome partisan divisions and sectarianism, the essential role of national popular culture and tradition, the need for ideological breadth of vision within the limits dictated by popular interests, and the crucial role of leadership." (p197)

In terms of political method, Raby is critical of both social democracy and the sectarianism of official Communist Parties, Trotskyists and Maoists as well, in fact all groups who lay claim to the Marxist-Leninist tradition. She attributes their failures to the orthodoxies of Marxism-Leninism. Nor does Raby agree with Holloway's view that it is sufficient to maintain autonomy without taking political power. Raby is for a vanguard leadership of the revolutionary process, but not a vanguard party. The key is for the leader to embrace and articulate popular culture in dialogue with the mass movement through mechanisms of participatory democracy. Without participatory democracy the revolution will fail.

Raby's innovation is to detect a specifically revolutionary-democratic variant of populism, a direct relationship bypassing institutions and parties, and to champion it. I would summarise her position as: neither Labour nor Lenin, but revolutionary populism.

While arguing for a different interpretation, I have learnt much from reading this erudite and impassioned book, a serious and highly welcome contribution that hopefully helps to raise the debate to a new level.

Andy Higginbottom



As Used On The Famous Nelson Mandela
Mark Thomas
Ebury Press £10.99

The first book by well known comedian/activist Mark Thomas is an amazing, funny and seriously concerning personal account investigating the arms and torture trade both undercover and un-covered provides one dark humoured book.

Surprisingly becoming an arms dealer seems an effortless feat with getting your new business cards being the hardest task before you're in the game, brokering your way around the law and conducting dodgy dealings with despotic regimes.

BAE Systems makes regular appearances throughout the book, including the sale of an outdated and overpriced military air-traffic control system to Tanzania, a deal so over the top that even the IMF and the World Bank oppose the deal? Everything here is coupled together with arming Mugabe, funding Saddam and retooling the Moroccan army to continue their occupation in Western Sahara.

The section on torture touches on the personal accounts of some British citizens arrested on false charges and later tortured: during this painful ordeal the victim remembers the hand cuffs that held him upright and induce sleep deprivation, more distinctively the 'Made in England' branded into the steel. Ironically, the British taxpayer subsidies this industry by around £13,106.30 per year per arms exports world this.

With all this unethical business New Labour introduces the new regulations on arms exports, followed by restrictions on brokering. For a moment this thought does take a while to accept, especially finding out the EU has adopted these groundbreaking policies too. It's at this point Thomas mentions the loopholes embedded in the regulations, and the no-punishment-just-a-slap-on-the-wrist that a company may get for breaking them, neatly added in by, Yes you guessed it, New Labour.

This book opens up the whole trade far beyond barrels and bullets, Hawk jets and Scorpion tanks. It's beyond humans rights, morality or ethics. It's also the cuffs used to hold in place torture victims and the lorries sold that later transport troops to and from a massacre, all with the pride of 'Made in England' stamped on the side. Last and most important it's the economics that dictates the trade.



Luz Estela Villarreal Muñoz

Luz Estela Villarreal, who died recently after a long battle with cancer, will be greatly missed by members of the Colombia Solidarity Campaign, particularly the Merseyside branch of which she was a leading member from its foundation in 2002, serving as its secretary for as long as health permitted. She was the heart and soul of Latin community activities on Merseyside and contributed tirelessly to the organisation of CSC events here, especially visits by Colombian trade unionists and social leaders.

Luz was a talented linguist who was fluent in English as well as having a good command of other languages including Romanian, having studied in that country in the 1980s. In

Colombia she was an active member of the University Lecturers' Union at the University of Córdoba, and at Liverpool University she taught Spanish courses and was working on a doctorate in modern languages until incapacitated by illness.

Among those visits to Liverpool were facilitated by Luz were Francisco Ramírez of the Colombian Mineworkers' Union Sintramincol, Carlos González of the University Workers' Union Sintraunicol and the Food and Beverage Union Sinaltrainal. Luz was very active in organising support for their campaigns against privatisation and against the activities of multinationals such as Coca-Cola, BP, Anglo-Gold and Nestlé.

Luz also participated in other campaigns such as Palestine Solidarity and the Stop the War Movement, attending rallies in London and Liverpool and motivating students to participate. She also did invaluable work at Refugee Action. She will be remembered above all for her warmth, generosity and humour, and her loss will be deeply felt by many people in this country and Colombia.

Diana Raby

Solidarity Shop

Killer Cola T-shirt

£10
S/M/L/XL
Black or Red

Killer-Cola in Colombia

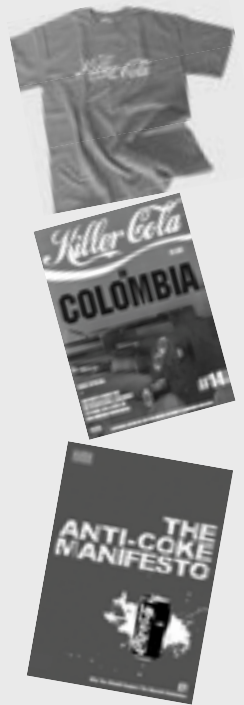
Information about coke's crimes in Colombia plus special delegation report.

Anti-Coke Manifesto

Everything you could possibly wish to know about reasons to boycott coca-cola
£1 plus 30p postage

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colombia_sc@hotmail.com

Cheques payable to:
Colombia Solidarity Campaign
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London, N17 6NZ



DVD

Another World Is Possible, Venezuela Today... The World Tomorrow?

by Gateshead UNISON

Julie Nicholson and Simon Hall of Gateshead UNISON have produced two DVD's that offer short but fascinating glimpses of the World Social Forum held in Caracas earlier this year and of the recent political changes in Venezuela.

Many films of this nature are often just a series of talking heads, but these DVD's inter-cut the spoken interventions with footage of demonstrations or of still photographs.

"Another World Is Possible" was filmed during the WSF and focuses mainly on the anti-war movement, climate change and multi-nationals, in particular the activities of the Coca-Cola Corporation in Colombia. There is much of interest here including spoken interventions from Cindy Sheehan, peace activist and mother of a US soldier killed in Iraq, and Phil Thornhill of the Campaign Against Climate Change.

The section on Coca-Cola is espe-

cially strong with contributions from Andy Higginbottom of the Colombia Solidarity Campaign, Edgar Paez of SINALTRAINAL (Colombian Food and Drink Workers Union), and from the comedian Mark Thomas and artist Tracy Moberly.

"Venezuela Today... The World Tomorrow?" really helps to bring to life the extraordinary changes happening in Venezuela by focusing on two events. Several workers at the INVEPAL paper company explain how a Government expropriation saved their jobs and about how INVEPAL is now co-managed between worker and state representatives. The other focus is the Juan Bautista Alberdi community school, taken over by parents, students and teachers when it was closed down by its anti-Chavez Director as part of the bosses lock-out in 2002. Important contributions from Orlando Chirino, one of the main leaders of the UNT (pro-Chavez union confederation), Rob Sewell from Hands Off Venezuela, and Jane Loftus from the Communications Workers Union and footage of the man himself, President Hugo Chavez, speaking at the WSF.

Matthew Stiles



A new DVD made by trade unionists and activists about the dramatic changes taking place in Venezuela.

Venezuela today... the world tomorrow?

Show it in your union branch or organisation as a way of raising this vital international issue.

The DVD is available from June 2006 simply by making a minimum donation to help with production costs:

Organisations (eg Trade Union branches): £20
Individuals £5.00

To order a copy or for more information contact:
Julie Nicholson on 07905737393



www.colombiasolidarity.org.uk

Activities

Events

First Thursday of the month

Movimientos presents...
 "A politically inspired night of Latin Rhythms, Tropical Funk & documentary films on Latin America"

@ the Salmon & Compass, 58 Penton Street (Corner of Chapel Market), Angel, Islington, London N1
 Music downstairs from 7pm:
 The finest in Afro-Latin, Cuban, Brazilian, Salsa, Hip Hop, Reggae, Cumbia, Mambo, Ska, Carioca & future Latin beats

Upstairs from 7pm: Films, photos, discussion and music focussing on a different aspect of Latin America each time. **FREE ENTRY!**

For more info contact movimientosuk@gmail.com or 07723 381303

Powerplay Launch Monthly Video Newsreel

Powerplay, the London based video activist group, are launching a new monthly video newsreel in October.

As the neoliberal system causes ever greater atrocities around the world in its push to secure the world's resources for the rich, this newsreel aims to link struggles around the world, providing information for activists that won't be seen on the telly - from the war in the middle east, to the inspirational movements in Latin America, to the growing struggle against privatisation and casualisation here and in Europe.

The newsreel is envisaged as something that people in all the different movements can use and contribute to, so please contact us with footage of actions, campaigns, strikes etc., or ideas that you want us to cover.

For more information, contact Shaun at shaundey@artserve.net, or ring 07779 109 628.

Online

www.fernandoarias.org

Re-erection Day
 See what happened when a 'flash mob' arrived outside the Colombia Consulate on 28 May. A special art performance took place then... "I'm a police officer, I tell you what to do... Stop the camera now! Do you wanna get nicked?"



Talks

10 October
Massacres, Extrajudicial Killings, Violent Displacement of Afro-Colombian Communities and Destruction of one of the Richest Bio-Diverse areas of the world

St. Ethelberga's Centre for Peace and Reconciliation

7pm - 9:30pm 10 October 2006 at 78, Bishopsgate, London EC2

Speakers include: Liliana Uribe Tirado - Prominent Human Rights Lawyer

Henry Ramirez Soler - Comisión Interclesial Justicia v Paz



Naka Mandinga and Maria Encina in London earlier this year

Andy Dockett

African descendants

Judith Amanthis and Mia Eisenstadt

"In 1956 I was baptised with the name of Jorge Isa, but I came to realise that my antecedents had been kidnapped from the west of Africa, from a territory that is now principally occupied by the state of Mali, but which had been part of the old kingdom of Mandinga. For this reason I changed my name to Naka Mandinga. I am a descendant of Africa, who lives now in the territorial occupied by the state of Colombia, but I feel myself to be an African descendant independently of which country I am in."

Naka Mandinga

Naka and Maria came to Europe in June to spread awareness of the vibrancy and richness of their culture whilst at the same time seek solidarity and understanding of the oppression that they face and fight in Colombia. The UK leg of the tour was organized by Colombia Solidarity with the cooperation of Professor Peter Wade of Manchester University, African Liberation Support Campaign (ALISC) Network, Global Women's Strike and Cuba Solidarity

Campaign branches in Sheffield and North London. African descendant Colombians are 11 million, 25% of the population. After Brazil and the USA, Colombia has the highest proportion of Africans in the Americas. Most have lived in the northwest and Pacific coast region between the sea and the mountains since 1851, when chattel slavery was abolished. Naka and Maria emphasised that their foreparents were free Africans who were forced into slavery by the imperialists.

The slave owners kept people who spoke the same language apart, and in this way Africans lost their mother tongues - Mandinga, Yoruba, Swahili and others. But African Colombians, with the help of their indigenous and mixtos friends, have created a distinct way of life and are fighting for the right to maintain that culture in their ancestral region.

Maria and Naka are members of the Process of Black Communities (PCN), which is one section of the broad social movement in Colombia. The PCN is a network of 83 groups, each with its own objectives, for

example, health care, education, economic welfare, the development of art. 4 million African Colombians are in fighting organisations. The PCN's immediate aim is to create an autonomous region for Africans in Colombia to govern themselves. This means also defending their region from multinational invasion and fighting for basic necessities like health care. They insist that each people has different basic necessities, specific to their needs.

They lay great emphasis on educating their young people about their history, culture and their struggle. They use different art forms, especially music and dance, and encourage young people to join organisations. It doesn't matter if PCN activists are seen as mad. Their aim is to combat the psychological oppression which has destroyed their African identity. Literacy is vital. The slave owners kept slaves illiterate to stop them fighting slavery. The government is doing the same today.

Full report from ALISC-NW9 3YR, PO Box 21266, London W9 3YR. Email nkexplo@yahoo.co.uk

FLA Office Appeal

The co-operative office our editorial team shared for the first three issues of Frontline has closed. This fourth issue has been produced in emergency circumstances, which are not sustainable. We appeal to all our readers to help us fund a basic office of our own, which can be done for £5,000.

If you want to make a contribution, why not help financially? As well as individual contributions we encourage supporters to hold fundraising events, cultural or anything that works.

Please send make cheque payable to "Colombia Solidarity Campaign", write "Office Appeal" on the reverse side, and send to: Colombia Solidarity Campaign, PO Box 8446, London N17 6NZ

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London Branch

Public Meetings:

Fourth Thursday of the month
 All at Union Tavern, 52, Lloyd Baker St, WC1 (nearest tubes Kings Cross, Russel Square, Farringdon, Angel)
 From 7pm to 8pm DVDs - 8pm Speaker and discussion topic:

Thursday 28 September

What now in Colombia?
 Emilio Rodriguez and Arturo Garcia

Thursday 27 October

British Mining Corporations
 Paul Dowling and Richard Solly

Thursday 23 November *tb*

Bristol Branch

Public Meetings:

Wednesday evenings, alternating admin meetings with reading groups and discussion on Colombia and related issues.

Upcoming Bristol events:

Please contact the Bristol branch for future events and meetings. They can be contacted on the following email address:
bristolcolombiasolidarity@gmail.com

Oxford Branch

Tuesday 3 October

British Mining Corporations in Colombia
 (The Town Hall, St Aldates, 7:30)
 Richard Solly will have just returned from a human rights observation trip to Colombia and campaigns on Latin American mining issues and indigenous rights.

The Oxford branch meets on the first Tuesday of every month in the East Oxford Community Centre. Contact Peter Bearder for confirmation on ox_colombiasolidarity@hotmail.co.uk

Other Branches

South Wales: Max Fuller
max.fuller@bopenworld.com

Liverpool Paul Grunnill
Paul.grunnill@bopenworld.com

Scotland: Barbara Scott
Barbara@barbarascott.co.uk

Nottingham :
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Plymouth
tstaunton@aol.com

Violento desalojo en Aguabalca

Caleb Harris

Mientras nos hallábamos parados en la esquina de una calle polvorienta, dos jóvenes corrían apresurados, uno de ellos llevando una pistola. Era sorprendente ver como brillaba con el sol ardiente. Estábamos en uno de los vecindarios más pobres de Colombia, el Distrito de Aguablanca en el suroeste de la ciudad de Cali. Muchos de los vecindarios de Aguablanca en un comienzo fueron invasiones. Estas rodean la mayoría de las ciudades latinoamericanas. Los vecindarios están poblados por millones de personas quienes solo pueden soñar con tener una casa, así sea con la renta más baja. Comprar una casa es imposible para los pobres, los desempleados, para quienes no tienen voz, quienes son con frecuencia una mayoría invisible en Colombia. En tales condiciones, ellos escogen una tierra baldía e inactiva y construyen casas ordinarias para sus familias. Algunas veces estas invasiones evolucionan y con los años se convierten en comunidades normales, oficialmente reconocidas, pero a menudo estas no son reconocidas como lo veremos con desconcertante detalle. En Aguablanca, ocasionalmente se presentan conflictos entre las pandillas, como suele ocurrir en las áreas pobres, donde muchos jóvenes no tienen ninguna aspiración, salvo el poder efímero ganado a través de la droga y las armas. Pero también existe otro tipo de violencia, una más insidiosa y terrible, ésta viste de traje y corbata en vez de los Nikes y la cachucha de béisbol (o un camuflaje disimulado). Yo estaba visitando Aguablanca con Johan, un fotógrafo suizo,



para conocer sobre el más reciente ejemplo de una violencia oficial. Entre los efectos más severos de la vieja pero todavía sangrienta guerra civil, el país tiene la segunda más alta población de refugiados internos después de Sudán. Ellos son conocidos como PID, Personas Internamente Desplazadas. Johan y yo estábamos en camino para reunirnos con alguna gente llamada con el neutral pero despectivo término: desplazados. Después de construir casas improvisadas en terrenos públicos baldíos en Aguablanca, más de 1.200 familias, la mayoría desplazadas, habían vivido en su nuevo asentamiento, llamado Brisas del Bosque, por cuatro meses. Entonces los líderes de la ciudad de Cali decidieron que ellos necesitaban el terreno para el desarrollo. De tal manera instruyeron el Escuadrón Móvil Antidisturbios o policía de choque, ESMAD, para que llegaran a la comunidad a las 2am de junio 16 y sacar la gente a la calle con gases lacrimógenos y bolillos. Luego la policía procedió a quemar las casas con todas las pertenencias adentro y como si fuera poco, aplanaron con bulldózers lo que quedó.

Durante el ataque, un niño de seis meses murió al quedar expuesto a los gases lacrimógenos, una joven madre embarazada perdió su bebé y muchos hombres, mujeres y niños resultaron heridos. Johan y yo llegamos doce días después. Unas 300 familias aún estaban viviendo bajo plásticos y cartones en una calle cercana. Hablé con el líder de la Junta de Acción Comunal, Gerson Alfredo Sánchez, él dijo: 'Todo el mundo estaba durmiendo. El escuadrón de la policía arrojó gases lacrimógenos. Nosotros corrimos y ellos nos golpearon con bolillos. Arrestaron a los líderes comunitarios para silenciar la resistencia, pero los dejaron en libertad, sin cargos, horas

más tarde. Muchos resultaron heridos y nosotros perdimos todo lo que teníamos.' Gerson añadió: 'La realidad es que nosotros no tenemos ningún otro sitio donde vivir ni dinero para pagar la renta, por eso es que tenemos que vivir aquí. Y ahora estamos en la calle.' El bebé que murió durante el ataque se llamaba Luis Angel Riasco Cuero. Su padre, Harold Riasco me dijo: 'No hubo advertencia, nada. Luego sentimos las lágrimas que salían por la acción de los gases y el bebé empezó a asfixiarse. Pensamos que si corríamos seríamos golpeados por el escuadrón. Así que le pusimos un trapo mojado en su cara y esperamos. A las 11:30am el bebé murió aquí en la calle.' Más de 50 hombres, mujeres y niños hicieron cola por varias horas bajo el ardiente sol de la tarde para contarnos sus historias. Yaneth Arroyo Martínez tiene un niño de tres años y dos mellizos de un año y estaba embarazada con el cuarto, antes de perderlo durante el ataque. Ella dijo: 'Ellos me cogieron y me golpearon. Me tiraron al piso. Esto es como una guerra hacia la gente. Yo fui al hospital pero perdí mi bebé.'

Jair Antonio Urbano y su señora Diana Calvo Quintero tienen un hijo de siete meses. Jair dijo: 'Ellos le pegaron a mi mujer en la cara. Ella cayó al canal de aguas sucias con el bebé en sus brazos, el niño bebió esa agua mala y se enfermó. Casi se muere.' El hombre dijo que tenía un mensaje para el gobierno: 'Por favor no ataque la gente. Nosotros somos pobres, pero somos seres humanos. Necesitamos vivienda y trabajo.' Fue esta una experiencia intensa y estremecedora, escuchar historia tras historia, de todo lo que se le puede quitar a usted, cuando ya usted no tiene nada.

*Caleb Harris [calebdch@yahoo.co.nz] Para más información ver la exhibición on-line www.accessallareas.org/aguablanca

Violencia Antisindical

Domingo Tovar Arrieta
Director departamento DHH y solidaridad

La violencia contra el movimiento sindical en Colombia es producto del modelo de desarrollo capitalista con la aplicación de una estrategia económica que favorece a las empresas transnacionales y a los grandes empresarios colombianos, que consideran como un enemigo a los procesos organizativos de los trabajadores y las trabajadoras, violando un derecho constitucional, el de asociación y financiando la guerra para aplicarla a los conflictos laborales.

El uso de la violencia contra el movimiento sindical en Colombia es uno de los rasgos más característicos de la historia del sindicalismo en el país. Su prolongada presencia e insidiosa manifestación ha llevado al sindicalismo hacia una dramática y alarmante crisis humanitaria; para nadie es desconocido que Colombia, ha terminado por consolidarse como el lugar más peligroso del mundo para realizar el ejercicio de asociación sindical, pese a los múltiples informes de derechos humanos denunciando la situación, a las observaciones de organizaciones internacionales de DDHH. Este desolador panorama sigue cobrando sus víctimas, instaurando su terror y prolongando una sistemática ley de impunidad y silencio. Desde 1991 hasta la fecha han sido asesinados 2.201 trabajadores y trabajadoras sindicalizados, se han registrado 3.172 amenazas de muerte y 187 trabajadores han sido desaparecidos.

Las violaciones al derecho a la vida contra miembros de organizaciones sindicales en hechos no relacionados con el conflicto armado, es decir en su casa, en la calle o en su lugar de trabajo, en los casos en los cuales se pudo identificar el presunto autor genérico, el 83.54% de los hechos fueron realizados por agentes estatales: por perpetración directa el 1.74%, por omisión y/o tolerancia o apoyo a los grupos paramilitares el 81.88%; a las guerrillas se le atribuye la autoría del 16.37%. En el primer gobierno de Álvaro Uribe Vélez fueron asesinados 356 sindicalistas en Colombia, cifra que incluye afiliados, dirigentes y activistas. El promedio mensual de víctimas de sindicalistas muertos o desaparecidos ha aumentado a lo largo del periodo, a causa de la violencia antisindical, antes era de 3 mensuales hoy son 5 mensuales. Vale resaltar la ejecución extrajudicial de 3 dirigentes sindicales de la subdirectiva CUT Arauca el 5 de agosto de 2004 a manos de miembros de la fuerza pública (ejército), contraviniendo las diferentes versiones y montajes efectuados por el gobierno pretendiendo involucrarlos como miembros de una organización insurgente. Las mujeres y los niños así como la población adulta son de los temas que más llaman la atención; las víctimas de esta violencia, han sido observadas como víctimas de un conflicto armado indiscriminado o como víctimas accidentales de la violencia ejercida y dirigida contra el movimiento sindical. En último término, en el aumento de la violencia contra las mujeres, es el desplazamiento de las violaciones hacia todo el núcleo familiar que compromete además la integridad de las personas que no pertenecen al movimiento sindical.

(Extracto del informe derechos humanos, solución política, acuerdos humanitarios vs seguridad democrática - impunidad)
Bogotá, d. C., 22 de Agosto de 06

Tributo a Luz Estela Villareal



Luz Estela Villareal, murió recientemente después una lucha intensa contra el cáncer, ella será muy extrañada por los miembros de la campaña de solidaridad por Colombia, particularmente por el branch de Merseyside en el cual ella fue activista y líder desde sus inicios. En el 2002, trabajó como secretaria hasta que su salud se lo permitió, Luz fue el corazón y espíritu de la comunidad latinoamericana en Merseyside.

Luz era una lingüística muy talentosa, ella era fluente en inglés y de otros idiomas incluyendo Rumano, en Colombia ella fue miembro activa del sindicato de profesores de la Universidad de Córdoba, y también, fue miembro activa del sindicato de la Universidad de Liverpool donde ella trabajó como profesora de Español.

Luz participó en otras campañas de solidaridad como la de Palestina, la campaña en contra de la guerra (Stop the War Movement) atendió marchas en Londres y Liverpool, estimulaba a sus estudiantes a participar en ellas, Luz también hizo trabajo invaluable en Refuge Action.

Luz Estela será siempre recordada por todo lo mencionado y por su fraternidad, generosidad y humor. Su pérdida ha sido sentida por muchas personas en este país y Colombia.

Diana Raby
Presidenta, CSC Merseyside

Guerra en el oriente, Guerran en occidente

Una de las características esenciales de este modelo económico es la continua súper explotación de los pueblos del "Tercer Mundo", que aglutina a la mayoría de los ciudadanos del mundo.

"Seamos honestos, la política internacional del gobierno británico no cambia gran parte dentro de un partido, e inclusive entre los partidos... porque nuestros intereses nacionales son continuos y permanentes". Lord Powell, antiguo consejero de la señora Thatcher, John Major y Tony Blair.

"La solidaridad es la ternura de los pueblos" Ernesto 'Che' Guevara.

Si cambiando el Primer Ministro no cambia la política de nuestro país, como Powell admite con completa franqueza, ¿cuál es entonces la razón de las elecciones? Parecería que el pueblo en Gran Bretaña no dice nada sobre lo que "nuestro" gobierno hace alrededor del mundo.

Si no es la voluntad del pueblo, ¿cuál es entonces el principio guía de la política internacional del Reino Unido? Desde casi todo ángulo, la alianza con USA es la piedra de toque para el consenso del establecimiento. Y esta

orientación 'Atlantista' es sostenida por los intereses de las corporaciones multinacionales británicas: siendo las de mayores utilidades las corporaciones petroleras (BP y Shell), los bancos y conglomerados de seguros, el sector minero (BHP-Billiton, Anglo-American y RioTinto), telecomunicaciones, fármacos y agro-industria.

Una de las características esenciales de este modelo económico es la continua súper explotación de los pueblos del "Tercer Mundo", que aglutina a la mayoría de los ciudadanos del mundo. En este contexto, la única forma de ejercer la democracia y expresar nuestra solidaridad humana, es la movilización contra la ocupación neo-colonial que se adelanta en nuestro nombre, por cualquier partido de gobierno, y contra las multinacionales cuyos rapaces intereses, fundamentalmente conducen la política de guerra británica. Entonces veremos cuan 'continuo y permanente' es realmente su dominio.

La Campaña de Solidaridad por Colombia fue fundada hace cinco años

para protestar contra la intervención militar de USA en Colombia. Como una campaña anti-imperialista, nos sumamos a la acertada condena de la ocupación de Afganistán, Irak, Palestina y Líbano y, a la amenaza de invasión de Irán, por parte del actual bete noir de Bush.

Como parte del movimiento internacional para cesar la guerra en los pueblos del Medio Oriente, nosotros llamamos la atención sobre las 'otras guerras de América', la prolongada, algunas veces abierta, pero más a menudo, sucia, encubierta guerra de USA contra los pueblos de Colombia y Latinoamérica. Ellos también necesitan nuestro apoyo. Únase a nosotros en solidaridad con ellos, con la esperanza de que el futuro brille para el real continente americano.

¡Fuera Estados Unidos de Colombia y el Medio Oriente!
¡No más guerra por Petróleo!

Ganó la derecha neoliberal en Colombia

Arturo García

al más alto nivel del gobierno de Uribe Vélez. Horacio Serpa, tres veces candidato a la presidencia por el oficialismo Liberal y uno de sus principales opositores en las dos últimas campañas presidenciales, sucumbió a la tentación de la repartija burocrática, aceptando el cargo de embajador Colombiano en la Organización de los Estados Americanos (OEA), con lo que sepultó sus posibilidades de llegar al poder, pues perdió toda credibilidad política y moral ante el electorado. Esto quedó reflejado en una estrepitosa derrota en las pasadas elecciones.

Lo mismo sucedió con el expresidente conservador Andrés Pastrana, quien de ser un ácido contradictor de las políticas de "seguridad democrática" y la nefasta "Ley de Justicia y Paz" que blindó a los paramilitares contra la acción de la justicia, fue seducido con el cargo de embajador Colombiano en los Estados Unidos. Vendidos sus principios morales y su autoridad de jefe natural del Partido Conservador por un plato de lentejas en Washington, su colectividad prácticamente desapareció del mapa político como partido y sus principales dirigentes - nacionales y locales - se deslizaron sin ningún pudor (característica propia de los oportunistas de oficio) hacia las huestes uribistas. Al fin de cuentas, estaban cambiando de forma, pero no de fondo, pues si

alguien encarnaba la ideología ultra reaccionaria del anquilosado y caduco Partido Conservador, ese era, ni más ni menos, que Álvaro Uribe Vélez.

Por otra parte, uno de los factores decisivos en la aplastante victoria electoral del Presidente Uribe, es la generosidad excesiva que ha mostrado a lo largo de su vida pública y, particularmente, en sus primeros cuatro años como presidente de Colombia con los grupos paramilitares.

Es de todos sabido que la "ley de Justicia y Paz" es un esperpento jurídico diseñado para legalizar el paramilitarismo y garantizar una impunidad feliz a costa del dolor, el sufrimiento y despojo a las víctimas de masacres, torturas y desapariciones. Además desplazamiento forzado de la población y otras violaciones grotescas a la Constitución Nacional y al Derecho Internacional Humanitario. Todo esto se ha conseguido mediante una labor sistemática de amedrantamiento y terror generalizado de la población civil, el señalamiento de líderes populares, sindicalistas, periodistas y defensores de derechos humanos como colaboradores o simpatizantes de la guerrilla.

Si los luchadores del movimiento popular son mostrados en los medios mediáticos oficiales como delincuentes y enemigos del pueblo, y a los genocidas de la talla de los Mancuso, los Jorges 40 y otros expertos de la motosierra se les



Wilson Borja

trata como héroes, paseando orondos en sus propios helicópteros y en la camioneta presidencial en la Costa Atlántica, entonces estamos hablando de un terrorismo de estado, que endosa su trabajo sucio al paramilitarismo para que haga campaña política armada a favor de su benefactor, obligando a la población, a votar por este y a impedir el apoyo a los movimientos de oposición. Esto es lo que se denunció en las elecciones de 2002. Un escandaloso fraude electoral a escala nacional que permitió a Uribe ganar la presidencia en la primera vuelta y a un buen número de curules en el Senado y la Cámara de reconocidos representantes del narco-paramilitarismo en Colombia. Ya existe una demanda ante la Fiscalía y la Procuraduría nacionales para que anule las elecciones de 2006 de los órganos del poder legislativo, pues se alega un fraude de proporciones vergonzosas, como resultado del poder corruptor del dinero del narcotráfico y las amenazas a los electores de los grupos paramilitares, que aunque supuestamente en su mayoría se han desmovilizado, su estructura militar sigue intacta y han continuado su tarea criminal de acallar la oposición. Han cambiado sus nombres pero usan las mismas modalidades bárbaras que los ha caracterizado. Por último, la gran prensa nacional se

puso al servicio incondicional de la campaña de Uribe con un servilismo que raya en la mediocridad, pues en la práctica, casi todos los medios se pusieron a la orden de una información mediática que hablara, escribiera y mostrara la imagen mesiánica del jefe, al tiempo que negaban la igualdad de participación en los medios a que tenían derecho los demás candidatos. Así pues, se edificó el mito infalible, la percepción virtual, de que Uribe encarnaba la panacea de la falsa democracia colombiana. Carlos Gaviria Díaz, el candidato por el Polo Democrático Alternativo (PDA), fue catalogado por Uribe como un comunista disfrazado de demócrata que entregaría el país a la Guerrilla. Uribe acudió a los medios más burdos para descalificar a sus adversarios políticos, pero no tuvo el valor, la gallardía y la capacidad para enfrentarse a sus opositores en los debates televisados.

Fue pues, con todas estas urdimbres maquiavélicas, con el arte de la mentira, la fabricación de estadísticas amañadas y acciones rastreras, como el señor Uribe Vélez se hizo reelegir para otros cuatro años. Cuatro años de represión contra la oposición política, violación de los derechos humanos, crímenes de lesa humanidad y mayor polarización de la sociedad colombiana.

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USA fuera de Colombia y Medio Oriente!

Ganó la derecha neoliberal en Colombia

Arturo Garcia

Con una abrumadora mayoría fue reeligido Álvaro Uribe como presidente de Colombia para el periodo 2006-2010. Con 7,363.297 sufragios (63% de los votos), más de un millón de los obtenidos cuando fue elegido por primera vez en 2002. A pesar del triunfalismo con que la derecha colombiana recibió los resultados, el verdadero ganador de los comicios fue el abstencionismo ya histórico de los colombianos, un 60% en esta ocasión.

El inesperado aumento de la votación a favor de Uribe podría explicarse en una campaña que de manera subrepticia adelantaron Uribe y sus acólitos desde los inicios de su primer mandato. En esta campaña abundaron todo tipo de prebendas y favores políticos para los miembros del Congreso de la República: ministros, altos funcionarios de Estado, cuerpos diplomáticos, dirigentes regionales además de otras figuras de la política nacional y regional que fueron comprados, como en cualquier feria de pueblo, con puestos públicos y pedazos de la gran torta nacional. Tomemos solo tres casos que son suficientemente ilustrativos del poder de corrupción

continuación en pagina 2e



El aparente fracaso del Plan Colombia

Robert Green

El Plan Colombia, la 'guerra contra las drogas' patrocinada por USA, lanzado por el presidente Bill Clinton en 2000, supuestamente reduciría a la mitad la producción de cocaína en cinco años. Sin embargo, después de seis años y \$5 billones de dólares (que es el programa mas grande de gasto militar de USA a parte del Medio Oriente) es muy obvio que en sus declarados términos anti-narcóticos ha sido una estrategia fundamentalmente errónea. La preocupación de que las cosas no estén dándose de acuerdo a los planes, se refleja en la prensa oficial de los Estados Unidos y el Reino Unido.

El *New York Times* (19 de agosto de 2006), que por largo tiempo ha apoyado la intervención, ha informado que allí existe la misma área cultivada con coca hoy, que cuando el Plan Colombia empezó. Un claro indicativo de la continuación del ingreso ha sido la caída en los precios de la cocaína en los Estados Unidos y Europa. Solo que los cultivos de coca son ahora más pequeños, dispersos y en áreas

más remotas. Para destruir el mismo número de plantas de coca de antes, se requiere la fumigación de tres veces el número de hectáreas sembradas. Lo que no se ha reportado es la consecuente y acumulativa degradación ambiental.

Hay un punto incómodo en *The Cocaine Jungle* de BBC World, cuando William Wood, embajador de Estados Unidos en Bogotá, se le presenta la evidencia de que el Plan Colombia está exacerbando el desplazamiento de campesinos de poblados enteros. Él no tiene nada que decir. ¿Qué podría decir él cuando sabe que es una verdad innegable que hay casi cuatro millones de refugiados internos, desalojados de sus casas? El programa reporta que los paramilitares derechistas de las Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia AUC, controlan el 70% de la producción colombiana de cocaína, más de la mitad del suministro mundial. Las AUC han acordado, con el presidente Uribe, 'desmobilizarse', en intercambio por la inmunidad

contra la extradición a los Estados Unidos y con la garantía de que conserven sus fortunas y se conviertan en barones civiles de la droga.

De hecho, como lo demostramos en esta publicación las 'desmobilizadas' AUC todavía tienen acceso a fondos y armas y han creado un sistema estructural de asesinatos en las ciudades (ver artículo sobre Barrancabermeja). Quizás se ha aplicado el criterio equivocado al Plan Colombia y los Estados Unidos no tienen intención de terminar la producción de cocaína: en cambio, en complicidad con el gobierno colombiano, los fondos del Plan Colombia se están desviando a los principales beneficiarios en que se ha convertido la contrainsurgencia urbana. En verdad, el 29 de agosto el embajador Wood ratificó el apoyo de los Estados Unidos a la 'desmobilización', entregando otros \$2 millones para facilitar el proceso. El Plan Colombia no ha fracasado, al contrario sus objetivos se han revelado

