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Raising the Alarm on Haiti

by Brian Concannon Jr., Esq.

[Ed. Note: This article is crucial. If you're reading the print version and would like to use the hyperlinks please send us your e-mail address and we'll subscribe you as an e-reader so you will be able to follow these references.]

Haiti's President, Rene Préval, won a landslide victory in February 2006 that handed him a clear mandate for progressive economic and social policies. Yet this electoral mandate is severely limited by the realities on the ground, especially an "International Community" determined to reduce the influence of Haiti's progressive Lavalas movement, including UN Peacekeepers willing to use lethal force to control Lavalas strongholds. Much of Haiti's government- especially the police force and the justice system- is still controlled by appointees of the unconstitutional Interim Government of Haiti (IGH) that Préval's administration replaced.

Haiti's last elected President, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, is still in exile in South Africa, but is never far from anyone's mind. Aristide's February 2004 overthrow is a lesson to Préval of the consequences of defying the international community. His potential return is a rallying point for both Haiti's poor, who want him back because they believe he can crystallize and energize the progressive movement, and for Haiti's elites and their international allies, who want him excluded for the same reason.

President Préval has not implemented many progressive policies, which has generated substantial frustration among Haiti's poor, the majority of whom



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support Lavalas. Haitians understand the limitations imposed on the President, and do not expect immediate, sweeping changes. But as Préval's first anniversary in office approaches, there is a growing consensus that he could be doing more, especially in replacing the public employees installed by the IGH, freeing political prisoners, and reigning in the worst of MINUSTAH's abuses.

President Préval has failed to replace public employees installed by the IGH at all levels, including local political appointees, workers in state-owned enterprises, police, prosecutors, judges and even ambassadors. This causes a double frustration among Préval's grassroots supporters, because they know that the IGH holdovers will not promote progressive policies, and the holdovers are taking desperately needed jobs from progressives (some of whom were illegally fired from jobs by the IGH).



Although the Préval administration managed to free several prominent political prisoners in its first months in office, the IGH's judges (many of whom, including half of the supreme court, were appointed illegally) and its prosecutors continue to persecute Lavalas activists - over 100 political prisoners remain in jail. Others, including former Prime Minister Yvon Neptune and activist priest Rev. Gerard Jean-Juste, are out of prison on provisional releases, but have political cases still hanging over their heads. At the same time, the justice system has made no effort to pursue those responsible for the attacks by the IGH and its allies against pro-democracy activists, or even to re-arrest the prison escapees who had been convicted of human rights violations under Haiti's 1991-1994 military dictatorship.

Haitians blame their President for this state of affairs, but they blame the international community even more. U.S. Embassy communiqués show a shocking insistence that MINUSTAH crack down harder against Lavalas neighborhoods (even while conceding that MINUSTAH fired over 22,000 rounds in one Cite Soleil raid). Documents from the Canadian government confirm that CIDA, Canada's version of USAID, is financing an organization to pursue the persecution of Yvon Neptune- a "human rights" group whose own parent organization in the U.S. formally disowned it for participating in persecution.

Outlook: Over the coming months, frustration will impel Haiti's grassroots groups into the streets to demonstrate for progressive policies. Both Préval and MINUSTAH will be placed under increasing pressure to suppress the demonstrations, which could lead to a new cycle of violence.

(The author is Director of the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti. www.HaitiJustice.org.)

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Solidarity through Action: Opposing U.S. intervention in Colombia

- by Doug Michel and Tom Burke

For those in social justice movements Colombia is a dangerous place. For trade unionists Colombia serves as "the most dangerous country" in the world. Its government, under the fable of the "oldest democracy in Latin America," serves as the most repressive regime in South America.

The Colombia Action Network (CAN) was formed in 2001, opposing the US military aid package called "Plan Colombia." Plan Colombia is an extension of neo-liberal policy that aims to suppress trade unionists, student organizers, peasant activists, and those who fight for social justice. The CAN stands as a solidarity organization committed to supporting these progressive movements under the principle of Colombian self-determination. The CAN opposes any and all U.S. aid to the Colombian government.

In summer 2006, the CAN sent a human rights delegation to Colombia. Hosted by FENSUAGRO, a nationwide peasant union, the group traveled to various regions observing the conditions of peasants and workers. In the Southwest, the delegation met with a community of peasants (campesinos) who were summing up their most recent demonstration from May.

This strike and occupation of the Pan-American Highway by tens of thousands, called for basic necessities - drinkable water, usable roads to reach markets, accessible health care, housing, and electricity. Yet, their communities were terrorized, people were "disappeared," and some were killed by paramilitary thugs and the Colombian military. This was only one of the eyewitness accounts of the delegation, and many other union workers explained the dangers and hardships of organizing under the oppressive Colombian government.

Since the delegation, CAN members have returned to their hometowns to host community presentations and campus teach-ins to build solidarity with the Colombian people. American solidarity activists must demand an end to US intervention in the region, and support the Colombian people's social movements for justice.

At the School of the Americas Watch demonstration in November, the CAN mobilized members from across the nation. Handing out leaflets, fliers, and news



Co-author Doug Michel (second from left) and the rest of the CAN 2006 delegation with leaders of FENSUARGRO in Popoyan.

articles, we engaged people about the crisis facing the Colombian people.

It is clear that Plan Colombia is failing. The US is in a situation growing more difficult to sustain by the day. Colombian Senators, Military Officers, and high-ranking government officials have been exposed for signing contracts with and working for narco-trafficking paramilitaries. President Uribe's own brother, a Senator, is part of the dirty dealing. These extra-legal death squads are active and encouraged publicly by President Uribe to kill his political opponents. Despite all this, the Bush White House supports the Uribe government.

The newest form of US intervention is extradition, including FARC peace negotiator Ricardo Palmera. Palmera is a political prisoner currently held in solitary confinement. The U.S. government handpicked his lawyers and he is allowed no witnesses. Despite this, Palmera won his first trial when a hung jury was declared. The CAN supports the call to "Free Ricardo Palmera!" The extraditions eliminate political opposition and violate Colombia's sovereignty. The Colombian people want peace and justice; and as American solidarity activists, we are obliged to speak out against all of the US government's interventions in Colombia.

(Tom Burke is director, and Doug Michel a graduate student, with the Colombia Action Network.)



CAN 2006 delegation with newly unionized banana plantation workers in Santa Marta.

Bolivia's New President

- by Nicki Mokhtari

This past year has proven challenging for Bolivia's first indigenous president, Evo Morales, who recently celebrated the anniversary of his first 12 months in office. Elected with 54 percent of the vote in December 2005 on a platform to defend coca farmers' rights and nationalize the country's hydrocarbons, Morales has managed to carry out some of his promised reforms. His administration has successfully cut government officials' salaries, (including his own by 57 percent) lowered energy rates for the poor, raised doctors and teachers' salaries and established literacy programs for 300,000 people.

Despite the wealthy right-wing parties' opposition, Morales' Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) party has slowly managed to create a Constituent Assembly to rewrite the country's constitution in order to better represent the historically oppressed indigenous who account for two-thirds of Bolivia's population. Tensions continue to mount surrounding the government's ability to satisfy the highly polarized and divided constituency, with an opposition stemming from the wealthier eastern districts of Bolivia that have called for autonomy. They particularly oppose Morales' proposed Agrarian Reform Law, which would redistribute unproductive and idle estates of large landowners to indigenous campesinos. The President not only faces strong opposition from the eastern separatists, but more recently from his coca growers base who are becoming increasingly more leftist and radical and calling for further reform.

Morales' administration continues to develop opposition to US interests, particularly with his nationalization efforts, coca policy, and strong alliances with Venezuela and Cuba. In an effort to distance himself from U.S. neoliberal policies, Morales has allowed the IMF agreement to expire and thus gained the liberty to advance his own economic agenda, specifically to consolidate the state's control over hydrocarbons. Also, through the promotion of the cultural, health, and religious attributes of the coca leaf, Morales strives to meet the coccaleros' demands

and undermine the US's 'Plan Dignidad' (forced eradication efforts to reduce both licit coca production).

Challenges lie ahead for the government as Morales has yet to expropriate foreign multinationals or fully nationalize the state's hydrocarbons. Considering the increasing polarization, Morales will have to revive Bolivia's socialist movement and defend it against the growing right faction who has shown their combative unwillingness to give up their power and privilege.

(The author is Research Associate at the Council on Hemispheric Affairs.)



Chile Presidential update -

Bachelet's Administration

- by Magali Devic



The author

After serving as both Health and Defense Minister under her predecessor's administration, Michelle Bachelet was inaugurated on March 11, 2006, becoming Chile's first female President. Bachelet's election is a tribute to Chile's return to democracy and the rising importance of women participating in political change. She announced her willingness to institute sweeping changes throughout Chile's governing class.

A moderate socialist who has aligned herself with Chile's ruling Concertación party (in power since 1990), Bachelet has committed to a "just equilibrium

between growth and inclusion." Her hybrid approach combines neo-liberal policies with a greater emphasis on social justice to assuage poverty and improve education, and it represents a balanced compromise in a region increasingly leaning toward a revolutionary left. During the first three months of her administration, Bachelet addressed her "36 measures" primarily tackling three key issues - education, health care - to create what she defined as a "broad social protection system," and the access to new technologies

In the wake of last March's demon-

strations, the Bachelet administration decided to increase social spending by 11.2 percent. The state expenditures are to include a large investment in new hospitals and medical equipment, as well as in university scholarships. The administration also pledged to democratize information and knowledge by increasing access for all Chileans to cutting-edge technology and encouraging business innovation. To achieve this, the government plans on offering to a total of 3,400 companies the opportunity to participate in exchanges and missions to gain first-hand knowledge and incorporate better business practices. The scheme aims at enabling Chilean companies to be more competitive in the international realm. The financing of key sectors might be problematic as Chile has developed an over-dependence on copper, whose rising price trend in the last few years - and more recently after the strike that erupted last August in the Escondida factory owned by international mining giant BHP Biliton - has been reversed.

Despite Bachelet's foreign policy of "open regionalism," calling for respect of multilateralism, regional integration and cooperation, Chile has experienced numerous clashes with its neighbors. Argentina suspended its supply of natural gas to Chile. But with populist leftist leaders such as Venezuela's Hugo Chávez or Bolivia's Evo Morales, Bachelet has managed to cultivate some ideological affinities with them while preserving a good relationship with the U.S. (Chile's a "strategic ally") and expanding bilateral Free Trade Agreements with China, Europe and others Latin American countries.

(The author is Research Associate of the Council on Hemispheric Affairs.)

Lula's Second Term Plans for Brazil

- by Katherine Hancy Wheeler,



The author

The October re-election of Brazilian president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva caused both excitement and apprehension throughout the nation. Initially elected in 2002 on a campaign platform bordering on socialist, Lula surprised Brazil and the international community by maintaining less extreme leftist policies than many of his South American counterparts. He continues the previous administrations neoliberal strategies. Entering into his second and final term as Brazil's president, Lula's January inaugural speech reiterated his commitment to the poor, a promise from his first term that critics claim he failed to fulfill. "To govern for all is my path, but defending the interest of the poorest is what guides us in this journey," he told Congress. Lula plans to strengthen his program, Bolsa Familia, which rewards over 11 million impoverished families with cash transfers if their children are vaccinated and attend school. Lula has also vowed to spur a 5% annual growth rate in Brazil by "loosening the belt" on last terms' tight fiscal policies. He plans to use the revenue from this expected growth to fund structural reforms and social programs. Lula restated his intention to combat organized crime, especially in the favelas (shantytowns) where drug lords institute their own rule of law. There are also expectations in Brazil that Lula's election will begin the process of political reform to rid the government of its entrenched elitism, corruption, and poor electorate representation.

Lula's second term success will depend upon his ability to consolidate support in the congressional majority. Currently, Lula's Worker Party holds only 83 out of the 513 seats in the House of Representatives. As he concludes his cabinet appointments in mid-March, Lula will have to negotiate government positions in exchange for congressional allegiances. As of now, Lula's second term plans appear to focus less on market demands and more on the inclusion of social movements' agendas. In the past, the US has pushed for more neoliberal economic policies in Brazil, specifically with its failed attempt to harness Brazil's support in its Free Trade Agreement of the Americas. Nevertheless, the US is critically aware of the prestige and influence Brazil holds in Latin America, as exemplified by Lula's leadership in Mercosur. To squander Washington's 'civil' relationship with one of Latin America's most moderate leftists would be to lose one of its last footholds of influence among its southern neighbors.

(The author is Research Associate, Council on Hemispheric Affairs.)

"In a commentary on democracy prepared by three eleven-year-old girls, democracy was defined as food, school, and health care for everyone. Simplistic or visionary? For them democracy in Haiti doesn't mean a thing unless the people can eat."

**Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Eyes of the Heart
(www.commoncouragepress.com)**

Ecuador's President Correa

- by Kevin Alexander Watt



The author

Ecuador's newly elected President Rafael Correa has found himself in one of Latin America's most precarious political posts. With eight presidents in the past decade, Ecuador's presidency has been sullied by corruption and ineptitude. Correa, though, may offer a gleam of hope as his idealism and drive have already afforded him considerable successes since his January inauguration, and there are no indications that he is slowing.

Correa has already taken steps to make good on his campaign promise to reform the nation's congress and constitution. Recently, he made a formal proposal for a referendum on the creation of an Ecuadorian Constituent

Assembly that would seek to better represent the country's diverse citizenry with more frequent elections and a greater number of representatives from impoverished areas. But because it threatens the jobs of many of the nation's current Congressmen, the referendum was initially blocked in the country's legislature. Eventually though, massive demonstrations led the Ecuadorian Congress to allow the referendum, which will almost certainly pass. However, even in light of growing cooperation from a once intractable congress and his impressively strong support base, Correa has been forced by the nature of foreign affairs to fight his international battles alone.

One such fight that has drawn significant worldwide attention to President Correa's administration is over Ecuador's debt. Much to the dismay of international creditors, Correa has called a large portion of Ecuador's \$10.3 billion in foreign debt "illegitimate," citing that lending agencies made loans to military dictator-

ships they knew were corrupt and had no intention of using the funds for national interests. Furthermore, during his inaugural address, Correa promised that Ecuador would begin focusing its finances on social initiatives first and using only leftover money to then pay off its debt. Additionally, in January 2007 Correa threatened to pay only forty percent of the debt, claiming that it "is too large for the size of our country and our realities."

Although these boasts have not stopped Correa's administration from making scheduled loan payments on time, they have obviously caused considerable concern. Not only was Ecuador's credit score lowered by Standard and Poor's, but many nations and organizations in the "developed world" have put pressure on the nation in order to stop it from setting a precedent for other disenfranchised debtors by willfully defaulting on its loans.

(Kevin Watt is Research Associate at the Council on Hemispheric Affairs.)

Venezuela - Which Way?

- by Dan Hellinger

Hope, anxiety, and astonishment best describe the package of radical moves by Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez since his landslide re-election on December 2. His re-nationalization of important sectors is widely popular among the majority of the population. Venezuelans seem supportive of his plans to amend the constitution to allow him to stand for re-election in 2013, to redraw the system of municipalities and states, and not to renew the broadcasting license of the RCTV, which played a key role in orchestrating the coup of April 2002.

But even some chavistas worry about centralization of power, especially about the National Assembly's decision to grant him broad decree powers in 11 different policy areas for 18 months. Why has the president decided to legislate through decree rather than entrust policy to an Assembly controlled by his own coalition?

Chávez is attempting a non-violent Cultural Revolution -- trying to do an end run around his own political establishment. He is frustrated with government bureaucracy and his own middle-level political leadership. The same motives are behind his demand that all parties in his coalition join his new party, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV).

Chávez may not succeed in uniting all of the left. All his supporting parties say

they will join the PSUV, but between the lines they are hedging their commitment. The key variable is, how will party officers and nominations for office be filled? Will the communities choose PSUV candidates for office, or will the old system of top-down control re-assert itself?

An associated development is rapid spread of grassroots "communal councils." These councils will determine how perhaps four percent of the national budget will be spent. Critics fear they will become a new patronage network, bypassing elected state and municipal councils. Supporters say that this is a major step toward participatory democracy and twenty first century socialism

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Dispatches from Latin America: A Book Review

- by Midge Quandt

Dispatches from Latin America: On the Frontlines Against Neoliberalism (South End Press, 2006), ed. Teo Ballve and Vijay Prashad, is a book for activists about militant social movements and left-leaning governments. The essays first appeared in NACLA's Jan-Feb Report on the Americas.* They are largely devoid of the theoretical analyses beloved by academics. Instead, the authors help us understand the inspiring resurgence of radicalism in the region.

Direct action by social movements and the election of progressive governments are responses to the devastation caused by neoliberalism. In this regard, the authors transcend the dichotomy that pits state power vs. social movement action as the key to systemic change. As Gerardo Rænique puts it, it is the "popular mobilization of what can be described as a 'social left' that has made possible the election of . . . left-wing governments."

Mass movements are also pivotal because they have created new forms of political and economic organization: worker-run factories in Argentina and autonomous government in Chiapas, for example.

Because of space limitations, I will focus on Venezuela and Bolivia as these countries have arguably the most potential for large-scale change. (In a talk at Princeton University, Jorge Castenada made a useful distinction between the two Lefts in the region. One is centrist and market-friendly, examples being Brazil and Uruguay. The other is radical and nationalistic, with Bolivia and Venezuela falling into this camp.)

In his essay, Steve Ellner raises the question of whether Venezuela can be a model for other nations. He takes on that part of the Left that argues that the exercise of state power feeds authoritarianism. This school opts for the horizontal networking practiced by social movements. Ellner contends that in Venezuela the state power that Chavez insists on is compatible with progressive and democratic politics _ he won about 60% of the vote in the last several elections _ and that this can be true for other countries.

▶▶▶ *Continued*

The experience in the chavista labor sector suggests a minefield ahead as far as forging unity is concerned. There are serious disputes within the Bolivarian labor movement about labor rights in endogenous development projects, such as cooperatives and co-managed companies, and about how to elect its own leadership. These issues will emerge when the PSUV meets to organize itself.

Meanwhile, Chávez faces some tough economic policy choices. Unemployment has reached record lows, but inflation is becoming a serious problem. Indigenous and environmental organizations oppose some major development projects, such as an international pipeline through the Amazon. Finally, the issues of crime and prison violence remain a serious problem impervious so far to progress.

Venezuelans are involved in a great experiment with participatory democracy. An optimistic scenario would see the new Community Councils as the basis for a new decentralized state. On the other hand, we may see in the end little more than a new patronage system controlled by Chávez. Both paths are open.

(The author is a professor at Webster University.)

However, Ellner sidesteps the issue of how the model works if you don't have the revenue that Venezuela has, a point made by Nicaraguan journalist William Grigsby in my interview with him last April.

Then there is the case of Bolivia. What is striking in the essays by Ballve, Hilton and Thomson, is the central role of indigenous movements in the revolutionary cycle begun in 2000, culminating in the election of MAS party candidate Evo Morales in 2005. (MAS grew out of the coca producers union.)

Until recently, the Left in Latin America disparaged indigenous organizing. But since the 1990s, indigenous movements in Bolivia and other countries have come into their own. As Delgado-P. shows in his piece, they have moved from being local to being national and transnational, while making common cause with other social movements. This has strengthened the Left. In Bolivia, links with diverse movements were forged in the popular insurrections of 2003. This is where the country's long tradition of collective organization paid off. The social movements soon united around the demand for nationalization of the hydrocarbons industry, and once in office, Morales did just that.

The convergence of strong popular movements with pro-left political parties in Bolivia and elsewhere is a promising development in the region. In helping activists understand these phenomena, Dispatches provides a useful addition to the organizers' tool kit.

* NACLA's Jan-Feb. issue is free if you subscribe to Report on the Americas for a year (\$29, a 20% discount if you note INTERCONNECT on your request). Send to them at 38 Greene St., 4th fl, New York, NY 10013.

(The author is a solidarity activist and historian who is on the executive committee of the Nicaragua Network.)

Fallen Hero, Fallen Nations

- A book review by Malcolm Bell

“Enrique Alvarez Cordova: Life of a Salvadoran Revolutionary and Gentleman” (McFarland & Company, 2006, foreword by Charles Clements) is John Lamperti’s careful yet compelling account of the man who, more than any other, might have prevented El Salvador’s bloody civil war. But the United States (under Jimmy Carter!) had other priorities, so both nations remained on the benighted side of history.

A scion of a Salvadoran ruling family, Alvarez was a U.S. preppy, an accomplished athlete, of course a horseman, an exceptionally generous and decent person, a wealthy gentleman farmer who identified with his workers, and a traitor to his class -- for the most part a rigid, greedy class that indulged in mass torture and murder rather than give up any wealth or privilege or treat fairly the laborers who supported them. Twice during the 1970s, Alvarez became Minister of Agriculture to try to put through the crucial land reforms that he came to practice on his own coffee finca, where he created a workers’ cooperative that flourishes today. Twice he quit when reform was blocked. He then headed the widely popular Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR), the last best hope for social justice and an end to bloodshed in El Salvador, until the security forces tortured and murdered him and five other FDR leaders on November 27, 1980, just five days before the same U.S. protégés did likewise to the four U.S. churchwomen. Alvarez’s mutilated body now rests in the cathedral in San Salvador near that of his friend and spiritual advisor, Monsignor Romero.

Prof. Lamperti’s fine biography not only tracks the course of an admirable man; it also sorts out the history of El Salvador’s descent into tragedy. The hero enlivens the history. I kept rooting for Quique, as his friends called him, to pre-

vail, even though his fate and the fate of his people were clear from the start. It is ironic that the frente that he led bore the same initials as those of another traitor-to-his-class who did much to save our own country from chaos in the 1930s. Roosevelt succeeded where Alvarez did not, in good part because assassins in league with a Colossus of the North did not cut F.D.R. down in the prime of his endeavors.

The book costs \$39.95 new. If you don’t want to pay that, perhaps you can persuade your library to buy it.



To the Editor

Your Co-Editor (my boss), Peter Mott, was too modest in your December issue about his book, “Cancer in the Body Politic.” The book is a compact trove of essential information and lucid analysis marshaled astutely around a medical model of diagnosis and cure. Dr. Mott confronts our nation’s ills, many of them self-inflicted, many in advanced stages; and he prescribes a number of apt remedies, “including major surgery.” Telling the knowable truth about U.S. conduct at home and abroad is grim business, but Dr. Mott’s optimism, patriotism, and underlying faith in God make his book uplifting. His diagnosis and prescriptions merit wide attention; I suggest that we activists act to see that they get it.

Malcolm Bell

“A true revolution of values will soon look uneasily on the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth. With righteous indignation it will look across the seas and see individual capitalists of the West investing huge sums of money in Asia, Africa and South America, only to take the profits out with no concern for the social betterment of the countries, and say: ‘This is not just.’ It will look at our alliance with the landed gentry of Latin America and say: “‘This is not just.’ The Western arrogance of feeling that it has everything to each others and nothing to learn from them is not just.”

Martin Luther King, Jr.
Address to Clergy and Laity
Concerned at Riverside
Church, April, 1967

PPP - Mesoamerica in the Eye of Globalization

- by the Beehive Collective

It will be surprising to many to learn that the neoliberal mega-project Plan Puebla Panama (PPP), still does exist and is charging full speed ahead. PPP projects continue to receive support from government and the private sector of Central America and the United States for feasibility studies, construction and/or operations, foreign investors. International financial institutions (primarily the IDB - InterAmerican Development Bank) are "financing" the projects, (i.e. loans that often come hand-in-hand with structural adjustment programs). According to the Press Monitors compiled by the DataCenter from January to November 2006, between the World Bank, IDB and BCIE (Central American Bank of Economic Integration) more than \$ 2300 MILLION dollars in financing for PPP projects was approved.

There are a few factors responsible for the apparent disappearance of the PPP from the radar of activists in North America. Widespread popular resistance prompted former Mexican president Vicente Fox's underhanded maneuvers to disguise the PPP, with tactics like shifting money away from projects officially named in PPP documents, while continuing to fund them using other names. The official PPP website even disappeared for a while - it has recently been re-vamped and is now back on line at <http://www.planpuebla-panama.org/>

Another challenge posed to mobilization around this issue is that while Central America organizers directed their energies almost solely towards CAFTA, the few grassroots groups in North America that were focused on PPP opposition faced increasingly limited capacity. Few publications in English covered the story that Fox formally re-launched the PPP in 2004 and even fewer groups are currently distributing up-to-date information. On the ground in Mexico and Central America, grassroots groups that are raising the alarm about these policies face renewed levels of aggression, threats and intimidation by military and paramilitary forces.

Under the banner of Regional Integration, many projects are in the 'feasibility study' phases, either under environmental assessment, in the bidding phase or already under construction.

The latest developments of the PPP include:

- Colombia officially became a member country; in November 2006 the PPP Executive Commission met in Medellin, Colombia.
- In the first days of his presidency of Mexico, Felipe Calderon met with Central American heads of state to discuss regional integration and the renewed push to implement the PPP.
- July 2006: official inauguration of the SIEPAC network, (electric energy integration initiative of the PPP). These plans double as communications infrastructure development - the fiber-optic cables of the "Mesoamerican Information Highway" will later hang from the same towers.
- Inter-oceanic routes: multiple proposals are still in the works for inter-oceanic canals crossing Nicaragua, Honduras-El Salvador and the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in Mexico.
- Many tourism infrastructure projects have been opened for bidding (tourism in and of itself is not the problem, but rather it is the illegal land grab facilitated by corrupt government and developed into mega-tourism in the interests of profits for foreign investors and at the expense of local land sovereignty).

- Mesoamerican Biological Corridor: a "conservation" corridor, problematic in its top-down, "hands-off" approach that tends to exclude, and often forcibly displace, local and indigenous communities that live on the land as ecological stewards.
- Regional oil refinery: IDB approved U.S. \$400 million in financing (2006).
- Multiple hydroelectric dam projects have opened for bidding in recent months and years.
- More "Green Development" in the plans - a new mechanism of the World Bank to promote big-business development in the global south that can be dubbed as clean energy and used to 'greenwash' aggressive, corporate-led land consolidation.

and now, right before your very eyes...

FTAA and PPP's vanishing act

Along with the PPP, the FTAA (Free Trade Area of the Americas) was a proposal encompassing a large region that, as a result, provided common ground for organizers and social movements for unified struggle. With overwhelming popular resistance, talks bogged down in 2005. But is the FTAA really dead as claimed? Although the proposed agreement spanning 34 countries has been buried by Chavez's own shovel, the FTAA has reappeared in smaller pieces - bilateral trade agreements doing the work of FTAA a country at a time. CAFTA (the Central American Free Trade Agreement) and many other agreements have been implemented forcibly, from the top-down, without meaningful public consultation. Free Trade, like the PPP is certainly not dead - in fact, more menacing than ever now that it has taken the form of a multitude of smaller, less recognizable projects, thus diffusing the opposition and making it more difficult to challenge as a regional or international movement.

■■■■► *cont. to pg. 10*

“The Plan Puebla-Panama Revived; Looking Back to See What's Ahead” Miguel Pickard. June 2004. IRC Americas Program Special Report. <http://americas.irc-online.org/reports/2004/0406ppp.html>

NISGUA has an up-to-date listing on-line at http://www.nisgua.org/themes_campaigns/index.asp?cid=1013

Celia Davis, International Press Monitor on Mesoamerica and the PPP, 13th September to 17 November, 2006. DataCenter, Strategic Information for Social Justice. www.datacenter.org “SICA lanza construccion de red de interconexion electrica regional”, El Financiero, July 16 2006

(The Beehive Collective is in Maine. graphic on p. 1 is theirs and a theme for LASC4.

RESOURCES

Major Events

- March 10. Immigrants' Rights Rally. Chicago: Stop Raids and Deportations! Unconditional Legalization! Bring the Troops Home! (to endorse <orl_sep@yahoo.com).
- March 17. March on the Pentagon - with Latin America contingent. End the Iraq War! End US Militarization of Latin America! Close Guantanamo! End the occupation of Haiti! Close the SOA! Free the Cuban 5! (to endorse www.marchonthepentagon.org).
- April 7. NYC and Los Angeles. US Hands off Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia! INTERCONNECT endorses. (April7@safewebmail.com or www.april7coalition.org).
- April 13-15. LASC 4 National Conference. See page 1 and join us!
- April 13-14. Mobilization for Farmworker Justice, Chicago.
- April 22-29. Sweatfree Communities Annual Conference. NYC. Clean Clothes and Fair Food! Justice in

Factories and Fields! (slr@clrlabor.org or www.clrlabor.org).

- May 20. Days of Prayer for Colombia. Get 500 churches to protest US policy. Witness for Peace (www.witnessforpeace.org) for organizing kit with info, ideas, announcements, film links.
- June 27-July 1. US Social Forum, Atlanta (404-622-0602, alovelace@mindspring.com, www.ussocialforum.org).
- July 1-12. Pastors for Peace Friendshipment to Cuba (212-926-5757).
- July 7-12. Mid-Atlantic and New England Regions Summer Peace-Building Institute. Washington DC. A capacity-building workshop for peace & justice advocates. Info: Joanne Ranney wfpne@witnessforpeace.org
- December 8-9. Second Summit, Heads of State of the Community of South American Nations, Cochabamba, Bolivia.

Campaigns

- Change US-Colombia Policy! Reduce Military Aid! Increase Humanitarian Aid, Stop Aerial Fumigation, Stop the Colombia Free Trade Agreement! (Packets available, Latin America Working Group, 202-546-7010, www.larg.org/countries/Colombia/newmemberpacket07).
- Buy Local@ Not Wal-Mart! Mexico has 845 Wal-Marts. Stop New Building! Save Historic Mexican Towns and Public Markets! (www.buylocalday.org, Global Exchange, 1-800-497-1994; or join the US Anti-Sweatshop Movement, 202-544-9335, clr@clrlabor.org, www.clabor.org).
- Break the Travel Ban of Cuba! Support HR 654 (Reps. Charles Rangel and Jeff Flake) which would end all restrictions on travel between the US and Cuba (LAWG, above).
- Let the River Run! Reforest northern Nicaragua! Protect Rivers and Food

Sources! Build! (Nicaragua Network, 202-544-9355, www.nicanet.org).

- Stop the International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) in El Salvador! (CISPES, 212-465-8115, www.cispes.org).
- 1000 Grandmothers. Booties for Peace! Close the SOA! (www.1000grandmothers.net).
- Genetically Engineered Trees Campaign (Global Justice Ecology Project, info@stopgetrees.org, www.stopgetrees.org).

Speakers

Immigration and Refugee Rights

- April 22-30, east coast, Mexico Solidarity Network (773-583-7768, mexicosolidaritynetwork@mexicosolidarity.org).

Mexico, popular resistance to neoliberalism

- April 11-17, West Coast, Chicago, DC (see MSN, above)

Guatemala

- April 10-May 4, NISGUA (www.nisgua.org)

Books

Cancer in the Body Politic: Diagnosis and Prescription for an America in Decline, by Peter Mott, M.D., 2006, EPICA. \$10+mailing (quantity discounts), admin@epica.org.

The Price of Fires: Resource wars and social movements in Bolivia, by Benjamin Dangle (www.boliviabook.com).

Dispatches from Latin America: On the frontlines against neoliberalism, by Vijay Prashad and Teo Balleve, 2006, AK Press (see Book Review).

Videos

Journey with the Revolution. A journey into the heart of the Venezuelan revolution. A Global Women's Strike production. Spanish and English with subtitles 61 minutes DVD. \$15; \$25 solidarity price; \$250 institutions <http://www.allwomenscount.net/Publications/Forsalepage.htm>. Check or money order to:

Crossroads Books Box 11795
Philadelphia PA 19101

Urgent Action

Background: Gen. Jose Efraim Rios Montt plans to run for Congress this year in Guatemala, despite facing an international warrant from Spain charging him with genocide, torture, terrorism and illegal detention - crimes he committed as head of the military regime during Guatemala's 1960-96 civil conflict.

Please write to the Guatemalan Attorney General to note Guatemala's obligation under international law to try those accused of human rights violations promptly and effectively or extradite them to another country; express concern about the stalled judicial proceedings against Gen. Jose Efraim Rios Montt and other defendants; request security measures for the survivors and their advocates; and request investigations of threats or attacks against them. **APPEALS TO:** Fiscal General de la Republica de Guatemala/Lic. Juan Luis Florido/Tercer Nivel, 8a. Avenida 10-67, Zona 1/Ciudad de Guatemala 01001/Guatemala. Postage 84 cents. Fax: 502-2251-2218 (www.amnestyusa.org/1703).

Travel (see Codes, below)

Bolivia: 6/17-27 (GX natural resources and social movements, indigenous, women, water privatization fight); 9/2-12 (GX, as above); 10/12-22 (WP).

Border: 4/29-5/2 (GX US/Mexico border); 5/24-6/4 (CPT monitor human rights, non-violent public witness to unjust immigration policies); 6/16-26 (CGE border crossings, globalization, migration, social work, Mexico City); 9/1-4 (GX US/Mexico border); 10/30-11/2 (GX, as above).

Colombia: 5/23-6/3 (CPT Magdalena Medio region. Support peace activists); 6/30-7/11 (WP True cost of oil); 7/14-24 (WP peace and war); 7/18-31 (CPT, as above); 8/3-13 (WP The people

behind the coal flyer); 8/18-28 (WP US policies, drug war, human rights); 9/26-10/9 (CPT, as above).

Costa Rica: 4/6-15 (GX ecotourism and sustainability); 7/21-31 (GX, as above).
Cuba: 6/3-12 (GX health and healing); 6/16-25 (GX educators delegation); 10/14-23 (GX architecture and urban planning).

Ecuador: 7/7-20 (GX Amazon watch, environmental justice, youth tour).
El Salvador: 4/26-5/6 (CISPES. May Day, labor, students, women, community organizing, privatization of water and health. Krista at 212-465-8115, Krista@cispes.org).

Guatemala: 4/10-5/4 (NISGUA, info@nigua.org, www.nigua.org); 5/26-6/3 (STTCH. One year of CAFTA - effects on women, Antigua, eastern Guatemala, learn Spanish; "free" trade. 202-265-3760, stitch@stitchonline.org); 6/23-7/1 (CGE Education for decolonization: professional development seminar; colonialism and how to reconstruct more just communities; Mayan communities and culture).

Mexico: 5/22-6/5 (WP migrant trail walk); 5/25-7/1 (CGE language, culture and social change, gender, sexuality, politics, arts. Cuernavaca for course in women's studies, LGBT communities); 6/6-15 (GX Chiapas); 6/6-16 (WP **Oaxaca** - paint and protest); 6/16-25 (CGE LGBT lives, Mexico City, Cuernavaca, rural); 8/1-11 (GX Chiapas).

Nicaragua: 5/21-6/3 (CGE environmental justice and sustainable development, rural and urban); 6/9-17 (Wisconsin Coordinating Council on Nicaragua -WCCN (608) 257-7230. exdir@wccnica.org.) Constructing Gender Equality in Nicaragua: Empowering Women through Alternative Models of Social and Economic Development; 6/15-26 (WP medical delegation); 6/20-29 (GX sustainable development, co-ops, coffee, free trade resistance); 6/28-7/7 (WP workers' rights in the globalized world. Intergenerational);

7/14/28 (WP teen delegation).

Venezuela: 4/9-19 (GX A new vision for the Americas); 4/23-55 (WP Colombia and Venezuela); 5/25-6/4 (GX, as above); 7/21-31 (as above); 8/11-21 (as above); 9/1-11 (as above); 10/6-16 (as above); 10/20-11/4 (WP Venezuela and Bolivia).

CODES

CGE: Center for Global Education, Augsburg College. 612-330-1159; globaled@augsburg.edu.
CPT: Christian Peacemaker Team. 773-277-0253, delegations@cpt.org.
GX: Global Exchange. 800-497-1994, x242, latinamerica@globalexchange.org; www.globalexchange.org.
GATE: La Crosse, WI. www.GATE-travel.org; 608-791-5283.
WP: Witness for Peace. 202-547-6112, www.witnessforpeace.org, erik@witnessforpeace.org.
US-C: US/Cuba Labor Exchange. 313-561-8330; laborexchange@aol.com.

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Movement News in Brief

Panama: On 10/22/06 a referendum was approved by 80% of the people for a massive expansion of the Canal. Only 43% of voters went to the polls. The plan includes deepening the channels, constructing two sets of locks at both ends and a third lane for large container ships, bulk and gas carriers. Tolls would be increased to pay for the \$5.2 billion project.

Cuba:

1. On 1/22/07 the World Social Forum praised Cuba's health and education program that is operating now in 68 nations with 29,400 professionals serving. Cuba now is training 30,000 foreign doctors; and collaborations on health care have served 154 nations from 1961 to the present.
2. The annual UN vote condemned the US embargo by 183:4.
3. The July 2006 Cuba Caravan delivered 60 tons of medical and school supplies, two ambulances, and two school buses. Over 100 US, Canadian, Mexican and European "caravanistas" broke the blockade (IFCO/Pastors for Peace).
4. A US congressional audit on 11/06 reports that 95% of the \$74 million for democracy-promotion from 1996-2005 was spent for cashmere sweaters, chocolates, and video games.
5. The Cuban parliament declared 2006 the Year of the Energy Revolution. Fidel Castro wants to decrease energy use by two-thirds (this includes the forced reduction in oil consumption when the USSR collapsed "The Hilton group reversed its ban on Cuban delegations staying at its hotels in Europe, and called on Britain and the US to resolve the contentious issue, which arises from the American embargo on the Caribbean island. The action came after unions and parliamentary groups in Europe announced plans to boycott the organisation after a Cuban trade delegation was banned" (The Guardian, 3/2/07).

SOA/WHINSEC: Webster University in St. Louis has cut its agreements with the SOA which allowed its graduates to transfer credits to graduate programs at Webster. (www.soaw.org)

Mexico:

1. On 11/21/06 the government quietly released an 859-page report on how three administrations, from the late 1960's until 1982 killed, tortured and "disappeared" political dissidents. This is the first time they have accepted responsibility for a dirty war against leftist guerrillas, university students and activists. This is now all posted on the website of the non-governmental National Security Archive at George Washington University (from Kate Doyle, director of the Mexico Project, Washington Post 11/22/06).
2. Immigration to the US - nearly 600,000 Mexicans per year during the Fox administration - is the reason that over 600 of Mexico's 2445 municipalities register a population decrease (International Migration Organization via Mexico Solidarity Network). President Calderon has privatized hundreds of miles of highway. Many large bids must of necessity be from foreign corporations.

Guatemala: The Canadian ambassador has been spreading misinformation about the Canadian mining Co, Sky Resources (nickel) and its subsidiary, Guatemala Nickel Co, against reports and videos by a Canadian student, Stevan Schnoor. The student - working as part of Rights Action - and a photographer have filmed an indigenous Mayan community being evicted by the army. Since the 1996 Peace Accords this has been an illegal army action (see video on www.rightsaction.org/video/elestor).