

UPSTREAM JOURNAL

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FIGHTING THE PRIVATIZATION OF HEALTH CARE IN EL SALVADOR

By Gloria Pereira-Papenburg

If you need to see a doctor at the public hospital in the town of Jiquilisco, El Salvador, you'll find that paying a "voluntary contribution" is part of the normal procedure.

For example, four months ago 34-year-old Rosa Penado brought her daughter to the local hospital emergency room. The girl needed a hernia operation, and her mother was charged 500 Colons (about 100 Canadian dollars). She could only pay half the cost, and so has not returned to the hospital because she is afraid that she will be asked for the rest, which she does not have.

The case of Rosa Penado and her daughter is just one of hundreds documented by the Human Rights Ombudsman of El Salvador. After investigating the situation of the right to health care in rural communities of the north coast of El Salvador, the Ombudsman's preliminary report concluded that the fear of not being able to pay for the necessary health care services prevents people from seeing a doctor.



Anti-privatization protest in El Salvador

In Uzulután a simple visit to a doctor in a public hospital costs half-day's worth of salary. Others who can get the money to pay for hospital services often can't afford to pay for prescribed medications. Half the people of El Salvador live below the poverty level. The proportion of poor people is higher in the rural areas, such as Jiquilisco, and therefore user fees put health care services out of the reach of most.

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PRIVATIZING PEANUTS - NO DEBT RELIEF WITHOUT IT

By Derek MacCuish

Peanut farming in Senegal is a tough business. The rain failed this season, and the peanuts didn't grow. There are a million peanut farmers in Senegal. Six million people depend on

the crop for income and support. They are facing deep widespread hunger which may become starvation.

The season before last farmers took a loss despite a good crop. Economic restructuring and privatization meant the end of gov-

(Continued on page 6)



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The Social Justice Committee, Montreal, has been working to raise public awareness of, and foster action on, international development and social justice issues since 1975. We work in solidarity with people in a number of Third World countries, and with Canadian and international organizations, in the search for a more just and sustainable socio-economic system. We try to raise the awareness of Canadians about the root causes of hunger, poverty and repression in the world and how they are related to us. Books, periodicals and audio-visuals are loaned free of charge through our documentation centre. Resource people are available to give presentations to school, church and community groups.

Views expressed in the *Upstream Journal* are the writers' own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Social Justice Committee. We welcome the submission of illustrations and articles on different aspects of international development and human rights (contact editor Derek MacCuish). Supporters of the Social Justice Committee receive The Upstream Journal by mail. This newsletter is published five times a year, at irregular intervals between September and June.

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(Continued from page 1)

More than one in ten people in El Salvador will not live beyond age forty. A quarter of the people do not have access to health services, and 34% do not have clean drinking water at home. (UN Human Development Report 2002) This is the context in which health care professionals, with the support of many Salvadorans, have been fighting for months against privatization of health services and for real access to these services. The doctors went on illegal strike as the only way to make the government to review its position. Hundreds of doctors faced losing their positions; several received death threats.

In the Journal of the Human Rights Commission of El Salvador, the Physicians Union described how the government of El Salvador reduced its financial support for public health care, and undertook a campaign of disinformation to convince the people that the workers are responsible for the health care crisis, that the system is beyond repair, and that the only solution is privatization.

The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the World Bank claim to be supporting projects that improve health care systems in Latin America, but they seem to be particularly inefficient, since public services are declining and corruption is increasing. In the specific case of El Salvador, the IDB approved a loan in 1998 to support the modernization of the Ministry of Health and Social Assistance (a process begun five years earlier with a World Bank loan). The health care sector reform proposal that emerged would transfer direct service provisions to the private sector. The health care unions are concerned that the proposal gives priority to profit-seeking concerns and put health needs in a secondary position.

The unions believe that public health care in El Salvador could achieve its goal of universal high-quality coverage. There have been important improvements in health in

the last decade, even with under-paid workers, understaffing and poor working conditions. The public system can take credit for the improvements since they have occurred without corresponding progress in other sectors, sanitation, housing and employment that are important factors in the health of the population.

The Salvadoran group “Journalists Against Corruption” denounced a bill that had been sent to the Salvadorian Congress, saying that it would restrict access to information on the proposed new health care system. They are concerned that this would mean the new health system would be managed without monitoring from media or from the public in general (Transparency International considers El Salvador to be a country with a high degree of corruption). The journalists point out that the Salvadorian Institute for Social Services is one of the institutions most affected by corruption, and that the government has never shown interest in bringing these practices to an end. Many people believe that a cleansing of the Institute’s management will allow better health care without need for private funding.

Disregarding opposition from all sectors, the President of El Salvador sent a proposal to the National Assembly to privatize health care services on October 16. The opposition parties rejected it in an unexpected move by a political party that usually votes with the government. The following day, the National Assembly approved a decree blocking the privatization of health care; they called it a “health guarantee”. The President stated that the legislative decree was unconstitutional and he had no other option but to veto it.

Thousands of Salvadorans took to

the streets of San Salvador on October 23 in support of the strike by health care workers and to protest against privatization. It was a huge show of solidarity with the strikers, with up to 80 thousand people according to international journalists. The people said that they would not accept any changes to their “guarantee of health”. This was the second massive public demonstration against health care privatization within a month.

In view of this public outcry, the President softened his position; he would not veto the decree but he would make amendments. It was not clear how much these amendments would dilute the “health guarantee” so this was not acceptable to the



Student-lead anti-FTAA protest in Montreal, 31 October 2002

doctors on strike.

At the end of the month, the mayor of San Salvador, a physician and a member of the leftist opposition party Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front, offered to serve as a mediator. He proposed that a commission be formed to formulate new proposals to reform the health care sector starting from scratch. The same evening (October 31) the President publicly announced that he accepted the mayor’s proposal and would not veto the “health guarantee”. This opens the door to negotiate a settlement with the health care workers but there is still the matter of the reinstatement of workers fired at the beginning of the strike, and other sanctions that had been im-

posed on the strikers.

The 350 doctors on illegal strike have been without salaries for three months, although they have provided emergency services. They say that they will not go back to their regular schedule until any economic, administrative or judicial sanctions are lifted. Despite the fact that the physicians have tremendous popular support, they find themselves now under a media campaign against them, to make an example for other workers who might dare to confront privatization in other areas.

It is possible that the government of El Salvador will try again to introduce private participation in health care but, for now it will have to wait. This may have an impact on other privatization projects in El Salvador, such as the electricity services, and also in other Latin American countries, in projects that are being strongly opposed by the people.

The strong opposition by the people might not be enough to stop these privatization projects. As we

saw earlier, the governments are being pushed by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the World Bank (WB) in the gradual transfer of health care and other social services, previously covered by the government, to the private sector. Privatization is part of the conditions attached to loans by international financial institutions to third world countries.

These institutions have kept this position despite repeated expressions of concern from the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the monitoring body of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. This Committee has said, since 1990, that the international financial institutions should pay greater attention to the protection of human rights when implementing their policies.

Over the years, the Committee has produced several General Comments to different articles of the Covenant. Comment No. 14 on the right to the

highest attainable standard of health (from 2000) says that "States parties have an obligation to ensure that their actions as members of international organizations take due account of the right to health. Accordingly, States parties which are members of international financial institutions, notably the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and regional development banks, should pay greater attention to the protection of the right to health in influencing the lending policies, credit agreements and international measures of these institutions."

This means that we must keep vigilant about the defense of human rights in El Salvador and, here in Canada, make our government accountable for its participation in the financial institutions that have such a strong influence on the realization of these rights.

GUATEMALAN VISITOR DESCRIBES HIS COMMUNITY'S EFFORTS TO BECOME SELF SUFFICIENT AND PROVIDE A DECENT STANDARD OF LIVING

"Everybody talks about the weather, but nobody does anything about it..."

by Eric Lamoureux

The temperature was uncomfortably close to freezing as I walked to the metro with Julian Marcelo Subac. In my broken Spanish, I asked him how he was faring through the Canadian autumn. Later, hearing him speak of life as a coffee-grower in Guatemala, I felt a bit foolish for asking. Here was a man from (much) warmer Central America, but considering what he has lived through cold air was probably not such a hardship: the violence of civil war, a government run by murderers, the collapse of coffee

prices, the increasing starvation, and now the threat of the Plan Puebla-Panama and the Free Trade Area of the Americas. And he hasn't suffered his problems in silence; he is doing something about them.

A Cakchiquel Mayan and a member of an organic, fair-trading, coffee cooperative in San Lucas Toliman in the Guatemalan highlands, Marcelo gave a number of talks in and around Montreal at the end of October. He described the life of a farmer in a country where twenty percent of landowners own 80 percent of the land. People growing coffee for those landowners make the equivalent of about three to four dollars for a ten-hour workday. In good times, the basic diet is rarely more elaborate

than tortillas and salt; in bad times, parents go without so that children can be fed. Life expectancy rarely exceeds sixty years. The chemicals involved in coffee production make matters worse.

Guatemala was supposed to be different after the 1996 Peace Accords. A Land Fund was set up, ostensibly to get more land into the hands of more people. Instead, due to the influence of large landowners and foreign interests, this fund has become nothing more than a typical bank, raising land prices as well as the indebtedness of the poor people. With notoriously brutal former dictator Efraim Rios Montt as President of Congress, the government has done nothing to help; many mem-

bers of Rios Montt's ruling party had appropriated the people's land when they fled government-sponsored violence during the civil war. Today, land reform remains a dangerous proposal in Guatemala.

To make matters worse, global coffee prices have fallen dramatically as low cost Vietnamese robusta coffee beans flood the global market. In many parts of Central America, growers don't bother to even harvest their beans; the expense is greater than the price they will receive at market. Landowners have taken advantage of this crisis to cheat workers of their wages, or sack them. In Guatemala, where forty percent of rural people are out of work, 600,000 people have been thrown off the land in the past months. This trans-



Julian Marcelo Subac with SJC coordinator of Central

lates into more than just the loss of a job; it means loss of access to shelter and to land for growing food. The United Nations World Food Organization estimates that eight million people in Central America are at risk of starvation this year.

By contrast, Marcelo's cooperative side-steps the global market and sells its organic crop directly to consumers. Set up with the help of a students' group from the University of British Columbia, this fair trade arrangement helps provide a decent standard of living for growers and their families. It frees them from dependency on landowners and on international middlemen (whom they

call "coyotes"). Being organic, fair trade coffee protects the health of the producer and the consumer, it respects the environment, and it leads to the promotion of biodiversity. A portion of the sales proceeds goes to improving the community, obtaining more land, protecting worker rights on plantations, and providing financial assistance to orphans of the civil war. Marcelo stressed that this is the only reasonable alternative for growers in Guatemala, and furthermore it offers a high quality product to consumers in Canada.

But there was another problem. Just as Marcelo's community found a viable system for supporting itself, other threats arose. Recent talks on the Free Trade Area of the Americas and on the Plan Puebla Panama seek to create an Americas-wide trading area that is more likely to improve the bottom line of multinational corporations than the lives of average Central Americans. The poor risk losing their land through expropriation, dam-building, or the growing land hunger of multinationals. Landless, they may find the only work will be in the maquilas, or sweatshops. Marcelo's people have organized demonstrations to protest these plans, but the government has ignored them.

Hearing of these new developments, it's easy to throw up one's hands in exasperation and say, "You can't win!" Alone, they probably could not. That was why he was in Canada, in chilly October. If his people are to succeed, they need support

from Canadians.

First, we need to support their attempts to gain a decent living through fair trade. These products – and they are not limited to coffee – may be a bit more difficult to find and cost more, but consumer demand is making them more readily available and cheaper. Fair trade can only change things if we support it, and buying fair trade products helps people.

Second, we need to better educate ourselves about the impact of the FTAA and the PPP and work to stop them. The Canadian government is an influential member of the development banks that are lending money for the PPP, and it is at the table at the FTAA talks. Development and trade deals which do not come from the people and do not put their interests first are criminal. We need to tell our government that we want no part in such deals, and that we want them stopped.

The main problem for Marcelo's people is not the weather. Although unjust trade may seem as difficult to deal with as bad weather, it isn't. People at this coffee cooperative are doing their share and more to make things better. The onus is now on us in the north. Supporting fair trade, and insisting that our government listen to us, are concrete actions we can take to help keep global trade from crushing people. These steps allow us to break down this monumental problem and tackle it. And doing that is more constructive than complaining about the weather.

**Where to buy fair trade coffee in
Montreal and Quebec?**
www.equiterre.qc.ca/english/coffee

(Continued from page 1)

ernment collection of the harvest at a set price. The crop wasn't collected efficiently, and farmers anxious to sell were open to exploitation by middlemen.

The IMF has been leaning on the government to get out of the peanut business for a while. Last spring, the government stopped collecting the harvest, as part of the economic restructuring the IMF was requiring in exchange for economic assistance and debt relief. When the private sector didn't respond and there weren't enough trucks to pick up the crop, too many farmers couldn't get a fair price. If they could get buyers, farmers accepted payments at a fraction of the set rate, suspicious of the government credit system being used for the first time and taking the cash in hand.

Senegal is one of several heavily indebted poor countries facing years of delays in debt relief for failing to comply adequately with IMF structural adjustment programs. The privatization of groundnut (peanut and other crops) agriculture is part of the restructuring required by the IMF and World Bank, as is privatization and deregulation of electricity.

Other countries stalled in their debt relief programs because of structural adjustment conditions include Malawi, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, SaoTomé & Príncipe, Honduras and Nicaragua. (see *Upstream Journal* Jan/Feb 2002)

Over the past year almost half of the twenty countries in the IMF/World Bank debt relief program, the Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) Initiative, have been stalled completely, unable to progress to the program's "Completion Point" and full debt relief. The Completion Point is when most relief arrives, including the cancellation of debts to wealthy countries, like Canada, that have attached their cancellation to the IMF/World Bank program.

The adjustment programs in these countries have similar features: privatization of state industries, including

public utilities, cut backs in the civil service, and deregulation of investment and industry standards. These have been features of adjustment programs for years, but more recently the financial institutions have been using the promise of debt relief to push them more vigorously.

Six countries have completed their adjustment programs to the satisfaction of the IMF and World Bank only to find that the debt relief provided is not enough to give real breathing room. The level of relief provided is based on IMF predictions that earnings from exports would reverse their decline of several years, and provide stable income to bolster the cuts to debt payments. Instead, commodity prices have continued to decline in real terms, leaving these countries still heavily in debt, their income from exports lower than ever.

A large part of the problem is the

refusal of the World Bank, the largest single creditor in these countries, to consider full cancellation. A third of debt payments goes to the World Bank, with a substantial portion being interest payments (see table). At this point, only the government of Ireland has indicated that full cancellation by the World Bank should be an option under consideration. The Canadian government refuses to take this stance.

Note: Derek MacCuish, the SJC's coordinator of economic justice programs, will be in Washington in early December to meet World Bank, IMF and government officials to press for reduced conditions and deeper debt relief. He will represent the Halifax Initiative Coalition of Canadian human rights, development, church, labour and environmental organizations. See the next issue of the *Upstream Journal* for his report.

IMF: Cancelling debt wouldn't leave enough money for more lending, or for programs like HIPC debt relief

From the IMF magazine "IMF Survey" Sept. 2002:

"Why not just forgive all the debt?"

There have been repeated appeals to the international community to simply erase all the debt of the world's poorest countries, but such a step would not be the most effective or equitable way to support the fight against poverty with the limited resources available.

Today's greatest development challenge reducing world poverty requires a comprehensive strategy that includes the efforts of the poorest countries to help themselves, as well as increased financial assistance from the international community and improved access to industrial country markets. Debt relief under the HIPC Initiative is only one element of the international support for poor countries that removes debt as an obstacle to growth. For many years to come, these countries will continue to need financial support on concessional terms to help them implement their growth and poverty reduction strategies and stand on their own feet.

Total debt cancellation would imperil the funds that multilateral creditors would have for future lending and would come at the expense of resources available to other developing countries, some of which are equally poor but have less external debt. Over 80 percent of the world's poor live in countries that are not HIPCs. For the IMF, total debt cancellation would exhaust the resources that finance the Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF) and the HIPC Initiative, and the IMF would have to stop providing concessional

Heavily Indebted Poor Country debts and payments to the World Bank

The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and the International Development Association (IDA) are part of the World Bank Group.

Principal, interest and total repayments are for one year, either 2000 or 2001, the latest year for which figures are available. Amounts are US\$ Millions

	Total Debt Outstanding	IBRD	IDA	Principal Repayment	Interest Payment	Total Payment	Interest Payments as % of Total
Country [Decision Point] 2001							
Benin	1,356	0	604	8	4	12	33.3
Cameroon	6,575	188	758	57	23	70	32.9
Ethiopia	5,697	0	2,151	22	14	36	38.9
The Gambia	441	0	196	3	1	4	25.0
Ghana	6,690	6	3,172	37	25	72	34.7
Guinea-Bissau	674	0	239	3	2	5	40.0
Guyana	1,406	6	188	5	2	7	28.6
Honduras	5,121	125	901	27	19	46	41.3
Madagascar	4,147	0	1,409	10	11	21	52.4
Malawi	2,735	4	1,762	24	13	37	35.1
Mali	2,890	0	1,243	11	8	19	42.1
Nicaragua	7,121	0	690	6	5	11	45.5
Niger* [2000]	1,638	0	723	8	6	14	42.9
Rwanda	1,316	0	713	8	5	13	38.5
Sao Tome and Principe	303	0	67	0	0	0	-
Senegal* [2000]	3,372	1	1,330	18	9	27	33.3
Sierra Leone	1,174	0	552	2	3	5	60.0
Zambia	5,884	17	1,869	17	16	33	48.5
sub total	58,540	347	18,567	266	166	432	38.4
Country [Completion Point] 2001							
Bolivia	5,806	0	1,146	12	8	20	40.0
Burkina Faso	1740	0	835	161	5	166	3.0
Mauritania	1,836	0	475	5	3	8	37.5
Mozambique	4,960	0	760	5	5	10	50.0
Tanzania	6,185	8	2,588	40	21	61	34.4
Uganda	3,107	0	2,101	22	15	37	40.5
sub total	23,634	8	7,905	245	57	302	18.9
TOTAL	82,174	355	26,472	511	166	734	22.6

Data from www.worldbank.org, Countries at a Glance tables accessed Nov 4th 2002

THE ACTEAL MASSACRES AFTER FIVE YEARS INJUSTICE AND IMPUNITY CONTINUE DESPITE LATEST COURT JUDGEMENT

By Karen Rothschild

December 22nd 2002 marks the fifth anniversary of the massacre of forty-five indigenous women, children, and men, in the municipality of Chenalho, Chiapas. Members of the social organization Las Abejas, they had been displaced from their home communities by paramilitary violence and had taken refuge in the community of Acteal.

They were massacred in the Acteal church while taking part in a day of prayer for peace.

On November 12, prison sentences were confirmed for nineteen indigenous men now detained in the Cerro Hueco penitentiary in Chiapas. They were sentenced to thirty-six years and three months for their part in the Acteal massacre. Nearly eighty people have now been sentenced in connection with the massacre.

Another six people were cleared of legal responsibility in the massacre. In the opinion of the Fray Bartolome de Las Casas Human Rights Centre in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, this latter decision did not sufficiently take into account the existing evidence against these six men. In addition, the Centre has signalled the need to recognize the responsibility, in relation to the massacre, of members of the administration of former Chiapas state governor Cesar Julio Ruiz Ferro. The Centre has more than once pointed out that the Mexican army, despite being barracked in the area, made no move to prevent the Acteal tragedy. In their opinion, the army's role should be investigated, as should allegations from witnesses regarding military participation in training the perpetrators of the massacre.

Statement issued by members of Las Abejas, 13 November 2002:

“As an organization and as victims of this massacre, we say that justice has only been partially rendered. Although some have had their sentences confirmed, other members of the group who perpetrated the massacre were released ... and they are the ones who were really responsible for organizing the massacre. In addition, there are twenty-seven persons who have not been brought before the law, despite the fact that warrants have been issued for their arrest. In the same way, no charges have been laid against public servants and the people who planned the massacre - such as former state governor Julio Cesar Ruiz Ferro and former president Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León. There has been no punishment for the big shots.

In the same way the (Chiapas state level) investigations for crime crimes have not prospered. Our demands for justice have simply been packaged and archived by the administrators of the state justice system. There is still not a rule of law for the benefit of all. There is only partial justice...

There are people who have been publicly accused. These are the peo-

ple whose actions caused the displacement of the different communities of Chenalho. We are the witnesses that these six persons who have been released are those who are really responsible for the massacre. We have made a formal accusation, and we have given information as to how the attack was planned several days ahead of time and how it involved a large number of heavily-armed men from the communities of Los Chorrros, Puebla, La Esperanza, Canolal, Pachiquil, and Quextic. Many of these men are still free, still living in their home communities.

At this time, we are living in a climate of insecurity. The present municipal president and the municipal council do not have the will to further the cause of justice. We have tried in vain to insist that the situation be resolved. Today there is a death threat in the community of Pechiquil...

There is a long way to go before full justice is reached, and much is still to be done in the case of Acteal. But we do not see any political will, on the part of either the state government or the federal government, to respond to our legal demands for justice. We are still living in a situation of injustice and of impunity...”

**Support the Social Justice Committee's
efforts to protect rights in Mexico and
Central America.**

**Become a member, and join us in the
struggle for positive social change .**

PARAMILITARIES RAID HOUSE OF SALVADORAN UNION LEADER

Latest Incident in Escalating Series of Paramilitary Violence and Threats Salvadoran government refuses to investigate case, guarantee safety of Ricardo Monge and his family

At 1:00am on Friday morning, armed subjects raided the house of Ricardo Monge, Secretary-General of the STISSS healthcare workers' union and prominent leader of the two-month healthcare strike that has won the passage of a legislative decree outlawing the privatization of healthcare. Monge himself was not at home when five men wearing ski masks, armed with rifles and handguns, burst into the residence, but his wife and two young children were terrorized by the men who proceeded to turn over the house; they took with them a number of internal union documents and left, but not before threatening the life of Monge and his family. Monge filed a police report the next morning with the District Attorney's office in Cojutepeque, but so far, police have not begun to investigate the case, nor has the government taken any steps to guarantee the safety of Monge and his family.

This incident is just the latest in an escalating series of paramilitary violence and threats against prominent members of the Salvadoran Social Movement. Monge has received anonymous death threats at his home and office, and even on his cellular phone. On October 3, the Medical College doctors' association received threats against 35 striking doctors and their families from a death squad organization calling itself the "Extermination Commandos." On November 14, the house of FMLN youth leader Gisela Cáceres was attacked in a drive-by shooting and left riddled with M-16 bullet holes. Police have not investigated any of these incidents, and US State Department officials derided doctors' denouncements as "unconfirmed rumors."

At the same time, police violence and repression is also on the rise in El Salvador since the passage of a new "National Defense Law" in August granted police and military broad repressive and surveillance powers, in violation of the 1992 Peace Accords. Protest actions have been met with heavy police response: all three "White Marches" were met by police armed with automatic weapons as well as teargas and rubber bullets. On September 19, some 50 riot police invaded the striking Oncology hospital and violently dragged workers out onto the street; Monge and other union leaders were held at gunpoint by masked agents who photographed and videotaped them, and kicked and punched them when they tried to stand. On October 30, national police chief Mauricio Sandoval placed a full-page ad in national newspapers warning that protesters could be arrested and charged with "high terrorism" for "obstructing the public right of way." On Friday, November 8, police took part in a simulated response to what officials described as "Demonstration, Peaceful or Violent": police academy students holding blank picket signs, playing the part of protesters, were wrestled to the ground and carted off by police in full body armor brandishing assault rifles.

Meanwhile, the Salvadoran Social Movement continues to mobilize in support of striking doctors, healthcare workers and electricity workers defending the healthcare and electrical sectors from privatization. The STISSS and STSEL (the electricity workers union) have called on us for international solidarity against privatization and repression. We are asking everyone to pressure President Flores and Andrea Rodriguez, the Central American officer at the US State Department. You can also directly support the mobilizing in El Salvador by contributing to the CISPES Emergency Strike Fund; 100% of all contributions will go directly to supporting striking workers in El Salvador. Please read below on how you can best support the striking workers of El Salvador.

www.globalization.org

Action alerts on economic and social rights abuse from around the world

VISITOR TO MONTREAL SPEAKS ABOUT SOCIAL REPRESSION IN GUERRERO, MEXICO

On November 4th, the SJC hosted the visit of Mexican social activist, Eleuterio Mayo Vargas, a student and community organizer at the Ayotzinapa Rural Teacher Training College in the Mexican state of Guerrero. Sr. Mayo is the general secretary of the executive committee of the Socialist Federation of Students and Peasants. His talk focused on student resistance to the privatization of Mexico's education system as well as on campesino resistance to the Plan Puebla Panama development programme.

By Karen Rothschild

The Rural Teacher Training Colleges

The Ayotzinapa Rural Teacher Training College is one of the thirty-six "normal schools" set up in 1935 by President Lázaro Cárdenas. The purpose of these schools was, and still is, to bring basic education to rural areas by providing teacher training to students from campesino and indigenous families with limited financial resources. Graduating students will go on to become teachers in remote and marginalized communities.

In the state of Guerrero, and in other regions of Mexico, rural teachers are all too frequently the targets of political repression. The rural teacher training colleges in particular have been viewed by the authorities as hotbeds of radical activism and, in the days of the Cold War, leftist subversion. The neoliberal policies of recent Mexican governments, with their emphasis on cutting social spending and increasing the role of the private sector in the provision of social programmes, represent a direct threat to the survival of the teacher training colleges.

The seventeen remaining (out of the original thirty-six) "normal schools" are struggling against government moves to limit their autonomy, reduce their budgets, and harass student leaders. Budget cuts have been aimed at reducing the student intake, eliminating free board and lodging for students from distant areas, and ending the financing of the farming activities that have been an

essential means of support for these rural schools. In two of the schools, it is now forbidden to organize independent student councils or committees. All too often, government authorities have reacted with legal harassment, police violence, and even the use of the Mexican army in response to peaceful efforts on the part of students and their parents to defend the schools..

The Plan Puebla Panama in the State of Guerrero

Sr. Mayo briefly described three scheduled development projects that are part of the Plan Puebla Panama in Guerrero. There are plans to construct hydro-electric dams at La Parrota on the Papaguayo River in the municipality of Acapulco as well as in Quetzalapa in the municipality of Ometepe. Both of these dams will flood land on which crops are being grown to supply regional markets. The attitude of the government is that there is an imperative need to generate more electrical power and that food can be imported.

In La Parrota, where 1800 hectares will be flooded, campesinos are being offered compensation of 300 pesos per hectare. Most people have relatively small plots of land - usually less than ten hectares. The price of a new house or apartment in the area is approximately 120,000 pesos. Expropriation thus means the loss of land, home, and livelihood.

The third project is a Volkswagen car factory which, despite the fact that it will emit toxic wastes, is to be built near a residential area. During the construction phase, there will be

jobs for local people on a six-month contract basis. However, local residents anticipate that, once the factory is in operation, there will be few jobs for them.

Sr. Mayo briefly described the history of social repression in the state of Guerrero, going back to the "dirty war" against the guerrilla movements of the 1970s.. He emphasized the fact that leaders of social organizations have historically been the targets of such repression. (Mexican writer Carlos Montemayor has pointed out that social activists such as former school teacher Lucio Cabañas have taken up arms when the paths to peaceful social change were blocked by official violence.) He referred to the disappearance of teacher Gregorio Alvaro López and the violent death of an activist at his own college, the imprisonment of Benigno Gúzman of the Campesino Organization of the Sierra Sur, and the massacre of seventeen of that organization's members at Aguas Blancas in 1995.

The traumas of war and political violence can never really be forgotten. This history of repression is always present in Sr. Mayo's mind when he talks of current civic resistance in his home state of Guerrero to the projected local manifestations of the Plan Puebla Panama.

Additional note:

Background material in Spanish on the struggle of the Mexican rural teacher training colleges is available for consultation in the SJC office.

Tel: 514-933-6797

HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN GUATEMALA HAS DETERIORATED, UN MISSION REPORTS

United Nations News Service 6 November – The human rights situation in Guatemala has deteriorated, as the climate of intimidation worsened amid threats and the assassination of judges, journalists and human rights defenders, according to a new report by the United Nations mission in the country verifying its peace agreements.

The UN Verification Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA) says that during the reporting period from July 2001 to June 2002, the deterioration in human rights has been closely linked to the failure to advance on other aspects of the country's peace accords.

“More than five years after the signing of the peace agreements, Guatemala's panorama of ethnic discrimination and profound social and economic inequalities persists,” the report says. “The State's lack of political will and weak institutional response have defrauded Guatemalans' expectations that the peace process would bring tangible improvement in their lives beyond the cessation of the conflict.”

The report notes that the Government has not taken decisive action towards strengthening civilian power and demilitarizing Guatemalan society, as envisioned in the accords. It also says the Government has a “grave responsibility” to confront and dismantle illegal groups and clandestine structures, which are in part an unresolved legacy of the conflict and its former counter-insurgency apparatus.

The report says that in order for the peace process, justice and reconciliation to advance, stronger actions are needed to protect human rights defenders, judicial officials, witnesses, journalists, union leaders and the clergy. The Mission urges the Government to fulfil its commitments to combat impunity and strengthen the institutions that protect human rights and battle corruption, calling such actions “key commitments” of the peace process and central demands of the Guatemalan people.

MINUGUA also welcomes the country's ratification of several international human rights treaties during the period under review, and recommends that other steps in the same direction be taken. “The human rights framework would be strengthened by the approval of additional legislation contemplated in the peace agreements,” the report suggests.

“Consolidating advances in the peace process, progressing on its unfinished agenda and ensuring its durability are monumental challenges for the Guatemalan State and civil society,” MINUGUA says, adding that it will make priority use of its resources to help civil society, peace institutions and the Guatemalan Office of the Human Rights Counsel become stronger and more effective.



Resistance by the First Nations. Source: UCIZONI

OCTOBER 12TH 2002

“DIA DE LA RAZA” – COLOMBUS DAY BECOMES DAY OF ACTION AGAINST RECOLONIZATION VIA FTAA AND PLAN PUEBLA PANAMA

October 12th 2002 was celebrated across Spain as a national holiday commemorating the 510th anniversary of the landing of Christopher Columbus and the ‘discovery’ of Latin America. The events of 1492 were the harbinger of what was to be a difficult and contentious relationship between Latin America and the rest of the world. Across Central America October 12th was marked by protest and declared a day of action against the latest strand of colonialism; the Free

The events in Central America were echoed by solidarity actions across the USA and Canada indicating the strength of feeling against the current mode of development in Central and Southern America.

Under the banner of ‘In Defence of Our Lands,’ people from diverse civil society groups across Mexico organized against the mega-projects of the PPP such as the Pan-American Highway, the Trans-Isthmus highway, and the proposed maquila factories. Blocking the

Trans Isthmus highway at Tehuantepec and Veracruz, Carlos Beas-Torres co-ordinator of indigenous peoples group UCIZONI declared, “Plan Puebla Panama means the construction of dams, highways and port expansion. In other words things that

advance the expansion of transnational corporations in the region and this means the immediate expulsion of our communities from our lands.”

The Pan-American Highway was also blocked at San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas and Jalapa de Marques, Oaxaca, for twenty four hours by local groups protesting the PPP mega projects. At Puebla the focus was upon actions to educate local people about the FTAA and the PPP.

In Nicaragua actions against the

Inter-American Development Bank [IDB], the main financier behind the PPP, blocked the Pan-American Highway at Esteli. In Managua twenty two civil society organisations marched against the ‘neo-colonialism of the IDB and the effects of structural adjustment programmes on Nicaraguan people. Criticism was also directed at the Nicaraguan government’s moves towards privatization of basic public services such as water and electricity.

In Honduras, four thousand people from thirty organisations closed the borders with Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua. In Panama, indigenous activists are currently marching two hundred miles from Costa Rica to Panama City to protest the ecological destruction of their lands by mining.

Back in Mexico, Zapatista supporters in Chiapas blocked access to the region’s main military base and rallied against the PPP, FTAA and privatization policies of the Mexican government. According to indigenous groups present, the aim of the PPP is to privatize traditional tribal lands so that trans-national corporations can exploit strategic resources such as petroleum, gas, minerals, biological resources, and hydro-electric energy from river dams. Demonstrators said these projects served the interests of the USA at the cost of increased suffering, poverty and marginalisation of the Indigenous population of Mexico.

In the USA and Canada these sentiments were echoed in widespread solidarity actions. Members of the South-West Network for Environmental and Social Justice occupied two bridges as northern and southern activists met at the Mexico-Texas border at El Paso/Ciudad Juarez.



The Raging Grannies join the Social Justice Committee protest at the Mexican Consulate, Montreal

Trade Area of the Americas and Plan Puebla Panama.

The October 12 protests in Central America coalesced around issues of Indigenous Rights and Neo-liberal economic development models – specifically the Privatization of basic services such as water and electricity, and the FTAA and PPP.

Demonstrators in the thousands blocked roads, ports, borders and bridges; others held educational events and cultural celebration rallies.

Here in Montreal, a delegation from the Social Justice Committee met with representatives of the Mexican consulate to deliver a petition and voice objections to the PPP. Seventy people joined the protest outside the Mexican consulate and were accompanied by local bands and speakers in a show of solidarity with the communities of the region.

A growing network of global resistance to the PPP and FTAA showed its strength and resolve on the 12th of October; on a day commemorating the past, the people of Central America have shown a determination to have a say in their future.

If you would like to find out more about the activities of the Social Justice Committee and its work on PPP, please call the SJC coordinator for either the Central America or Mexico programs - 514-933-9517 - or email us: americas@s-j-c.net.

Prepared by Laura Butler, with thanks to Amy Gray at the Bank Information Centre, Washington, for source material.

UK Minister for International Development Clare Short opposes unconditional debt relief, links it to war in Sudan:

"I think there has been a wonderful, heart-warming public campaign across the world and very strongly in the UK on debt relief, but some of the detailed arguments have been economically muddled. There were even people saying that unconditional debt relief, for example, which as I keep saying in the case of Sudan probably would have prolonged the war, that has moved off, or sometimes people were saying debt relief, not aid, which is a muddle."

- Clare Short speaking to the British Parliament's International Development Committee, 5 Nov. 2002 www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200102/cmselect/cmintdev/uc1279j/uc127902.htm

Note from the editor:

Very few people want debt relief for governments that are not representative of their people, let alone engaging in wholesale slaughter. It makes no sense whatever to associate efforts for unconditional debt relief to the support of the vicious regime in Sudan.

More than forty impoverished countries were promised relief when the Heavily Indebted Poor Country Initiative was launched in 1996. The program is bogged down by IMF/World Bank conditions of privatization and cuts to public spending, including the elimination of thousands of jobs. Only six countries have navigated the program to its miserly conclusion, now recognized by all to be inadequate.

When he was Canadian Finance Minister, Paul Martin argued that no G7 country could possibly implement the kind of "reforms" demanded of impoverished debtor countries, and that any government that tried would surely fall. The conditions attached to debt relief are unreasonable, and economically and socially unsound.

Talk about a "muddle."

Human rights volunteers needed in Mexico City and Guerrero PEACE BRIGADES INTERNATIONAL – MEXICO PROJECT

Peace Brigades International (PBI) is a non-partisan international organization dedicated to practicing nonviolence in conflict areas. PBI volunteers, by providing support and protective accompaniment, create "breathing space" for groups working nonviolently for social justice in their respective countries. PBI volunteers also facilitate workshops on non-violence upon request, and disseminate first-hand reports locally and internationally. The work of the Mexico Project is currently focused in Mexico City and the state of Guerrero.

Volunteers are required to be at least 25 years old, prepared to make a 1 year commitment and fluent in Spanish. Before being accepted, all candidates must present letters of reference, take part in a telephone interview and participate in a week-long training session.

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For more information and application forms contact us:

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(416) 324-9737 pbican@web.ca www.peacebrigades.org/mexico.html**

GUATEMALA: HOW SHOULD WE FOCUS OUR EFFORTS FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE?

Ernie Schibli received this letter in response to his article “Déjà vu in Guatemala” (*Upstream Journal* Sept/Oct 2002, reprinted in the *Catholic New Times* 17 Nov. 2002):

“The article pointed to the fact that despite many and sincere efforts to bring social justice to this country ‘the poverty, i.e., misery – is every bit as bad now as it was [twenty years ago] then. People in Guatemala are poorer. There is no land reform. The army is stronger.’ Gruesome murders are being carried out relentlessly, etc., etc.,

If this is the case than we have to ask ourselves why these well intentioned social justice efforts remain so ineffective. In fact, could we possibly have put some the poor Guatemalans at increased risk through our efforts or policies. Asking them to carry our banners proclaiming injustice through their cities may be asking them go beyond limits we would not cross ourselves. What should we be doing now? And how should social justice efforts now be directed?”

- Bert Monster, Ontario

Ernie’s response

Our reader has raised several important questions about the effectiveness of solidarity with the people of a country like Guatemala. These are questions that many in the solidarity movement ask themselves frequently.

First of all, let us remember that international solidarity, while important, plays a minor role in the struggle for justice in Guatemala. That conditions in that country have not substantially improved is due to a number of factors, not just a failure

of the solidarity movement. In fact, conditions might have been even worse if not for the efforts of the solidarity movement. We’ll never know.

As far as putting poor Guatemalans at risk, this is something we try very hard to avoid. Organizations such as the SJC make a point of not undertaking activities, projects or campaigns that have not been, at the very least, approved of by partners on the ground, especially if there is any perceived risk. We work in solidarity because people and organizations in Guatemala have asked it of us. This does not mean that we just sit back and passively do as we are told. We have knowledge, experience, questions, and suggestions to share. It would be remiss of us not to do so.

Having said all this, I do believe that international solidarity groups and organizations have made errors. All too often we do not stay the course. There are occasions when we have declared victory and headed off to some other issue when the first one was far from successfully resolved. Poor country foreign debt is a good example. Many declared the Jubilee debt cancellation campaign a victory and headed off to work on trade. If anything, the debt issue is even more pressing today than it was five years ago but the solidarity movement is much weaker. Related to this is a tendency to jump from one campaign to another. I must say though, that when it comes to Guatemala there are a number of solidarity organizations across Canada that have shown remarkable persistence.

This does not mean that the solidarity movement does not have to evaluate its strategy and tactics. Persistence without evaluation can easily become bullheadedness. We must

always examine what we are doing in the context of present needs. For example, at the SJC we decided to take a closer look at social and economic factors than we had in the past. Globalization, free trade agreements, privatization are not indigenous to Guatemala. They are ideas and policies that have come from outside the country even if they have been enthusiastically adopted by the country’s elites. What responsibility do those foreign countries, institutions and corporations that are pushing these policies bear for the plight of Guatemala’s poor? How is the solidarity movement to respond?

Readers, join in and share your thoughts. sjc@web.ca

**Book a speaker
or video for a
Social Justice
Committee
presentation.**

**Call the SJC
public education
coordinator
Ernie Schibli
514-933-6797**

EXPANDING OUR EDUCATING FOR JUSTICE – THROUGH YOU

Ernie Schibli

A major raison d'être of the Social Justice Committee has long been providing public education on global justice. Starting with our first interactive presentation on Colombia and coffee in the 1970s, we have conducted thousands of presentations for school, church and community groups as well as the general public. We've brought in speakers from around the world, shown movies and videos, performed theatre, conducted numerous presentations with our home-grown interactive visuals, and provided speakers from our own ranks. Some groups we only see once but many have invited us back over and over again. While the vast majority of our presentations dealt with Central America and Mexico or the international debt issue, we have tackled a number of other issues as well - South Africa, Canadian indigenous struggles, peace, tourism, etc.

Just this past month we sponsored Julian Marcelo, a Guatemalan popular organizer, for six separate events, and Mexican youth leader Eleuterio Mayo Vargas on another occasion. We spoke on international trade to McGill students, used our interactive trade presentation in St. Lambert. Our debt presentation was prented to audiences at the YMCA, St. Thomas a Becket Church, Dawson College, Entraide Missionaire (in French), and three times in Belleville, Ontario.

Clearly, the SJC does not stand alone in the struggle for global justice. We are but one, albeit with our own unique mission and style, of many groups in all parts of the world that are working towards a more just global society. We have chosen the path of consciousness-raising in Canada through education and the discussion

on values. It is based on our hope that we Canadians, when we better understand the issues at stake, will work in solidarity with others for a better, more just world.

Our education program has gone well beyond presentations to groups. We have made our various interactive kits, videos, CD-ROM software and other materials available to others. We send out the Upstream Journal to members and friends. We continually provide updated information on our web sites and we constantly provide the news media with information.

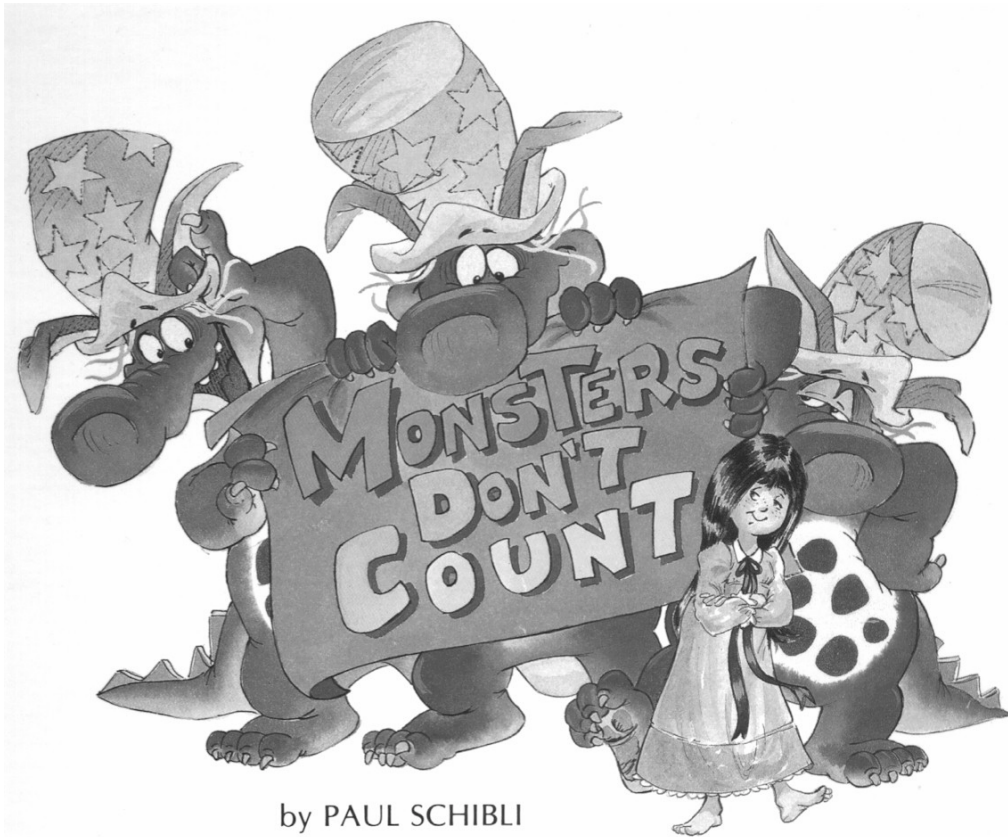
Yet, the group presentation lies at the heart of our education program. It is where we have the best opportunity to share information, raise ethical questions, engage in dialogue, and challenge one another. It provides an opportunity to meet others face-to-face and to come to know and appreciate one another. That is why we believe it so important.

Despite our successes to date, it is clear that much more has to be done. We have merely scratched the surface. This is where you come in. Undoubtedly, you belong to some organization. You will certainly have groups of friends. These are people we would like to meet, to have the opportunity of sharing our vision with. Frequently, the only point of contact we might have with them is through you and so we are asking you to make it. Talk us up. Get some invitations. It does not have to be a large group in a formal setting. It could be at your home with just a few friends. There are a number of us who would gladly come and share our insights and information. Just give us a call.

P.S. Both of our program committees could use more members. Maybe it is time for you to consider becoming active in this way.

**Social Justice Committee educational
resources -
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