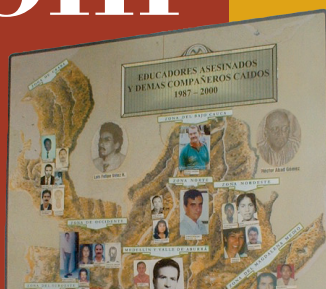


Classroom violence

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Latin cleaners fighting back

How London's exploited workers are getting organised – community mobilisation and the unions: page 7



FRONTLINE LATIN AMERICA

April – June 2009

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Indigenous Colombians mobilise popular resistance

VIVA LA MINGA!



La Minga arrives in Bogotá

Photos: ACIN

The Minga was voted Colombia's 'Person of the Year' in 2008, to the warm approval of freedom-loving people. But what is the Minga?

Robert Greene

'Minga' is a traditional indigenous word meaning special work team, combining together to complete a task useful for the community.

In modern times, defending the community can only be achieved by political resistance and the term has come to signify both a day of action and a popular assembly.

For sure, the Minga of Indigenous and Popular Resistance is a means for the self-acting masses to participate in shaping their future.

Lasting from early October to the end of November 2008 the Minga has transformed a political scene dominated by the right-wing government of President Álvaro Uribe Vélez.

Uribe was riding high on account of the national and international acclaim he received for gaining the release of Ingrid Betancourt and 15 military personnel

held by the FARC guerrillas in July (no matter that their release was obtained by trickery and deception). With Uribe triumphant, for a while Colombia felt more than ever like a society under lock down, firmly in the grip of the patriotic military-media machine,

whilst army and paramilitary death squads continued with their dirty business of eliminating opponents with impunity.

continued on page 2

Confrontation on Pan-American Highway



FARC accused of massacre against Awá community on Ecuador border

Reports from several members of the indigenous Awá community, settled in Nariño in the UNIPA area near the border with Ecuador, state that on 4 February armed men dressed as the FARC detained 20 men, women and children from the community.

Frontline Correspondent

The Awás were taken against their will to the El Hojal stream near to El Bravo village, where several of them were assassinated. The following day confrontations between the guerrillas and the national army took place nearby. That afternoon bombing started between El Bravo and Sabaleta, generating terror among the people and a mass exodus.

The National Indigenous Organisation of Colombia ONIC holds the FARC responsible for killing 27 Awá in early February. The FARC has admitted that its forces killed 8 Awá who, it claims, were acting as army informers. This explanation has been strongly rejected by the indigenous movement and human rights organisations.

On 23 February, the indigenous communities started a Humanitarian Mission (Minga) for the Dignity of the Awá People in order to recover their bodies. They hold the Colombian government responsible for its insistence on involving civil society in the armed conflict, for its negligence in failing to prevent forced displacement and other human rights violations by illegal armed groups and the state's own forces.

Sources: www.onic.org.co and colombia.indymedia.org

See *Colombia: Why they Kill the Awa* at <http://upside-downworld.org/main/content/view/1730/61>

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Stop Press: Indigenous Videos

- The Time is Now! Indigenous Tribunal July 2008 in the Sierra Nevada. Made for ONIC
 - The Minga in Action Clips from news reports
 - Aida Quilqué Message recorded especially for Women's Day 8 March 2009 (also at <http://video.google.es/videoplay?docid=-5309022787009325555>)
- These are available for use in solidarity with the indigenous movement. Please send order and small donation to cover costs payable to 'Colombia Solidarity Campaign', PO Box 8446, London N17 6NZ.

FRONTLINE
LATIN AMERICA

Colombia Solidarity Campaign

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from page 1

The original inhabitants of Colombia have been reduced to just over 2 per cent of the population. The last issue of Frontline Latin America reported evidence presented to the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal in July 2008 that 18 of Colombia's 102 indigenous peoples are in danger of extinction. Genocidal repression against indigenous communities has not abated. No less than 1,240 indigenous people have been killed and 53,885 forcibly displaced in the 6 years of Uribe's rule.

The Minga wrested the initiative back to the people, to civilian resistance against handing over natural wealth to an alliance of local profiteers and the multinationals. It has again shown the indomitable genius of the oppressed. There was the slightest chink of opportunity: with his appalling human rights record an issue in the US presidential election, Uribe had to at least simulate respect for citizens' right to protest.

- The Minga's core demands are:
- To reject Free Trade Agreements with the US, Canada and Europe;
 - To repeal laws such as the Rural Development Statute, the Mining Code and the Water Plan that facilitate plunder of natural resources;
 - To end repression, no more state terror and war, reparations for the victims;
 - To end the infiltration of paramilitarism in the Congress and executive;
 - To complete previous government agreements, especially that made after the Nilo massacre, to return lands taken from the indigenous peoples.

From early October there were indigenous protests in several regions, but it was the Cauca Valley in the south west of the country that became the focus of a mass mobilisation on the streets that would last nearly two months.

11 Oct: The Minga starts blocking the Pan-American Highway at María de Piendamó, the traditional gathering point.

12 Oct: The 516th commemoration of Columbus's 'discovery' of the Americas, but a day of disgrace for the 50 million indigenous people, soon reduced to a tenth that population. The Minga grows to 12,000 people. As their road blockade continues, the national media seek to deride them and turn public opinion against the protestors, in preparation for the attack that was about to come.

15 Oct: 90 indigenous people are wounded in assaults by the ESMAD riot police, who kill Taurino Ramos, a 23-year-old indigenous man, by a shot to the head. Police are filmed using machetes and catapults.

16 Oct: A ski-masked rifleman mingles with the police and snipes at indigenous targets. Caught on film, this clip is subsequently broadcast internationally by CNN.

17 Oct: President Uribe sends

Viva la Minga!



a message to the Minga demanding that the indigenous people apologise to the soldiers and police wounded in the confrontations. The number of indigenous injured reaches 150 people.

21-25 Oct: The Minga lifts the blockade and marches 70 km to Cali where it is met by social movements.

26 Oct: Uribe evades a meeting with the marchers who are left waiting for him for hours.

29 Oct: The Asociación de Cabildos Indígenas del Norte del Cauca (ACÍN) reports that 29 indigenous people were assassinated nationwide the previous month.

2 Nov: Uribe at last attends a meeting in María de Piendamó, where he is confronted by Aida Quilqué (pictured below left), but fails to make any concrete commitments. Journalist Holman Morris broadcasts the event on his Contravía programme.

3 Nov: The Minga deliberates and decides to continue the mass mobilisation with a new tactic, a 300 km march to 'Walk the Word' to the national capital Bogotá.

10 Nov: Marchers leave Cali accompanied by a caravan of colourful *chiva* lorries. Groups join from Antioquia, Nariño and Guajira. Other popular sectors join the human river of resistance.

12 Nov: March arrives in Ibagué where it plans to meet with displaced people, but the police block the route and attack on horseback. A contingent of women at the front break through police lines allowing the Minga to proceed.

19 Nov: Indigenous movement joins urban social movements in a human rights public hearing in Soacha, the impoverished southern outskirts of Bogotá which has seen hundreds of young people 'disappeared' by the state and paramilitaries.

20 Nov: The Minga arrives at National University campus, but is denied use of buildings to accommodate the marchers, who camp out in the open. In Cauca University, Popayán students are threatened by the Black Eagles paramilitaries for supporting the Minga.

21 Nov: Solidarity events in Berlin, Barcelona, Paris, London, Lima and cities across the Americas.

22 Nov: The Minga becomes a national demonstration converging on the capital city's main Plaza Bolívar demanding: Human Rights; Return of Territories; the State to implement agreements with the social sectors.

29 Nov: Aida Quilqué, the chief counsel of the Regional Indigenous

Council of Cauca, CRIC, addresses a wrap-up rally: "The Minga has constructed community in Bogotá. We came from the mountains and the valleys of Cauca, the snowcaps of the Sierra Nevada of Santa Marta, the sands of La Guajira, the jungles of the Pacific and Amazonia, the peaks and the volcanoes of the Andean ranges. Step by step, the countryside animated our hearts, united the voices of our people, and reawakened the dreams of a country for everybody." (1) The Minga rally decides a dual strategy, working in base communities alongside targeting its demands towards the US.

10 Dec: Aida Quilqué of the Nasa people and Ana Manuela Ochoa of the Kankuamos attend the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, where Colombia's record is being examined. They demand that Colombia signs the 2007 UN Declaration On The Rights Of Indigenous Peoples.

16 Dec: At 4am in the morning Edwin Legarda, Aida Quilqué's husband, is assassinated by an army ambush. The news is met with outrage.

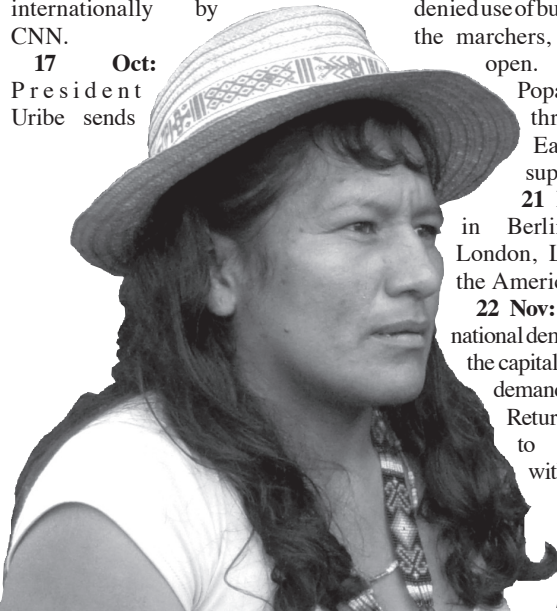
Indigenous leaders and independent indigenous media outlets have been persecuted throughout the process. On 25 November state forces detained two leaders of the Cañamomo Lomaprieta community in Riosucio the coffee growing region Caldas. This is an area where indigenous people have been taking back the land with direct action occupations, land needed for the alternative plan for life.

The ACÍN was at the heart of the mobilisations. Its multimedia web page was blocked. On 14 December, its radio station Radio Pa'yumat was attacked, cables destroyed and equipment robbed. ACÍN's communication team receive continual death threats.

Despite these problems, on 21 and 22 February 2009 a conference of delegates from Afro-descendant, student, trade union, indigenous and many other organisations met to affirm their support for an ongoing Minga of Social and Community Resistance. The conference decided on a plan of sector mobilisations through 2009 leading up to a summit of social organisations in the last quarter of the year.

On all previous experience this will surely be attacked and at least some of the participants will pay with their lives for standing up to the regime. The people continue their resistance in this full knowledge. The Colombia Solidarity Campaign calls for accompaniment, support and defence of the Minga.

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info@eric-colombia.org
(1) report by Mario Murillo at <http://upside-downworld.org/main/content/view/1600/61>



Aida Quilqué

Campesino solidarity activist Mateo Cramer dies in road accident

Well known in Latin American solidarity networks, Matthieu Cramer, friend and militant of the Inza campesino struggles in Cauca, in Colombia's south west, died on 10 December 2008 in a road accident in the north of Peru. Matthieu (Mateo) was travelling to meet his brother and campesinos in Argentina.

Mateo was always full of energy, and side by side with those in struggle whose cause he shared.

"El mono", the blonde one, would not be content if these lines were only about him, for his whole being and revolutionary action was to reclaim power for the people and not for the individual.

Every project and every idea he proposed was in the context of community, autonomy and rebellion: whether it be a house occupation in Geneva; the wave of community struggle at the National University in Bogotá to achieve students' basic right to food; the campesino community projects in Cauca; or the social and community Minga launched by various indigenous communities last year. The list of processes that Mateo supported and gave his energy to is endless, because he trusted fully in the force within each and every one. He was a beautiful person, it has to be said, laughing and with a ready smile.

Mateo was able to link up and strengthen communities in different parts of Colombia and the world, as the best example of internationalisation of struggle and solidarity "he put on the shirt" ("walked the talk") and participated as another Inza militant. His life work makes clear the importance of 'internationals' being present in communities that are seeking alternatives to the conflict, a presence that is committed, transparent and open to understanding the logics of thought and action of community members.

Congress hears evidence of trade union killings

There have been 9,911 acts of violence against Colombian trade unionists in the last 23 years, according to a report presented by the National Trade Union School (ENS) on 12 February to a special hearing of the Education and Work Committee of the US House of Representatives in Washington.

2,694 trade unionists have been assassinated since 1986 (including 482 killings from 2002 to 2008 under the government of Álvaro Uribe Vélez). 60% of the homicides of trade unionists in the entire planet occur in just one country: Colombia. There were 49 assassinations in 2008, 10 more than 2007.

ENS highlights the theme of impunity: of the 2,694 homicides only 1,104 have been officially investigated, but in only 90 cases, 3% of the total,

has there been a sentence passed in court, and only against the material agents rather than the intellectual authors of these crimes.

In respect to trade union rights, ENS points out that the Colombian government has not fulfilled basic International Labour Organisation (ILO) standards: of the country's 18 million workers, less than 3 million have a labour contract and, according to the law, these are the only workers who may join a union. Of these, less than a million workers are actually unionised. Besides this, there are the hurdles to forming a union: in 2007 the (Orwellian-named) Ministry of Social Protection denied registration to 253 union applications.

ENS pointed to the Associated Work Cooperatives

(CTAs) as the vehicle for a new model of labour relations. CTAs are quite different to cooperatives as envisaged by the ILO: low-wage labour in precarious conditions and their workers have no rights or unions. The CTAs are pseudo-cooperatives that the employers and the state are using to destabilise workers' rights and prevent the consolidation of union organisation.

The Education and Work Committee has 40 days to add information into the report that will be considered by the US Congress in its deliberations on whether to approve a Free Trade Agreement with Colombia.

Source: Rebanadas de Realidad - ENS, Medellín, 12/02/09

All change in the US? Chiquita, Holder and President Obama

The streets of Washington, D.C. filled with people upon the announcement of Barack Obama's election as the president of the United States. There were cries of victory, celebratory weeping, and strangers who greeted one another in warm embrace. Riding the bus home that night, I listened as people spoke excitedly about finally feeling represented in a city that has historically silenced its majority African-American population. They talked about finally, after years of disappointment and disillusionment, feeling hope.

Tahirih Aliah, US correspondent



US Attorney General Eric Holder (right) with Bill Clinton

rights violations as reason to oppose the agreement's ratification.

Obama took issue with Colombia's continued violence against trade unionists, stating "The history in Colombia right now is that labour leaders have been targeted for assassination on a fairly consistent basis and there have not been prosecutions... We have to stand for human rights and we have to make sure that violence isn't

being perpetrated against workers who are just trying to organize for their rights..."

Human Rights Watch argues that Congress should "continue to delay ratification of the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement until Colombia shows concrete and sustained results in reducing impunity for trade unionist killings and dismantling the paramilitary mafias responsible for many of the killings."*

Many of Obama's cabinet appointments were in Bill Clinton's administration of the 1990s. This is particularly alarming because, after all, it was Clinton who passed the North American Free Trade Agreement, and ratified the Helms-Burton provisions tightening the embargo on Cuba. Clinton is notably remembered for the massive military package of 2000 called 'Plan Colombia', he fought congressional Democrats' efforts to attach human rights conditions to the aid.

With Hilary Clinton at State Department, Robert Gates as Secretary of Defense, James Jones (former board member of Chevron and Boeing) as his National Security Advisor and Janet Napolitano for Homeland Security Chief, there is little sign of change in Obama's foreign policy team.

The new president's most controversial appointment is Eric Holder (pictured) as Attorney General. Holder was the defense lawyer for Chiquita Brands International in a case accusing the corporation of assisting AUC right-

wing paramilitaries during their reign of terror in Urabá, Colombia's north-western banana growing region.

Chiquita used to be known as the United Fruit Company, notoriously the beneficiary of the army massacre of hundreds of banana workers in Santa Marta in 1928 (depicted in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's Hundred Years of Solitude), and the US Marines invasion of Guatemala in 1954.

In the latest case, Chiquita admitted to paying the AUC \$1.7 million over 7 years. Holder claimed that Chiquita made the payments to protect the corporation from the paramilitaries, comparing the situation to a mafia-like extortion. He lauded the company's "voluntary self-disclosure" and chastised critics for treating the company "too harshly" for making what was, in his words, "a really painful decision".

Then the Organization of American States issued a report demonstrating that Chiquita had provided thousands of AK-47s rifles and ammunition to the AUC. No small matter: with Chiquita's support, the paramilitaries murdered 4,000 civilians in Urabá, and spread their operations throughout Colombia with a violent takeover of other regions.

Holder, using his influence as former Deputy Attorney General under Clinton, negotiated Chiquita's deal with the Justice Department. Chiquita was ordered to pay a fine of \$25 million, for the crime of donating to a terrorist organization; but no officials received any jail time, and no reparations were paid to families whose lives were torn apart. In this vacuum of accountability, a US lawsuit is being led by 173 families of banana workers who were killed by paramilitaries.

An infamous paramilitary leader, Salvatore Mancuso, has declared from his detainment in US custody that he has extensive knowledge about corporate collaboration with paramilitaries, including not only Chiquita but Dole and Del Monte as well.

So, will it be human rights or corporate rights? After all of Obama's rhetoric, shouldn't these cases be a priority for the new administration?

*Human Rights Watch, 2008. *Breaking the Grip? Obstacles to Justice for Paramilitary Mafias in Colombia*

Blair starts new job for Uribe

Tony Blair has accepted a job working as a consultant for the Colombian government; he will be assisting the Foreign Policy Commission with their development of a "bolder" foreign policy for Colombia, writes Hasan Dodwell.

Jaime Bermudez, Colombia's Foreign Minister, boasted of the "good luck and fortune of being able to receive suggestions and recommendations from a personality like Tony Blair".

The British ex-Prime Minister, according to Bermudez, will be asked to review the final proposals of the Commission and offer his "recommendations, comments and suggestions".

"What a great possibility to have experts who can suggest possibilities and options so that Colombia can have a bolder foreign policy", he added.

The Colombian Government's proposal was put to Blair whilst he and the Colombian President were together in Washington on 19 January. While the onslaught continued in Gaza, the Middle East Envoy found time to visit

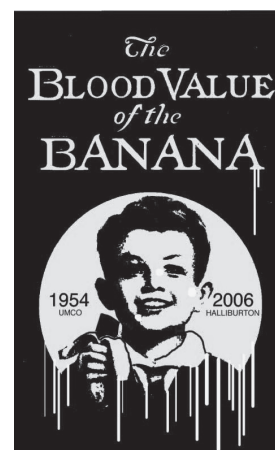


Blair, Howard and Uribe receiving Bush's Medal of Freedom in January

Washington where he, and Uribe, received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from the outgoing US President George Bush.

The coming together of two of

Bush's staunch allies has been criticised by the anti-war campaigner, and Labour MP, Jeremy Corbyn. He called the decision "sad news" for Colombia.



News

Colombia's Madoff – The DMG scandal

The nasty underbelly of capitalism continues to be revealed and globalisation means no geographical region is immune. Japanese and US regulators have, over the last few months, had to deal with the collapse of at least two so-called "pyramid" or "Ponzi" (read: fraudulent) investment financial schemes set up by, on the one hand, the Japanese bedding and health products businessman, Kazutsugi Nami (estimated at US\$ 1.2 billion) and on the other, the US investment trader, Bernard Madoff (US\$ 50 billion). The schemes are evidently castles built on sand and never more so than DMG – the collapsed pyramid operating in Colombia over the last 4 years.

G. Saavedra

The pyramid schemes, on which many had placed their financial faith, are based on a form of investment gambling where a minority become better off but always at the expense of the majority involved, because of false promises to investors of double and even treble-figure rates of interest on non-existent funds. Thousands of people who invested in these get-rich-quick schemes have had their fingers burnt. In Colombia, DMG was built on cocaine gains propped up by unhealthy alliances of state, business and local armed groups with a turnover of US\$1.5 billion and 4 million customers.

The emergence of DMG would not have been possible without the context of state neglect and collusion with an unforgiving ruling financial system plus the established narco-paramilitary

Pyramid investment scheme collapses

mafia. The latter, in particular, have been undergoing a phase of drastic restructuring due to changed state-mafia allegiances and inter-gang duels. As a result, the rural peasant economies of Southern Colombia have been gradually decimated and local populations have had to cling to precarious and insecure livelihoods, unable to avoid the local drug mafias which are increasingly sustaining themselves through the economy fed by para-financieras – paramilitary financial institutions.

Many Colombian citizens, in desperation, had believed the system set up by young and dynamic David Murcia Guzman (DMG), to be a godsend. In fact the initials DMG were widely said to stand for Dios Mio Gracias – My God Thanks! And to a certain degree it was a godsend. To people with no access to proper health, education, welfare or pension provision, the rates of interest promised by DMG were not to be sniffed at. Many had felt their meagre savings were in the best of hands. In effect, unlike other pyramids, DMG, surprisingly, consistently delivered on its promises, as the funds kept on growing. The system worked so well that the established oligarchy began to get uncomfortable. The convoluted and baffling truth exploded into public view in November 2008 when Guzman was arrested, along with his co-directors from Belarus and Brazil, in Panama, where they lived a luxurious life whilst overseeing business profits.

After Guzman's arrest thousands of minor investors in the Southern

Colombian region of Narino, Putumayo and Cauca were up in arms about the collapse: "With DMG we never lost, with the government, yes," said Carlos Rodriguez, who invested 28 million pesos (\$12,000).

"David Murcia was only trying to redistribute the wealth a little in Colombia," said Norberto Escobar, 47, an impoverished DMG investor from Putumayo, the southern coca-growing department. Thus, Mr. Guzman is still seen by many as a miracle risk-taker and folk-hero for his financial efforts towards the average citizen. Unfortunately, it is probably this aspect of his popularity which brought about his downfall. Colombia's ruling classes began to feel uneasy at Murcia Guzman's increasing success and influence which were extending widely.

So what have been the consequences of DMG and its financial victims?

Uribe's deeply embarrassed government of "democratic security", after pressure from opposition parties and protestors, promises financial compensation for losses, but this remains to be seen. For the deeper truth is that Uribe's strong links with the ruling financial system and the Colombian ruling class have forced him to clean up. Older, and often corrupt, power seeks to preserve the status quo under this medusa of capitalism. In addition, David Murcia's trial is not yet over having been delayed by various hurdles. It has actually been difficult to provide him with a defence lawyer as at least three have withdrawn citing conflict of interest.



Historic victory for cane cutters

On 15 September 2008 12,000 cane cutters from the departments of Valle de Cauca and Cauca decided to go on strike to protest against the inhumane conditions on the sugar plantations. The workers demanded an end to indirect employment, through sub-contractors misleadingly named Associated Work Co-Operatives, and an increase in their wages – the sugar companies have significantly increased their profits as a result of the ethanol trade but this has had no positive impact on the wage of the cane cutters.

José Antonio Gutiérrez

Since the beginning the strike has faced violent repression from the riot police, ESMAD, demonisation from the mainstream media, and attacks from the government itself, with President Uribe claiming the strike had been "infiltrated" by the FARC.

This reaction is not coincidental: bio-fuels is one of the strategic areas of the economy that Uribe's government is trying to stimulate and, in addition, one of the most important Colombian

businessmen, Ardila Lulle, has an effective monopoly over the employers' association ASOCAÑA.

The workers knew that to confront direct repression they had to keep a united front, and they remained as one despite numerous attempts to divide them. There were particular attempts to create division between workers on direct contracts and those contracted through cooperatives.

In one instance 900 "directly contracted" workers were informed they were being fired as a result of the strikes carried out by the "indirectly contracted" employees. There were also efforts to alienate the cane cutters from the community, resulting in clashes between the haulage contractors and traders. These attempts to create division failed.

Likewise, efforts to criminalise protest and solidarity also failed. On 22 October the strikers' spokesmen were arrested: comrades Oscar de J. Bedoya Muñoz, Omar Enrique Sedano García, and José Valencia Llanos. Also arrested were two advisors to the opposition senator Alexander López: Alberto Bejarano Schiess and Juan Pablo Ochoa. The charges were, it was claimed, for the incitement of violence – they were released two weeks later. Senator López himself was also slandered for the 'crime' of having met with the cane cutters. The government's message is clearly that solidarity with the common people is a crime.

Nevertheless, the determination of the workers showed, once again, that what is needed for the triumph of the people is unity; unity of the workers, unity of the working class. Thus far the situation has been favourably resolved towards the workers in seven out of the eight sugar refineries...

Long live the unity of the working class! Long live the cane cutters of Colombia!

Full article at <http://www.colombiasolidarity.org.uk/content/view/439/>

The cane cutters from the María Luisa refinery finished their strike on 10 December 2008.

Álvaro José Vega, President of the Valle sub-committee of the Workers' Central Union, CUT, has stated that 12 leaders who participated in the strike and sat at the negotiation table have faced death threats, and that two of them have had to leave the region.

EU – fine words, foul deeds

The EU is negotiating Association Agreements with Latin American countries to secure corporate-friendly legal regimes across the continent by 2010. Mexico and Chile already have agreements with the EU, whose attention is now focused on Central America and the Andean region.

Andy Higginbottom

Formally, an Association Agreement consists of three elements: a Co-operation Agreement; a Political Dialogue and a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) but the core element is the FTA. The EU is insisting on parity with any pre-existing free trade deal with the US. In Central America, this means that EU corporations will get the same market access as US corporations currently do under the CAFTA-DR free trade agreement.

Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica are negotiating as a bloc with the EU commission, acting on behalf of its 27 member states. Negotiations entered their seventh round at the end of February, and are expected to conclude in May 2009. The EU's demands include privatisation of public services; protection for its investors; opening up of natural resources and intellectual property rights over natural wealth. Social movements say that "there are no differences between CAFTA-DR

and the EU's agreement". Indeed, the EU is not providing an alternative to the US deals, rather it is taking advantage of them to consolidate free market regimes.

The governments of the Andean region have been split by EU tactics. Since negotiations began in September 2007, the right-wing governments of Peru and Colombia have agreed bilateral negotiations, and are willing to open up their markets. In contrast, Bolivia's Evo Morales has insisted on protections against the privatisation of life essentials such as water, and against the commercialisation of genetic knowledge. Since Morales' stand was made explicit last year, the EU has isolated Bolivia and worked with the more compliant regimes.

Peru's FTA with the US came into force on 1 February 2009, and Canada signed an FTA with Uribe in June 2008. But Colombia's proposed FTA with the US has been blocked in the US Congress, where the Democrats especially have insisted on an improvement in Uribe's human rights record before they approve a deal.

When still a presidential candidate, Hilary Clinton hinted that she would agree the Colombia deal. At the end of February Uribe sent a high-power team for talks with Clinton, now newly ensconced as US Secretary of State. In this context, an EU trade agreement will make it easier for Uribe and Clinton to overcome human

rights objections and deliver a US deal as well.

In February 25 EU negotiators went to Bogotá for the first round of detailed talks with their Colombian and Peruvian counterparts across 14 commercial sectors, with very little transparency. The talks on pharmaceuticals are completely secret. Human rights guarantees are not part of the negotiation.

Social movements have been angered by the EU's hypocritical claims to be concerned with regional integration, co-operation and development. Behind the soft language lies a brutal policy. The Coordination of Andean Indigenous Organisations accuses the EU of deliberately dividing the Andean Community of Nations, and has called for popular resistance to the EU free trade agreements.

The Hemispheric Social Alliance, that was at the forefront of mobilisations to defeat the US led Free Trade Area of the Americas, has called on social movements in Europe to mobilise against the EU's plans. The bi-regional social movement alliance Enlazando Alternativas (Linking Alternatives) is working for a different relationship, one of solidarity, co-operation and real dialogue between the peoples of the continents.

For more information see:

www.bilaterals.org

www.fightingftas.org

www.enlazandoalternativas.org

Drummond strikers win



Kitchen workers at Drummond

Colombia has become the sixth largest exporter of coal globally, due to changes in laws which allow foreign companies to own and export coal. US corporation Drummond bought the mining rights in La Loma, Cesar in the late eighties. Coal exports from La Loma increased from 1 million tonnes in 1995 to 22.9 million tonnes in 2007, the majority of which is exported to the US and Europe. Profits in 2007 were US \$1.15 billion.

Claire Hall

Approximately 10,000 people work at the open cast mine, 400 of them in the kitchens and canteens. In December, Caves GHL signed a new multimillion-dollar three-year agreement with Drummond to continue providing catering services. They planned to sack all workers on 31 January and replace them with temporary staff working through so-called 'cooperatives'. The workers responded to the threat by striking. At 5am on 21 January catering production stopped and the Caves workers blockaded the canteens. The unionised miners do not work without hot food so consequently the majority of coal production stopped too.

After 30 hours of negotiations Caves met the workers' demands: direct contracts for two years; recognition of their union; and the right to negotiate for better conditions. This is a historic

victory, against the disturbing trend in Colombia of an increasing shift to sub-contracted labour. The victory was partially due to the determination of women involved who rejected the proposal from Caves, and declared: "We were all going to be sacked, why are we scared? We will win or we will lose, but not more of the same".

Thanks to this spirit and the solidarity of mineworkers union SINTRAEMINERGETICA and foodworkers union SINALTRAINAL, the workers won job stability and dignity and learnt that struggle and solidarity are effective ways to successfully confront exploitative multinationals.

More info: www.gizzacroggy.blogspot.com



Workers cheer their strike victory

Tabaco signs Cerrejón deal

On 12 December 2008, Cerrejón Coal and the Tabaco Relocation Committee signed an agreement which, according to the Relocation Committee's legal adviser, Armando Perez, contains most of what the community has been demanding since the brutal eviction of the community and the demolition of their village in 2001.

Richard Solly

Cerrejón Coal is owned by three massive mining multinationals listed on the London Stock Exchange – Anglo American, BHP Billiton and Xstrata. Colombia Solidarity Campaign has supported the Tabaco Relocation Committee since the Campaign was founded in 2001.

The company has committed to:

- paying old indemnity money held in an escrow account
- paying new compensations
- buying a plot of land to be given to the municipality of Hatonuevo, which is legally responsible for reconstructing Tabaco
- building a community centre on that land and delivering the initial engineering works necessary for the community to build the new village
- funding socio-economic projects.

The company says its contributions to indemnities will total US \$1.8 million and another US \$1.3 million will be disbursed for sustainability



Tabaco leader José Julio Pérez

Photo: Steve Striffler

projects. Cerrejón will also pay the legal expenses accrued by Tabaco Relocation Committee representatives and any taxes generated by the agreement.

This agreement has been achieved through the dogged determination of the people of Tabaco and the organisational capacity of the Tabaco Relocation Committee. But it has been assisted by alliances with others within and outside Colombia.

The involvement of the indigenous

Wayuu organisation Yanama was key. It was Yanama's President, Remedios Fajardo, who first brought to international attention the devastation being caused by the Cerrejón mine. Remedios Fajardo and Armando Perez helped to create a network of organisations in the countries where the mine's multinational corporate owners have their headquarters – the USA (where original mine operator Exxon Mobil is based), Australia (BHP Billiton), Switzerland (Xstrata) and the United Kingdom (Anglo American).

The campaign of support for the people of Tabaco has included legal actions, use of shareholders' meetings, speaking tours, publications and letter-writing campaigns. Finally, complaints were brought against BHP Billiton and Xstrata to the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) by Australian and Swiss groups for breach of the OECD's voluntary guidelines on involuntary resettlement.

The December agreement should lead to the rebuilding of the community and people's livelihoods. But it is essential that we continue to monitor its implementation to ensure that the company and the municipality of Hatonuevo actually do what they have committed to doing.

Furthermore, other communities – Tamaquitos, Roche, Chancleta and Patilla – still face relocation and need solidarity in their own negotiations with Cerrejón Coal. The company must accept those communities' demands concerning community membership and the quantity and quality of the land to which they are to be moved, and ensure that, in the period before relocation takes place, the livelihoods of all members of those communities are protected.

Cerrejón workers' union SINTRACARBON made important gains in its contract negotiations during December and January. Long-term sick workers will receive basic pay for eighteen months. Company contributions to pensions, health insurance and education have increased and loan facilities improved. Pay rises of 11% were agreed. Improvements were won in terms and conditions of subcontracted workers.

Disagreement remains between management and union over whether work at the mine counts as 'hazardous' under Colombian law, but the company will finance an independent study in co-operation with the union and will pay increased social security contributions in accordance with the law for any areas of work that the study deems hazardous.

SINTRACARBON emerges from the talks strengthened by the broad participation of its membership in defining the union's positions and by greater respect from management.

Venezuelan trade unionists killed

Three Venezuelan trade unionists were assassinated on the night of 27 November 2008. Richard Gallardo, chair of the Aragua Region of the UNT (National Union of Workers), Luis Hernández, Chair of the Union of Pepsi-Cola workers, and Carlos Requena, who fought on a national level for the improvement of workers' health and safety, were shot dead by gunmen who fled on motorcycles.

Katerina Annis

They had spent the day supporting workers at Alpina, a Colombian-based dairy company, where

400 workers were involved in an industrial dispute and had been attacked by regional police after occupying the plant. The day after the killings hundreds of workers took to the streets in protest, blocking major highways. A regional strike was held on 2 December with yet more road blocks.

Another trade unionist was assassinated in the state of Aragua on 4 December. Simon Caldera was the leader of the Bolivarian Construction and Industry Union and was also killed in a drive-by shooting.

The nature of all four murders – assassination of trade unionists by hired killers – together with the fact that the first 3 were participating in a dispute with

a Colombian-owned company, has led to suspicions that Colombian paramilitaries may have carried out the killings, possibly on behalf of bosses.

On 29 January two workers were killed by police in the state of Anzoátegui, Venezuela. Pedro Suarez from the Mitsubishi factory and José Marcano from nearby auto parts factory Macusa were killed when regional police were attempting to evict hundreds of workers who had been occupying the Mitsubitshi (MMC) factory. Six police officers were arrested and a private security firm is being investigated, whilst the Venezuelan national assembly are also investigating the killings.

See www.handsoffvenezuela.org for more info

Solidarity

New Generation – In solidarity with peoples' struggles across the Americas

"The old world is dying, come help us build a new one. Help build the international school for bottom-up organising"

NG / CM / ISBO Collective

Who we are!

We are a collective of organisations working together on this project:

Nueva Generacion

'Nueva Generacion' (NG) is a Latin American (mainly Colombian) Youth Arts Collective who uses the arts to raise awareness and educate around political issues and Latin American culture. NG is also one of the founding groups of Refugee Youth. Please visit: www.myspace.com/newgenerationlondon

Refugee Youth

'Refugee Youth' is a network of youth groups of Refugees across London. We use Popular Education and Action Research methods for supporting young people in developing their leadership and taking action in their own communities. Refugee Youth also exists as a community, indeed family, creating a powerful support system for young Refugees, some here on their own, as well as being a force for change. You can see more about the organisation on: www.refugeeyouth.org.uk

Cais Maloka

Our close friends Javier Sanchez and Maria Delapava, members of the Nueva Generacion collective and former staff of Refugee Youth, returned last October to Colombia to build a Social Action and Research Centre on a farm they bought just outside Cali, Colombia.

The Centre is called 'Centro de Accion e Investigacion Social MALOKA — CAISMALOKA', and alongside being their own vision, is also modelled on the Highlander Center in East Tennessee, USA: www.highlandercenter.org



highlandercenter.org

We are currently working on developing a website for CAIS Maloka! www.caismaloka.com

What we want to do?

Maria and Javier, with daughter Chia, are already doing incredible work with young people using the arts to explore issues in their lives and communities and develop solutions to their own struggles. Youth Hip Hop groups, working on campaigns on environmental justice, with National Indigenous Organisations, and much, much more.

The main barriers they are facing is lack of resources both economically and people-wise; so this is one of the reasons we are organising a series of fundraising events, to support their work on the ground (effectively on the front line), and to fund a delegation of young Activists for a solidarity visit next year to build the centre itself and support them in developing their grassroots work.

Bottom-up organising school

Another reason we are raising funds for them is to enable them to participate in the organising activities

for the International Bottom-Up Organising School within the next year. For example they are planning visits to Organisers in Bolivia, Mexico and Brazil over the next year to share experiences of organising and build relationships of solidarity across the Americas, initially.

We all recognise that it is easier in the global north to gather financial resources due to being one of the centers of Capital, and indeed see it as fundamental in our solidarity work here in London.

The Organising School is organised by Curtis Muhammad, a Mentor and friend of ours, whose experience is rooted in the Freedom Struggle of the 60s in Mississippi, USA and since then in West Africa and consequently New Orleans, USA.

We recently had our first gathering in Venezuela which brought together Activists from Colombia, Venezuela, New Orleans, Jamaica and London. It was a very powerful experience, with much learning and many plans!

The aim is also to share knowledge about each other's social justice struggles, but also to build relationships of solidarity, particularly across the Americas. It is also an incredible opportunity for us as younger Activists to learn from Elders about grassroots organising and building Social Justice Movements.

The School was born out of both Veteran Activist Curtis's 40 years of experience, and organising with the 'Peoples Organising Committee' in the horrific aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in New Orleans, 2005. Please see: www.peoplesorganizing.org

Why we are doing this?

Maria and Javier really are doing some heroic and powerful work in the rural areas near to Cali, Colombia — indeed in Cali itself and with national organisations; with little economic resources in the midst of a very volatile situation.

During conversations in Venezuela,

Activists, and also build and gather further solidarity for their organising in Colombia.

We are approaching and working with different organisations such as No Sweat! and the Colombia Solidarity Campaign, knowing their politics of solidarity with the poor and working peoples' struggle in Colombia and across Latin America asking for their support in our organising efforts.

As a result of our reaching out and building these relationships, we have organised several events such as one on 30 January at Bar Fiesta in Brixton, and another event with No Sweat! on 12 March at which Mark Thomas performed in support of our solidarity work. We are asking people and organisations to please come and support our events — and to join us in our organising!

We would like to say as a Collective we deeply appreciate all of the solidarity and support from all of the people and organisations whom we've been working with.

THANK YOU!!!

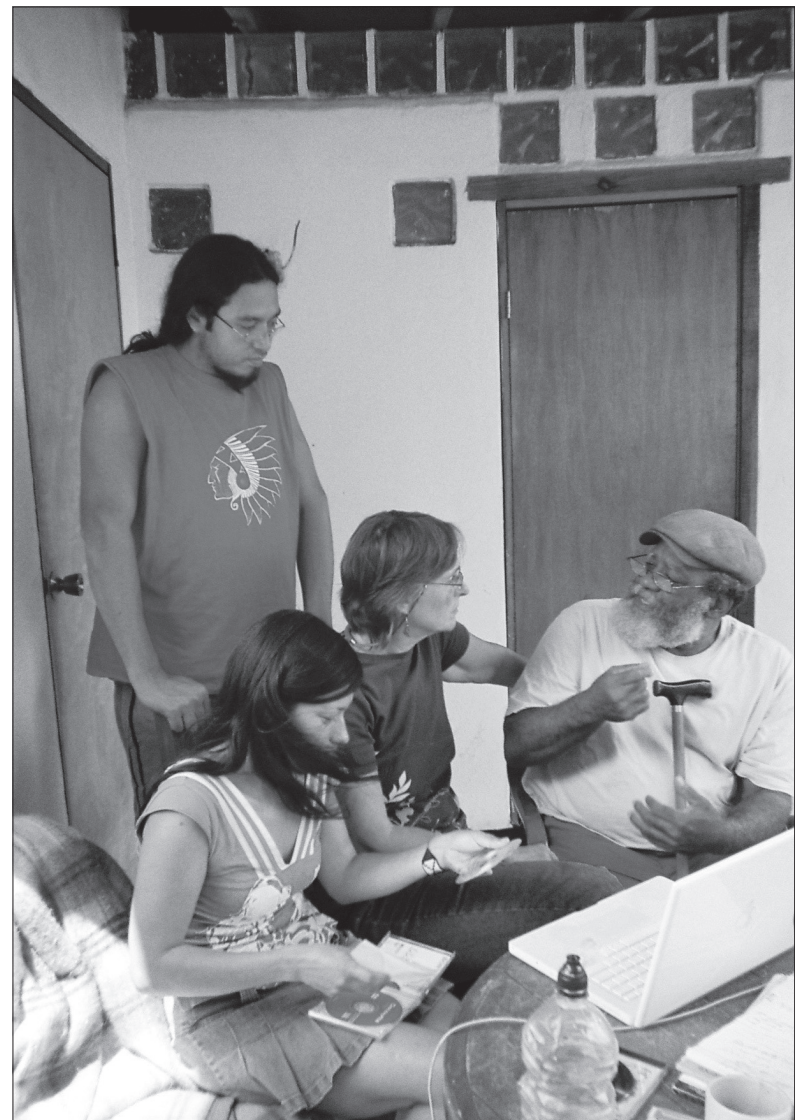
With peace & love

"The Friends of CAIS MALOKA and the International School for Bottom Up Organising Collective"

For further details please contact us at: mhari_organiser@yahoo.co.uk or etereadesign99@gmail.com

www.caismaloka.com

www.myspace.com/newgenerationlondon



Action

At a packed meeting last November in the heart of London's Latino community, trade union activists, Latin American solidarity campaigners and migrant rights groups came together to hear from Latin American workers in the capital.

London's Latin workers fight back against the bad bosses

Campaigners explain how the capital's cleaners are getting organised

Latin American Workers Association

The meeting, held at the Pullens Centre in Elephant and Castle, was set up by the Latin American Workers Association and the Campaign Against Immigration Controls (CAIC). It proved a good opportunity to take the pulse of recent campaigns, especially in the context of the current global recession and increased immigration checks and raids in the workplace. (1)

Amey workers at NPL

The first speaker, Julio Mayor, is one of five cleaners sacked by Amey Plc at the National Physical Laboratory, and a member of Prospect and Unite. He described how Amey began to attack the conditions and staffing levels of the 36-strong Latin American workforce after taking over the cleaning contract in December 2006.

Amey is a major beneficiary of Private Finance Initiatives (PFIs) in the UK. It is owned by Spanish construction multinational Ferrovial which bought Amey when the latter went bust in 2003. Thanks to the takeover, Amey is now a majority shareholder in Tubelines, part owner of the London Underground. In the summer of 2008 cleaners at Tubelines organised in the RMT went on strike, but Tubelines and their cleaning contractors took advantage of the immigration laws to persecute the principal activists.

Similarly, Amey workers at NPL were tricked into attending a fake health and safety training session. Once locked in, 60 police and immigration officers carried out an immigration raid as a result of which 7 workers were arrested and 3 deported, to Brazil and Colombia.

The 'Amey Five' were sacked in September 2008 after issuing a leaflet seeking support from NPL staff. Since then an energetic campaign has taken place on their behalf, with protests at Amey offices across the country and exposure in both the English and Spanish language media (2).

Recent actions have included solidarity picket outside Amey offices in Bristol and Newcastle; a student and staff protest at Kingston University during a visit by the Amey Chief Executive; a noisy demo at Amey HQ in Oxford supported by the local Trades Council and the No Borders network; a guest spot at a 300-strong Shrewsbury Pickets meeting in London (3); and the production of a campaign video. These and many other actions forced the company into negotiations in February 2009, which subsequently broke down. The workers have decided to continue their fight arguing that they would prefer to accept nothing and retain their dignity than accept the company's final offer. Their union has withdrawn representation. (4)

Lancaster workers at Schrodgers

The second speaker, Jaime, is a Unite union cleaner working for Lancaster cleaning company at Schrodgers Investment Management Ltd, a global asset management firm. He described their recent fight for a wage increase and against detrimental changes in

working conditions.

Initially management threatened to sack them and bring in new workers. Then managers said they would consider giving the pay rise demanded but only if they could cut costs by transferring three of the workers to another workplace. The delegation refused to give an answer saying they would take it back to a general meeting of all the workers.

The meeting unanimously decided that they would not agree to a single worker being transferred. Instead the workers decided to organise a protest outside the bank. Unfortunately Unite officials spent more effort trying to convince the workers to postpone the demonstration rather than help organise it.

When Jaime heard about the struggle of the Amey workers he spoke to them and they encouraged the Schrodgers cleaners to go ahead with their campaign - with or without the union. The demonstration went ahead successfully despite the workers being fearful of what might happen. They then sent a petition to management saying more protests would follow unless the company's attitude changed. As a result, Lancaster then met a delegation of the workers and agreed to a pay rise without strings attached.

Mitie workers at Willis Insurance

Since the meeting, Schrodgers cleaners have been supporting union brothers and sisters employed by Mitie at Willis insurance brokers, five of whom were sacked in February 2009 because they could not switch to all-night working. It is no coincidence that union activists, including a shop steward, were among those sacked, coming as it did on the heels of a Living Wage campaign at the site. An 'unofficial' demonstration has been held and more protests are lined up, with support from a range of groups including the London Coalition Against Poverty, Ecuadorian Movement in the UK and National Shop Stewards Network. As the global recession bites it is clear that cost-cutting is the excuse for firms to try and root out activists and thus weaken working class organisation. (5)

ISS workers at SOAS

Robinson, an ISS cleaner and Unison member at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies described how their struggle had been a long process. Initially the workers had felt scared and isolated. So they agreed collectively to try and overcome this every day - to build up an atmosphere of solidarity. They



Sacked cleaners and supporters protesting outside Willis's headquarters in London

Photos: Paul Haste/Morning Star

started with a film showing of Bread and Roses to show all the workers that organising was possible.

From this a committee was elected to lead the fight for their rights. When the management attempted to intimidate the workers, e.g. not paying some of them for two or three months, the cleaners asked for support from all the university workers and students. The campaign has been successful as they won a pay rise to £7.45 and trade union recognition.

The campaign has since spread to Birkbeck College next door, where cleaners, students and staff have successfully lobbied for the so-called Living Wage, although here as elsewhere in the University of London the fight to bring cleaning services in-house is still pending.

Immigrant workers and the unions

Finally, the speaker from CAIC made the point that all of these situations are very similar in that people don't actually work for the company where they work but for contractors, thus dividing up the workforce. Another common denominator was the way immigration laws were being specifically used to stop workers from organising.

The discussion centred on two issues: undocumented workers, and the role of the unions. Could we support current demands for regularisation of undocumented workers, such as that raised by the Strangers into Citizens campaign and supported by the leaders of unions like Unite and Unison? A Unite official speaking from the floor argued that all groups should get behind this initiative. Others argued that the Strangers into Citizens proposal is divisive, as some workers would be given papers while others would be deemed unworthy and face deportation. As in the U.S. the mass protest in support of regularisation to take place in London on May 4 will undoubtedly be marked by this debate between an amnesty for some or papers for all.

Two of the speakers were very critical of how the unions had behaved during their campaigns with one saying the union had been an observer rather than an organiser and the other pointing out that their union had been more obstructive

than helpful and that it was really down to the workers to organise themselves.

The chair summed up the meeting asking those present to support any future actions and the campaigns of the workers and commented that despite having criticisms of the union we aren't anti-union, that people should get organised and join a trade union but that ultimately we are the union.

Join the Friday picket line!

Solidarity and determination is the key to victory. There will be a picket at 1pm every Friday until the five Mitie workers are reinstated. In front of the Willis building, Lime Street, City of London (near Monument Tube station). Venceremos!

(1) This article is an edited and updated version of the original report at <http://www.permanent-revolution.net/entry/2414>

(2) See www.caic.org.uk for reports.

Campaign video 'Amey, Julio and Pedro' at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ho7W4-RBhKc>
See also <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJcQ6n7kTRI>
(3) Lobby of parliament 12 March. See www.shrewsburypicketscampaign.org.uk
(4) See interview with Julio Mayor in Noticias February 2009.

(5) See this video of the Mitie cleaners' protest and interviews: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8CaYVPQrIYs>

For more updates on these struggles contact latin_americanworkers@hotmail.com

Please send messages of support to williscleaners4justice@live.co.uk or telephone Edwin 07931 464 890 or Alberto 07803 634 319

Colombia

False positives – smearing the dead

Throughout the consecutive governments of Álvaro Uribe, members of the security forces have killed hundreds of civilians, presenting them as combat victims with the aim of exhibiting military success and receiving benefits.

Movement of Victims of State Crimes

These executions, which are preceded by forced disappearances, occur systematically and should be regarded as crimes against humanity. It is extremely serious that those who should be defending people's lives and ensuring their safety are the very same ones responsible for comprehensively violating their human rights. These criminal practices are encouraged by the Democratic Security Policy.

Referred to as "false positives", these deaths should not be thought of as the acts of extreme individuals, isolated cases or as mere symptoms of corruption within the armed forces. They have happened in multiple departments in the country, repeatedly and with the participation of officers, non-commissioned officers and regular soldiers of the national army. Colombian Defence Ministry directive No. 029 of 17 November 2005, offers rewards to any soldier that can demonstrate having killed members of armed groups at the margin of the law.

Legalising the executions perpetrated by members of the security forces is an old criminal practice in Colombia. In September 2008 "false positives" became known in the country when the bodies of 19 youngsters from the municipality of Soacha, who had been disappeared, were found in mass graves in Ocaña and North Santander. In recent years the human rights platform Coordinación Colombia-Europa-Estados Unidos reported more than 1,400 of these cases. For its part, the Office of the Prosecutor General has commenced investigations relating



to extrajudicial executions that involve 763 agents of the security forces and recognise the existence of at least 1,137 victims.

Although president Uribe on discovering the seriousness of what was happening ordered the dismissal of 27 servicemen, among them three generals, this did not go far enough.

The defence minister, Juan Manuel Santos, has declared that these crimes are in the past. However, the media continues to file daily reports that demonstrate these executions still go on.

On 6 March 2009, the Movement of Victims of State Crimes marked a day against extrajudicial killings. The Polo

Democrático UK held a picket of the Colombian Embassy in London.

Secret document leaked

Extract of the document in which the funding of rewards is detailed

This protocol not only casts doubt on the legality of the Democratic Security Policy, which has gained popularity for Uribe, it also compromises the international cooperation agreements signed in several countries.

The 15-page document contradicts Uribe, who has always denied the existence of a systematic reward policy. But the order took effect permanently on 17 November 2005. According to tables in the document the government pays 1.7 million Euros for a group leader and 1,300 Euros for a regular guerrilla fighter.

With this public offer soldiers threw themselves into the hunt of undocumented peasants. Fear did the rest. Nobody was able to prove these atrocities until someone from the army had a change of heart.

US has known since 1990

Declassified documents from the US State Department have been leaked to the civil organisation National Security Archive (NSA), an investigative group linked to the Georgetown University. They reveal that the CIA knew in 1990 of these criminal practises perpetrated by the Colombian security forces. The president at the time was the liberal Virgilio Barco.

In one of the files the CIA links General Mario Montoya to joint operations with extreme right-wing paramilitaries in Medellín. This general is the same hero who liberated Ingrid Betancourt but who, on November 4th, was forced to resign to take the heat off Uribe,

Myles Frechette, who occupied the post of US ambassador to Colombia in 1994, claims Montoya encouraged the "body count mentality", referring to the way successes in the counter-insurgency war could lead to promotions within the military. The organisation Colombia Nunca Más, which seeks to salvage the country's historical memory, has created a data bank of 25,000 extrajudicial executions, of which 10,000 bodies have never been found.

Uribe Attacks 'Fellow Travellers'

Claudia Julieta Duque

It took almost six years for the president to make a declaration even worse the one he made in September of 2003 against defenders of human rights ("writers and lobbyists in the service of terrorism").

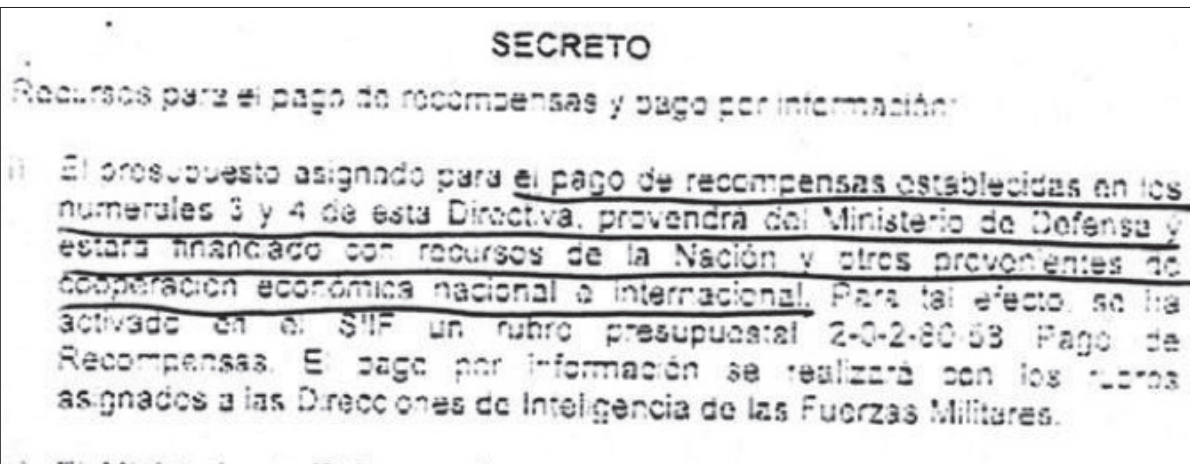
The context of this new occasion was the crisis that the government unleashed on itself with military over-flights during the unilateral liberation by the FARC of three policemen and one soldier on Sunday January 11th. There were distracting sophisms with the presence of Hollman Morris at the scene and a report from Jorge Enrique Botero for Telesur but the final word went to the journalist Daniel Samper who confirmed the government's intent to sabotage the liberations.

The president accused, without mentioning names, pointed with generalisations and stigmatised yet again the 10% of Colombian men and women who, according to surveys, do not agree with the Democratic Security Policy, nor with "investor confidence" and not with the proven, undeniable fact of the close links between the Uribe clan and the paramilitary project.

He called us the "Intellectual Sub-division of the FARC" and warned us not to discredit the government or openly support the guerrilla.

With his speech, Uribe has not only legitimised once again the use of violence against those who oppose it, but he has also given clear instructions to initiate judicial persecution, forced disappearances, arbitrary detentions and even the odd insult in the country's various airports, as already happens to Piedad Córdoba. Or perhaps more threats, like the 50 that Hollman Morris received last Sunday.

In the Casa de Nariño, there are those who seem determined that no possibility of peace should prosper in Colombia. For them, war is the only option to ensure a third presidential term.



FARC guerrillas release five hostages

Politician Alan Jara, the former governor of Meta, was released by FARC guerrillas on 3 February. Jara was kidnapped by the FARC in 2001 and had spent more than 7 years in the jungle. The day before, the FARC unilaterally released three police officers and a soldier, through the International Red Cross.

Jara accused President Álvaro Uribe of having "done nothing" to free the hostages, instead he thanked senator Piedad Córdoba and Venezuelan

President Hugo Chávez for their mediation efforts.

Jara's release was in stark contrast to the international media show for Ingrid Betancourt in July 2008. It had been delayed because the army was threatening the area where the guerrillas were about to deliver him. Jara stressed the need for continued pressure towards a humanitarian agreement between the government and the FARC. His criticism of Uribe was sharp, "It would

seem that the country being at war suits President Uribe", he said, adding, "I believe that the FARC has made a gesture, and that gesture should be returned".

Sigifredo López, a Valle councillor who was kidnapped by the FARC in 2002, was released two days later. He praised the efforts of senator Piedad Córdoba, but in contrast reminded his former captors that "in human history no revolution has prospered without popular support".

El Salvador

Breaking the cycle of despair

Will El Salvador's elections deliver a change of direction for the region?

The people of El Salvador will vote for a new president in the next few months. The first election round will be held on 15 March, and if no candidate wins outright with more than 50%, the second round will be on 19 April. National assembly and local municipal elections have already been held on 18 January, which the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) won with a slender advantage. The coming presidential election could bring a change in the historical trend, not only in El Salvador, but for all Central America as well.

Antonio Urbina

The 1980s in Central America was a decade of low intensity warfare fuelled by the United States government in order to destroy the Sandinista Revolution lead by Frente Sandinista para la Liberación Nacional (FSLN) in Nicaragua, and at the same time force a surrender from the guerrilla front in Guatemala — Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG) and the FMLN guerrillas in El Salvador. The human cost of the war years was colossal, almost half a million deaths, tens of thousands disappeared, millions of refugees and internal displaced people. The infrastructure and almost all of these countries' economies were destroyed. After ten years of war, it was evident that none of the actors could obtain a military victory and a new approach based on a more realistic policy toward peace agreements was started.

These distinct processes conform to a common 'peace model' that has served to perpetuate more subtle mechanisms of domination. The outcome has been free trade economic agreements that are imposed on governments that are democratically elected, but dependent on, and docile with respect to, US policies. The demobilisation of the armed actors was the first step in long processes through the intervention of the United Nations and especially the 'Contadora Group' of nations - Panama, Colombia, Venezuela and Mexico - deemed to be "friends of the peace process". Partial agreements were set in place to humanise the armed conflict, and establish the global framework for democratisation.

The specifics vary from country to country. In Nicaragua, the Sandinistas were defeated in the presidential election by an opposition coalition led by Violeta Chamorro on 25 February 1990. Only then did the contra forces, trained and armed by the

US, start to demobilise.

In El Salvador and Guatemala, after long negotiation processes and some partial agreements, two Peace Agreements were signed, on 16 January 1992 and 26 December 1996 respectively. Both agreements allowed the guerrilla forces to become legal political parties and to participate in the electoral processes. The FSLN and FMLN kept an important share of the polls as the leftist current, with about 30% of assembly seats, and majorities in local councils, in rural communities as well as in the capital cities. Both maintained real prospects of winning a presidential election.

In all the countries, the section of the Peace Agreements that was never implemented is the part requiring structural reforms aimed at reducing the profound social and economic injustice embedded in the exploitation systems of these countries. On the contrary, the 1990's saw a strengthening of the neoliberal policies, with a reduction in social services and privatisation of the few resources that were still kept by the State.

In El Salvador, in 2001 the US dollar replaced the colon as the national currency. These policies — the monetisation of the economy; the proliferation of maquila sweat shops where no trade union is tolerated; the predatory plunder of natural resources without any concern for the environment or the rights of the people living in the territories depriving them of their ancestral land in favour of mining, fishing or agro-industrial multinational companies that become the new landowners — were all consolidated by the negotiation of a multilateral trade agreement between the US and the Central-American puppet governments. This agreement is called DR-CAFTA, "Dominican Republic and Central America Free Trade Agreement", whose negotiation started in 2002 using the 'fast track' procedure, was signed during 2004 and ratified by the national assemblies without any kind of debate. DR-CAFTA was enforced one year ago despite huge protests and demonstrations by the popular organizations. Only Costa Rica took its free trade agreement to the polls, it

V for Victory: Mauricio Funes



was approved by a tiny majority (51% Yes vs. 48% No votes) despite the huge effort of the Costa Rican government and the open intervention and threats of the US government.

The latest elections in Central America have brought important changes in the political landscape. In Nicaragua, the FSLN has now a relative majority in the National Assembly and Daniel Ortega is again the President. In Guatemala, Alvaro Colom first ran for president in 1999 as candidate of the Alianza Nueva Nación (ANN), a leftist coalition promoted by the URNG, the old guerrilla transformed into a legal political party. In 2007 Colom was elected president with the backing of the Unidad Nacional de la Esperanza (UNE), a social democratic party). Panama has refused to sign the CAFTA agreement. And in El Salvador, the possible FMLN victory in the March/April presidential election could bring a change in the regional balance of political forces.

Nevertheless, these advances are not bringing, at least for now, any change in economic policy. The inherited structures are not challenged and the organized popular movement is weak and cannot push for the changes needed. For example, in Guatemala the current president confronted CAFTA in his electoral campaign, but now, once he has been elected, he is looking for "the best way to take advantage from the trade agreement".

Similarly in Nicaragua, the FSLN was part of the struggle against the CAFTA, but once the electoral campaign started Daniel Ortega stopped talking about it and when he won the election he backed the agreement. Now Ortega has called for a "compensation fund" to pay for the side effects that are now evident and that are making the Nicaraguan economy deteriorate. Only more recently have some improvements in social policies regarding educative and health spending have been implemented by the Nicaragua Government. The

increase in the budget for social policies has been strongly criticised because it is said it will increase the public debt. Daniel Ortega has announced that Nicaragua could embrace the ALBA (Alianza Bolivariana de las Américas) promoted by Hugo Chávez, but it is hard to see how this can coexist with membership of a free trade agreement with the US.

Since the signing of its Peace Agreement, El Salvador has been ruled by the Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (ARENA), an extreme far right party funded by Roberto D'Abuison, the intellectual author of the killing in 1980 of Monseñor Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador and the creator of death squads that killed thousands of civilians during the war years.

If FMLN wins the coming El Salvadoran election, it could be an historic moment for this small country, and it will also have important consequences for the whole region. US intervention in the last presidential election was denounced by the solidarity movement. The US Government has sent huge amounts of money to ARENA in the months before polling day so it could be used to promote their candidate. The US has also threatened the population, saying that in the case of an FMLN victory all the money sent by the immigrant population living in the US to their families in El Salvador will be confiscated and all future transactions will be banned (home remittances constitute 17% of the GDP of El Salvador: US \$3 billion a year). Another threat was that all the maquila facilities will be closed by the multinational companies, therefore firing hundreds of thousands of employees. The FMLN had strongly opposed CAFTA's ratification, and has participated in the struggle against the neoliberal policies implemented by the ARENA government. It has also denounced the treaty's ratification to the Supreme Court of Justice. Now, the FMLN could win the next presidential

election because the last opinion poll gives them an advantage over ARENA of 17%. Cambio en El Salvador para vivir mejor (Change in El Salvador for a better living), the political program of the FMLN, talks about the real democratization of the country and promises to implement policies aimed at poverty reduction. However the only direct mention on trade talks about "enhancing the trade with the United States, and in the framework of regional integration, also with other countries in Central America"; there is no explicit comment about CAFTA.

The victory of FMLN in the parliamentary and local elections held on 18 January was slightly weaker than forecasted by the opinion polls. In the event, the FMLN attracted 49.5% of the vote, obtaining 37 out of the 84 seats in the National Assembly; ARENA obtained 32 seats with 40.1% of the vote; and three smaller parties gained 15 seats between them. Since FMLN has not achieved an absolute majority in the National Assembly, it will need alliances with other minority groups, all of them right-wing, which will make it very difficult to reject the CAFTA. Furthermore, the FMLN has lost the council of San Salvador city, which they had kept for twelve years. San Salvador council has been won by ARENA, a clear warning that the forthcoming election is going to be very hard and very tight.

A victory of FMLN in the presidential election in El Salvador would make them the first guerrilla group to win the presidency after successfully becoming a legal political party. Such a victory would change the political landscape of Central America, where for the first time in history there will be a majority of governments that call themselves "leftist". Then, maybe, they could start real structural reforms at a regional level, which, let us hope, will not ignite a new cycle of threat, destruction and death fuelled by the US government.

Change

Bolivia's new constitution

Against a barrage of opposition media propaganda funded by Bolivia's elites, the new constitution was approved with 61% of the popular vote.

Nick Buxton

On 25 January, three days before the world's business and political elites gathered for the World Economic Forum in Davos, a very different crowd was forming in the Andean capital of Bolivia. Whilst Davos' leaders appeared bereft and lost at the failure of their prized economic model, Bolivians danced to mark its defeat. The occasion was the celebration of the country's new constitution which, in its opening words, "puts behind us the colonial, republican and neoliberal state" and commits to building a state "based on principles of sovereignty, dignity, complementation, solidarity, harmony and equal distribution and redistribution of social goods."

Bolivia, once the prized pupil for its wholesale application of policies encouraged by the IMF and the World Bank, is now one of the countries articulating an alternative.

Post-neoliberal constitution

The 100-page document rejects the dominance of private capital and reasserts the role of the state in the economy.

All of Bolivia's natural resources, such as gas and oil, are declared the patrimony of the state, with the state given the unique right to administer strategic resources and to run basic services such as electricity and water. Private monopolies of goods and services are forbidden - the state is required instead to develop policies focused on the domestic market, directed towards reducing social inequalities, and favouring small-scale farmers and micro-industries.

The constitution also declares Bolivia a pluri-national state. It recognises Bolivia's 36 indigenous nations and languages, acknowledging their right to run their own judicial, health, educational, and communication systems, and to exercise distinct forms of communitarian democracy.

In addition, the constitution picks up on many demands at the forefront of social movement campaigning in the last decade: the prohibition of

How Morales and his supporters have changed the rules in the people's favour



foreign military bases on Bolivian soil, the recognition of household work as an economic activity, the wide and full recognition of political, social, economic and cultural rights, and the rejection of trade agreements that endanger peasant producers or small businesses.

Heavy costs

Nevertheless, the struggle that Bolivia's social movements have been through to get to this stage has been very costly. It was in 1990 that a group of indigenous marchers from the east of the country first put forward the demand for a new constitution that would properly recognise Bolivia's ethnic and cultural diversity. Morales' successful election in December 2005 was strongly tied to his firm commitment to facilitate a constituent assembly that would reshape Bolivia.

Morales' victory gave new energy to social movements but sparked even fiercer resistance. Whilst the MAS government has frequently shown it has popular backing at the ballot box (winning four electoral victories so far), the last three years have witnessed a constant barrage

of attacks led by a landowning and business elite predominantly based in the eastern lowland regions of Bolivia. Manipulating regional sentiment, racism, and the fear of centralised government (along with the usual bogeymen of communism and Venezuelan interference), they have created enough popular support to stall any government attempts at structural reform.

They have backed this up with the use of 'shock' troops of young men who have attacked the constitutional assembly, government institutions, social movement leaders, and indigenous people in general. In one such attack, during September 2008, a group of henchmen linked to the governor of the northern province of Pando killed more than 30 campesino farmers. At times the threat of civil war seemed a frightening possibility to many Bolivians.

Compromised document

Against this background, in October 2008, the government agreed to over 100 changes to the constitutional document to enable it to pass the Senate. This included changes such

as agreeing that land size restrictions would not be applied retroactively, the dropping of an overall prohibition on genetically modified organisms, allowing mixed public-private companies to be involved in service provision, and weakening the rights of indigenous communities to completely block exploitation of resources within their territories.

The government's valiant efforts to avoid violence and negotiate compromises angered many on the radical and indigenous left. "This constitution is the definition of vagueness and surrender," said Pedro Portugal of the newspaper Pukara. Social movements, including those supportive of MAS, expressed concern that the government's negotiated compromises with the opposition had made land reform proposals meaningless.

Yet even the watered down constitution proved too much for many of Bolivia's elites. Ruben Costas, the governor of Santa Cruz, has warned of "unyielding resistance". Branco Marinkovich, a food industry tsar and implacable opponent of Evo Morales, blamed the results on fraud and Venezuelan interference and said

that the country needed a two-state solution. The opposition still has plenty of tools for disruption.

Building a new hegemony

Against this bitter opposition, Bolivia's government now has to develop the laws and entrench the authority of the constitution. This will be a struggle that will take place in congress, in the courts, on the media waves, and on the streets. Leny Olivera, a student activist in Cochabamba, says: "We have learnt that changing laws is not enough, we need to change people's minds and attitudes and this is a long process."

For the MAS government, it will be critical to start winning this battle in the four regions (Santa Cruz, Pando, Beni and Tarija) where the majority voted against the constitution. More than 30% of citizens in these regions have, in spite of tight opposition control and an atmosphere of fear and intolerance, already consistently voted for the process of change.

Ongoing struggle

Ultimately, the lesson of the constitutional vote is that documents and institutions alone won't bring about lasting change.

Oscar Olivera, a strong government critic from the left who helped lead the water war in Cochabamba that threw out the multinational Bechtel, says:

"The yes vote won, which could have been predicted, but this doesn't mean that there is one box in which we can find the solutions to our sufferings and therefore create wellbeing. The YES must be understood as the possibility, still, of using this space as a way of continuing to reflect, to think, to struggle, to continue hoping, believing, living in order to create by our own means the life we want, that we have longed for with such passion, as we marched to La Paz, or from San Sebastian, or when we took over factories, and led strikes."

In Bolivia, the struggle for economic and social justice is far from over.

Chávez wins term-limit referendum

Venezuelan voters have ratified a constitutional amendment to abolish term limits for all elected positions, writes Diana Raby.

The referendum, held on 15 February 2009, permits President Hugo Chavez to stand again in the 2012 elections - the same will apply to all elected officials, including those in opposition.

This same practice exists here in the UK. Margaret Thatcher won four elections for the Conservatives and Tony Blair won three for Labour. Unlike Venezuela, however, British voters did not have the privilege of directly electing them into their positions at the head of government.

Once again the international media have made claims of a 'dictatorship' and Chavez being president for life. They ignore the fact that he will only be president if elected by popular vote, through elections which have been repeatedly and scrupulously certified

as free and fair. The constitutional possibility of mid-term recall was also overlooked.

The amendment passed by a comfortable margin, 54% to 45%, with a turnout of close to 70%. This was the fifteenth national vote since Chavez's first election, a clear demonstration of Venezuelan democratic participation.

The referendum's success was more remarkable in the face of another, vicious, dirty-tricks campaign by the opposition. This included a staged attack on a synagogue - falsely attributed to chavistas - and the infiltration of Colombian paramilitaries which, fortunately, was detected by the security services.

Victory in this campaign was not only crucial for Chavez, or Venezuela, but for the Left and the popular forces throughout the region. Defeat would have thrown Venezuela into crisis and would have called into question the entire regional project

of integration based on social justice, equitable exchange, and sustainable development.

A reverse in Venezuela would have been a devastating blow to the popular transformational projects in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Paraguay, and to the steady recovery of Cuba. It is no accident that, a few weeks before the vote, leading figures from the Venezuelan opposition met with US officials in Puerto Rico, conspiring once again to destabilise the government in Caracas. Such opposition conspiracies will no doubt continue.

The referendum's victory offers Chavez a renewed mandate to push forward with the Bolivarian Revolution, with the consolidation of popular power, the community councils, and the goal of 21st Century Socialism - a concept in urgent need of clarification and implementation as the world economic crisis continues to intensify.

Ecuador

Respecting Pacha Mama

How Mother Earth finally has her place on Ecuador's political agenda

The subject of the environment is now a major issue on the political agenda in Ecuador. The damage which has been done to nature caused by an economic model based on the extraction of natural resources, like in many other countries in the 'third world', has been devastating for Ecuador. Particularly the exploitation of oil which sustains the Ecuadorian economy has been harsh on the environment, an example of which is the environmental catastrophe which has been occurring over years caused by the company Chevron Texaco in the Amazon jungle, also known as the 'Chernobyl of the jungle'. Add to this the damage of the shrinking industry, flower-growing industry and palm plantations among others.

Fidel Narváez

Amidst this crude reality the defence of the environment has never had a large echo in Ecuador in spite of the brave fight of environmentalists against the transnationals. Activists on the whole were criminalized by the law. The media did not give great attention to environmental struggles either.

The Ecuador of today however presents another picture. It seems paradoxically that when Ecuador went on its most radical political tour of modern history, with progressive environmental proposals that received attention from the world, the arguments of radical ecologists suddenly became interesting to the opposition to the government and the media who had never previously been interested in the plight of nature.

Rafael Correa's government in an unprecedented action pronounced the amnesty of hundreds of environmentalists and social activists who had been persecuted by the courts. He doubled the efforts to combat deforestation and imposed his authority over particular companies which have always been detrimental to nature. He launched original proposals like the ITT initiative in which for the first time an oil-dependent developing country will leave the largest reserves of this oil underground to preserve intact YASUNI national park, one of the places with the greatest biodiversity in the world. He has retracted 97% of the mining concessions so that they will be subject to the new controversially-passed mining law which is the strictest in the region in terms of environmental controls. The new Ecuadorian constitution is qualified by many as the most "green" of the planet.

La "PACHA MAMA" or "mother earth" has been given the place that she deserves on the political agenda of Ecuador. This has understandably brought about huge expectations within the most radical environmental sectors. None of this would have been possible were it not for the insurgence of a national government which has proposed an ambitious strategy to withdraw Ecuador from neoliberalism.

At the end of the day if the largest



opposition to the government of "citizen revolution" comes from "radical environmentalism" then this is not only a good sign for "PACHA MAMA" in general but also shows that with big topics, like the redistribution of wealth for example, the social consensus which the Ecuador of today is reaching is much more solid and encouraging.

● **Fidel Narváez is an activist in the Permanent Assembly of Human Rights (APDH) and the Ecuador Movement in the UK (MERU).**

Debt – the grand theft of dignity

The Commission for the Integral Audit of Public Credit, Auditoría Integral del Crédito Público (CAIC), formed of predominantly foreign analysts, has called the Ecuadorian national debt "a grand theft".

Diego Almeida

Hugo Arias, coordinator of the commission, signalled that more than 80% of the total amount is a result of refinancing payments. Whilst Ecuador has received close to \$80 billion in credit, \$127 billion has been repaid thus far. There are also clear indications of illegality, abuse and illegitimacy involving governments, private creditors, and multinationals.

Cases demonstrating the corruption of previous government functionaries, as well as spurious contracts and negotiations, are widely documented in CAIC's report. In one of the most notorious cases two people, unilaterally and on behalf of both the people and the state of Ecuador, decided to renounce the right of debt cancellation for debts of more than \$7 billion, reviving the debt, as well as adding additional administrative and general charges, and fines for delayed re-payments.

After the audit's report had been presented in the final trimester of 2008, the government started to adopt measures to address some of its findings. These included the declaration of mora técnica in November 2008, from which followed the concurrent announcements on the defaulting of the 2012 Global Bonuses and the presentation of the debt restructuring plans.

President Correa has recognised that not all of the Global Bonuses are illegitimate and, as a result, agreements will be sought with the creditors. Nevertheless, past events, plagued with such corruption and illegality that often not even the final destination of the funds are known, will be taken to international courts.

The Global Bonuses amount to 39% of Ecuador's national debt which, in October, totalled \$9.93 billion, 19% of GDP.

Whilst legal cases are being prepared for presentation to the international courts, Ecuador is also proposing, as a future measure, the creation of a United Nations institution responsible for the international arbitration of national debt.

In one particular case the Brazilian construction company, Norberto Odebrecht, was in charge of, alongside several other projects, the construction of a hydroelectric plant. The plant however encountered structural problems and had to be closed after only a few months of operation. The forced premature closure caused financial losses to the state, which also had to cover the costs of repair.

The launching of this project was achieved with a loan from the Brazilian bank Bandes. This very same bank paid \$200 million directly to Odebrecht whilst the Ecuadorian state must still honour the debt's repayments.

Under these conditions the Government of Ecuador decided to contest the debt and turn to the International Chamber of Commerce in Paris in order to present the case.

As much through this event as in the many phases of Ecuador's national debt, the government has a clear interest in unravelling the circumstances surrounding the agreement of contracts and in identifying those legally responsible. Above all, it is in the Ecuadorian government's interest that the reigning principle is one that dictates the function of a debt contracted with a state, in contrast to commercial debt, as being necessarily rooted in social considerations.

● **Diego Almeida is a student of Politics and International Relations at the London School of Economics, member of MERU**

New mining law splits left

The recent indigenous protests in Ecuador are the proof of the emergence of a degree of tension between two lefts, which display distinct ideas as to the path of the Ecuadorian revolutionary process, writes **Samuele Mazzolini**.

At the centre of the dispute has been the new mining law, an announced point of clash between President Rafael Correa and some sectors of the indigenous movement.

Correa had defended from the very beginning the necessity of a new way of mining that introduces a considerable degree of environmental responsibility, and that increases the stake of the Ecuadorian state in terms of royalties, taxation, and through the creation of a national mining company. Broadly, the law favoured by the governing party gives a clear progressive turn with respect to the previous one.

This has not been considered enough by CONAIE, the biggest indigenous organisation of Ecuador, and by ecologists that have tried to block the approval of the new law. Their arguments point to the environmental damage that is brought about by mining, in particular open-cast mining. Concerns regarding water and air pollution have been their strongest claims, arguing that the environmental protection of the new law is insufficient to prevent the detrimental effects of open-cast mines.

Correa on the contrary has warned that 'we cannot live as beggars while sitting on a sack of gold', highlighting the budgetary problems of the state given the declining prices and reserves of oil, and the difficulty of undertaking, without the necessary resources, the badly-needed social and productive projects that his conception of economy involve and that the new Constitution prescribes.

On 20 January, a national anti-mining mobilisation took place, following a number of previous demonstrations. Contrary to the uprisings

of the 1990s, these protests have not been able to gather much consensus. The reason lies in the fracturing of the indigenous movement in recent years, with the leadership of CONAIE enclosing itself within a sectarian politics which has privileged communitarian claims over wider national considerations, following its misplaced participation in the Gutiérrez government. This line, however, has not been shared by the entire indigenous population, as confirmed by the position of many against the mining law.

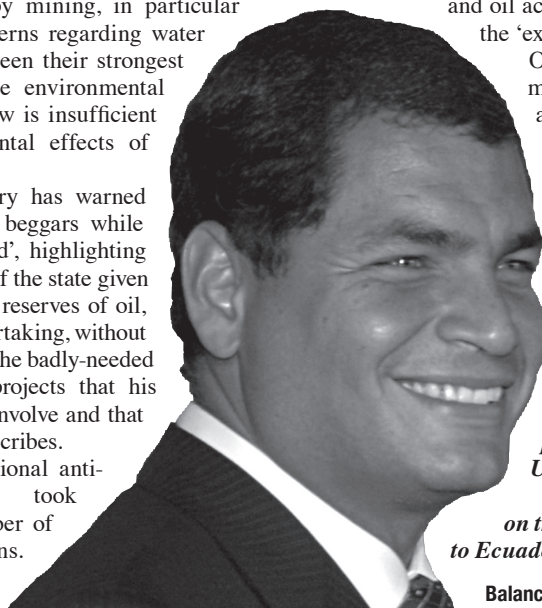
It may be true that the dialogue could have deepened more on such a sensitive issue, but it is undeniable that many of the concerns expressed by ecologists and indigenous people were in fact incorporated into the law. What is really striking is the development of two fundamentally different discourses. On one side environmentalist sectors are questioning a number of projects that Correa is undertaking, based on the unquestionable defence of the environment. At the same time, they are critical of mining and oil activities because of the accentuation of the 'extractive model'.

On the other side, Correa envisages a model of development with the main aim of delivering decent standard of living for the whole population, one which involves a hike in consumption for popular sectors and the reduction of economic inequalities. He is also conscious that 'extractivism' cannot be a model for sustainable development, but recognises the importance of generating the necessary funds to build a new productive apparatus.

● **Samuele Mazzolini is a postgraduate student at Oxford University.**

Editor's Note: We welcome debate on this issue, of fundamental importance to Ecuador and the region.

Balancing act: Rafael Correa



Education

Over recent years there has been a growing awareness in the UK of the scale of human rights violations in Colombia, and particularly against Colombian trade unionists (Amnesty, 2007). Between 1999 and 2005, of the 1174 reported murders of trade unionists throughout the world, 816 were Colombian (ENS, 2007). However, what is less well known is that more than half of these (416) were working in the education sector (see Figure 1).

While these figures are indeed shocking they represent only a partial representation of the nature and scale of violence, death threats, forced disappearances and displacement that the education community in Colombia continues to endure on a daily basis. As we can see from Table 1 between 1991 and 2006, 808 educators were assassinated, 2015 received death threats, 21 were tortured, 59 were ‘disappeared’, 1008 were forced to leave their homes and jobs for fear of violence, and 161 were arbitrarily detained.

In the rest of this article I will try to explain how and why educators and the education system more generally have become embroiled in the ongoing Colombian conflict and to suggest reasons why some areas of the country have been more affected than others.

How does the Colombian conflict affect education?

The education system in Colombia has been affected in a range of direct and indirect ways by the ongoing armed conflict. Firstly, as a significant portion of state spending, education budgets have come under pressure from the government’s needs to cut costs to fund the armed conflict. While cost-cutting and neoliberal restructuring within the education sector has taken place across the world, when it takes place in a zone of conflict it can have particular ramifications, as is the case in Colombia. When teachers and students challenge or resist measures of fiscal austerity, decentralization and privatisation in Colombia – as others have done elsewhere – there is a tendency for the protest to become highly polarised and for leaders and activists to be targeted both by state and paramilitary forces as ‘subversives’. In this sense, the major education trade unions become, during periods of cost-

Colombia’s classroom wars

MARIO NOVELLI on political violence against educators

cutting and neoliberal restructuring, easy targets of attack and liable to suffer human rights violations.

Secondly, particularly in rural areas many schools become directly embroiled in the conflict. The Colombian Commission of Jurists

(CCJ, 2004:68) note that between 1996 and 2003, 71 schools suffered attacks by guerillas, paramilitaries and state agents, often during combat between the different groups. In interviews I carried out in Colombia several teachers mentioned how,

particularly in rural areas, the military and police would often set up camp close to schools, in clear violation of International Humanitarian Law, placing schools in danger of attack. Similarly, schools have often been used by the different armed groups as

both a place to sleep and also to hold meetings in rural areas for the purpose of political propaganda. Thirdly, students have been forcibly recruited from schools by both guerrilla and paramilitary groups. Human Rights Watch (2003) estimate that there are more than 11,000 child soldiers in Colombia. The Colombian military have also used schools as potential terrains for recruiting soldiers and informants. In Arauca, a recent Colombian military campaign entitled ‘Soldier for a Day’ took children to military barracks where they could dress up in camouflage, learn about helicopters and armed cars (CCJ, 2004:64). Fourthly, in some areas teaching staff have come under pressure from local paramilitary organizations concerning the content of their classes (Cameron, 2001). Fifthly, events like the above have a strong psychological effect on both children and teachers experiencing such events and the CCJ (2004) estimates that since 1991 over 1,000 teachers have permanently left their jobs through fear of violence.

Why are education unions targeted in Colombia?

Evidence suggests that the vast majority of human rights violations against trade unionists were carried out by the military and/or rightwing paramilitary organisations linked to sections of the Colombian state (c.f. Human Rights Watch, 1996; 2000; 2001). They suggest that the trade union movement is targeted because of its oppositional stance to government policies and its links with oppositional movements. If this is true, and trade unionists are seen as a key concern, then a logical target would indeed be the teaching profession. Due to repression, and the massive growth in the informal sector, trade union representation is very low in Colombia with only 5% of the workforce unionised. The majority of state employees are unionised – around 800,000 – and the biggest trade union in the country is FECODE, the national teachers’ federation, with over 250,000 members (the private sector in education is almost completely non-unionised and represents over 50% of secondary school students and around 70% of university students). FECODE also has a strong presence and influence in the CUT (the major national Colombian labour Federation) with many ex-members occupying leadership roles.

FECODE is also a highly disciplined and well-organised trade union with members in every city in Colombia and, as a consequence of this, the capacity to mobilise nationally like no other union in the country. Throughout the 1990’s to date it has mobilised to oppose educational reforms linked to neoliberal austerity measures, decentralisation and privatisation, with some success.

Since 2000 FECODE has mobilised on several major occasions, particularly in 2001 against changes in educational funding mechanisms (Law 2001), which led to a six week strike, and more recently in 2007 over the Colombian Government’s national budget plan. In both cases, while not successful in completely blocking the plans, they have been able to negotiate significant modifications to the legislation. In 2004 they also mobilised nationally and in a highly public manner for a ‘No Vote’ in a referendum brought about by the current Colombian President, Alvaro

1999-2005 Comparison between world statistics on trade union homicides and Colombia

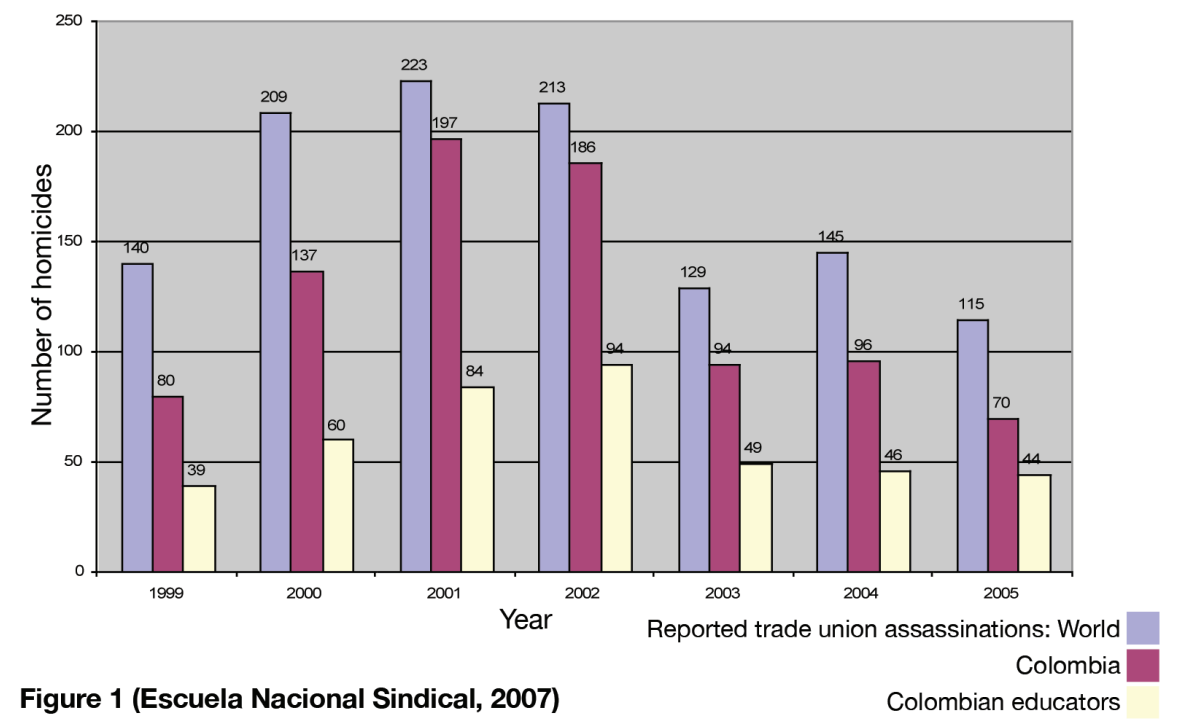


Figure 1 (Escuela Nacional Sindical, 2007)

Eradication of critical thinking – a state policy

The eradication of critical thinking has become a state policy to perpetuate the established order, writes a Colombian student.

Many voices throughout history have pronounced against arbitrary economic, political and social systems, but in Colombia today there does not seem to be a place for dissidence. The possibility of constructing a new history and of inhabiting the world in different forms seems to be unimaginable, unnameable and unspoken. Ours is a society buried in silence, the disappearance of a stage, the eradication of the others or the no-ones and the marginal.

Because of this, we, the students of the University of Caldas, want to demonstrate our vehement rejection of the systematic persecution of student and teacher victims at state universities. There have been recurring calls from president Uribe for the police to enter universities without even the slightest justification, and at the same time, for the ‘prosecutors of the father land’ to judge students and university professors.

Without doubt, the strongest example of authoritarianism and persecution that the government has devised against thinking and reflection is the case of the new anti-terrorism campaign led by Jorge Iván Piedrahita Montoya, a public prosecutor for designing false positives (see page 8).

Montoya has ordered an inquiry into university databases to search for people whose background may make them somehow related to the guerrilla. An order which was, of course, rejected by some of Montoya’s legal colleagues and the rectors of the universities who indignantly stated the idea was disproportionate and persecutory.

Amidst all this logic of persecution, on Thursday 13 November 2008, the distinguished academic Jaime Alberto Pineda, a professor of philosophy, was arrested. The next day he was moved to Bogotá by order of the General Prosecution of the Nation.

Our professor was accused of ‘rebellion’, a crime of which he had already been accused in Manizales in 2007, and declared not guilty due to

lack of evidence. In the case of his new arrest they accused him of the same charges, which is a flagrant infringement of the national constitution which states that a person cannot be judged twice for the same charges (Article 29).

In spite of this, on 19 November the judge rejected the defence lawyer’s appeal. Yet we still have faith in the discernment of the judge to see the inconsistencies in the process and to free our teacher as soon as possible. We also irrefutably oppose the pronouncements made by the press, specifically those in the magazine SEMANA which irresponsibly assumes the guilt of Jaime Pineda without proven facts – an insult to the integrity and the principle that one is assumed innocent until proven guilty.

We hope that there will be more dissident voices, and more support for Jaime Pineda and all those who have been victims of state persecution.

In hope that our teacher will soon be returned, as will all those who believe that reinventing myths is not only possible, but necessary.

Education



Picture of educators and human rights defenders killed in Antioquia between 1987-2000 that hangs in the headquarters of ADIDA, the Antioquia teachers union, Medellín. No trade union has suffered more from repression and political violence in Colombia then ADIDA over recent decades.

Uribe Velez, to change the Constitution to allow for his re-election. The referendum was won by the opposition and FECODE was credited with a key role in the victory. FECODE has also pledged open and public support for the new political opposition party formed in 2001, the Polo Democrático Alternativo, which is a fierce critic of the current administration and to the current nature of the 'peace process' with the paramilitaries, which it sees as giving immunity to persons involved in widespread crimes against humanity. Two ex-Presidents of the FECODE are now members of the Colombian Congress for the PDA. All of these issues have contributed to FECODE being targeted by political violence.

Where in Colombia are educators' human rights violated?

While this political violence against educators in Colombia is both widespread and has a long history, it is not evenly distributed. In Figure 2 we can see the combined totals of 5 key human rights violations (homicides, forced displacement, disappearances, death threats and arbitrary detention) during 3 time periods (1992-1997; 1997-2002; 2002-2007). What is most startling is the prevalence of

Human Rights Violations (selected types) against educators (1991-2006)

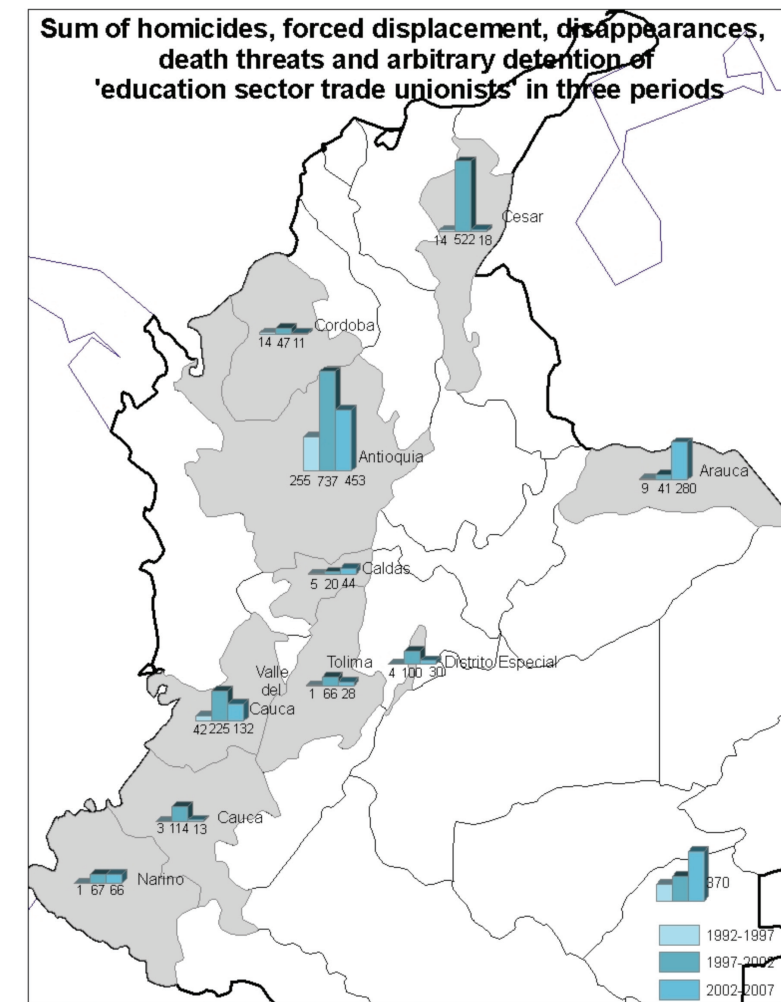
Year	Murder	Death Threat	Arbitrary Detention	Disappearance	Forced Displacement	Torture
1991	44	2	0	1	0	3
1992	28	3	3	1	0	5
1993	14	0	0	3	0	0
1994	38	0	0	2	0	3
1995	31	1	0	4	0	4
1996	69	163	32	6	1	0
1997	84	285	10	1	261	0
1998	49	228	1	3	425	0
1999	39	365	6	3	26	0
2000	60	37	31	13	136	2
2001	84	49	7	7	26	0
2002	94	20	1	4	3	0
2003	49	212	7	3	89	0
2004	46	329	15	5	30	1
2005	44	186	44	1	8	1
2006	35	135	4	2	3	2
Total	808	2015	161	59	1008	21

Table 1. (Esuela Nacional Sindical, 2007)

the department of Antioquia in all of the time periods. This is important because Antioquia during the mid 1990s was seen as the laboratory for the new paramilitary project, which then spread outwards to other departments (O'Loingsigh, 2003). During this period paramilitarism in Colombia appears to move from regional private armies for landed elites concerned with guerrilla attacks to a national structure with close ties to the military. If we

look at the statistics on human rights violations against educators from 1997 onwards in Antioquia we can clearly see the sharp rise in assassinations, forced displacement and death threats which coincides with this shift.

Beyond Antioquia, central to an explanation of the geographical patterns of human rights violations against educators is an understanding of the spread and trajectory of Paramilitarism in the 1990s, and the ongoing execution



ENS (2007) Escuela Nacional Sindical Banco de Datos, Medellín: Colombia

Figure 2

of Plan Colombia, the massive US military aid package which began in 1998 (Duncan, 2006, Romero, 2007). As we can see from Figure 2 during the second period (1997-2002) there have been large increases in human rights violations against educators in both Valle de Cauca and Cauca, and also Cesar. Valle de Cauca, Cauca and Cesar were all regions where paramilitary organisations emerged in the late 1990's, and were also key strategic territories for Plan Colombia operations. Similarly, in the third period (2002-2007) we see a sharp increase of human rights violations in Arauca since it became designated as a 'special rehabilitation zone' under President Uribe's new Democratic Security Plan.

Conclusions: Despite the widespread attacks on educators and education sector trade unionism, opposition to the Uribe government continues in both schools and universities. As members of the international education community and international trade union and solidarity movements it is important for us to build solidarity with our Colombian colleagues to strengthen their attempts at making more visible the horrific human rights situation taking place in their country and to assist them in both the financial and political support they need to defend the human rights of their members. We can also pressure our own governments to stop supporting the Colombian state until it respects and protects the human rights of its citizens. If we can begin to do those things more systematically, then we too can play a part in the struggle for human rights in Colombia both in the education system and beyond.

● **Mario Novelli is a Lecturer in International Development at the University of Amsterdam. This article is a brief summary of the findings of a forthcoming report to**

be published in both Spanish and English in the spring of 2009 by Education International, the global federation of teachers' unions: Novelli, M (2009) Colombia's Classroom Wars: Political Violence Against Education Sector Trade Unions in Colombia (Guerra en las Aulas: Violencia Política Contra Los Sindicatos Del Sector De La Educación En Colombia). Brussels: Education International.

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Book reviews

Linked Labor Histories

by Aviva Chomsky
(Duke University Press, £17.09)

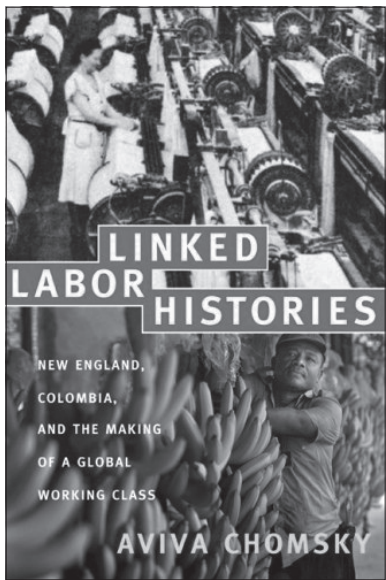
In *Linked Labor Histories* (LLH) Chomsky critiques the orthodox view of globalisation as new and benign, helping poor countries develop. From the point of view of method, she insists it is possible to study immigration and capital flight (deindustrialisation) together.

The connections are that ‘employers stand to benefit when there is a surplus of labor’, and that ‘both strategies relieve employers of payment for the reproduction of their labor force’. Chomsky explores what workers in the global south and in the north have in common, and in what ways region shapes class relations. She addresses these large themes through two interrelated sets of case studies linking labour and capital in New England, in the north east of the USA, and Colombia.

The case studies are tremendous. Chomsky recounts how the US union movement was built one hundred years ago by immigrants, anarchists, socialists and communists working from the bottom up. She shows the tension between unions seeking to save jobs through allying with their employer and a more class oriented strategy. Labour – management collaboration induced the union officialdom to become more conservative, opposing strike action and seeking to isolate the radicals.

New England was a centre for loom manufacture as well as textile production. Following strikes in Massachusetts capital moved plants to the southern USA, and from there continued to seek out ever cheaper labour production locations. The pivotal role of Puerto Rico in the chain of connections is a revelation. Textile production was off-shored from the US mainland to Puerto Rico in the 1940s, where it took advantage of the oppressive conditions to employ a low pay largely female workforce, with collusion from the garment workers union. The ‘favorable investment climate’ on the US-colonised island became the model for export-oriented industrialisation, as officials brought study groups from Africa, Asia and Latin America to learn how it was done. After Puerto Rico, Colombia was the next step in the chain of expanded production. Before long the fitters trained on Draper looms in Medellín would be skilled, but low paid, migrants to New England.

Each of LLH’s three chapters on Colombia are highly recommended for anyone wishing to unravel the complex interaction of the forces at play nationally and internationally. The United Fruit Company, now



Chiquita bananas, was a New England company. There is a clear explanation of the split in the guerrilla movements in the banana growing region Urabá, and, as one wing was turned into a paramilitary tool for Chiquita, how this spilled over and was duplicated in the union movement; labour – management collaboration with a violent edge. Disastrously the official international union structures adopted the reactionary union as their ally. This is crucial background to the two Coca-Cola international campaigns, for and against a boycott.

Chomsky traces how for decades the USAFL-CIO union federation operated on behalf of US multinationals and government, a history itself sufficient to explain why for a long time most Colombian trade unions have preferred to be independent rather than affiliated to global federations that are dominated by the very same AFL-CIO.

The story is brought up to date, and brought back home, with a chapter on the workers producing coal at El Cerrejón that fuels New England’s power plants. There is a subtle and useful discussion of unions and communities, and how committed international solidarity can be a catalyst for social movement unionism.

Chomsky is surefooted in the chapters that form the book’s substance, and she is refreshingly honest about labour solidarity – when it is bombastic, when it is real and the shades in between. LLH is classified as both Globalization and Labor History. Certainly the history is detailed and insightful, putting the workers’ story centre stage through testimonies, biographical sketches and by tackling the issues of building a movement.

The book’s analysis of globalization does not match this, it needs to draw on a more systematic critical political economy, to apply the concepts of imperialism and exploitation as distinct from the conventional globalization and inequality – but to be fair that is for another work. Chomsky has succeeded in her initial aim, to link labour histories, and from this perspective produce the most stimulating book on Colombia to appear in English for the last decade or more.

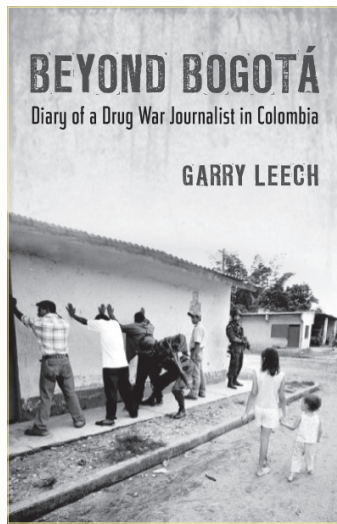
by Garry Leech
(Beacon Press, £14.25)

Beyond Bogotá: Diary of a Drug War Journalist in Colombia is framed by flashbacks made over 11 hours by the author as he is held captive by FARC guerrillas. The early chapters are autobiographical, tracing Garry Leech’s first encounter with Latin America as a US Special Forces soldier in Panama. Leech gets a real shock when he is detained as a now demobilised back packer in El Salvador, where he witnesses army brutality at first hand and realises that the US trained thugs are not the ‘good guys’.

From there it is on to Ecuador and Colombia, and the finding of a vocation. Most mainstream journalists seldom leave Bogotá. It is to Leech’s great credit that he has sought out the realities of the war and its impact on the people.

By the fourth hour / chapter we are into book’s the main groove, reconstructions of episodes reporting from all corners of Colombia. Leech

has been the most extensive journalist writing in English on the armed conflict in rural areas, from Chocó to Saravena. He takes us in with him, arrive in an area with a theme in mind, usually buddied up with a fellow journalist for security, book into the hotel, report to the local commander, get a local driver, make contacts, follow the story, get into a dicey situation. More than routine, this is the working method



Latin America at the Crossroads

by Roberto Regalado Álavarez
(Ocean Press, £11.99)

In just five pages of the preface to the English edition, Cuban writer Regalado aptly sums up the contemporary, neo-liberal period. He comes to this telling conclusion:

“The domination intensified the crisis; the crisis stimulated the rise of popular struggles; and the popular struggles led to the search for left political alternatives. And this chain reaction, which occurred over and over again, forced imperialism to remove the kid gloves of “democratic governance” and resort again (or continue resorting) to the same open interference and intervention that it has practised since time immemorial. This is the essential core of the failure of the current system

of domination...” (p5)

Regalado deepens our analysis of the class struggle in Latin America through the conceptual lens of cycles situated as stages of capitalist development. He argues that modern imperialism has passed through three stages: the ‘monopoly capitalism’ of the final years of the 19th and the early 20th centuries; then the stage identified by Lenin as ‘state monopoly capitalism’ in his analysis of the driving forces of the First World War; then a third stage of imperialism that Regalado calls ‘transnational monopoly capitalism’ characterised, he argues, by the interpenetration of capitals, and the merger of national cycles into a single transnational process of capital flow and accumulation.

Regalado explains how sustained US

counter insurgencies played the crucial role in the defeat of popular forces in all three political cycles, in each case laying the ground for a new round of capital accumulation.

This opens the ground for a really vital debate. The question is, will the outcome of the current upsurge in popular movements and now left wing governments be any different to the three previous cycles? Or, to put it another way, what must be done to avoid the left suffering a similar fate? Will the fourth stage of imperialism actually be its final stage in Latin America?

There is a definite polarisation between Peru and Colombia on the one hand; and Venezuela, Bolivia and, potentially at least, Ecuador on the other. This splitting into two camps is not only in relation to the US, but particularly right now in relation to the European Union (EU) and it attempts to impose its own version of free trade agreements.

While the powers have their rivalries, which will one day erupt, the striking feature is the underlying commonality of position between the US and EU: they are both intent on removing any obstacles to deepening market penetration and, for now, continue “to place inter-imperialist rivalries on a secondary level”. We have to mobilise strategically against British and European imperialism (as well as against the US).

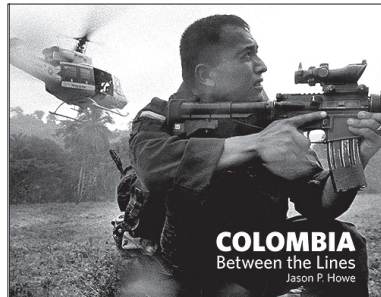
him twice she is a paramilitary, and before they hook up seriously, reveals she has assassinated 10 people).

The photos are technically good, at times daringly close to the combat, and of subjects on both sides of the armed conflict.

But what worthwhile explanation can be gained from such a dubious moral compass is truly beyond me. Coffee table Colombia.

by Jason P. Howe,
(ConflictPics, £20)

This book was heavily trailed, thanks to the excerpt that appeared in the Independent, ‘I fell in love with a female assassin’, in which Howe reveals that his Colombian lover worked for the right wing paramilitary death squads. (It’s not as if he didn’t know, she tells

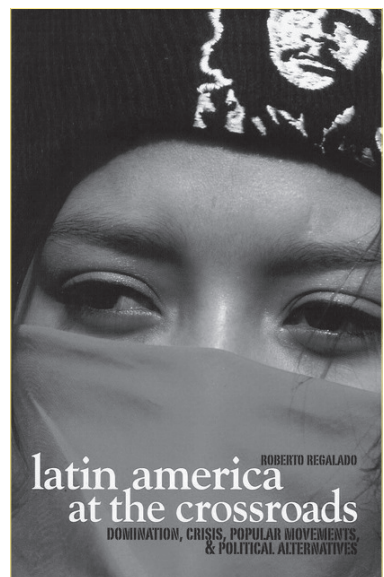


of an independent reporter committed to getting out the truth of this highly misrepresented conflict. The results of Leech’s journalism can be seen on <http://www.colombiajournal.org>

Beyond the reports, what the book format offers us is the reflections of a war journalist - why he is doing it, what impact this repeated risk taking has on his life and emotions; and the potential for greater range and depth of analysis. Range there is, we hear the explanations of the conflict from the principal armed actors the paramilitaries, army majors and FARC guerrillas. From this kaleidoscope of conflicting views what emerges as the book’s strongest theme is the criminality of US policy, the so called war on drugs, but better understood as a war against the campesino farmer population in areas perceived to support the FARC. The FARC’s perspective comes over in interviews with commanders Simón Trinidad (now in US prison) and Raúl Reyes (later killed in a cross border strike into Ecuador).

The eleventh hour takes us into La Macarena National Park, where aerial fumigations have turned all the coca bushes brown. Cecilia shows that the chemicals drenched her family plot, destroying all the subsistence crops, and “the children suffered from diarrhea and vomiting for several days, they were terrorized by the helicopters”. Indeed, Leech’s very first article for Colombia Report , “Are We ‘Salvadorizing’ Colombia?”, established his underlying theme of challenging the morality and wisdom of US policy. Some 70,000 El Salvadoreans were killed by death squads sponsored by Ronald Reagan.

Read this book in conjunction with the photos on the web site at www.beyondbogota.com/home.htm



There is a socialist bloc emerging in Latin America. We must defend both the governments subscribing to ALBA and the independent popular social movements in all countries. Can we help bring about the defeat of the fourth stage of imperialism in Latin America? There is more than a fighting chance of success, but it surely will take a fight to succeed. Belying its own title, in truth Regalado’s book goes beyond the crossroads, for he posits again the need for revolution.

www.colombiasolidarity.org.uk

Activities

Colombia's killings — the British connection



Colombia Solidarity Campaign is affiliated to the **European Network of Friendship and Solidarity with Colombia**, which has eleven affiliates in Spain and ten from other countries. For more information : <http://www.redcolombia.org/>

COLOMBIA
SOLIDARITY
CAMPAIGN

London Branch

Public Meetings: Third Tuesday most months at the Apple Tree pub, 45 Mount Pleasant, London, WC1
7pm Monday 20th April (exceptionally a Monday): El Salvador
7pm Tuesday 18th May: Education and Youth
For more info email: info@colombiasolidarity.org.uk

Bristol Branch

Aims to create awareness of the social injustices being perpetrated in Colombia. We hold talks, films and share information about continuing human rights abuses and what we can do from our city to aid the resistance.
For more info email: bristolcolombiasolidarity@gmail.com

Sussex

Sussex Colombia Solidarity: Linking up initiatives towards real democracy and justice in Colombia.
Email: sussexcolombiasolidarity@riseup.net

Norfolk

Norfolk Latin America Solidarity Forum: Covers issues on Colombia, Bolivia and Venezuela.
For more info email: norfolklasf@gmail.com or visit www.nlasf.org

Sheffield

Sheffield and Barnsley: Conference on Latin American Perspectives on International Development, 21-22 March at Northern College, Barnsley.
For more info email: admin@chilesda.org

Merseyside

Merseyside: Monthly meetings and solidarity activities.
Email: colsol.liverpool@btopenworld.com

Join the Colombia Solidarity Campaign!

Membership includes free subscription to Frontline Latin America
Individuals: £7.50 unwaged, £15 waged. **Organisations:** £30 branches/small (2 copies), £60 medium/regional (5 copies), £120 large/national (10 copies).

Mark membership category and return slip with payment to "Colombia Solidarity Campaign"

Name _____

Address _____

Tel. _____ email _____

Colombia Solidarity Campaign, PO Box 8446, London N17 6NZ
www.colombiasolidarity.org.uk email: info@colombiasolidarity.org.uk

Activists and students gathered on 7 February for a briefing conference on Colombia's Killings — The British Connection held at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London. Summary of speakers and workshops.

Carlos Cruz (Polo Democrático) From the history of the banana workers massacre in 1928 to the assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in 1948, democracy does not exist in Colombia. Political opposition is persecuted and repressed. The government does not protect its citizens from human rights abuses. Poor people and marginal groups are not represented in the political bodies.

Mario Novelli (University of Amsterdam) Between 1999 and 2005, 1,174 trade unionists were reported murdered across the world. From those 816 were Colombians, and more than half of these (416) were from the education sector. Who is carrying out these violations? Research shows that state terror is the answer. The state uses terror tactics to protect their elites and transnational economic interests. The official international community is silent vis-à-vis the human rights violations. We must look at who invests and supports state terror.

Jeremy Corbyn (Labour Party MP) British military aid: we are witnessing the most efficient PR whitewash that gives the Colombian government a positive image around the world. The elite panders to foreign economic interests. It is the largest recipient of US and EU military aid in Latin America. The 'war on drugs' has been the perfect cover for 'democratic security', i.e. militarisation. Although the British government are aware of massive human rights abuses, their involvement in Colombian state terror remains high. Britain aids military counter-insurgent training. Plan Colombia and the supply of arms to the armed forces. We demand an end to all military aid and training.

Helena Perez Niño (Workshop on Gender violence in the conflict) Apart from all forms of social control, arbitrary detentions and extrajudicial killings in the context of the armed conflict, sexual violence has been used as a way of terrorizing civilians. It targets the most vulnerable parts of society: Afro-descendants, indigenous

and campesinos; of these the most vulnerable are women and children. The state refuses to acknowledge the findings of the reports of NGOs such as www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR23/040/2004 and www.mujeryconflictoarmado.org

Julie Nicholson (film maker) The Time is Now (Ese es el momento) made on behalf of ONIC documents the indigenous Permanent People's Tribunal. Indigenous communities came from across the country and the continent to voice their denunciations of multinational and state crimes against their peoples and territory. From the extraction of natural resources, the degradation of the environment to the assassination, intimidation and displacement of indigenous communities this film signals the prelude to the unification and solidarity between indigenous communities seen in the Minga marches of October 2008.

Alvaro (Polo Democrático — Workshop on persecution of the opposition) The state blames the war on 'subversive' groups and uses the concoction of 'narco-guerrillas', and this rhetoric has convinced the international community, and most of its own population. Despite the scapegoat of the conflict, the real problem is not the war but the huge social and economic inequalities.

Paul Dowling (Leigh Day Solicitor) After the construction of a British Petroleum pipeline — from Casanare to the Caribbean — the land has suffered erosion and water contamination. Farmers have lost their agricultural

production. State militarization of the zone around the pipelines has increased and restrictions on the local inhabitants have been imposed. Having already achieved one out of court settlement from BP, Leigh Day is representing a second group of farmers.

Richard Solly (Colombia Solidarity Campaign) The communities around El Cerrejón (the largest open-pit coalmine in the world) and the railway that transports the coal to the coast, have suffered displacement, violence, and environmental damage. Enormously profitable companies based in London are responsible for the legacy of the destruction of Tabaco and the Wayuu settlements: BHP Billiton, Anglo American and Glencore International.

Ruth Tanner (War on Want) Britain is the largest EU country to buy palm oil and bio-fuels, accounting for 33% of Colombian production. Even a British government report shows that palm production is likely to produce violence and environmental damage, but investment continues. President Uribe announced that the production of bio fuels is a governmental priority. International agro-businesses use paramilitaries bringing human rights violations, forced displacements, and land theft: 70% of the population in Nariño have fled out of the region. www.waronwant.org

Andy Higginbottom (Colombia Solidarity Campaign) The war is widespread and Britain is involved in this tragic situation. Some of the biggest corporations involved are based in London, they must be held accountable for their actions. Solidarity

work is vital. It builds the human bridge between grass roots movements here and there: this is a participatory way to help our brothers and sisters. We need to work collectively and democratically.

Joanne Crouch (International Peace Observatory) IPO works with grass roots organisations through physical accompaniment of verification commissions, campesinos and other organisations. Having an international presence in Colombia and acting as witnesses, IPO reduces the risk of abuses against vulnerable groups. The organisation promotes humanitarian missions to protect human rights activists, applies political pressure, and raises awareness human rights violations. www.peaceobservatory.org

Julio Mayor (Latin American Workers Association) There is a large Colombian immigrant community in Britain; often exploited and without papers, the Colombian government has done nothing against the new EU immigration laws. LAWA works with British unions to promote the rights of Latin American workers and improve their working conditions.

Leonardo and Jimmy (Nueva Generación/Refugee Youth) got everyone to relax and laugh at the end of a long day! These London-based social organisations aim to empower young people through music, theatre and drama performance. As a group of Latin Americans, they welcome people from all over to support community-based activities and grass roots international solidarity.

Pickers say Viva la Minga!



Emergency picket of Colombian Embassy in London on 21 November by the Colombia Solidarity Campaign — in solidarity with the indigenous Minga. Fears of a police attack on the marchers heightened as they arrived in Bogotá. Similar solidarity protests took place outside Colombian embassies across Europe and North America.