

Exposing the corporations

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Stop press: State of emergency and national strike

Due to mounting unrest among many sectors of civil society and intensifying strikes over the last month by judicial and cane workers, among others, President Uribe on 9 October chose to call for a 90-day national renewable "estado de conmoción interior" (state of emergency) instead of reaching a fair agreement with workers.

G. Saavedra

The move has been deemed unconstitutional by opposition politicians and trade unions.

This legislation allows the Colombian government to cease paying wages to striking workers, severely limit powers of association and replace judges and striking workers and it may also increase militarisation while severely endangering civil rights for all.

Since 2002, Uribe's government has cut public-sector wages by 30 per cent, reduced the payment of overtime and overnight work, increased the pensionable age by a third and introduced insecure and uninsured employment by "associated worker's cooperatives."

Judicial workers in Colombia are the lowest paid in Latin America and have been waiting for a promised pay rise since 1992.

Striking cane workers are known to work under conditions of virtual slavery and, on demanding better conditions, have been falsely accused over the last few weeks of being FARC guerrilla sympathisers.

National indigenous organisation ONIC had already called for 12 October to be a day of indigenous and popular resistance.

Trade unions have joined in, saying that the government's steps are fascist in character and have called for a national strike on that day.

The Polo Democrático Alternativo opposition party is taking legal measures to have the state of emergency declared unconstitutional.

Campaign contacts on page 9

COLOMBIA
SOLIDARITY
CAMPAIGN

CANE CUTTERS FIGHT FOR LIFE AND DIGNITY

Indefinite stoppage since 15 September

The men are sun-beaten, strong, hardened — they do field-work, harvesting, irrigating, cleaning, cutting and gathering up the cane. Others go into the factory mills where they produce ethanol, sugar and alcohol fuel, their principal labour is managing the chemicals.

Berenice Celeyta A., Nomadesc

We speak of at least 14,000 labourers in the sugar cane industry in the Valle del Cauca who have worked in conditions of slavery since the 1930s.

They are the workers on 13 ingenios (a sugar mill/refinery and its feeder plantations) located along the length of the River Cauca basin. The majority of them have calloused hands from the machetes with which they cut the cane and a pronounced musculature from long days of 12 to 14 hours labour.

For decades, that have generated the wealth which is concentrated in the country's five richest families and four big economic groups. The equation is as simple as it is cruel — they pay a cutter 5,700 pesos a ton (£1.50)

and to cut three tons requires 12 hours work.

These hardworking men have made enormous efforts for the government, the sugar cane industrialists and their association Asocaña to understand that, to go on working, the workers need conditions of dignity as human beings.

They have shown the country and the world that workers' rights are obtained by the iron will to transform their current inhuman conditions.

It was not easy to take the decision to stop work on 15 September as their lives are at stake.

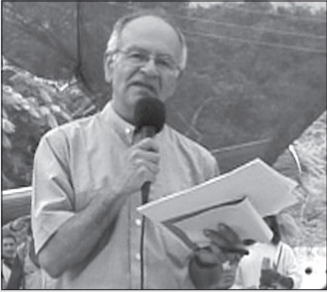
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LATIN AMERICA

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Editorial Board

Editor: Andy Higginbottom
Features editor: Ben Pearson
Subbing and Layout: Charley Allan, Diego Almeida, and Manuela Torres
Graphics: Garpeo
Translations: Carolita Ramírez, C. Siempre

With special thanks to Fidel Narváez, Amancay Colque, Julie Nicholson and Mike Pentney.

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Their solidarity and ours

Their solidarity. With the banking system on the point of collapse and as anger welled up against a taxpayer bail-out for the fat cats, George Bush II took time out to launch the US's next grand project for the Americas.

On 24 September, Bush was joined by representatives of the 11 Latin American governments that have — or seek — free trade agreements with the US in the Pathways to Prosperity in the Americas initiative.

This brings together “like-minded countries” — actually governments — into a US-led bloc. The pathways to prosperity will be “democracy, open markets and free trade” — that is, a deepening of the same neoliberal model that has brought so much social and environmental havoc.

At the very moment that finance capitalism lost popular legitimacy in its heartland, Bush and his allies declared their strategy to consolidate a chain of investor-friendly regimes, more finance capitalism!

Ignored by the UK media, this latest Bush initiative is important as it provides an overall framework for a renewed right-wing offensive. Fidel Castro and vigilant social movements immediately drew attention to the danger and the realities of such progress — “wars of conquest, its unequal exchange and permanent pillaging of other peoples.” [1]

In South America, the governments of Colombia, Peru and Chile are openly aligned with the US. Colombia's president Uribe was already in Washington lobbying hard to get the US-Colombia free trade deal passed. The Democrats are blocking its ratification because of concerns over the assassination of hundreds of trade unionists under Uribe and his dirty deal with the paramilitary hit squads that actually carry out the assassinations.

Colombia is supposedly a democracy, but only in name, as any opposition to neoliberalism is subjected to a regime of terror. You have the right to vote, but

you will be assassinated on the way to the polling booth.

Just because Bush and Uribe are in solidarity with each other is no excuse for the UK and the EU to back Uribe, yet they do. The UK government refuses to withdraw military support for Colombia, despite all evidence that this worsens the human rights situation, largely because of the huge profitability of British investments there.

Meantime led by its Trade Commissioner, one Peter Mandelson, the EU is on the point of negotiating its own free trade agreements with Colombia and Peru. In contrast, the government of Bolivia has refused to negotiate a deal that would cede European multinationals the opportunity to privatise the very means of life, water and biodiversity. [2]

Mandelson's tactic of breaking the common front of the Andean nations is, so far, succeeding. US and European “divide and rule” policies lay Latin America open to corporate reconquest.

Our solidarity. Neoliberalism and especially the US's last big project — the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) — have engendered resistance at many levels. For a time, the monster transformed itself into a multi-headed beast, in the form of a succession of bilateral trade and investment deals, but it is still the monster of exploitation. The only choice open to us is to, once again, unite and fight against the US and European imperial surge.

First, at the governmental level, Venezuela and Cuba formed the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA, which also means “dawn”) in 2004 as a solidarity-based initiative. Nicaragua and Bolivia have since joined this left-wing alternative to free market economics.

The Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) was agreed in 2005 and came into being this year. The US is not allowed in and this is a factor in Bush's decision to press ahead with his own “pathway to prosperity.”

Second, there is an ongoing process

between social movements in Latin America, as seen for example in the mass gatherings in Lima and Managua, in the expressions of solidarity with Bolivia, the Andean social movement mining conference [3] and statements by Brazilian movements against “their” corporations in neighbouring countries.

Thirdly, there is the solidarity from inside the US and Europe. There has been real excitement and inspiration for the idea of “socialism of the 21st century” emanating from Latin America. Now we must mobilise against the right-wing reaction to this challenge, as the excellent picket of the US embassy on 17 September shows. We recognise that our battle is not only with Bush, nor just US imperialism, but with European corporations and imperial ambitions as well.

The role of exiled Latin American workers has emerged as a critical factor, their experience bridges continents. May Day 2006 saw over a million Latino immigrants in the US take to the streets demanding their rights.

Now, Latino immigrants in Europe are mobilising with others against their criminalisation. In London there is a real fight to unionise and the stirrings of opposition to deportations. It is vital that these internal developments be supported by activists and internationalist solidarity campaigns.

In this sense, solidarity also begins at home. The socially invisible cleaners who work the early morning or twilight shifts in those banks about to take billions of public money, they and not the bankers are the people worthy of recognition and solidarity.

Their solidarity is solidarity for the banker and the investor, our solidarity is the solidarity of the peoples.

[1] “Bush's Self-Criticism” Fidel Castro, Havana, 27 September (Prensa Latina)

[2] See “An agenda for domination — Latin America's FTAs with the European Union” at <http://www.grain.org/front>

[3] Full text: <http://www.minesandcommunities.org/article.php?a=8847>

Foreign Office consultation on human rights

On 3 September, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) held a meeting with representatives of several civil society organisations to discuss their concerns regarding the human rights situation in Colombia, in relation to the four-yearly Universal Periodic Review by the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHCR).

Diana Raby

A formal UPR session will take place in December at which other member states submit questions, the Colombian government has to respond, and these responses will be followed up at the regular UNHCR session in March 2009.

The UPR procedures strongly encourage civil society input, hence the September session which was chaired by Tony Kay (Head of the Andean Section, South America Team, FCO) with other FCO officers and representatives of CAFOD, Peace Brigades International, ABColombia, Justice for Colombia and the Colombia Solidarity Campaign (Richard Solly and Diana Raby). The new UK ambassador to Bogotá John Dew also arrived for the final part of the meeting.

The session lasted some two and a half hours and was characterised by what diplomats call “a full and frank exchange of views.” We raised the problems of forced disappearances, arbitrary arrests, threats against and assassinations of human rights workers and trade unionists, the paramilitary and the flawed demobilisation process, forced displacement, the responsibility of the military and other state agents and the role of transnational capital.

One of the key concerns expressed by all civil society

speakers was the issue of follow-up and implementation. On numerous previous occasions, Colombia has responded to such questions with promises to end impunity and take action to prevent abuses, but then failed to act.

Civil society input also helped to strengthen the official UK submission, for example by including the term “paramilitary” in the list of illegal armed actors (and not just FARC and ELN) and inserting a question relating to the responsibilities of transnational corporations. Concern was also expressed regarding UK policy, especially on the question of UK military assistance to Colombia, but this is not part of the UNHCR remit and neither is it, unfortunately, something on which the FCO is willing or able to give a specific commitment.

The conclusion, perhaps, should be watch this space ... but don't hold your breath!

Is this the end of the FARC?

View the debate at the Frontline Club, 10 July 2008.

Chaired by renowned journalist Isabel Hilton, a panel composed of Malcolm Deas of Oxford University, Alice O'Keeffe of the New Statesman magazine, Hernando Alvarez of the BBC World Service and Andy Higginbottom Secretary of the Colombia Solidarity Campaign.

Review this debate at http://www.frontlineclub.com/club_videoevents.php?event=2468 or <http://www.ustream.tv/recorded/548425>

CD available to Frontline Latin America subscribers.

Cane cutters fight for life and dignity

Human rights in brief

from pl

Already, over 40 cane cutters have been seriously injured because of the lawless actions by the masters of war. Their lives are at risk because they are dying of hunger, because their paupers' salary does not provide enough to feed their family or their children's health and studies.

Their lives are at risk because the supposed "state of social right" that applies today in Colombia does not allow the country's workers, nor any organised social sector, to declare themselves against the devastating economic policies imposed by this regime of terror.

From before hour zero, the government and Asocaña knew the workers concerns and had in their hands the political responsibility to start a negotiation with serious proposals that would allow a real solution to this grave situation. Institutional lies cannot hush up the powerful truth coming from the 14,000 sugar plantation workers, that they seeking nothing other than that the basic minimum norms of workers' rights be respected.

Señores of the government and Asocaña, slavery was abolished on 1 January 1852. You have to respond before national and international tribunals for the treatment you are handing out to the cane workers and, if you do not proceed to a negotiation and establish agreements that guarantee the rights of workers in the sugar cane industry, you will have to account for the violations of national and international norms.

- At 4.30am on 25 September, approximately 130 troops belonging to the Escuadrón Móvil Antidisturbios (Mobile Anti-disturbance Squadron, ESMAD) of the National Police surrounded the ingenios at Providencia (Cien) and Central Tumaco (30) and, without any reason, attacked the workers with tear gas bombs, leaving at least 20 injured.

- On 28 September, Diego Palacio, the Minister for Social Protection, continued his stigmatisation of the workers, as well as their advisers and sureties, and this time attacked the Central Unitaria de Trabajadores — (United Workers Centre, CUT). Private guards working for Atlas security company passed by the workers' assembly points at Providencia mill, filming them from up close. That afternoon, President Álvaro Uribe Vélez's own guard, among them members of the Servicio de Inteligencia de la Policía (Police Intelligence Service, SIPOL), took photos and filmed the workers, advisers and members of the CUT Valle at Castilla mill.

- On 8 October, more than 250 people, the workers' wives and children, started an action on the highway in Candelaria. More than 100 ESMAD men arrived and, without a word of mediation, launched a tear-gas assault, causing the asphyxia of at least 10 children.

For messages, help and more information, contact Nomadesc: dhprohibidolvidar@yahoo.com, accionjuridica.nomadesc@gmail.com Cutting out the cooperatives: p7

Expansion of the Cerrejon Mine set to bring further displacement

South America's largest open-face coal mine El Cerrejon, which is owned by UK-registered multinationals Xstrata, BHP Billiton and Anglo American, is due for expansion in December 2008. Making others pay for the social and environmental costs of the operation is, and will be, key to its enormous profitability.

Ben Pearson and Richard Solly

A history of displacement

In 2001, El Cerrejon was owned 50/50 by Exxon Mobil Corporation (US) and a consortium made up of Anglo American, BHP Billiton and Glencore, a private Swiss company that later sold its share to Xstrata, with which it is closely linked.

In August of that year, private security backed by state riot police and paramilitaries invaded the Afro-Colombian settlement of Tabaco, violently displacing the entire community. Homes were bulldozed and resistance was met with violence and forced disappearances.

The community now lives displaced with little assistance from either the companies or the Colombian state. What assistance they do get has been the result of long, hard struggle by community members and supporters.

For years, the various owners of the mine have bought out or threatened local campesinos and indigenas into selling their land around the mining operation. Four settlements remain — three Afro-Colombian and one Indigenous Wayuu — incarcerated on dead, dusty land not yet consumed by the mine.

The surrounding countryside is green and full of animals, but the communities cannot plant their own crops or access traditional hunting grounds or fishing routes for fear that the "law" — the conglomerate's private security — will detain or kill them.

Cut off from the Afro-Colombian settlements, the Indigenous Wayuu must walk a month on foot across the border to Venezuela to retrieve fruit and vegetables for their community.

Communities and workers

The existence of the mine and consequent community isolation through curfews and control has ensured that local commerce has died out.

High levels of environmental pollution have led to large incidences of severe respiratory diseases while the noise of trucks and machinery 24 hours a day disrupt the once-quiet settlements.

Trains take their load along the mine conglomerate's private rail track 150km to Puerto Bolívar, where the coal is unloaded onto ships destined for sale outside of Colombia. Here, sub-contracted workers receive minimal pay, poor working conditions and no access to trade unions.

Members of SINTRACARBÓN, the coal workers' union, are in discussion with the conglomerate, voicing their concerns over labour conditions, pay, and health care, while simultaneously highlighting the plight of the communities surrounding El Cerrejon.

Given that the inhalation of the coal dust has been categorised as highly dangerous under Colombian law, they argue that the conglomerate should pay a higher level of social security to its workers in such a hazardous industry.

Expansion to bring further displacement

In December of this year, the mine is set to expand and the Afro-Colombian settlements of Roche, Patilla and Chancleta will suffer the same fate as the residents of Tabaco. It is hoped that the violence will not recur as the conglomerate now know the PR repercussions.

Despite continued attempts to break up the unity of the settlements, the campaign continues for justice, reparation and community relocation and the company has been forced to negotiate on the basis of admittedly inadequate World Bank guidelines on involuntary removal.

The indigenous community of Tamaquito, which is just outside the mining concession but detrimentally

affected by it, is also in negotiation with the company. With international support and the efforts of SINTRACARBÓN, the eyes of social movements are on the conglomerate's next move.

The communities demand reasonable reparation for injustices suffered under unhealthy and violent conditions. While the conglomerate siphons off huge profits, residents have to wait two weeks to see a visiting doctor — to treat diseases caused by the proximity of the mine.

"Generating progress"

Indigenous culture focuses on La Madre Tierra (Mother Earth). Through this conception, extracting anything from the ground is like draining the blood out of the human body.

While offensive corporate billboards litter the roadways and tracks around their settlements heralding "communities for the future" and the conglomerate's commitment to "social responsibility," the experiences of the communities reveal a completely different reality.

The conglomerate's assertion that they are attentive to the needs of the communities, preserving Wayuu culture and creating a better life for all the people around the mine, seems ridiculous when speaking to a resident who can't breathe properly due to coal dust inhalation.

In El Cerrejon, we see imperialism in its starkest form — communities who have lived for centuries on their land invaded by multinational companies with the full support of the state, simultaneously reforming mining codes, in order to secure territory and extract profitable natural resources.

Anglo American is based in London. BHP Billiton, headquartered in Australia, has important offices in the UK.

Sur Bolivar miners in the news

Teofilo Acuña, a leader of the Sur Bolivar miners, visited Britain at the invitation of the Colombia Solidarity Campaign and London Mining Network.

See reports "Colombian goldminers under threat" by Sandra Satterlee in the *Guardian Weekly* 25 April 2008 at www.guardianweekly.co.uk/?page=editorial&id=570&catID=6 and "On the costs of confronting Colombia's paramilitaries" by Jo Lateu in *New Internationalist* August 2008 at www.newint.org/columns/makingwaves/2008/08/01/teofilo-acuna

Another union leader assassinated

Union leader Alexander Blanco Rodríguez was assassinated on 26 August in Cantagallo at about 10pm by sicarios (hit men) who approached his work team as they were changing shifts and shot him in front of his comrades. Alexander Blanco was an active member of social organisations that provided the work force for contract firms working at (state oil corporation) ECOPEPETROL oil wells.

Forty-one union leaders and members belonging to the Central Unitaria de Trabajadores (CUT) federation have been assassinated so far this year. The CUT reports that more than 560 trade unionists have been assassinated under the mandate of president Álvaro Uribe, who was elected in 2002.

La República 31 August

Johnny Silva inquiry

An inquiry by the Attorney General (Fiscalia) has confirmed that 21-year-old student Johnny Silva was shot dead by .38-calibre bullets from a gun of the ESMAD, the special anti-riot police unit. Johnny was shot in the neck at a distance of 23 metres. The shooting took place on 22 September 2005 as riot police invaded the UniValle campus to break up a demonstration against the US-Colombia Free Trade Agreement. Johnny was not one of the protestors. No police officer has been charged.

El Espectador 21 September

Olga Vergara assassinated

Feminist leader Olga Marina Vergara was assassinated on 24 September along with her son, niece and nephew in their Medellín home. Olga was a member of Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres (Women's Peaceful Way) and had a long record of defending women in the Antioquia region. Her assassination occurred the day before the Ruta was about to publish the book *Violence Against Women in a Society of War*.

Further information email: comunicaciones@rutapacifico.org.co

Extra-judicial executions

The Colombian office of the UN High Commission for Human Rights has asked the government and its military to "clarify and put an end to the practice of alleged extra-judicial executions" that may have left as many as 80 dead this year alone.

The bodies of 45 young men have been found in the past week alone in unmarked graves, 23 of them in northern Santander province. Although the identity of the killers has not been determined, Colombian authorities have said they are investigating the possible existence of death-squads within the military that portray the dead as enemy combatants killed in fire-fights.

Miami Herald 28 September

Accompanier expelled

Christina Friederika Müller, a German citizen who was providing accompaniment to human rights organisations, was arrested by DAS police agents in Cali on 1 October. She was deported the following day and banned from returning for seven years. Christina is a member of the Network of Solidarity and Friendship with Colombia. Numerous international organisations have complained to the Colombian authorities.

Brussels tribunal

An International Opinion Tribunal convened in the European Parliament in Brussels 15-17 September 2008. It took notice of the verdicts of various opinion tribunals concerning Colombia, heard the testimony of more than 20 witnesses from social movements and human rights organisations and reviewed voluminous documentation, before concluding that the allegations before it of state crimes had been substantiated. The crimes include forcible displacement, forced disappearances and collusion with multinational corporations, all of which have been carried out with impunity.

For full reports see www.colombiasolidarity.org.uk

Press gangs

A member of the Conscientious Objectors' Collective Action group in Bogotá spoke in August about the illegal recruitment of young people, including disabled, displaced and indigenous people, and minors into the state military.

J Calliste

Increasing numbers are picked up off the streets in trucks and taken to military barracks. Although Article 18 of the 1993 UN pact on civil and political rights states that "no-one will be obliged to act against their conscience," there are no legal rights for conscientious objectors.

The Acción Colectiva de Objetores y Objetoras de Conciencia (ACOOC) promotes non-violence and

freedom of conscience and supports conscientious objectors. Half of all young people refuse military service. However, those who cannot buy a card, the "libreta militar," cannot get a legal work contract or graduate.

In 2005, there were 1,800 deserters from the state military and the numbers are rising.

ACOOC has built up affinity groups of young people at risk of recruitment and conscientious objectors who protect each other and resist physically. The group organises actions at barracks on recruitment days and gives legal counselling and economic support to young objectors.

By working with families and communities, ACOOC helps young men to resist the strong pressures to join the military.

Ecuador

Winning the fight for another world

The Ecuadorian people have won another decisive battle towards their “citizens’ revolution,” with a significant 64 per cent of the population saying Yes to a new constitutional road map for their country.

Fidel Narváez

It is yet one more signal of support for President Correa, who in less than two years has won four consecutive election ballot results. A victory has been achieved once more, despite aggressive opposition from the economic groups which own and control the majority of the media outlets, this time with active participation of the Catholic church.

The new constitution is without doubt the most democratic in Ecuadorian history. For the first time in the election of the *asambleistas* (assembly members), all candidates were guaranteed equal coverage by the media. Almost 80 per cent of the *asambleistas* were citizens who had never before stood for election and came from the social movements and NGOs.

The assembly received around 70,000 visitors from 3,000 organisations and, in marked contrast to the previous constitution, engendered by neoliberalism, the new constitution was this time subject to approval by referendum.

As a result of this process, Ecuador formalised its decision to abandon the neoliberal economic model and proceed to a social and solidarity economy which returns to the state the right to plan and control natural resources and strategic sectors of the economy, aspects which will not be allowed to be privatised under any conditions.

This includes water, which from now on will be considered a human right. The economy will also be orientated to promote and guarantee food security and sovereignty.

Citizens’ participation will be one of the main themes in the new constitution. A new power has been created in parallel to the traditional executive, legislative and judicial powers.

The Council for Civil Participation and Social Control is made up of citizens from civil society and will replace political parties in the selection of key authorities, such as those of the Treasury, Attorney General, Election Tribunal, Constitutional Court, etc.

The selection of civil servants will be done by public competition and will be open to all. This new body will in effect supervise and oversee the performance of these new authorities in the manner of an anti-corruption commission.

All state enterprises will always have an “empty seat” on their directories in order to allow the participation of civil society in management.

The repeal by referendum of any popularly elected post, including that of the President, is another tool by which participatory democracy is strengthened in Ecuador.

Among the numerous social achievements are free education up to university level, universal health

A new constitution for Ecuador



Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa

care with free medicine for terminal illnesses and cover for disabled people, social security for housewives and informal workers, the prohibition of employment agencies and agency work and paternity leave for men.

The most revolutionary achievements are perhaps those made on behalf of the environment.

Ecuador has given birth to the first constitution in the world to accrue rights to nature. This means that anyone can take legal action on behalf of the environment and demand its rectification.

Transgenics are prohibited, biopiracy is penalised and it will not be possible to patent any product of biodiversity or those which form part of the ancient knowledge of the indigenous peoples.

Simultaneously, Ecuador is now the first country with “open doors” as it will not require visa from any other citizen in the world. This is a clear message that, in Latin America, we are constructing the “other world that is possible.”

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



When history’s not on our side

It is difficult to describe one of the more unpleasant chapters of Ecuadorian history without being taken over at once by indignation and impotence.

Diego Almeida

Who in their right mind can comprehend the fact that, after having paid the enormous debt for liberation from the Spaniards and in full oil boom, Ecuador has sold its sovereignty?

And I mean sold its sovereignty since, because of a debt which grew from \$585 million in 1975 to \$17 billion in 2004, Ecuador has had to sign 13 letters of intention to international bodies, which in plain language means the acceptance of economic impositions.

Where is a people’s sovereignty if, from abroad,

it is told that it cannot invest in health, education or infrastructure for its people because it needs to honour a debt?

It is only mad men who imagine that, in an oil producing country whose economy is based precisely on exports, oil is not the major product to leave the country. Since 1982, Ecuador has been an exporter of capital, having paid off \$119.83 billion in debt repayments.

It could have set itself free of more than \$7.5 billion in 1992, since, according to US law, the debt had expired, but in just a few days, without the power to do so and in the face of any concepts of transparency and honesty, the Ecuadorian consul-general in New York signed a treaty in the name of 14 Ecuadorian public entities which resurrected the debt together with interest, penalties and fresh credit for the payment of new obligations.

GET INVOLVED

The Amazon fight to keep oil underground

www.yasunigreengold.org

No-one is illegal

While Europe is erecting greater barriers to impede the access of migrants from the developing world through the adoption of ever-more restrictive laws, a small South American country, wounded by the phenomenon of massive migration in recent years, is undertaking a totally different path.

Samuele Mazzolini

On one side, the old continent seems to have forgotten its past as a net exporter of migrants, while on the other Ecuador is giving a valuable lesson in the name of those humanist ideals which have often been denied its citizens living abroad.

The recent resolution of Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa which

implemented an “open doors” policy in his country with no visa requirements for tourism to any world citizen has found further echo in the new constitution, recently approved by a popular referendum. In the new Magna Carta, new principles regarding migration are established in line with the different conception of politics put in place by the current government, which sees man as the primary purpose of all public action.

Instead of criminalising people moving across the globe because of the growth of economic disparities, these dispositions try to focus on the question differently.

The first element which is worth noting is the principle that nobody can be declared illegal, inspired by the value of universal citizenship, treating migration as a right, not as an offence.

This is completely at odds with the recent norms adopted by the European Union, which dispose the detention of “illegal” migrants up to 18 months.

In addition, a number of tutelages are provided both for foreigners living in Ecuador and Ecuadorians living abroad. As for the first group, humanitarian assistance and protection rights are granted to refugees, clearly directed to the thousands of Colombian “desplazados” who reach Ecuador in search of a safe place. Moreover, people living regularly in Ecuador for five years are entitled to acquire political rights.

As for the second group, the constitution recognises transnational families and the possibility for them to benefit from the Ecuadorian pension funds abroad.

Important political rights are also granted. 5 per cent of the future national assembly will be elected by the diaspora of Ecuadorians living out of the country, for whom governmental action has also created special programs to motivate them to come back to live in Ecuador and alleviate the personal traumas lived by millions of people.

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

This being just the aperitif of the great treason by Ecuadorian civil servants to their country and their people, it is logical to believe that, as the peoples of Latin America wake up, they too will simultaneously have to wake up the firm desire to rewrite history and seek justice.

New winds blow in through the middle of the world and an honest government, perhaps for the first time in the republican history of Ecuador, has set up by decree and from within civil society organisations a commission to audit the debt.

This hitherto globally unheard-of initiative will provide the state with the necessary tools for the refutation of said debt.

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

Bolivia

Attempts at destabilisation

President Evo Morales has expelled US ambassador Philip Goldberg for “conspiring against democracy and seeking the division of Bolivia.”

The expulsion came after a chain of provocations, fomenting violent opposition and even raising the prospect of a US-backed coup against Bolivia’s first ever democratically elected indigenous-led government.

Goldberg had the week previously met with Ruben Costas, governor of Santa Cruz, the country’s richest province and one of five eastern provinces known as the media luna, or “half moon,” whose governors are demanding autonomy from central government.

The ruling families in this region are European descendants who threaten to break up Bolivia so that they can capture oil and gas revenues for themselves. Their separatism is mixed with racism and the right-wing “civic” movements that they have spawned have taken to street attacks on indigenous people.

In a referendum on 10 August, 67 per cent of Bolivians gave Evo Morales a vote of confidence. Evo announced that there will be a further referendum on 7 December on the new draft constitution.

In reforming Bolivia as a “plurinational” and unitary state, the constitution will reaffirm the significance of the country’s indigenous as well as European heritage. Other progressive elements, such as state control of natural resources and land reform, directly challenge the vested interests of the media luna elite.

So, faced with another likely defeat in the forthcoming referendum, the right decided on a destabilisation policy to block the democratic process. They launched a wave of attacks in the first two weeks of September.

The opposition’s violence came to a head on 11 September when, at Porvenir in northern Pando province, an unidentified group machine-gunned a contingent of marchers to

prevent their protest against right-wing governor Leopoldo Fernández. First reports said that eight people had been killed, but later it was revealed that over 30 men, women and children were murdered and 109 disappeared.

The killers were paramilitaries contracted Colombia-style by the local mafia and landowners.

Fernández was arrested for homicide. The very next day, Evo expelled ambassador Goldberg for his links with the opposition. In an act of solidarity with Bolivia, Venezuela’s President Hugo Chávez immediately announced that the US ambassador had 72 hours to leave as well.

• See www.ubnoticias.org/en for more information. For other reports and analysis, see: www.boliviasec.org.uk, www.handsoffvenezuela.org, www.venezuelanalysis.com, redpepper.blogs.com/venezuela, www.vicuk.org



Cochabamba eye-witness

17 September 2008

There has been a build-up of tensions in the country as the Media Luna prefects lead their followers on a campaign of street violence, attempts to sabotage the oil and gas industries and roadblocks to prevent exports and supplies to the rest of the country.

Steve Wagstaff

The social movements respond with plans for a march on La Paz to demand the legislation needed in order to hold a referendum on the new draft constitution and announce an encirclement of Santa Cruz, with blockades of all highways. The encirclement is quickly implemented, forming 31 roadblocks in all.

UNASUR (the new body representing all South American nations) meet in Chile and, with only Peru absent, unanimously issue strong support for the Bolivian government.

Demonstrations have been held outside the buildings of two privately owned TV stations in La Paz to complain about biased reporting. Residents of El Alto are organising solidarity shipments of food and other goods to Pando. The government is also sending food there.

I visit the nearest of the social movements’ roadblock. We pass through Bullo Bullo, the last pueblo before the border of Cochabamba and Santa Cruz departments and soon come across a long line of about 100 parked trucks.

The start of the blockade is marked by a symbolic single line of small boulders neatly arranged across the highway, guarded by half a dozen young men. The blockade is situated on a long bridge over a wide river, perhaps half a kilometer long.

The entire length of the bridge is lined on each side by makeshift, but very effective, shelters made simply by leaning together three or four large tree branches, each retaining its smaller branches and all of the foliage. A gap at the front provides a low entrance way.

Inside each shelter, six or eight campesinos and campesinas sit or lie on blankets and pillows, some preparing food. Many of the shelters have a makeshift sign above the doorway naming the branch or unit within the “six federations” of the cocaleros of El Chapare to which the shelter and the people inside it belong.

Each shelter is more or less the same size and shape, are evenly spaced and exactly lined up, giving a very neat appearance and an impression of orderliness and efficiency.

The space between the two rows is about three meters wide and there is a constant coming and going as if in a bustling market, with people shifting food and gas canisters in wheelbarrows

or on their backs.

The bloqueadores are prepared to maintain the blockade for as long as necessary. Each one of them spends two days and two nights at the blockade and is then relieved by a different shift.

At any one time, there are perhaps 300 people on or around the bridge. The atmosphere is completely calm and there are no police or soldiers present.

Negotiations

Formal negotiations between the government and the Media Luna prefects starts on 18 September, with government ministers, Congress deputies and foreign observers present.

Meetings last 12 hours on the first day and it’s agreed to form three commissions to discuss the IDH (taxation of oil and gas), the proposed new constitution, departmental autonomy and the designation of authorities in the National Congress.

The oppositionists have relinquished control of all of the government and state buildings which they had occupied as well as the Santa Cruz headquarters of the state-owned TV Channel 7 and of Entel, the recently nationalised mobile phone company. Channel 7 is therefore back on the air in Santa Cruz, in spite of the wrecking of their office and the theft of computers.

However, the oppositionists have remained in occupation of the offices of INRA (National Institute for Agrarian Reform), the government department charged with implementing modest reforms in land ownership. This highlights the fact that land reform is always a crunch issue within revolutionary processes in Latin America.

Thousands of campesinos and workers from the west of the country are gathering in Cochabamba to demonstrate outside the buildings where the negotiations are taking place and thousands more are arriving to join the blockades surrounding Santa Cruz. Shortages of gas remain in Cochabamba and queues at filling stations can still be seen.

3 October 2008

The negotiations between the government and the opposition prefects have virtually collapsed, technically they are suspended.

Arrests: The government are already holding Leopoldo Fernández and four others implicated in the Pando massacre. They have also arrested three civicos in Santa Cruz and Tarija suspected of terrorist offenses damaging a gas pipeline and attempting to sabotage other oil and gas installations.

Yesterday, the government issued orders for the arrest of Branco Marinkovic, the leader of the opposition Civic Committee of Santa Cruz, and another important opposition leader. They have gone into hiding.

The order to arrest Marinkovic, who has vast land-holdings and owns many factories, is a very significant development.

London embassy picket



Protesters outside the US embassy

Scores of solidarity campaigners picketed the US embassy in London on 17 September before a huge rally at the National Union of Journalists to demand an end to US interference in Latin America.

The events were organised by Hands Off

Venezuela and the Bolivia Solidarity Campaign in co-ordination with other Latin American solidarity groups and trade unions.

For a full report by Paul Haste and Charley Allan see www.boliviasec.org.uk



fightback

UK launch of Polo

On Saturday 6 September, over 100 people packed into a London meeting room for the founding event of the Polo Democrático Alternativo (PDA, Alternative Democratic Pole) in the UK.

Diana Raby

The PDA is the main opposition party in Colombia and its emergence over the last few years has marked an important advance for the Colombian left, which previously has been divided and ineffective.

The PDA's relative electoral success, winning the mayoralty of greater Bogotá on the last two occasions and achieving an unprecedented 22 per cent of the popular vote for its presidential candidate Carlos Gaviria running against Uribe in 2006, has established it as a major political force.

The PDA will hold its next national conference from 26 to 28 February 2009 and delegates will be elected on 26 October 2008. Colombians living abroad are entitled to vote, hence the interest in organising a UK section of the party and registering a list of UK-based candidates for these internal elections.

Unity and organisation: At the 6 September event, Miguel Puerto, who chaired the meeting, called for unity and for Colombians to register promptly as members of the Polo.

Derek Wall of the British Green

Party spoke in solidarity and showed a remarkable knowledge of Colombian popular struggles going back to the assassination of Gaitán in 1948. On behalf of the Colombia Solidarity Campaign, I analysed the rise of the Latin American left, arguing that Colombia could not long remain immune to the new and positive developments in neighbouring countries.

Estéban Cancelado from Spain spoke for the PDA in continental Europe, explaining the difficulties of work among immigrant communities.

Professor Pedro Agustín Díaz of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia presented an original analysis of the Colombian diaspora and Tarcisio Mora, president of the CUT (the Colombian TUC) gave a ringing endorsement of the Polo and its relevance for the unions.

Several members emphasised the importance of unity and effective organisation. A computerised display was available to demonstrate how to register online as members of the party and how to vote. A provisional list of candidates was presented and arrangements were made for future activities of the Polo UK.

The large turnout, effective organisation and enthusiasm of those present made this without doubt the most successful political event ever held by the Colombian community in Britain.

Coca-Cola boycott

Javier Correa, a Coca-Cola worker at the Bucaramanga bottling plant and president of Colombian food and beverages union SINALTRAINAL, has confirmed the continuation of the boycott of Coca-Cola products.

Ben Pearson

Calling for unity between Colombiansocialmovements against multinational companies, Javier appealed for continued international solidarity with the resistance.

Workers' conditions remain extremely precarious. Around 480 Coca-Cola workers are unionised, with 300 belonging to SINALTRAINAL. For five years, the union has been conversing with the Coca-Cola Company about the wealth of disappearances, tortures, threats and assassinations of their members at the hands of paramilitaries.

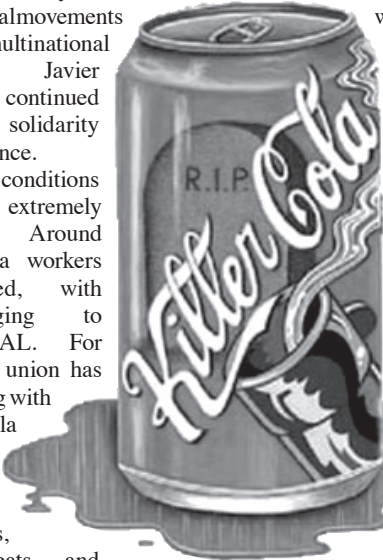
The union will not be silenced nor forget their dead comrades, neither will they allow the misdeeds of the Coca-Cola Company to be covered up by bribes.

Eighty per cent of Coca-Cola workers are sub-contracted and labour legislation fails to protect their right to unionise and fight for their rights. SINALTRAINAL have attempted

to organise sub-contracted workers, but this has resulted in them being laid off for "conspiring."

As a result of international awareness of the deaths and threats to its trade unionists in Colombia, The Coca-Cola Company have spent \$4 billion attempting to clean up its international image, contracting PR and CSR gurus such as Ed Potter, director of Global Labor Relations.

Living under hazardous conditions, speaking out against the politics of the Colombian government and the multinationals — within the discourse



Latin American cleaners sacked, union campaigning continues

Five Latin American cleaners working at the prestigious National Physical Laboratories (NPL) were sacked on 30 September by the contractor that employs them, Amey plc, owned by Spanish multinational Ferrovía.

Amey managers told the cleaners they had been sacked for "damaging the company image," just days after a flying picket of supporters highlighted their case (see photo). But this is just the latest in a series of attempts by Amey to break union organisation at NPL by any means necessary, in order to force through changes while keeping the workforce in a state of constant fear.

Two months previously, the same cleaners were suspended for daring to criticise Amey for putting an excessive workload onto ever fewer staff, unilaterally changing terms and conditions and disrespecting grievance procedures.

When Amey took over the contract in May 2007, it found itself faced with a largely Latin American migrant workforce that had recently unionised and was taking steps to gain recognition — something afforded to all other staff at NPL. Amey wanted to make changes, but a workforce that knew that a company taking over a new contract cannot change terms and conditions stood in its way. Shock tactics were required.

On the word of an informant, Amey found the pretext it was looking for — "illegal workers" — and hatched a plan with the Home Office to terrorise the workforce by carrying out an immigration raid.

The cleaners were tricked into attending a fake training session only for the doors to be bolted and seven of the workers to be taken away by the police.

Of these, three were deported — one to Colombia and two to Brazil. All lost their jobs.

Their crime? To help make Amey plc its £75 million net annual profits and support their families



Exposing NPL at the nano-technology exhibition, Institute of Directors, London

photo: Richard Whittell

back in South America.

Unbelievably, the company claimed in a subsequent meeting that they had been "socially responsible" by wrecking the lives of these already vulnerable workers and their families!

The disappearance of these workers had the convenient effect of reducing the workforce without replacing them. There are now just 15 cleaners where before there were 36! The current suspensions are a direct result of the remaining workers attempts to protest against this trend.

Amey, however, is no stranger to these tactics. It is a majority shareholder in Tubelines, which cleans parts of the Underground. Tube cleaners who

dared to strike for a living wage this summer were faced with a corporate response consisting of paper checks, immigration raids and deportations to safe, prosperous countries such as Sierra Leone and the Congo.

We say: "Regularise all migrant workers whose work produces millions in profits for Amey and other mega corporations."

• REINSTATE THE SACKED CLEANERS!
• TRADE UNION ACTIVITY AND SPEAKING UP IS NOT A CRIME!
• NO-ONE IS ILLEGAL — PAPERS FOR ALL
latin-americanworkers@hotmail.com
www.caic.org.uk

of the "war on terror" to which the Uribe regime has aligned itself with its war policy of "democratic Security" — ensures that trade unionists are branded as terrorists.

"The stigmatisation of trade unionists has grown deeper," explains Javier. "Twenty-eight have been killed so far in 2008."

The workers at SINALTRAINAL are all in agreement that the international boycott campaign must continue. Furthermore, it needs to take place on a much larger scale in order to succeed.

This involves a greater campaign inside Colombian territory. As has been shown by the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal, the connections with other organisations are essential in order to amplify the movement in the fight against multinationals in Colombia.

International Solidarity

SINALTRAINAL want to show that the eyes of the international community — not just human rights organisations — are on the Coca-Cola Company. Social movements, international groups and governments need to pressure the company to change its practices.

"The fight has to be more global than ever before," insists Javier.

Boston City Council supported a resolution declaring Boston, Massachusetts, a Coke-free city, whereby the city administration cannot serve Coca-Cola products or stock them in vending machines that are located on city property. It also encouraged businesses in the city to join the international boycott in solidarity with the Coca-Cola workers of SINALTRAINAL.

The painters union has removed Coke vending machines from its buildings as have bus drivers from all school bus yards in Boston.

The resistance goes on, with the continued necessity for international solidarity. Under Uribe's regime of terror, these are vulnerable times for the workers and trade unionists of the Coca-Cola Company.

Students and workers, social and indigenous movements need to unite to fight against this company and the multitude of multinationals that are displacing and murdering Colombians for the extraction of natural resources, the exploitation of workers and the securitisation of territory.

The wall of impunity that surrounds multinational and governmental actions must be broken down as well as the invisibilisation by national and international mainstream media of SINALTRAINAL's work and the plight of Coca-Cola workers.

Without international support, SINALTRAINAL will be placed in a much weaker and precarious position and the death threats will continue. The boycott against Coca-Cola products is more essential than ever. THINK BEFORE YOU DRINK.

The Coca-Cola Company's products include all manner of Coca-Cola drinks, Fanta, Schweppes, Sprite and Oasis, among thousands of other beverages.

• For more information about Coca-Cola's international crimes and how to support the international boycott, visit: www.killercoke.org

Colombia

Cutting out the co-operatives

How sugar refinery bosses are trying to break a strike by cane cutters

Since 15 September 2008, more than 10,000 sugar cane cutters from the main sugar refineries in the Valle de Cauca, Colombia, have declared a permanent assembly and worked stoppage. They are demanding direct contracts with the sugar companies, seeking to better their working conditions which, at the moment, resemble slave labour owing to the harsh conditions under which they work and their miserable salaries.

Alejandro Pulido, Asociación Nomadesco

Talk to any taxi driver from Palmira and he'll confirm the silent social indignation over the working conditions that the sugar cane workers face day-in day-out.

Working days start before sunrise and could go into the night, under temperatures that sometimes surpass 35 degrees, during which each worker hopes to cut four tons of sugar cane for which he may be paid 25,000 Colombian pesos, about £6.50.

From this money, social security, contributions to co-operatives and work equipment, among other things, is subsequently deducted — to such a degree that, during the best of months, a sugar cane worker's final income might reach 400,000 pesos, about £100.

Casualised labour and co-operatives

The work stoppage is for the right to direct employment by the sugar companies and to negotiate directly with them.

At present, cane-cutters have to pay to an intermediary co-operative, which gives them no employment rights. The outsourcing of labour is one cause of the desperate conditions of the sugar-cane cutters. The negative role of co-operatives as subcontractors was even recognised by government minister Palacio.

There are now serious divisions between the hundreds of workers directly contracted to the companies and the thousands who have no employment rights and can only work and be paid as members of a co-operative.

Sugar Scrooges

A passer-by in the Caicedo Square in Cali commented that, right now, Señor Ardila Lulle and the bosses of these refineries must stop being such scrooges and acknowledge the work of the cane cutters.

The enormous profits made by the sugar refineries are no secret, especially when you count the guaranteed quotas established by the Colombian government for the production of ethanol.

For 2006, they reported net profits of around 300 billion Colombian pesos (nearly £80 million), profits that were concentrated among a handful of elite landowners in the fertile valley of the

Cauca river. The demands of the workers would only cost around 30 billion pesos (about £8 million), which equates to 10 per cent of the industrial income in 2006.

Cutters resist police violence

The cutters' strike has been going for two weeks, surprising the local authorities and public opinion. The first sign of the crisis was the spontaneous mobilisation of unorganised, seemingly easily controllable people.

Everyone was waiting for the baton-wielding brutality of the riot police (ESMAD), the traditional means of negotiation utilised by the present government, which has been unexpectedly resisted by the cutters.

Perhaps the valiant police, accustomed to beating up students or homeless people, weren't prepared for robust men used to hard physical labour who know how to use their work tools with perfection. The protest of the sugar cane cutters has, up to this point, resulted in 20 of them being wounded and an indeterminable number of threats, intimidations and attacks by state forces.

The big bosses of the refineries didn't predict this scenario. The strike is costing them four billion Colombian pesos a day (about £1 million). All the while, the will of the workers remains undaunted in the face of hunger and the repression of the ESMAD and, in eight out of the 13 largest refineries, the blockades of the entrances continue.

Net profits of some of the sugar refineries in 2007

Company	Millions of Col pesos (millions of £s)
Incauca	11549 (3)
Mayagüez Refinery	22895 (6)
Providencia	25023 (6.5)
Manuelita	12806 (3.5)
Riopaila Industrial S.A	50427 (13)

Source: *Portfolio. The 1001 Companies. 2008*

The leaders of the strike and all of the cutters are aware of the delicate situation in which they find themselves. They know that, with a government known for extrajudicial assassinations, pacts with paramilitaries and false positives — whereby social movement members are assassinated and their



Photos: Alejandro Pulido, Asociación Nomadesco

bodies subsequently dressed in guerrilla uniforms — criminalisation and the dirty war are just around the corner.

Nevertheless, in this situation, they are doomed to hunger and distress through what they have to face each day.

With tears in his eyes, one cane worker resting on his improvised plastic bed recounted that he was ready to die in this protest because he could no longer endure the conditions under which he is living, that this was no life

Furthermore, the president in one of his communal councils declared that the FARC were manipulating the situation, quoting the undercover agent word for word.

"The guerrillas held a meeting with some of the workers, manipulating the movement by obliging them to go on strike," he said.

These incriminations are the start of a strategy of eroding the legitimacy of the cutters' protest to make way for a future scenario of military and judicial repression against the leaders of the cutters' movement, who have shown an amazing capacity for organisation and resistance.

Minister Palacio said that the strike of the sugar cane workers is far from the context of the regional conflict and, attempting to defend it, the evident crisis of outsourcing labour.

"Cooperatives are a valid model and of enormous importance throughout the world and one should not discount them," he said.

"But, yes, it is true that we have a huge problem with the abuse that is arising from the Association of Workers Co-operatives (CTA). In Colombia we now have a new law to avoid this labour intermediation and it must be applied."

Serious concerns exist surrounding the negative effects of the co-operatives in regards to the labour conditions of millions of workers in Colombia, around 5,000 workers in the ports, workers in the palm industry and innumerable companies that profit from labour reforms. These new regulations notably lower their costs, while seemingly do not increase employment or productive investment in the country.

These laws, however, cannot eliminate the economic logic that gave birth to the outsourcing of labour, that transfers labour costs to the worker that were once assumed by the company, ones which obliged them to take on non-fiscal obligations, administrative costs, among others. This makes the living conditions of the workers even more precarious.

Casual and direct contract — the labour force divided

There are also sugar workers that are opposed to the strike — nearly 450

that are directly contracted by the company. They receive social benefits from the company and the state quotas that have guaranteed them a dignified way of life.

They, along with the contracted technicians, demonstrated by way of a march on 18 September in Cali's Caicedo Square, uniting around 1,000 demonstrators, paradoxically demanding the right to work. The sugar refineries have withheld the salaries of every worker in order to put pressure on the demonstration of the sugar cane cutters.

This mechanism, along with state rewards, has given rise to all types of movements on the part of the trade unions of contracted workers of the refineries against the cutters of the co-operatives.

This, in turn, has generated a rejection of and violent confrontation with the people's assembly.

Attempts at negotiation have been systematically evaded by the Association of Sugar Cane Producers, Asocaña. Its president Luis Fernando Londoño declares that there will be no discussion concerning contracting and insists on the illegality of the strike. This would justify the use of public force and prosecution of its leaders.

At the moment, the Colombian government has instigated negotiations with each one of the refineries, which could disrupt the mobilisation of the cutters.

Humans replaced by machines

One of the most important decrees of Minister Palacio has been to signal the imminent mechanisation of sugar cane cutting. This has been seen in other parts of the world and would generate an unprecedented social crisis in this region.

Nearly 10,000 official jobs would be lost, which, added to unofficial jobs, could reach 30,000. This would have grave repercussions for living conditions in the region.

The cutters movement, however, have not declared their clear position on this issue, one which represents a real threat to living conditions in the near future.

The mechanisation and the absence of new job creation foretells an even more serious future conflict.



Views

The cocaine issue has seen somewhat of a resurgence over the past year. Colombian state visits stressing the need for consumers to take responsibility for the effects of the drug trade, combined with an explicit invite by the Colombian president to celebrity cocaine users to come and witness the damage for themselves, have highlighted the issue.

Jake Eisenstein

Blur's Alex James was the first celebrity to renounce his wicked ways and campaign against use of the drug. With cheers from the mainstream press, Colombian and UK governments, he called on middle-class students and young professionals to address the hypocrisy of their simultaneous taste for cocaine and fair trade coffee.

Contrasting the recent media interest, the drugs issue is little talked about in politically left circles, perhaps due to libertarian currents dating back to the early '60s seeing restriction of such personal freedoms as inherently conservative.

Cocaine tends to receive even less attention, perhaps due to its inability, compared with something like cannabis, to fit within these traditional political paradigms. As such, when arguments are made from the perspective of fair trade and human rights, it seems difficult for those on the left to not join the right in the condemnation of the drug.

To adapt Mark Twain's famous quote on finding oneself in the majority, when an issue unites left, right, governments



and the media, it's time to pause and reflect. It was with these sentiments that the Bristol branch of Colombia Solidarity Campaign organised a panel discussion to explode some of the myths surrounding the cocaine trade by bringing multiple perspectives to the table.

Colombian musician Juan Gabriel Gutierrez kicked off the discussion with a moving speech challenging people to think beyond their preconceptions about the enormity of the cocaine issue for Colombians. He also called on would-be users to think through the supply chain carefully and to reflect on the primacy of personal desires over possible consequences that is so engrained in us by consumerism.

Emily Crick of Transform, a UK-based organisation that campaigns for drug policy reform, advanced the controversial position in favour of legalisation of cocaine. This, she

stressed, would not mean the total deregulation of the market, but rather by legalising the drug it would become subject to the same tests, quality control and health warnings as any other commodity. The revenue gained in tax, combined with the savings made in policing, could be put into social programmes, while the diminished price due to legal transport would make it a less-attractive business to criminal organisations.

She argued further that, were it legal, environmentally damaging and displacement-producing drug eradication would be unnecessary, but that in order for it to work the move would need to be at an international level lest the Colombian government suffer debilitating sanctions.

Shifting the frame of debate, Duncan Winton of the Bolivia Solidarity Campaign argued that it is necessary to think beyond the cocaine discourse that conflates coca the plant with cocaine the drug. He explained that the coca leaf, central to Andean culture, traditional medicine and religion —

though banned from international trade in the same category as cocaine and heroin — could bring massive health and economic benefits if internationally recognised as something distinct from the refined and chemically enhanced cocaine.

Finally, Nathan Eisenstadt of the Colombia Solidarity Campaign argued specifically in reference to the calls for consumers to boycott cocaine, arguing that the function of this state-media discourse is to construct cocaine as “the problem” in Colombia. This, he argued, ignores the historic failure of redistributive land reform, deeply skewed income distribution and state violence that lies at the root of the Colombian conflict.

“Without cocaine, there would still be inequality, multinationals and exploitation,” he insisted.

“While it is a noble choice for people to boycott cocaine, this must not obscure the violence and exploitation at the hands of the state and multinational companies. Drugs is not the issue, capitalism is.”

BELCHING OUT THE DEVIL: GLOBAL ADVENTURES WITH COCA-COLA

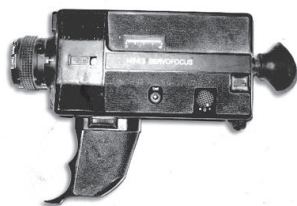
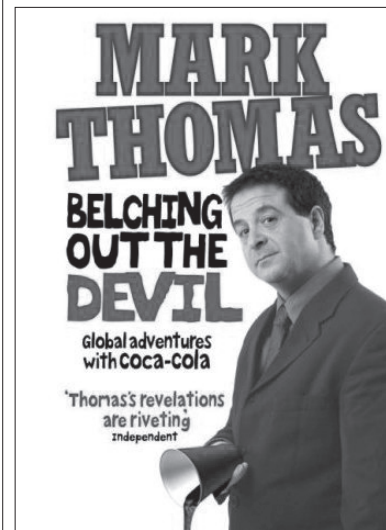
by Mark Thomas (Ebury Press, 2008)

The release of Mark Thomas's chronicle of The Coca Cola Company's international crimes brings a necessary addition to the activist's toolbox.

Witty and revelatory, the book describes injustices meted out to Coca Cola workers and communities affected by the presence of the greatest multinational symbol of capitalism.

Latin American countries under the spotlight include Mexico, El Salvador and Colombia, where he looks at the issue of child labour on sugar cane plantations and the assassination of trade union leaders.

Mark sees the book as an “agitating tool or intellectual monkey-wrench” for facilitating discussion. It is the latest and most formidable catalogue of the corporation's crimes around the world and it brings another string to the bow of the campaign against the Coca Cola Company.



• cinema klandestino •

Inspired by the Cineclubs of Bogotá, the Cinema Klandestino Collective have spent the past year bringing the best of Latin American cinema, old and new, to a Bristolian audience.

Laurie Ray

Launched in October 2007, Cinema Klandestino is Bristol's roving underground cinema club, screening features, documentaries and shorts on a weekly basis and providing a non-profit alternative to mainstream cinema for a weekly fee of only two British pounds, all of which goes to improving their setup and sourcing new films.

Born out of a do-it-yourself philosophy, Kolectivo Klandestino have a conscious commitment to providing a space for exploring the cultures, societies and politics of Latin America and an opportunity for Bristolians to engage with film and one another.

Situated in an ever-expanding series of squatted and autonomous spaces, independent social centres, the occasional scout hut and in people's homes, CineK simultaneously explores the geographies of Bristol's underground social scene, bringing people and place together in new ways. In line with its do-it-yourself philosophy, the collective requires participants to take a step towards them and call the Klandestino hotline to find out where each event will be held.

Cinema Klandestino is plugged firmly into the Bristol's alternative cultural scene. From their Latin niche within the city's vibrant independent cinema culture, the collective have forged links with numerous other groups in the city, working with them to cross-promote independent cultural and political events and modes of organisation.

On top of their staple weekly events, the collective have an occasional arrangement with Bristol's Cube Microplex, where, with screenings of rare and previously unseen documentaries and films, the collective bring their philosophy of participation to the overground.

Previous outings have included the UK premier of *La Colombiana*, a documentary on the life of Colombian cumbia diva Totó La Momposina, at which members of Toto's family made a guest appearance to talk with the audience about the film and demonstrate the cumbia rhythm en vivo.

• For more a little more info and publicity for upcoming Cube events visit: www.cinemaklandestino.org

Boycott exchange

Guardian Weekend published an extract of Mark Thomas's book *Belching Out the Devil*. These letters followed:

“The problem with concentrating on Coca-Cola is that it lets Colombia's government off the hook (To Die For, September 20). Mark Thomas is right to say that Colombia is the most dangerous place in the world to be a trade unionist; he is also correct in stating that since 1986 2,500 trade unionists have been systematically murdered.

GMB is against the boycott of Coca-Cola because we were asked to do so by the largest federation of Colombian workers, CUT (Central Unitaria de Trabajadores). To concentrate on these few workers, as horrific as their fate was, is to take away from all of the other thousands who have been assassinated, tortured, imprisoned and disappeared.

Joni McDougall — International solidarity officer, GMB national office, London SW19

“In response to Joni McDougall of the GMB (Letters 27 September): the majority of Colombian trade unionists assassinated are public sector workers, private sector unions being nearly completely eliminated. The union SINALTRAINAL has survived, despite losing eight Coca-Cola workers and 14 Nestlé workers to paramilitary death squads.

The boycott campaign does not let the state off the hook, rather it draws attention to the alliance between state, paramilitaries and multinationals. The real issue is that the boycott has brought these issues to a wider, fresher audience.”

Andy Higginbottom — Secretary, Colombia Solidarity Campaign

Ten years of Plan Colombia

The Beckley Foundation Drug Policy Programme has just issued the report *Ten Years of Plan Colombia: An Analytic Assessment*, which makes devastating reading for supporters of US policy.

“If the main purpose of Plan Colombia as proposed 10 years ago was to reduce the supply of illicit crops, recent results suggest that it has failed ... According to the UN, Colombia still produces a staggering 60 per cent of the world's cocaine.”

“Events in Colombia demonstrate that attempts at crop eradication, be they manual or via fumigation, have not had a significant and sustained impact on the illicit cocaine market,

particularly within the US.

“A key explanation for this is that such enforcement actions are, in the main, directed at the weakest link in the chain: coca farmers. However, in the case of Colombia — and indeed all other drug-producing countries — it is important to note that the impact of any supply-side intervention will ultimately depend upon global market developments.

“Put simply — as long as demand remains high, supply will continue.

“It is clear that a military approach against drug trafficking fails to achieve democratic stability and peace, since the increasing militarisation of the anti-drugs efforts can have devastating

effects in terms of displaced population, intensification of the conflict and the escalation of the violence, all of which can also impact upon neighbouring countries.”

The weakness of this report is that it takes US policy at face value. The problem is of course that the purpose of Plan Colombia was never simply to stem the supply of drugs, rather it was counter-insurgency, to terrorise regions of the country, defeat the left-wing guerrillas, secure through force zones of raw materials and implant US military forces in South America.

• Download the report from http://www.idpc.info/php-bin/documents/Beckley_PlanColombia_Sept08_EN.pdf

www.colombiasolidarity.org.uk

Activities



Colombia Solidarity Campaign is affiliated to the **European Network of Friendship and Solidarity with Colombia**, which has eleven offices 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, WC1X 0AE
7pm Tuesday 18th November: Amazonian Indigenous Peoples — Their Struggle for Survival.
For more info e-mail: info@colombiasolidarity.org.uk

Bristol Branch

Campaigns on diverse subjects as the oil industry, mining, Coca-Cola and the assault on public education in Colombia and are looking for people to get involved in organising, publicising and fundraising.

Public Meetings: Lounge bar of the Miner's Arms pub (Mina Road, St. Werburgh's) at 19:30 on the first Wednesday of every month

Friday 24 October: benefit gig at the Red Factory, Cave Street. See: www.bristol.indymedia.org/article/689016
bristolcolombiasolidarity@gmail.com

Sussex

Sussex Colombia Solidarity Network: In the south-east of the UK, linking up initiatives towards real democracy and justice in Colombia.
Email: sussexcolombiasolidarity@riseup.net

Norfolk

Norfolk Latin America Solidarity Forum: NLASF covers issues on Colombia, Bolivia and Venezuela. We are relaunching the Killer Coke campaign in our region.
For more information contact us: norfolklasf@gmail.com and nlasf.org

Sheffield

Sheffield Latin America Dayschool: Celebrating 50 years of Cuban revolution. Solidarity with Latin American resistance to neoliberalism, US-EU domination 9.30-4.30 Saturday 1 November. Quaker Meeting House, St James St, S1, Sheffield. Organised by Sheffield Cuba Solidarity Campaign & Sheffield Venezuela Information Centre. Register online at www.s-la.net

Movimientos

Monthly events showcasing the freshest local and international Latin-centric acts, plus films screenings, exhibitions and Latin culture

First Thursday every month, 7pm-2am. Entry: Donations before 9pm/£3 after. Salmon and Compass, 58 Penton Street (corner of Chapel Market), N1 9PZ (Angel tube/Northern Line). **More info:** www.movimientos.org.uk

Solidarity at the Climate Camp

Speakers from the Colombia Solidarity Campaign, the Movement of Ecuadorians in the UK, the Bolivia Solidarity Campaign and Hands Off Venezuela held a workshop at the Climate Camp, a week-long gathering near Hoo in Kent that provided a space for debate and action on the global ecological crisis and the social issues surrounding it.

Bob Sutton

The week culminated in the 10 August day of mass action against the existing Kingsnorth coal-fired power station on the site of which the government intends to build Britain's first coal power station in 35 years.

Several Bolivian activists were unable to make the meeting in time due to police harassment, which anyone who visited or has heard from the climate camp will be familiar with.

This policy of attrition by the state had taken a toll on many campers and by Wednesday many of us were exhausted. However, over 50 people attended the workshop and the significance and importance of forging links of solidarity with "third-world" resistance was lost on none of us.

The obvious point was made that



Bolivian dancers preparing at Climate Camp

Photo: Amy Scaife

there is a high chance that it will be Colombian coal fuelling both the existing and any proposed station at Kingsnorth. Opposition to imperialism must be central in the critique of the fossil fuel industry and more broadly of British capitalism put forward by the climate action movement.

The new and revolutionary wave of social movements across Latin America gives us optimism. There is much that environmentalists here can learn from them in terms of a holistic and sustainable view of nature.

We discussed what climate activists can do to support those fighting in

the global south. It is vital to continue to build solidarity with progressive movements in Latin America and defend them against attacks from forces within Britain through action here.

The Climate Camp itself and wider radical environmentalism has a part to play, to begin to demonstrate that we in Britain can start at least to uncouple ourselves from lifestyles that require the plunder of other nations to be sustained and take action against the institutions attempting to keep them that way.

The day ended with a Bolivian folk dance in the camp's student tent after the performers eventually managed to negotiate the police siege.

• **More information:** climatecamp.org.uk, workersclimateaction.co.uk, handsoffvenezuela.org, boliviasec.org.uk, movimientoecuador.co.uk



Members of the Merseyside branch — a hardy lot

Merseyside sixth anniversary

The Merseyside branch of CSC celebrates its sixth anniversary this year.

Founded by academics Luisa and Diana Raby, it has maintained a core membership boosted by up to half a dozen additional members over the years. One of our most active members, Luz Estela Villarreal, sadly passed away two years ago.

The branch has strong links with a wide range of other Liverpool progressive organisations, but especially the Cuba and Palestine Solidarity

Campaigns, Latin American Studies at Liverpool University and the People's Centre.

In addition to making a regular presence at Stop the War, May Day and similar events across Liverpool, it hosts awareness activities with film shows and visiting Colombian guest speakers including Javier Giraldo, Samuel Morales, Francisco Ramirez and Yolanda Herrera.

The branch has held meetings on roughly a monthly basis, initially at the People's Centre and

latterly at the Mersey Film & Video premises on the aptly named Hope Street. The formal meeting is followed by decidedly informal drinks next door at the Everyman Theatre that invariably give rise to heated discussions on the issues of the day affecting the wider world.

If any Merseyside reader is interested in finding out more about us, they should contact Diana (colsol.liverpool@bopenworld.com) or Paul Grunnill (paul.grunnill@bopenworld.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

BangOutOfOrder! & Kebele Sound present a:

benefit gig for Colombia

Friday 24th October. 9pm start

With renowned solo artists:

Elsbeth Anne Macrae
(Chimeric anti-folk)

Toby Wainwright Johns
(grunge legend turned troubador)

Aspel Orchid
(DIY neofolk theatre)

Clayton Blizzard
(a one man folk-rap insurgency)

£4.00
"donation"

at The Red Factory
Cave Street,
Just off Portland Square,
St Pauls.

all proceeds to:



espacio
bristol
colombia

<http://www.espacio.org.uk/>
<http://www.colombiasolidarity.org.uk/>

Some of the biggest multi-national companies in the world have been condemned for their role in the Colombian conflict. They are accused of funding and supplying arms to murderous armed groups responsible for atrocious human rights abuses, as well as directly benefiting from the groups' crimes.

National and international social organisations gathered 21-23 July in Bogotá to hear a summary of the evidence and the verdict in the final session of the Peoples' Permanent Tribunal (PPT).

PPT is a non-governmental tribunal established in 1979 with the aim of continuing the work started by the Russell Tribunals in investigating war crimes committed by US forces in Vietnam. The PPT bases its verdicts on human rights declarations and conventions and is free of the powerful political, economic and state ties that affect the institutions normally charged with investigating such issues.

PPT verdicts hold no official jurisdiction. However, this non-institutional character does not detract from verdicts intended to represent the "conscience of humanity."

It is very difficult to get the companies into court as they operate through subsidiaries in the country and their relationships with paramilitaries are hard to prove. This does not make them any less certain or obvious however. Threats often explicitly tell trade union leaders to leave a particular multinational alone, such as a threat saying "stop fucking with Coca-Cola."

Some exceptions do exist, the most notable being the successful prosecution of the Chiquita banana company in a US federal court last year, where it was found guilty of supplying funds and arms to paramilitary groups who were murdering and threatening the local population.

Colombia is important as a bad example and the regime of impunity for corporate crimes illustrates just what is wrong with leaving the multinationals to police themselves. Increasingly abandoned by national and international institutions, the only defence of the social movements in Colombia against the corporate abuses has been to mobilise public opinion and form alliances outside official structures.

In 2005, food and drinks workers union SINALTRAINAL linked up with the CAJAR human rights lawyers collective to form the Observatory of Multinationals, Megaprojects and Human Rights. The observatory co-ordinated with ONIC, the national umbrella organisation of indigenous people, and other social movements to form the Colombia chapter of the PPT. They organised a three-year programme hinged around six sectoral public hearings on agri-food, mining, biodiversity, oil, public services and indigenous genocide.

Over 3,000 people attended the final hearing, a gathering of social movements from different regions opposed to the corporate takeover of Colombia.

Colombia's oil deposits: Strategic development prospects

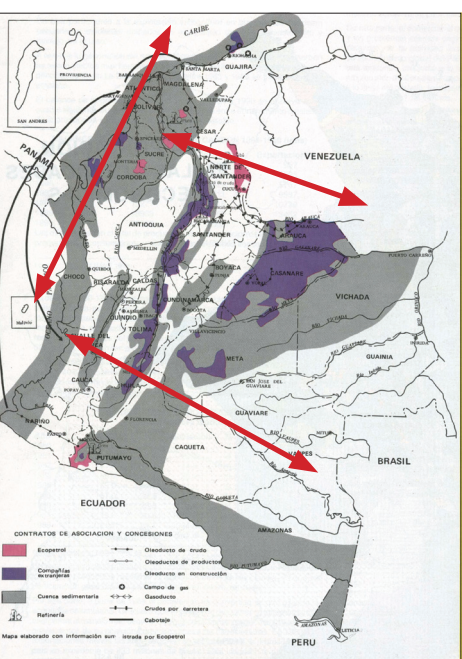


photo: Óscar Paciencia

Condemning corporate crimes in Colombia

Andy Higginbottom and Robert Green report from the Peoples' Permanent Tribunal

The accompanying map shows Colombia's main oil deposits and the darker zones show where foreign oil companies have gained the most profitable concessions. The plan is to open up the entire country along three strategic development axes. The corporate takeover has generated conflicts over territory in all corners of Colombia.

Arauca in the plains to the east of the Andes has a history of strong social organisation, agricultural co-operatives and alternative education projects. In the 1980s, US corporation Occidental moved in to extract the oil. Arauca was put under martial law by President Uribe in 2002 and today it is an armed encampment, including US marines.

Under the nose of the army, paramilitary operations have increased. The town of Saravena has, for six years, lived under military siege.

The paramilitaries have resurfaced, painting graffiti in the town, and assassinated seven residents in one week. The demands of the social movement in Saravena include the right not to be removed: "For the Defence of Life, Human Rights and Staying in this Territory."

Valle and Cauca in the south-west is another area of intense social conflict and the landlords and paramilitaries have declared war on militant indigenous groups. Outside the formal PPT session, indigenous leader José Goyes showed us a bullet wound from the assassination attempt he escaped in June.

The Nasa and other groups in Cauca are determined to reclaim Madre Tierra, the Mother Earth robbed from them. Tricked and disappointed by successive governments failing to implement commitments, the indigenous peoples have turned to the direct action tactic of

land occupations.

Armed police have attacked them and now they have been declared targets for assassination by the paramilitaries. A recent threat against the Nasa community in Cauca announced the start of a genocide against the community.

One very hopeful sign is the emerging alliance between indigenous and African descendant movements.

We met union-organised workers from Michelin and Unilever who are appealing for international solidarity. Buying out local businesses by multinational corporations has led to sackings, wage cuts and the removal of employment rights — in short, intensified exploitation.

The final verdict of the PPT states that the multinational companies operating in Colombia have become involved in "practices which are violatory to the most basic human rights ... articulating themselves with networks of violence which are rooted in state strategies incentivised and sponsored by hemispheric policies which seek legitimacy in the need for investor security."

The verdict goes on to state that the *modus operandi* of the multinational companies includes "disastrous effects on the environment, persecution and extermination of trade unions, payment for the protection and services of the state's armed forces, clandestine contracting of paramilitary groups, extra-judicial executions of trade unionists and members of social groups which oppose the actions of the companies, the 'flexibilisation' and 'precarisation' of working conditions and the adulteration of their products with serious implications for the health of consumers."

The tribunal was also damning regarding the

role of the Colombian state, highlighting the devastating consequences which all-encompassing privatisation policies and the selling-off of the country's vast natural resources to multinationals have had on Colombian workers and communities.

The last 20 years have seen 4,000 trade unionists murdered in Colombia, while conditions for workers continued to deteriorate — 32 per cent of workers currently have no contract, 60 per cent are informally employed and 44 per cent don't have any type of social security cover.

Multinationals and affiliates that were found to participate in varying degrees in human rights violations:

Food and Drink: Coca-Cola (US), Nestlé (Switzerland), Chiquita Brands (US);

Oil: BP (UK), Occidental Petroleum (US), Repsol (Spain);

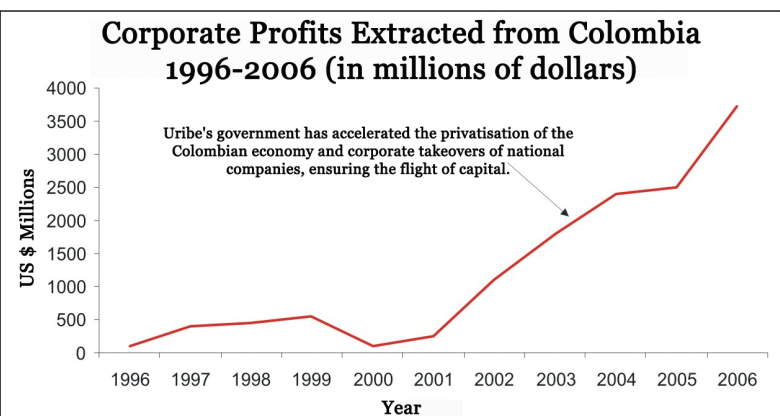
Mining: Cemex (Mexico), Drummond (US), Muriel Mining, Glencore-Xstrata (Switzerland), Anglo American (UK), BHP Billington (UK/Australia), AngloGold Ashanti — Keshada (South Africa/UK);

Biodiversity: Monsanto (US), Smurfit Kapa — Cartón de Colombia (Ireland), Multifruits S.A. — Delmonte (US), Pizano S.A (Colombia), Urupalma S.A (Colombia), Dyncorp (US);

Public Utilities: Unión Fenosa (Spain), Aguas de Barcelona (Spain), Canal Isabel II (Colombia), Endesa (Spain), Telefónica (Spain);

Indigenous: Ecopetrol (Colombia), Petrominerales (Canada), Gran Tierra Energy (Canada), Brisa S.A., Empresas Públicas de Medellín (Colombia), B2 Gold (Canada).

• Robert Green's name has been changed for security reasons.



State terror and multinational corporations

Libardo Sarmiento explained that the current phase of conflict has been characterised by the establishment and consolidation of the neoliberal economic model and the dominance of foreign capital in the country.

The cost of the process has been two million lives, four million internally displaced people and a further five million externally displaced.

The mid 1970s saw the beginning of a systematic dirty war unleashed by the state against popular sectors of the society in both urban and rural areas.

State terrorism and paramilitary groups were used to establish political, economic, social and cultural domination and ensure the continuation of the privatisation and de-nationalisation of the country's economic structures and territories.

This era has seen the increasing concentration of wealth and property in increasingly fewer — and usually foreign — hands.

Colombia's incredible wealth in biodiversity and natural resources and its geo-strategically crucial position at the tip of South America with ports on both the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, has seen foreign governments and multinational companies alike jump at the readiness of successive generations of Colombian governments to sell off the country's natural resources and sovereignty at the expense of the Colombian people.

Sarmiento outlined how foreign investment has skyrocketed under President Álvaro Uribe, seeing record profits but impoverishing the country, increasing the wealth gap and reducing huge sectors of the labour force to precarious conditions. The foreign buy-up continues at a frenzied pace, with direct foreign investment in the country increasing by 71.3 per cent in 2007. Repatriated corporate profits have shot up in the last five years.

Defence and security is the only public sector which is seeing government investment, currently receiving 5 per cent of the GDP and with plans already approved to triple this during this year. The period 2007-2010 will see 38,000 extra police and soldiers in Colombia, taking the total number of soldiers to 270,000 and the total number of police officers to 156,000.

Critical meetings that took place in 1996 in de Quirama, Antioquia department, which was attended by officials from the Colombian,

US, British, Israeli and Canadian governments, the CIA, the Colombian armed forces, paramilitary leaders and multinational companies, discussing the "final phase of the war and the consolidation of the domination and accumulation regime."

The conclusion was that this process would last until 2014, at a cost of \$8 billion and up to two million lives.



Hearings in different places

The TPP initiated with a series of pre-hearings which took place on indigenous land located in various different national regions.

Javier Sánchez

We began this year in the department of Arauca with our U'wa brothers and sisters and our Sikuani brothers and sisters in the municipality of Saravena.

The problems defined by the statements compiled were to do with oil exploration and the accompanying general displacement generated by the companies involved in this economic sector.

There has been violation of human rights in contravention of international human rights statutes and consequent destruction of our communities, who are progressively destitute and saddened by the erosion and destruction of our very hearts, our U'wa way of thinking and living.

From there, we went to the south of the country in the department of Nariño, to Divisio in the municipality of Awa. We were joined by the permanent council of the Cofan and the Siona people from the Putumayo.

Here we were able to clearly confirm and denounce the effects of glyphosphate fumigations. We confirmed the resulting displacement of subsistence crops, water sources and how many new-borns have died just two

The Indigenous Peoples Tribunal

The PPT public hearing on *Multinationals and the Genocide of Indigenous Peoples* took place on 18-19 July in a village called Atánquez, nestled in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada, home of the *kankuamos*. Some 500 people gathered to share experiences.

A common theme of the tribunal hearings is the violent dispossession of rural communities and the strong correlation between the patterns of paramilitary violence and zones of interest for resource extraction.

Since 1986, 403 indigenous people from the *kankuamo*, *wiwa*, *kogui* and *arhuaco* peoples have been assassinated in the Sierra Nevada alone. Nationwide, since Álvaro Uribe Velez came to power in 2002, an average of 146 indigenous people have been assassinated each year.

No less than 18 of Colombia's 93 indigenous groups face extinction. This ethnocide stems from a combination of direct physical elimination combined with liquidation of indigenous societies, as national and multinational corporations move in on their territories.

Hector Mondragon reported that displaced indigenous people are more than 8 per cent of the four million displaced peoples, double their proportion of the whole population.

"What can we conclude? That the blow that the Rural Development Statute has had on indigenous populations has been predicted and allowed to include this scandalous increase of the violation of human rights of the indigenous peoples, the scandalous increase in assassinations



Testimonies were presented from five regions

which took place between 2002-2006, the scandalous increase in displaced indigenous peoples.

"By blood and fire, they are taking away the rights of indigenous peoples and, if we do not stop it now, they are going to take them all away as they have done with workers' rights. We cannot permit this, we must put a stop to this.

"As our comrades in el Cauca are doing to stop this — with their fight for the liberation of Mother Earth which they are celebrating at present — which we must show solidarity with, with all our strength, because

with that courage they are standing up not just for indigenous peoples but for all Colombians.

"I end my speech with a heartfelt salute to my comrade Rafael Colque who, the week before last, lost an eye due to an attack on him by the police. Fellow comrade leaders, the Nasa peoples of Corinto, like him we are prepared to give our eyes, our lives and all our futures, but the rights of indigenous peoples are inviolate and untouchable and will not be brought down."

Long live the fight of indigenous peoples!



Javier Giraldo SJ speaking at the TPP

or three days after spraying has taken place.

Increasing militarisation of the land has resulted in the displacement of our brothers and sisters as the territory is invaded without permission, as if they were the owners of our land. The National People's Ombudsman (Defensoria del Pueblo) has been a while in taking this on board.

We went on to the department of Caldas. There we were accompanied by our indigenous brothers and sisters from Antioquia, from Risaralda, from Quindio and from the Cauca region.

We visited the indigenous resguardo of San Lorenzo in the Riosucio municipality. There the problems denounced by the cases examined were to do with mineral exploitation, gold mining by the

Kehdada company causing a myriad of territorial problems in this part of the country.

Increased militarisation was also an accompanying feature, as it is used as a guarantee for these projects to function.

Then we spent time in Cucuta with our Bari brothers and sisters from Catatumbo, who strongly denounced oil exploration and the mega-projects initiated in this region of the country.

We concluded in the Cabo de la Vela in La Guajira, where the people denounce the salt mining and the wind farms, the tourism projects, and once again the militarisation of our territories. Here our Wayu brothers and sisters are also forced to abandon their land, their territories.

And here we are today in the Final Hearing, gathering and compiling all the work we have carried out over more than six months in the whole of our national territory so that our brothers and sisters may denounce the abuse of international human rights, the abuse of our social rights, the violation of our cultural rights, our economic rights. We are here for the livelihoods and survival of our indigenous people.

Resistance and Autonomy!

• **Javier Sánchez is consultant on land, natural resources and biodiversity for the ONIC (National Indigenous Organisation of Colombia).**