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## EDUCATION ROCKS

Colombia has been rocked by protests throughout May as 280,000 teachers went on a 10 day strike to block threatened cuts. They occupied 97 schools in Bogotá alone. 2,000 teachers set out on foot from the extremities of Colombia, gathering support on their way to the capital city where they led a monster 200,000 strong demonstration on 30 May. Their mass support has forced the government to negotiate with teachers' union FECODE. The teachers want a guarantee that the passing of a law to change how spending is transferred to the regions will not be used to camouflage cuts.

Higher education is in even deeper turmoil. The economic viability of public universities is threatened by a new law that will make each institution liable for its pension liabilities, rather than drawing pensions from a central fund. This World Bank approved 'decentralisation' policy is a central plank of Uribe government's misnamed National Development Plan, and the cuts also threaten water supplies and health services. Atlantic University already has such a scheme and was forced to sell off its infrastructure to meet payments.

Students and staff launched a campaign to defend working class access to higher education by gathering in permanent assemblies at their centres of learning. But these protests have been either closed administratively, as by rector Moisés Wasserman at National University, or violently repressed. In the early hours of 31 May two hundred heavy duty ESMAD riot police ejected the occupation of Cauca University in Popayán, and surrounded the buildings with a cordon of armoured vehicles. At 3am on 3 June ESMAD dislodged students from the technical university in Boyacá, two days later the rector cancelled the semester.

The repression has spread back to the teachers. On 8 June police attacked a union demonstration in Pereira with tear gas and plastic bullets, injuring at least fifteen protesters. Juan Carlos Martínez had to be rushed to hospital for surgery to save his left eye. Despite these assaults, the fight for education continues.

Campaign contacts on page 25



'Wanted - Paramilitary' - Colombian protestors accuse President Alvaro Uribe with responsibility for paramilitary groups

Peter Bearder

# Paramilitary horror - scandal reaches Uribe

Robert Green

Right-wing paramilitaries trained Francisco Villalba how to handle arms, make home made bombs, and to cut people up. Villalba details how in 1994 he was taken to Farm 35, in Antioquia, it had been converted into a paramilitary training camp. He practised on victims gathered in from nearby villages, "they were aged people brought in alive and tied up in lorries". The victims were held in a lock-up a few days until the paramilitaries were ready. At the start of the training the victims were separated into groups of four or five and then the training began - as reported in Colombia's principal newspaper in *El Tiempo*, 23 April 2007.

The instructions were to cut the arms, the head

and to quarter them alive. They came out crying and pleading that nothing should be done to them, that they had a family." Villalba describes opening up people "from the chest to the belly to take out the tripe, the offal. The legs, arms and head were cut off." Other units prefer the chainsaw, but Villalba's team found they get snagged by clothes. So, "it was done with a machete or a knife. And the offal, we took out the intestines by hand."

The paramilitaries prized these sessions as a 'test of courage'. One trainee refused to do it; commander "Double Zero" called the man over and cut him up as an example.

Villalba estimates that 400 victims are buried in Farm 35. Three years later, October 1997, he used his skills in the El Arro massacre in Ituango in Antioquia. The paramilitaries occupied the town for

a week while they went from house to house looking for people named on a prepared list. Nineteen campesinos were brutally murdered. In August 2006 the Inter-American Human Rights Court (IACHR) condemned the Colombian state for not protecting the population of El Arro, and ordered the payment of US \$1.5 million in compensation, in addition to a public apology.

The man commanding the unit at El Arro was Salvatore Mancuso, now held with forty other AUC 'para' leaders in jail under the government's Justice and Peace Law.

The man who at the time was governor of Antioquia, the department in which El Arro and countless other massacres were taking place, was one Alvaro Uribe Velez, since 2002 the president of Colombia and architect of the self-same 'Justice and Peace'.

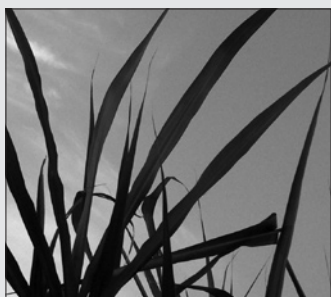
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# The truth will out – and it stinks

Normally speaking it's best not to get personal in politics, but in this case it's unavoidable, for in president Alvaro Uribe is concentrated a whole political project, one element of which is to remodel the paramilitary death squads moving them from their rural strongholds into the cities, to modernise the 'dirty war' in an urban setting.

The still limited admissions of the AUC death squad commanders have scandalised international public opinion: massacres to order, and all wings of the establishment deeply implicated. Every week the news from Colombia takes a new and ever more scandalous twist, Uribe tries every trick in the book to save himself and his entourage from going down. The hard man is beginning to look desperate to avoid "the institutional dangers of the truth".

Of course Uribe cares, not about the tortured and decapitated victims; he cares about his own, his friends in the military, his politician buddies and the businessmen who fund him. Those politicians who are charged with and admit to links with the paramilitaries may still be sentenced, but even now Uribe is trying to rig it so they are exempt in advance of any prison sentence.

## Para-military horrors from page 1

Villalba's confession is but one in a series of admissions by former paramilitaries of what they have been doing for the last fifteen years, a supposed 'counter-insurgency' war almost entirely directed against the civilian population, spreading from Antioquia to envelope most of the country in terror.

There are two principal modalities – massacres, for which some preferred chainsaws, and selective assassinations. Apart from deliberately sowing fear in the affected communities, the techniques of human butchery follow a hideous logic (you can get more dismembered bodies into a given space than whole ones; corpses thrown into the river sink if the guts are removed).

Common graves, sometimes with hundreds of bodies, have been found in San Onofre in Putumayo. The horrors are far from over. Since the revelations started last year, the next generation of paramilitaries, the Black Eagles, have started disinterring graves and throwing human remains into rivers: evidence removal. Estimates of the total number of AUC victims vary between 10,000 (official estimate) to over 31,000 (the human rights NGOs figure).

None of the above atrocities have caused the current crisis in Colombia's dominant class. The new factor has been a rising torrent of revelations linking more and more sectors of the establishment with paramilitary terror. The 'para-política' scandal broke on 4 September 2006 when *Semana* magazine revealed information from the laptop computer of another paramilitary chief 'Jorge 40' that he had been systematically paying off politicians across the north of the country, and eliminating their opponents. The paramilitaries have used their profits from drugs to buy up vast tracts of land along the Atlantic coast.

In November 2006 the dealings of Jorge Noguera, head of intelligence service DAS appointed by Uribe, came out: he had drawn up hit lists of trade unionists and academics and passed

The real scandal is that, incredibly, whatever vile acts the paramilitary murderers and their backers admit to hadn't mattered too much to official Colombia, because everyone knew anyway that atrocities go on, and that the establishment gives them the go ahead. Although Uribe himself has tried to orchestrate the mother and father of all cover ups, it is hard to escape the collective guilt. Individuals are responsible, and legally it is their individual guilt that needs to be proved, but it is manifest there has been a shared conspiracy, a class consciousness cruelty of the rich that has for six decades commissioned the use of horrible, calculated and systematic violence to make sure that no matter what, the Left will be prevented from governing and not even be allowed to exist as a viable political alternative. The deception has been to perpetrate criminal political violence whilst carrying out the semblance of a representative democracy.

The paramilitary 'demobilisation' was always going to be a risky operation, but Uribe calculated with George W. Bush's full support he could pull it off. Bush however is already a lame duck president, and what was once Uribe's strength has become his weakness. In Washington Congress is

them over to the likes of Jorge 40 to carry out executions. 'Para-política' had gone para-institutional.

There was far more to come. In January Mancuso 'confessed' that he was personally responsible for 55 executions and 6 massacres, a total of 336 victims. Even so, Mancuso was being economical with the truth. Concerning military support for his atrocities, he only named officers who are either dead or already cited for collusion. In other words Mancuso has a major bargaining chip in his hands, hinting that he will name more names if needs be to get lenient treatment. He has already accused Vice-President Santos of agreeing to bring the paramilitaries into Bogotá, although Santos strenuously denies this.

The Attorney General handed to the Supreme Court a secret pact signed in Santa Fe de Ralito by the AUC leadership and 32 politicians, promising to support the paramilitaries' political project. And a study reveals that the paramilitary expansion had by 2002 reached 223 municipalities, from that base "new groups had been formed that elected a third of the Congress in 2002, took over more than 250 mayors in 2005 and increased their parliamentary representation in 2006".

The Supreme Court has responsibility to investigate and judge members of Congress and high state officials. On 15 February four senators and a congressman were detained on orders of the Court, all from the governing bloc, another congressman escaped. On 19 February 2007 Foreign Minister María Consuelo Araújo, a close confidant of President Uribe, resigned. Her brother was one of the detained senators, moreover her father and cousin were alleged to have narco-paramilitary connections. Two weeks later the Supreme Court issued an order to arrest her father, a former Senator and Minister of Agriculture, for having been Jorge 40's emissary in the kidnapping of another politician Víctor Ochoa in January 2002.

Uribe defended his DAS chief, so when Noguera was arrested on 22 February 2007 (subsequently released) and with by now over thirty congressmen either detained or under

controlled by the Democrats and they are looking for opportunities to take a pop, and they see Uribe as Bush's favourite in South America. The Democrats have become much more sensitive to charges of human rights violations in Colombia, they know that it is hopelessly compromised and cannot be defended as a model for democracy.

Uribe is increasingly ridiculed in the US, yet he is still projected as a democrat by politicians and the mainstream media in the UK and Europe. It's a disgrace, and just because they care more about human rights. It's up to us in the solidarity campaign to change that, to bring the horrible truth home, to isolate Uribe and to confront his backers who share responsibility for the killings.

As we go to press *The Guardian* has just produced an eight page supplement *Inside Colombia: A Changing Landscape* that gives an outlook based on business representatives and Uribe. Such uncritical reporting underlines the importance of getting *Frontline Latin America* distributed as widely as possible, to report the outlook of the social movements and the experiences of the Colombian people. Please take out a subscription, and order extra copies.

close investigation, the para-political scandal escalated into 'paragate', signifying it was close enough to force the resignation of the president.

The term 'paragate' obviously refers to Watergate and the demise of Richard Nixon, i.e. it comes from the US, where the scandal has spread. Despite ever more frantic trips to Washington, hiring four lobby firms at a cost of \$100 million a month, and despite hurriedly appointing two African descendant ministers, Uribe has failed to persuade the Democrat Party to back him. The Democrats are set on blocking ratification of the already negotiated Free Trade Agreement, and have cut 30% off US military assistance under Plan Colombia.

Uribe is resilient and, fighting for political survival as his own base crumbles with the threat of prison, he has played a double manoeuvre. The first move is a surprise, the release of up to 400 FARC guerrillas and Rodrigo Granda, the man said to be the FARC's 'foreign minister'. The latter was released at the request of French president Sarkozy, hoping thereby to secure the release of prominent French-Colombia Ingrid Betancourt, one of the hostages held by the FARC. This move earned Uribe praise from the G-8 leaders meeting in Rostock, but it is probably not enough to enter serious negotiations with the FARC, and is in any case a smoke screen for his second move.

Uribe's second move is to propose a law that will ensure that convicted Congress representatives do not go to prison, a promise of impunity. Indeed an anomaly had arisen where parliamentarians accused of nexus with the paramilitaries could serve longer sentences than the paramilitaries themselves. In a surreal turn of events three Congressmen have resigned their parliamentary privilege and are considering whether to declare themselves as AUC paramilitaries.

The victims have no direct role in the 'Justice and Peace' process, they are threatened at its hearings, the plans for reparations are pathetic and there is no attempt at reconciliation; and yet, horrible and perverse as it is, the truth is finally coming out.



## MAP



## Para-corporations

Two US multinational corporations have been in the spotlight for their direct links with right wing paramilitary death squads.

Banana corporation Chiquita admitted in March 2007 that between 1997 and 2004 it had made \$1.7 million in regular payments to the AUC as, the corporation said, 'protection money' for its workers. Chiquita Brands International (formerly United Fruit Company) paid a \$25 million fine in the US courts. But the admission was being economical with the truth. An investigation by news magazine *Semana* reveals that the collaboration between Chiquita's subsidiary Banadex and the paramilitaries was far more collusive than admitted. Banadex had on 7 November 2001 bribed customs agents to turn a blind eye while it unloaded and stored 3,400 AK47 rifles and ammunition imported from Nicaragua. These were passed on to the AUC, whose then commander Carlos Castaño declared the operation a great success. The AUC's pacification of the banana zone Urabá had, on official figures, taken 432 victims in 62 massacres.

A civil action is being taken out in the District Court of Alabama against US coal company Drummond alleging



the corporation used paramilitary guards to intimidate the workforce. Drummond denies the allegation, but Rafael García, a former head of the IT department at the state intelligence agency DAS currently in detention, has declared that he was present at a meeting where Augusto Jiménez, president of Drummond in Colombia, handed over 200,000 dollars in cash for paramilitary leader Rodrigo Tovar Pupo, alias 'Jorge 40', to carry out the murders of two union leaders - a contract killing. Lawyers for mining union Sintramienergética are trying to include García as a witness to the Alabama hearing.

## Fumigation NOT working: official



Coca seeds

The US government reported on 4 June that the amount of land in Colombia under cultivation with coca, the raw material for cocaine, increased by 9% in 2006. The policy of aerial herbicide spraying of coca fields is failing to curb coca production. On the contrary, fumigation is prompting farmers to replant as quickly and in as many locations as they can, contributing to the dispersal of coca growing and Colombia's internal armed conflict to new areas of the country.

The reported rise in coca cultiva-

tion followed another record-setting year of fumigation, with 425,000 acres sprayed, nearly 25% more than in 2005. Since 2000 the US-backed Plan Colombia program has sprayed herbicide on some 2.1 million acres.

"US and Colombian authorities should focus resources on rural development, alternative livelihoods, and on-the-ground destruction of illegal coca plantations and end the wrong-headed, counter-productive focus on fumigation" said the Washington Office on Latin America, the NGO revealing the figures.

## ILO controversy

The CUT and other trade union federations have made strong protests to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) for its decision to downgrade Colombia from the group of countries with the worst human rights violations. The ILO's decision taken at its annual conference in Geneva is extraordinary given that in 2006 alone 72 trade unionists were assassinated in Colombia, more than the entire rest of

world. Of the 2,475 recorded homicides of trade unionists since 1986, less than 1% of those responsible are brought to justice. It is not surprising that the rate of union organisation has collapsed from 12.5% to just 4.6% of workers. Between May 2006 and April 2007 there have been just two officially recognised strikes. The answer to the riddle of the ILO's permissive attitude is that it is a tri-partite body: employers, governments and unions. The first two of these groups do not consider the situation sufficiently serious.

<http://www.cut.org.co/>

## Para-gate closes in on Uribe

Steven Mather

Pressure is mounting on the Colombian President Álvaro Uribe. During a debate in the Colombian senate on 17 April, the former M-19 militant and now Polo Democrático Senator Gustavo Petro accused him and his family of having strong links to the paramilitaries dating back to his time as Governor of the Department [State] of Antioquia between 1995 and 1997.

According to Petro, during this time paramilitaries used to meet at Uribe's family farm Guacharacas, "From there, at night, they would go out and kill people", he said. This was done to get rid of any alternative to their ideological view, "Any means to the end, which was to destroy the left was justified," said Petro, "this strategy ended up creating the monster of paramilitarism that still confronts us."

The alternative was really about land and resources. As the paramilitary leaders enriched themselves through drug trafficking they reinvested their profits in other businesses. They also cleared land for transnationals. Around 200,000 *campesinos* were forced from their lands and the murder rate went up 400% while Uribe was governor. This was all done under the legal auspices of the Convivir which were armed civilian militias that, ostensibly, were to defend local populations and gather intelligence to support the army in its fight against the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (the guerrilla). Uribe was one of the most enthusiastic supporters of the Convivir and Antioquia had the highest number of them in the country.

It soon became clear that the Convivir were simply a legal frame-



Uribe with the Colombian police

work under which the paramilitaries could act with their usual impunity. Petro named several paramilitary leaders as members. They were big fish: José "Chepe" Barrera, a paramilitary for 20 years was made a boss of the Sietecueros Convivir by Uribe. Others were Salvatore Mancuso and Julián Bolívar. Uribe has said he had no knowledge of Barrera's paramilitary credentials until 2004 and, unlike the rest of the country, believed Mancuso was a mere cattle rancher.

Antioquia is one of three departments (Córdoba and Chocó being the other two) that take in Urabá, a region that is rich in agricultural land, notably bananas and cattle ranching and has oil and mineral wealth. It is also important for contraband running due to its Caribbean coast.

During Uribe's time as governor the area was a battle ground between rebels in the guerrilla on the one side and the army and paramilitaries on the other. The relative strength of the guerrilla at this time led to a growth in size and activity of the right wing paramilitary groups as they sought to defeat them. This has now largely

occurred as the paramilitaries control the region keeping it secure for transnational corporations.

The Convivir were eventually outlawed in 1999 after condemnation from Colombian human rights groups as well as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International but most of their members simply continued their operations in the local paramilitary group the ACCU.

Petro also produced a photograph of Uribe's brother Santiago during his speech. In the picture he appears smiling along side the infamous cocaine trafficker Fabio Ochoa.

Accusations of links to right wing paramilitaries have dogged Uribe and his family for years. His father was a drug trafficker with links to both the Ochoa and Escobar families of the Medellín Cartel. Uribe himself was the Mayor of Medellín the capital of Antioquia in 1982 when Pablo Escobar controlled the city. It was said then that no politician was given a post without being given the nod from Escobar.

One of Uribe's ranches in Córdoba neighbours that of Carlos Castaño, a leader of the AUC paramilitary group. Castaño and Uribe share the misfortune of having their fathers murdered by the guerrilla in the early 1980's. Castaño, like Escobar, approves of Uribe saying publicly that he is the, "man closest to our philosophy".

Whether or not a smoking gun emerges to confirm Uribe as the "para-president" his reputation is taking a bashing even among US politicians. Although George Bush still calls him a man of peace former Vice-president Al Gore recently declined to share a platform with Uribe citing, "deeply troubling allegations", that must be resolved.



# “Why are they killing us?”

Peter Bearder

Buenaventura is experiencing a grave humanitarian crisis. On Thursday 31 May, 800 people took to its streets to demand justice and the vindication of the right to life, liberty and dignity in their territory. The following day an even greater number packed into the Assembly of the Republic for the Public Audience of Victims, an historic event for the city. La Guardia Indígena (Indigenous Guard) of the local Nasa tribe matched the police in equal numbers.

The event was convened by Senator Alexander Lopez, Vice Chair of the Commission Of Human Rights. Alongside the throng of journalists and national and international human rights bodies, were a commission from the European Union and a representative from the US Embassy. The slogan of the day was “Why are they killing us and for what?”

Indeed Los Bonaverenses have good cause to ask this question. In 2006, human rights groups put the number of murders in the city at between 400 and 600. It continues to be the most violent city in Colombia with massacres, disappearances, torture and forced displacement counting amongst the many violations committed against its people. So far in 2007 there have been 265 victims. As the most important port town on the country's resource rich Pacific coast, it is a key point of strategy for the States programme of global trade. It is also the battleground both for illicit armed groups, narco-traffickers and powerful economic interests. What is more, there is an added racial dynamic to the extreme poverty and open violence that the overwhelmingly afro-descendent population of Buenaventura is suffering.

The Audience gives safety in numbers to the many families giving testimony to human rights abuses. Many, however, are still silent to the possibility of reprisals. Along the walls are displays and photos telling of the many massacres. One such display showed the horrifically mutilated victims of the “Football Massacre”. On the 19 April, 2005, 24 young local Afro-Colombians were tricked into leaving for a fictitious football tournament. Twelve were later found in a river while the remaining twelve are still missing. A spokesman of the Proceso de Comunidades Negras, Naka Mandinga, gave testimony to the murder of his relatives and asked why his family were being systematically persecuted and murdered. One mother told how paramilitaries entered her house and murdered her two sons. Her tears were reflected by the faces of other mothers in the audience.

Very few of the victims of the crimes have any hope of getting justice. Corruption and state links to paramilitary terror mean they few have faith in

the Police. Militarization of the slums and surrounding estuaries has brings fear, silence and impunity. Liberal Senator, Piedad Córdoba, promised to denounce, in the Senate, the crimes of the paramilitaries and the accompanying crimes of the States armed actors. The final speaker looked directly at the (exclusively white) collection of senior officers sitting uncomfortably at the front of the auditorium. The police are not necessarily a force of protection, he said they are also a force for risk, threat and destabilization.

Official and institutional declarations on the violence in Buenaventura highlight the role of narco-trafficking and organized crime. But for local priest, Father Augustine this is a form of discrimination. “It is an excuse for subduing the people”, he said “it is a form of social control and social cleansing”. Indeed the State has failed to provide many alternatives for those who are falling into armed groups or the cultivation and trafficking of cocaine. The Assembly heard how unemployment is well over 40% and 49% of children do not have access to education. In some areas there is an average of 8 to 13 people per house. Health is another basic provision that is severely lacking; the rate of infant mortality is calculated to be between 10% and 50% above the national average.

Far from remedying this, the State's ‘development’ of the region to suit the dictates of its macro-economic strategy is deepening poverty and misery. Draconian legislation such as the Ley Forestal (Forestry Law) accelerates the exploitation of primary forest and waterways. Meanwhile villages along the port's tributary rivers are stripped of collective titles to ancestral fishing waters. Monocropping such as African Palm plantations bring forced displacement at the hands of paramilitary groups for the benefit of transnational capital.

The time for the Colombian Government to fulfil its obligation to protect the people of Buenaventura from extreme poverty and illegal armed groups is long overdue. “We are a peaceful and hardworking people” said one speaker. Yet their geo-strategic positioning puts them in the line of fire of powerful interests. To compound this, their socio-political status as a discriminated minority gives them little defence. In this respect their plight is typical of other afro-descendent populations in Colombia who, along with indigenous peoples, bear a disproportionate share of the violence in this war. One banner perhaps best made sense of the *Ethno genocide: We Afro-Bonaverenses are marked out for our race and pursued for our riches*. Read other eye-witness reports from Colombia at <http://www.bearder.com/peter/>

## Massacre: 2 years on Buenaventura commemorates football killings

Mario Novelli

On 19 April 2007, representatives of Buenaventura's social movements marched in memory of the second anniversary of the massacre of 12 young people who were tortured and murdered by paramilitaries after accepting the offer of 200,000 Colombian pesos (approx £50) to play football, from a man who arrived in the neighbourhoods of Punto del Este, Santa Cruz and Palo Seco. Two days after the alleged match the disfigured bodies of the youths, aged between 15 and 22, were found dumped in a ditch 5 kilometres away from Buenaventura Airport, in an area continuously patrolled by members of the Marine Corps.

The march took place in a context of the military occupation of the city,

with heavily armed soldiers on every street corner, and suspected members of the military intelligence filming the march. There were fewer than 60 people on the march, a reflection of the fear that pervades the city. So far this year over 150 people have been murdered, 16 during the previous weekend, and the climate of fear is pervasive. Despite the fear, the protesters marched alongside some of the mothers of the slain youth chanting slogans of resistance against the failure of the Colombian state to protect the human rights of the citizens of Buenaventura.

The march ended at the CAM square, located next to the local government offices. A black wreath was wrapped around the square's central statue and the pictures and the names of the murdered youth were pinned to the wreath. This was

followed by a football match between a mix of local youth and some of the mothers of the murdered boys – each wearing a tee-shirt with the name of one of the deceased on the back and the slogan “In memory of those youth, so that life can go on”.

The march and the commemoration were powerful symbolic reminders of the ongoing suffering of the people of Buenaventura, Colombia's biggest port city, yet a place of rising poverty and squalor.

Imports and exports move in and out, but little seems to filter through to the local population. The black communities of the Pacific Coast continue to suffer from widespread discrimination and exploitation and corruption is endemic. As one of the mothers' poignantly noted “my son died because we were poor. If we weren't he would still be here”.



## Samuel Morales released

Amnesty International UK writes

Trade unionists and human rights defenders Samuel Morales and Raquel Castro were detained on 5 August 2004 during an operation in which the armed forces killed three other trade union activists.

After protracted trial proceedings, they were convicted of ‘rebellion’

in November 2006, despite serious doubts about the reliability of evidence presented against them. On 28 April 2007 Samuel Morales was released after completing his sentence. He will continue with his appeal against the conviction. To date Raquel Castro remains imprisoned.

Whilst Samuel Morales's release is welcome, he and his family will

continue to be at high risk of attack by paramilitaries who previously directly threatened them. Amnesty International is calling on the Colombian authorities to ensure his and his family's safety, and that of Raquel Castro.

For more information: [http://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions\\_details.asp?ActionID=217](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions_details.asp?ActionID=217)

## La Rochela verdict - at last Reuters

In a ruling hailed as a landmark by human rights advocates, the Colombian government has been ordered to pay damages over a 1989 massacre of state investigators by army-backed militias.

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights ordered more than \$5 million in damages be paid to relatives

of 12 investigators killed by right-wing paramilitaries in the northern hamlet of La Rochela.

The decision, which cannot be appealed, marks the first time the state has been found guilty of involvement in the murder of its own agents.

The court, which is part of the Organization of American States,

also ordered Colombia to do more to guarantee the security of agents investigating illegal armed groups that still control wide swathes of countryside.

“This decision highlights the inability of Colombia to get to the bottom of this type of case on its own,” said Jose Miguel Vivanco of New York-based Human Rights Watch.



# Peace community attacked

Peter Bearder

**S**an José de Apartadó Peace Community is a humanitarian zone whose inhabitants reject all armed action, but they have become a major target. In spite of the arrival of worldwide delegates in late March, the community has suffered a further assassination at the hand of paramilitaries. The murder follows a

string of threats, arrests and violations of the physical and psychological well being of community members and associates, carried out by groups going under the name of Aguilas Negras (Black Eagles - a remobilized paramilitary group).

The Community sends the following:

"The continuous deaths, aggressions and threats against our process have

not stopped. All the forms of destruction are utilized against us by paramilitaries in joint action with the police to exert pressure, threats and death. Our historic duty, in the search for respect of civilians in armed conflict, is to give testimony to the facts so that humanity is able to some day to judge these terrorist acts. Again we have to tell of a new murder in violation of the humanitarian zone and against our

community:

- Today Monday, 14 May towards 7:00 am, Francisco Puerta (campesino leader and ex-coordinator of the humanitarian zone of La Vereda Miramar) was murdered in front of the Apartadó Bus Terminal by paramilitaries. Two paramilitaries approached him near the store in front of the Terminal where he was seated and shot him several times. They subsequently left in peace despite the police presence that surrounded the location.

- At 7:30 am today, a group of six paramilitaries in civilian clothing were seen with long weapons in El Mangolo. Another four civilian paramilitaries were found with short weapons in Tierra Amarillo. The Military and Police were found only two minutes from this paramilitary presence.

- On 13 May at 10:40 am a trader from Apartadó arrived to San Josesito to buy some pigs. He conveyed a message that paramilitaries in the neighborhoods of Apartadó were saying that they were going to carry out a massacre in the Peace Community.

...These facts show the drive of paramilitary murderer that the government tries to hide. They give testimony to a new wave of murders against the leaders of the humanitarian zones and of community members.

This drive of extermination against the community from the Government has again failed since we do not retreat from our peace principles, we will continue firmer than ever. Alongside national and international solidarity we are further animated to continue in transparency to search for an alternative and just world. The work and memory of Francisco gives us force to continue ahead, our greatest sympathy

goes to his children and family."

Please direct denouncements to the following authorities demanding that the Colombian Government guarantees the right to life of the community members and recognizes its integrity.

**Dr. Álvaro Uribe Vélez -**

**Presidente de la República**

E-mail: auribe@presidencia.gov.co

**Dr. Francisco Santos -**

**Vicepresidente de Colombia**

E-mail: fsantos@presidencia.gov.co

**Dr. Carlos Franco -**

**Director del Programa de Derechos**

**Humanos de Vicepresidencia**

E-mail: cefranco@presidencia.gov.co,

fibarra@presidencia.gov.co

**Dr. Michael Frühling - Oficina**

**del Alto Comisionado de Naciones**

**Unidas para los derechos humanos.**

E-mail: oacnudh@hcrh.org.co

In the UK, also send your e-mail to Colombian Embassy:

mail@colombianembassy.co.uk with a copy to:

info@colombiasolidarity.org.uk



## Putting the spin on repression

Scott Nicholson

**P**olice used percussion grenades and teargas to violently breakup a land recovery organized by the Barrancabermeja Association of Displaced Persons (Asodesamuba), families that have been forced to flee from their homes in the countryside and have sought refuge in the city.

On 23 May more than 100 of families peacefully occupied a vacant city lot in order to pressure the mayor, Edgard Cote, to take action to resolve their desperate situation. Riot police arrived at 4 a.m. next morning. The people responded by sitting down and singing the national anthem. The police began beating people. Three people were hospitalized, including a three-month-old girl, and the families were forced to abandon the lot. Luis Albeiro Duran was last seen alive by his family on 29 May when he left for work. I accompanied the family and members of the Popular Women's Organization (OFP) to search for him in the Arenal neighborhood on 4 June.

His spouse Nely, mother Elisabeth, father Luis, and the women of the OFP went house-to-house in Arenal - showing his photo and asking for help in finding him. The neighborhood is controlled by the right-wing paramilitaries and most of the people were afraid to provide any information.

Finally, one young man said that Luis Albeiro had been grabbed by a group of men on the evening of 29 May. Later on, six shots were fired. People ran to see what had happened but armed men kept them away from the site where the shots had been fired. The body was then dumped into a branch of the Magdalena River that runs alongside the neighborhood.

Wilson, a reporter with Caracol television, took out his radio and called Civil Defense (search and rescue). He held out the radio so that Luis could hear the conversation. Members of the Civil Defense had found two bodies that day alongside the Magdalena River.

Luis described what his son was wearing when he left the house and that he had a heart tattoo on his right shoulder. The Civil Defense responded that one of the bodies had a similar tattoo.

"It's him! It's him!" cried out Luis. Gloria (a leader of the OFP) held Elizabeth as sobbing wracked her body. Nely ran a few steps and another member of the OFP put an arm around her. "The children will never see him again!" she cried for Sharia (their six-year-old daughter) and Jordan (eight-year-old son).



Although the Civil Defense members had found Luis Albeiro's body, they hadn't bothered to retrieve it. We traveled with his family down the Magdalena River to Boca de Sogamoso - the area where Civil Defense reported finding the body. The boat wasn't able to enter the shallow channel there and we turned back as it started to get dark.

Gloria returned to that area with three Civil Defense members the following morning and they brought the body back for burial in Barrancabermeja. She said it appeared that Luis Albeiro had been tortured.

Gloria also said that alias "Cenizo" was implicated in the killing. He's the hired killer that works with the paramilitaries in Arenal. "Everyone knows about Cenizo except, apparently, the police" she said.

The Colombian government recently hired the public relations firm of Burson-Marsteller to lobby congress for continued military aid and to approve the "free trade" agree-

ment between Colombia and the U.S. The firm is headed by Mark Penn - a former Bill Clinton pollster who is a top advisor to Hillary Clinton. The government also hired the Glover Park Group which includes Joe Lockhart - a former Clinton White House spokesman. Wal-Mart, Citigroup, and Caterpillar have joined this effort in their role as co-chairs of the Latin American Trade Coalition.

Bill Clinton pushed through congress a massive increase in U.S. military aid for Colombia in 2000. The paramilitaries, with support from the police and military, took over Barrancabermeja just a few months later.

Last night (8 June) in New York City, Clinton was presented with the "Colombia is Passion" award by Colombian president Alvaro Uribe. Clinton described Colombia as "the oldest democracy in Latin America." The people here in Barrancabermeja that are suffering from paramilitary violence have yet to enjoy that "democracy."

## Human Rights Summary

**M**ore than seven people are assassinated or disappeared out of combat each day as a result of socio-political violence, according to a report by the Colombian Commission of Jurists\*. When the people who died in combat is added, the figure rises to 14 per day. 19,875 men, women and children have been added to the list of victims of Colombia's civil war in the past five years.

International media coverage of Colombia during this period has largely focused on the alleged success of President Uribe's security crackdown. It is only since last year's uncovering of links between illegal paramilitary units and the Government that cracks have begun to show in the state's façade.

Indeed, while the number of deaths out of combat has fallen slightly compared to the period 1996 - 2002, overall figures remain the same. The report states that 75% of the 6,227 recorded deaths in combat where the author is known are attributed to the State, either directly or via paramilitary groups. Since 9/11, US military aid to Colombia has increased in an effort to tackle insurgency as part of the 'war on terror'.

Extra-judicial executions leapt from 118 per year between 1996-2002 to 227 per year between 2002-2006. This relates to Uribe's "democratic security" policy, which has seen a massive

increase in the capacity of troops and police units, ostensibly aimed at tackling guerrilla groups.

Justification for the number of civilians murdered as part of this policy lies in the government's assertion that insurgent groups maintain links with the civilian population, making it impossible to distinguish between combatants and civilians.

Another worrying factor is the pressure exerted on state forces for "positive results" in the war on terrorism, likely a prerequisite for receiving US aid. These figures show that US aid to Colombia funds a regime whose murder count is at least three times more than the supposed terrorist target.

Arbitrary detentions have risen massively, with 6,912 recorded between 2002-2006, compared to 2,869 for the six years prior. Over one million people were displaced in this period.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner notes that the most trustworthy figures are not from government sources, which do not "include extra-judicial executions or arbitrary detentions", but from independent NGOs. The government has stated that it does not reveal security information to the public before being heavily "scrutinised".

\* Colombia 2002 - 2006: Situation Regarding Human Rights and Humanitarian Law at [www.icj.org/IMG/CCJ\\_Ingles.pdf](http://www.icj.org/IMG/CCJ_Ingles.pdf)  
Francis Andrews



## News

## In brief

## Changing Venezuela's Airwaves

The Venezuelan government has refused to renew the licence of an opposition television station that helped instigate a coup against President Chavez in 2002.

Radio Caracas TV (RCTV), Venezuela's oldest television network, had its licence revoked at midnight on 27 May. Subsequent rallies across the country, both in support and against the move, further revealed the deep divisions in Venezuelan society.

Criticism from the US and other foes of the Chavez-led government focused on the alleged undermining of freedom of expression in Venezuela. Chavez said the comments were "laughable" and pointed to the role played by RCTV in the 2002 plot to oust him from office, when the channel repeatedly aired calls for his dismissal.

A member of the National Association of Free and Alternative Community Media (ANMCLA), which represents hundreds of community media outlets, argues that RCTV is a remnant of the economic oligarchy that has ruled Venezuela for five centuries.

"Freedom of expression is the expression of freedom, not the voice of privilege."

The gap left by RCTV has been filled by state-run TVES, reported to be more of an administrative channel acting as a medium for independent production to reach the airwaves.

Francis Andrews

## Nationalisations in Venezuela

Venezuelan Oil Minister Rafael Ramírez celebrated on 30 April after securing sovereign control over the remainder of the country's reserves in the Orinoco Belt.

These were given to transnational corporations by the old regime under the policy of *Apertura* (Opening) in 1992.

The state oil company PdVSA will have at least a 60% share in any joint venture contract it enters into with any foreign or domestic corporation.

The reserves in the Orinoco Belt are heavy and extra heavy crude which means they need costly refinement processes and the foreign companies have the expertise.

Hugo Chávez the Venezuelan president was characteristically forthright in his assessment of the move, "Imperialism dominated our basic industry, our energy resources and our natural resources for a long time. That is over today", he said, "Today is the end of that time when all our natural resources always ended up in the hands of the alien but the Venezuelan people."

A week after the announcements on the oil industry, on 8 April, the workers of SIDOR steel protested outside the plant in Puerto Ordaz to demand the same.

Chávez had threatened the Argentinian owners with nationalisation but in the end the government has forged an agreement over the heads of the unions by agreeing to allow the plant to remain in private hands.

Despite the fact that the company has reneged on various agreements with the steel workers in the past, Chávez has accepted assurances from the owners that the company will give priority to the domestic economy over international markets.

Chávez said recently that he believed the trade unions should not be autonomous and should be incorporated into his plans for a single socialist party. Watch this space.

Steven Mather

## Guarani land exploited

Jane Cotter

Monica Vargas of Debtwatch spoke to the conference organised in London by the Bolivia Solidarity Campaign on 31 March about the natural resources of Bolivia: who controls, manages, enjoys – or destroys – them.

'Corridors of development' have been designed under IIRSA (Iniciativa de Integración de las Infraestructuras Regionales Sudamericanas) to criss-cross Latin America connecting centres of production, industrial or agricultural, regardless of which governments are in power. They carry highways, fibre-optic cables and oil and gas pipelines.

These routes, dreamed up more than 100 years ago in the USA, are completely unrelated to local people's needs. There is no relation between the places of extraction and consumption: wood is the source of energy in all countries in Latin America, except Venezuela. But open-cast mining and hydrocarbon extraction for export will affect the biodiversity of any area, and hydrocarbons are one of the most ecologically destructive industries in the world. The map of REPSOL, BP and Occidental oil and gas concessions in Bolivia coincide with the recognised indigenous and protected territories.

The 96,000 Guarani people – who also live in Paraguay, Brazil and Uruguay – are the third largest language group in Bolivia. Thousands are forced to work on plantations in the rich Chaco region in conditions resembling slavery, or the Middle Ages in Europe.

Guarani land is sacred, and everything that grows on it. The people



Guarani mother and child

Survival International

believe that souls return to meet in this area (Itika Guasu). They do not touch anything in the area, including a cactus.

The Guarani land is the wealthiest area of Bolivia, in terms of its gold, uranium, oil and rich biodiversity.

REPSOL operatives unfortunately destroyed the vegetation of the area of exploitation, then left behind their latrines, which were pictured at the London conference. The audience was

invited to think how people would feel if excrement were left behind by Latin Americans when they had visited a European church.....

Previous experience of how Canadian and US companies polluted lands around the River Tijuana has led to Guarani resistance to a recurrence of children born with no eyes or ears in their region.

Bolivia Solidarity Campaign:  
<http://www.boliviasec.org.uk/>

## Venezuela withdraws from IMF and World Bank

Steven Mather

Venezuelans have been on the sharp end of IMF and World Bank structural adjustment programmes so their government's decision to withdraw from both institutions is symbolically very important.

Since the early 1980s the IMF and World Bank have been the main tools by which transnational capital and its allies in the US government have imposed neo-liberal policies on the economies of the South.

The debt crises in Latin America and Africa in the 1980s gave them the opportunity as stabilised governments wanted loans to affect their economies. The US government has the controlling vote on both institutions' boards so it could decide the conditions under which countries received those loans. The conditions became known as the infamous structural adjustment.

Structural adjustment requires cuts in public spending and large scale privatisation of industry with production dedicated to export industries. This effectively creates a new arena from which transnational capital can profit. That profit swells the stock markets of New York and London rather than the country where the wealth is generated.

The elites running the countries of the South may not always have supported the policies but since, unlike the rest of the population, they haven't had to suffer the consequences they have implemented them anyway.

On many occasions a state's forces have been used to slap down any resistance.

This is what occurred in Venezuela in 1989 when the Perez government followed IMF orders to reduce domestic fuel subsidies. The Caracazo – a grassroots rebellion against the cuts – was brutally crushed and thousands were murdered by the state.

But while the resistance was temporarily repressed the loss of confidence in the old regime proved terminal. Only three years later Hugo Chávez led the failed coup against the IV Republic and only five years later he was elected president.

Chavez paid off the IMF early in his first period of office so its intervention into Venezuelan politics seemed unlikely. But when he was overthrown the IMF offered help to the dictatorship. As the regime was dissolving the democratically elected National Assembly the IMF announced that it was, "ready to assist the administration in whatever manner they find suitable".

Chavez was restored to power after only three days but since then his government claims the IMF has continuously tried to undermine the economy by discouraging investment. The IMF releases annual figures predicting growth for the coming year and these are widely used by companies to make investment decisions. High predicted growth means more confidence in the economy means more investment.

In 2005, the IMF predicted a 1.1 per cent growth rate for Venezuela while they achieved 10.3 percent. In

2006 Venezuela's growth was 10.2 per cent but the IMF had predicted only 3.8 percent. This has led Venezuelan Minister of Finance Rodrigo Cabezas to publicly describe the IMF as being little more than a political tool of the US government.

Despite the symbolism, the economic circumstances in Venezuela today are very different from the days of the Caracazo and this tempers the impact of the decision to withdraw from the IMF and World Bank. The high international oil price means that Venezuela is unlikely to need a loan in the foreseeable future.

The boldest stand against the IMF in Latin America came in 2005. Argentina's economy had collapsed in 2001 after following IMF policies. The result was devastating economic hardship for most of its people. Four years later Nestor Kirchner, Argentina's president, told the IMF they would only pay back 30% of what they owed to both the IMF and private lenders. If they didn't like it they would get nothing. The IMF quietly accepted.

In line with the left ward shift in Latin America other countries are speaking out too. Ecuadorian president Rafael Correa has talked of kicking out the World Bank while the Sandanista president Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua talks of negotiating a way out of the IMF.

The IMF and World Bank still have many countries trapped in suffocating levels of debt across the world but, in parts of Latin America at least, their influence along with US interests more generally seem to be declining.

## In brief

## Bolivia Disputes Multinational Tribunal

On 29 April 2007, Bolivia, Venezuela and Nicaragua announced their decision to withdraw from the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) "in order to guarantee the sovereign right of countries to regulate foreign investment on their national territories."

Bolivia suffered from the injustice of ICSID when US multinational Bechtel sued for between US \$25 and \$100 million after it was thrown out during the Cochabamba Water War. Bechtel sued under a Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) between Bolivia and Holland by the mere fact of having a postal address in Holland. Only a huge international activist campaign forced Bechtel to back down.

In early 2005, Quiborax, a national mining company initiated legal actions under ICSID. The company was illegally given mining rights to a protected area in the south of Bolivia, Uyuni. Under mass mobilisation, the concession was cancelled. Even though the company is national, the company got its Chilean shareholders to initiate legal action against Bolivia.

ETI Telecom, an Italian multinational notified ICSID on 30 April 2007 that it was undertaking negotiations with the Bolivian Government over its decision to nationalise the former State telecommunications company.

ICSID is an unbalanced arbitration tribunal where only multinationals challenge States. Of 232 arbitration cases, 230 have been brought by transnational corporations (TNCs) against States. Multinationals seek damages of millions of dollars as they claim not only for investments but loss of future profits. 36% of cases have ruled in favour of TNCs, 34% have led to out of court settlements in favour of multinationals and 30% have become paralysed for various reasons. In the few cases that States have won, they have not been compensated by TNCs.

Nick Buxton

## Costa Rica in CAFTA Fight

The popular movement in Costa Rica is still fighting to block acceptance of CAFTA-DR, the free trade deal with the US. The Central America Free Trade Agreement has already been ratified by El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic as well as the US, but in the face of a 200,000 strong protest march on 26 February and the threat of a general strike, Costa Rican president Oscar Arias was unable to push Congress into approval.

CAFTA will reduce tariffs on US exports, and open up Costa Rica's telecommunications and insurance sectors to takeover by the multinationals. All of this means slashing jobs and increasing poverty in the name of economic competitiveness.

Rather than accept the popular will, the government has come up with a new tactic and set up a referendum for 23 September; set up to play into the hands of the business community using its finance, media access and party political machines to propagandise for a 'yes' vote.

Nonetheless the awakening of mass mobilization in a country previously known as the Switzerland of Central America may yet defeat the US project.

# Towards the integration of the Peoples

Over seven hundred delegates from 33 countries came together for the sixth "Hemispheric Gathering for the Struggle Against Free Trade Agreements and the Integration of the Peoples" held in Havana, Cuba from 3 - 5 May. Osvaldo Martínez opened by recalling how in 2001 there had been a conference to coordinate efforts to defeat the US grand plan for the Americas of the 21st century - the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA, otherwise known by its Spanish and Portuguese acronym ALCA).

The social movements and progressive governments of Latin America are rightly proud that their mobilisations have defeated this imperial project but, as Martínez pointed out, "US strategy to dominate Latin America takes on other forms and faces, forcing us to continue the struggle...we have won a battle but we have not yet won the war".

Speaking on behalf of the Cuban Organizing Committee, Martínez analysed the changed situation as characterised by bilateral or multilateral free trade agreements, smaller versions of the FTAA, "be they with the United States or Europe, these agreements are the same in essence... neo-liberalism is consecrated as an economic policy and converted into a legal obligation of States and the circle of domination is closed."

The gathering brought together a plurality of views, but within that Martínez paid homage to the ideas of Bolívar's teacher Simón Rodríguez, and José Martí in emphasising "a better world must be built on the basis of our own ideas, because we cannot build such a world imitating the US or Europe".

He concluded with a rousing



"You want our money? - When you give us light!"

message to fellow Latin Americans: "We, Cubans, march united next to you for life, beauty and justice, offering you, with the modesty the struggle has taught us, the experience we have accumulated during 47 years of holding our ground and constructing a better world, a world in which there is always room for improvement, the world of a socialism born, not of imitation, but of heroic creation".

The main issues at the conference were the ongoing struggles against free trade agreements; energy and responses to Bush's ethanol offensive; indigenous movements and pluriculturalism; multinational corporations and the social movement's approach to integration, specifically the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas ALBA.

Colombia Solidarity partic-

ipated with friends from several European countries as part of the Enlazando Alternativas network (for analysis see page 17).

## Nicaragua demands Social Justice

*Dolores Jarquin, Coordinator "Another World is Possible" movement, Nicaragua*

In 1990 in Nicaragua there were new laws to restructure the constitution with protections for the rights of the people and to defend our national sovereignty. In the last 4 years the laws have been changed to open everything up to the market and the transnationals.

We discovered recently that the US is sending technicians down to carry out surveys on our aquifers, and they pass on the data to the multinationals

without us knowing the results. We want a new Water Law because our water belongs to the people and the Nicaraguan nation, and so we call on the people to defend this right and demand of our deputies in the National Assembly to put aside their interests as landholders and associates of the transnationals and to defend national interests.

An even worse case is electricity. Many of our villages still don't have supply, the national network was privatised and handed over to the Spanish transnational Union Fenosa. The prices Fenosa wanted to supply street lighting to local authorities were too high, so many didn't sign them. A survey found that 17% of its street lights aren't working. The corporation charges municipalities 1% of their taxes even when it is not supplying them! Nicaragua has been left in the dark because of the irresponsibility of this corporation. It doesn't carry out education programmes as to the dangers of electricity, and last year it started making cuts without warning to poor areas.

In December 2006 Fenosa started a case with the World Bank's International Centre for the Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) claiming back \$54 million from our government. In his election campaign last year Daniel Ortega promised to make Fenosa fulfil its responsibilities, that means they must pay the people back \$14 million compensation for bad service. And we call on the government of José Luis Zapatero in Spain to stop making demands on behalf of the corporation.

We in the social movements of Central America have a challenge to stop the free trade agreements.

The political parties, even those who say they are on the left, want these to be accepted. We are part of the Continental Social Alliance. We have to work together to find ways of resistance to the neo-liberal model itself.

## LA and Caribbean Solidarity

*David Abdullah, Trinidad and Tobago Oilfields Workers Trade Union*

Britain was the main investor in my country in the colonial period; then from the 1950s to the 1970s US corporations dominated, but now we are seeing a shift back to Europe with BP, British Gas and Repsol from Spain being the major corporations taking our natural resources. BP's liquefied natural gas plant generates 25% of its global profits. Another UK corporation, BHP Billiton, has taken another gas field.

The whole hemisphere was united in a common struggle against the FTAA, but now we have different challenges that we have to understand to build a common platform of struggle between Latin America and the Caribbean. The European Union is using two methods, Articles of Association with Latin American countries and what it calls Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA) with former colonies in the Caribbean, which are particularly small and vulnerable economies. They amount to the same thing, locking us in to neo-liberal rules of the game. But Europe in particular tries to play one off against the other. They will try and use prospect of deals with Latin American to force us in the Caribbean to accept worse terms. We appeal to the solidarity of Latin America to help us reject these EPAs.

## Mine clashes in Peru

Robert Green

Nearly all of the Peru's gold, copper, zinc and silver mines are foreign owned, and minerals constitute 62% of the country's exports. The mines are huge open cast pits using up water supplies and causing contamination.

On 12 April clashes in the Áncash region of Peru left two miners dead, six wounded and 37 detained. Miners union federation FNTMMS called a strike on 30 April. The federation organises just 22,000 out of 110,000 miners, because 75,000 miners work as contractors without employment rights. The government said the strike was a total defeat, but FNTMMS reported a third of all miners joined the action which secured negotiations after 5 days.

*Mining and Development in Peru,*

*With Special Reference to The Rio Blanco Project, Piura* focuses on communities confronting Minera Majaz, a wholly owned subsidiary of the British company Monterrico Metals (for background see *Frontline Latin America* No 3). The report (available at [www.perusupportgroup.org.uk](http://www.perusupportgroup.org.uk)) warns that the mine's development would be a serious risk to the ecosystem and the subterranean waters in Huancabamba and Ayabaca provinces.

In 2001 residents in nearby Tambogrande culminated years of campaigning with a local referendum that overwhelmingly rejected the opening of a mine. Critics of the Rio Blanco mine are similarly organizing civic resistance, but they face assassination attempts, the latest was directed against Nicanor Alvarado

Carrasco (see <http://www.indymedia.be/en/node/8365>). A Chinese consortium Zijin has taken over Monterico for £94.6 million. This has not stopped community opposition and a solidarity protest in London on 2 April.

President Alan Garcia-Perez came to Piura to promote the mining projects. In April he sent a military contingent into the border area with Ecuador, as a way of intimidating the deep rooted resistance.

At midnight 2 May farmers blocked major roads to demand the immediate suspension of all mining projects in and the declaration of a no-mining "red zone" in the Piuran Cordillera. Two days later the main road between Sullana and Tumbes closed and there was a fierce battle between police and demonstrators in which hundreds were hurt.





## COKE BOYCOTT NEWS

Francis Andrews

Students at Trinity College Dublin have voted for the third time to boycott Coke. Coca Cola products have not been sold in student union shops since 2004. The vote - for 2,029 students; against 1,199 - was the biggest margin of victory since the boycott began.

The campaign to ban Coca-Cola in British universities has achieved another success with the recent move by University of Manchester student union to eject the company from its campus. Manchester University is one of Britain's largest and the decision, approved by 400 votes to 20, mean its 36,000 students will join Oxford, Edinburgh, Bristol, Bradford,

Middlesex and SOAS in spearheading the campaign.

Smith College in Massachusetts has severed ties with Coca-Cola in reaction to human rights abuses in Colombia, Turkey and India. College President Carol T. Christ said: "Smith will preclude Coca-Cola from the list of approved bidders when we enter the approved renewal process later this summer."

"As a private college with a public conscience, Smith College takes issues of human rights and environmental sustainability very seriously."

Other US universities to ban the product include Simons Rock College in Great Barrington, Massachusetts and Aquinas College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.



Coca-Cola exploits unpaid child workers

## Coca Cola...

### ... threatens a Mexican town

A study carried out by the Water Commission of the town Apizaco in Capama, Mexico has revealed that the local Coca-Cola Femsa plant uses 4.8 million litres of water a day, generating daily profits in the order of 3.5 million pesos.

"The profits that Femsa makes from exploitation of the San Luis Apizquito aquifer are in the millions, and do not come to the municipality, but only receive 10 thousand pesos a year for its licence to function", complains Reyes Ruiz Peña, a councillor in the town.

The diversion of water to Coke's operations, and to the plant of fellow multinational Procter and Gamble, threatens drinking water supplies for half a million people in coming years.

Source: ABC Noticias

### ... abuses Colombian workers

In March 17 workers at the Villavicencio bottling plant decided to join our union, SINALTRAINAL, but the managers threatened them with the sack. We demanded legal protection for these subcontracted workers to unionise, but they and others were indeed sacked.

Then, at 6.00am on 23 April 2007, SINALTRAINAL unionised workers in the Barrancabermeja plant were protesting against the use of subcontracted workers who had joined the

union in Bucaramanga, Villavicencio and Bogotá. Manager Gabriel Gomez arrived at the entry gate and ordered his supervisors to use force to break the protest, running his car right up to William Mendoza who nonetheless refused to move, despite insults.

### ...contaminates marshland

According to a report by the District Auditor, of the 50 thousand hectares of water meadows that existed around Bogotá fifty years ago, only 660 hectares remain. Of these, the most contaminated is Capellanía, in the Fontibón district, where Panamco S.A (Coca Cola), discharges untreated industrial waste water.

On 27 May a new campaign has started by citizens and community leaders to protect these community lands.

We in SINALTRAINAL demand that Coca Cola ceases its environmental damage, and that it makes reparations for the damage and helps restore the ecosystem.

### ...and exploits children

Through its sub-contractors, Coca Cola uses children to distribute its products in Colombia (see photo).

The children are not paid. This conduct is against all international human rights conventions, we as a union condemn it.

Javier Correa  
President of Sinaltrainal

# Ecuador

## Correa turns onto a new path

Lorna Ramirez



Rafael Correa during his election campaign

The election of Rafael Correa as president of Ecuador has revived the trust of Ecuadorians who believe in the sovereignty of their country and the dignity of their people. The president has announced the nationalisation of resources, questioned indiscriminate oil exploitation and to reduce the monopoly control of big business. He has at the same time established an independent international policy concerning the US military presence in the country and Colombia's anti-drug fumigations in the frontier zone.

But there's a long way between projecting a country which is more equal and sovereign, and achieving the reality. For Correa it is clearly necessary to restructure the political system, legislation protecting national resources and the lines of operation of foreign corporations.

In this light, the first big project is to elaborate a new constitution. The proposal to convene a National Assembly with full powers to change the constitution was accepted in a referendum by 78% of voters. The actions of the opposition that sought to delegitimise this democratic proposal were unsuccessful, demonstrating that the president has the base of Ecuadorian democracy with him.

Correa explained how a National Assembly was seeking "a new constitution that reforms political institutions ...so that there is governability and accountability, a true democracy and a more just and participatory economic system". He made clear that he is not trying to assign himself absolute power.

For the social movements and organisations that supported the referendum, the new constitution will help found a pluri-ethnic state, "with full economic, territorial and political sovereignty that guarantees the nationalisation of natural and energy resources, orienting them to the development needs of

the Ecuadorian people", as affirmed by CONAIE, the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities.

On 14 April Correa proposed to stop the ITT (Ishpingo, Tambacocha, Tiputini) oil exploitation project on Yasuni indigenous territory and a biosphere reserve. The proposal is to put social, cultural and environmental concerns above economic capital, but at the same time it requires compensation from the international community for contributing to the control of climate change. So, Correa has initiated a campaign in the European Union to receive economic support: "they must compensate for what has value and not for what has a price", he said.

The Energy Sovereignty Plan is also being prepared: it seeks to regulate the supply and marketing of fuels in order to counteract contraband and corruption caused by illegal trafficking of oil. An Anti-monopoly Law is under consideration, which will protect in the national interest resources in energy, telecoms and construction, amongst others, traditionally cornered by foreign capital. Insofar as profits from these promising sectors belong to the state, and not to a private corporation from another country, they will bring more benefits to the Ecuadorian people. The new president stated on 26 May that the country lost US \$1 million last year because of bad negotiations with mobile phone corporations: "The party ends here, everybody will pay taxes, will respect the environment, the workers and the laws of the country. Giveaway government has ended, this upsets some and they are the ones who will try and destabilise us".

It is also clear that the new government's international policy stems from a firm determination to defend the country's sovereignty. In March Correa ratified the decision not to renew in 2009 an agreement made with the United States ten years ago that allows their armed forces

to operate from Manta base. Since the base was installed the local and national community has demonstrated against it, denounced clauses in the agreement that grant the base immunity, permitting impunity when US violates human rights as in cases of sinking fishing boats, displacement of campesinos, prostitution, violence and sexual harassment of women and girls, persecution of local inhabitants, contamination of water sources and the soil, and the presence of shooting ranges in populated areas, constituting a high risk for people in the zone.

Correa has shown he rejects Colombia's intervention in Ecuador, whether that is in military or anti-drug operations. In spite of many requests to stop fumigating coca crops in the frontier zone with glyphosate Colombia's president Alvaro Uribe had refused to suspend them or recognise their noxious effects for people and the environment. But on 22 May, a report by the UN's rapporteur for health concluded that "fumigation with glyphosate on the frontier is affecting the physical health of inhabitants of Ecuador and their mental health", and at last the Colombian government sees itself obliged to stop the fumigations.

Besides these decisions on internal legislation and external policy, the big challenge of the current government is to achieve national sovereignty in a manner that respects the sovereignty and autonomy of the communities, those who at the end of the day constitute the nation: indigenous people, campesinas, afro-Ecuadorians, miners...

It has to be seen, for example, what actions the government will take in the face of the strike called by the mining communities in Azuay Province, starting 5 June. The artisan miners reject the exploitation of their territories by the Canadian corporation IAMGOLD and are struggling to defend water.





# Environment

## On the trail of destruction:

### The Permanent People's Tribunal

Tahirih Alia

The lush, humid forest of the Darien jungle provided the setting for the latest hearing of the Permanent People's Tribunal (TPP) Session on Biodiversity, Fumigations and Militarization in Colombia. Situated alongside the Atrato river, between the western slopes of the Andes and the Caribbean Sea lies the small river community of Nueva Esperanza in the Cacarica river basin. Like so many places in Colombia, however, the captivating beauty of this place belies a dark and violent history. The Cacarica community settlement was established as a humanitarian zone after the return of some inhabitants who were forcibly displaced during 'Operation Genesis', the military and paramilitary campaign of terror waged in the region in 1997.

The hearing took place on 26 and 27 February 2007 and was attended by nearly three hundred people from different regions of Colombia where multinational corporations have caused serious harm to the environment and enjoy the support of paramilitary groups in the pursuit of their objectives. Additionally, delegates came from supportive organizations from 17 countries in Europe and North and South America. Many witnesses travelled for miles (some walked for more than ten days straight) to tell their stories of violence and terror waged upon their families and communities in order to pave the way for multinational corporate investment and the extraction of resources.

The sessions were organized around distinct conceptual frameworks. There were contextual exhibitions on biodiversity and biopiracy, palms and biofuels, environmental and agrarian policy, and genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in Colombia. Charges were presented against several national and multinational corporations. Each charge included testimonies by persons who suffered directly from the effects of these activities as well as documentary evidence presented by the prosecuting counsel and witnesses.

Irish/Dutch owned Smurfit Kapa-Cartón de Colombia is charged with destroying tropical rainforests, Andean forests, and other ecosystems; destroying social fabric and traditional and cultural means of production in communities; depleting and contaminating water sources; influencing the formulation of governmental policies in the country and pressuring public servants to favour the interests of multinationals.

Multifruits S.A. - subsidiary of the US transnational Del Monte - is charged with the practice of illegal plantain agrobusiness planned on 22,000 hectares of land. Control is maintained in this area through the pressure employed by the *Águilas Negras* (Black Eagles) despite having announced their demobilization in 2005.

Pizano S.A. and its subsidiary, Maderas Del Darién, are charged with the destructive mechanized extraction of wood resources in Cacarica; having caused profound damage to the territory, forest resources, and the living

conditions of the Afro-Colombian communities that live in the logging areas; benefiting from the forced displacement of more than 2,500 Afro-Colombians and *mestizos* and a third of the region's indigenous peoples.

Urapalma S.A. is charged with acting jointly with other palm enterprises and the Colombian State in illegally planting from between 4,000 to 7,000 hectares of palm (and projected to comprise 22,000 hectares) within the collective territories of Afro-Colombian communities.

US corporation Monsanto is charged with supplying the component Round-Up Ultra for the aerial spraying eradication program using glyphosate on crops used for illicit purposes (which has been applied since 1984 and has become the principal Plan Colombia strategy implemented jointly by the Colombian State and the USA).

US transnational DynCorp is charged with creating war and political instability, profiting from the encouragement of conflicts, and making them functional to the rendering of their services; benefiting from mercenaryism, which encourages the deterioration of the living conditions of the population subjected to this militarization, the loss of thousands of lives, as well as the delicate social fabric pertaining to these persons; and destroying natural resources.

In a final act of commemoration, the Tribunal concluded with the reburial of the remains of community member Marino Lopez. He was murdered by army and paramilitary soldiers, who called residents out into the community field, and proceeded to play a game of football with Lopez's decapitated head. Songs, ceremony and an abundance of illuminated candles provided the reverent atmosphere surrounding the burial, which marked ten years exactly of the young man's gruesome murder.

The Tribunal collected the documentary and testimonial evidence for the presentation in the final hearing of the TPP session on Colombia, which will take place in July 2008.

"Our continent is a territory of immense biodiversity and unimaginable potential in relation to the planet's natural reserves. As such, it is highly attractive to a neoliberal global system dedicated to the commercialization of natural resources everywhere. Its voracity spares nothing and knows no limits when it comes to extracting species or modifying ecological systems that have evolved for thousands of years, with the sole purpose of enlarging profit margins of huge corporations.

"Countries rich in biodiversity such as Colombia suffer the over-exploitation and aggressive commodification of their natural resources; the devastation of their biodiversity in favour of large-scale monoculture production; environmental crises engendered by irrational production activity and the permanent subordination of their internal development strategies and respect for the fundamental rights of their citizens, to the geo-strategic interests of large powers."



A tribunal judge (top) listens to witness testimonies at the Peoples Permanent Tribunal session on biodiversity, fumigations and militarization in Colombia (above and right)





# Natural resources

## Gold mining in Colombia:

### Cauca assembly in resistance

Peter Bearder

#### In Brief

##### The people behind the coal

Witness for Peace, New England are taking a delegation to Colombia, 3-13 August 2007. Colombia's coal comes from two of the largest open-pit coal mines in the world: El Cerrejón, begun by Exxon in the 1980s and now owned by a consortium of UK-based companies (Anglo-American, BHP Billiton and Xstrata), and La Loma, owned by the Alabama-based Drummond Company. Both of these mines export large quantities of coal to the United States, and both have been accused of serious human rights violations.

The delegation will follow the trail of the coal that supplies power to New England, meeting with human rights activists, trade unionists, members of Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities, and others affected by coal production.

##### Drummond skimping on taxes

Colombia's Controller General (official auditor) has shown that US corporation Drummond that has been mining Colombian coal since 1988 has a shortfall in royalty payments to the nation estimated at US \$70 million. The auditor accuses the Mining Ministry of failing in its duty to check mining profits. Drummond under-reported its profits by inflating transport costs and citing a sale price lower than international rates. These manoeuvres were revealed a year ago by Polo Democrático opposition Senator Jorge Enrique Robledo. Although due \$70 million, the Mining Ministry has accepted that Drummond need only pay \$40 million to settle.

##### State mining corporation

On 1 May Uribe's government laid off all remaining workers at the state mining corporation MINERCOL, culminating an 11 year campaign to eliminate it as an effective regulatory authority. The 1996 Mining Code openly stated that the World Bank had ordered MINERCOL's closure. Francisco Ramirez, President of the MINERCOL Workers Union, has suffered seven attempts on his life, but the union fights on for an end to persecution and reinstatement of all its members.

SINTRAMINERCOL: e-mail: [sintrami@telecom.com.co](mailto:sintrami@telecom.com.co)

##### Community leader health wrecked

Jose Julio Perez is President of the Relocation Committee at Tabaco, the community that was forcibly removed by the expansion of the El Cerrejón open cast mine in August 2001. Jose had a stroke on 25 May. He had just returned from Riohacha, where he was attending an event in support of SINTRACARBON, the union that organises workers at the mine, and its campaign for better health services from government agencies. His family has been struggling immensely to deal with the lack of health services in the region, and their own lack of health insurance. Jose Julio is currently in a private clinic in Valledupar (about two hours away from where he lives in Albania). He initially suffered paralysis in half of his body, but he has been slowly recovering mobility and they are hopeful for a full recovery.

Aviva Chomsky

Buenos Aires is a small Afro-Colombian mining community an hour's drive by jeep from the nearest town in Cauca, southwest Colombia. The hall of the local college is filled with a variety of faces from the municipio of Suarez - human rights workers, campesinos, Afro-Colombians and members of local indigenous groups such as CRIC (The Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca).

They are all extremely concerned about the existence in their territory of the mining company Kedahda. Kedahda is 99.98% owned by London/Johannesburg based Anglo Gold Ashanti. Paramilitary violence arrived in this part of Cauca two years ago - the same time as Kedahda. It is currently seeking to reform the country's Mining-Code which will ease the exploitation of mining resources at the expense of the small mining companies, the environment and the rights of the local communities. This forum is one of the first steps in exercising the right to life, dignity and permanence in the shadow of this mining giant.

With a subsoil rich in basic minerals, Colombia is considered one of the 'new frontiers' for the mining industry. Already there are approximately 4,261 gold mines, 191 platinum and 10 emerald concessions.

The proposed reform to the Mining Code will favour applications from companies with economic and technical advantages. The Special Reserve Zones (protected environmental or ethnic territories) will be opened up only to macro-strategic mineral projects. As such, they will be handed to the biggest investors. To facilitate this, public resources such as water and transport will be made freely available even if it is at the expense of local competitors and inhabitants. Taxation will also be flexibilised; if no deposits are found all taxes for the period of exploration will be dropped. To compound this the reform will further repress Colombia's famously brief prior consultation process. This amounts to a clear violation of the right to territory and participation for countless communities across the country. Meanwhile the inhabitants of Cauca flounder. The day before (19 May) social movements in the department declared a permanent assembly of the people. It's opening statement denounced corruption, underinvestment in health, education and infrastructure and the misappropriation of their resources to benefit foreign capital.

The changes link up closely to the pending Free Trade Agreement with the US. In November 2005 the Minister of Mines and Energy, Luis Ernesto Mejma, talked of "an enormous world of opportunities that is opened up to the energy and mining sector with treaty". Firma Cavellier de Abogados, a lawyers firm involved in the signing of the treaty in Bogota, owns the 0.02% of Kedahda that does not belong by Anglo Gold Ashanti.

All the changes (privatization/deregulation/ trade liberalization) will be imposed by the security forces of



the state. On a daily basis we are now seeing protest and mobilization against the treaty from all sectors of Colombian civil society.

Juan Andris is an Afro-Colombian in his 20's. He pointed to the largest mine in the community across the valley. "The environmental damage is wholesale, water, land, air and social composition". By social composition he is referring to the militarization and para-militarization of the community that comes with the arrival of large scale mining operations. Accompanying this are problems of violence, prostitution, inequality and changes of surname which break social cohesion. "Many of us have been relocated to Cali", said another villager, (Cali is a city three hour drive away) "We are a rich country but there is so much poverty".

Kedahda now owns 150,000 hectares across Colombia. The correlation between the company's operations in Cauca and the spread of paramilitary violence fits into the national pattern. Jorge Molano, a Bogotá based human rights lawyer, told how in 70% of the municipalities where Kedahda have worked there have been tortures, disappearances and massacres at the hands of paramilitary groups. What is more, in 335 of the 336 municipalities people have been forcibly expelled off their land. Anglo Gold Ashanti and the mining industry at large have a shameful track record in contributing to Colombia's 3.5 million internally displaced.

A representative recounted the experience in his department of Sur de Bolivar where Kedahda has operated since 2004. From 1996, Anglo Gold and Conquistador Mines found gold deposits in Sur de Bolivar, opening up one of the bloodiest chapters of Colombian history. Paramilitary incursions have been supported on land, in the air, and in the waterways by the 5th Brigade of the Colombian Army. Blockades cut off delivery of food and medicine vital to the survival of the communi-

ties. The results were thousands dead and over 20,000 (officially) displaced. "Our schools and hospitals have been burned to the ground three times", he said, "and why? Because of the resources on our land." It was a brutal warning from history and a heroic tale of resistance.

The forum saw the fortification of solidarity and organization between the indigenous groups and the Afro-Colombians. Traditionally there is not much trust between the two groups in

the area. Event organizers and human rights NGO La Red de Hermandad (The Network of Brotherhood) believe it is necessary to confront the problem together and form a collective strategy through the exchanging of experiences and ideas. Through mobilization, in the widest sense possible, these communities hope to achieve permanence in the face of Kedahda's ominous advances. "If we organise and believe in ourselves we can do many things".



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## Anglo American: Dismantling deception

Richard Solly



**ANGLO  
AMERICAN**

London-based mining multinational Anglo American's annual shareholders' AGMs are usually rather sleepy affairs. Despite record profits of £5 billion, this year's meeting, on 17 April, was different.

Outside the AGM, members of London's Filipino community displayed banners calling for the company to get out of the Philippines, and Colombia Solidarity Campaign supporters handed out leaflets with information about Anglo American's activities in South Africa, the Philippines, Ghana and Colombia.

Inside the meeting company Chairman Sir Mark Moody Stuart was clearly troubled by the range and intensity of attacks on the company's behaviour.

Colombia Solidarity Campaign members spoke about the forced removals around the Cerrejon Coal mine in La Guajira, one-third owned by Anglo American (see report in the January-March 2007 edition of *FLA*), and the paramilitary attacks against small scale gold miners in areas where Kedadha SA is exploring – Kedadha is 100% owned by AngloGold Ashanti of South Africa, and AngloGold Ashanti is 42% owned by Anglo American plc.

Phillipus Dolo, a Mohloho community leader, and Richard Spoor, a lawyer representing communities denied basic rights by Anglo American's Anglo Platinum subsidiary in South Africa, revealed the massive environmental destruction and social dislocation, including police violence and harassment, associated with the company's presence there. Despite the company's boast that it opposed *apartheid* and is helping to construct the new South Africa, Dolo told shareholders that the treatment of rural communities by the company and local police are much the same as they were before – and the 'Section 21' black-owned companies with which the multinational is working are unaccountable and benefit a small elite to the detriment of the community as a whole.

Santos 'Santi' Mero, Deputy Secretary General of the Cordillera Peoples' Alliance (CPA), an independent federation of progressive peoples' organizations in the Cordillera Region of the Philippines, and Tina Moyaen, Chairperson of the Save Apayao Peoples Organization (SAPO), which is spearheading local opposition to proposed large-scale

mining activities in the Philippine Cordillera, accused the company of deceit and distortion in its dealings with opponents.

Anglo American's behaviour in Colombia is not unique – communities around the world are similarly impacted by the company's willingness to take advantage of poverty, conflict and violent repression of dissent (see 'Fresh Allegations', *The Observer* 22 April 2007).

The company's responses to questions raised on Colombia were vague. Cerrejon Coal is apparently committed to collective negotiation with communities facing relocation as the mine expands, if that is what the majority of their residents wish. Community members tell us that they are under constant pressure from people claiming to represent the company to sell up individually and move away, thus undermining the possibility of collective agreements. The company wants evidence of this – but of course getting signed affidavits from residents accusing named individuals of harassment and intimidation is difficult in circumstances where impunity for acts of extreme violence is the norm.

Anglo American refused to give information about Kedadha's exploration activities, said that it condemned human rights abuses and asked for evidence of any such abuses in Kedadha's areas of activity. AngloGold Ashanti CEO Bobby Godsell offered to consider any written reports on the subject and to meet with the company's critics.

The attack on the company continued at the launch of the London Mining Network on 18 April. Participants at a meeting in a packed lecture theatre in London's School of Oriental and African studies heard about Anglo American's record in much greater detail from the visitors and from Richard Solly of Colombia Solidarity Campaign. Anglo American's Vice President for External Affairs, Edward Bickham, was given a right to reply and spoke in a conciliatory manner. It was clear that the accusations leveled at the company had found their target and that the prospect of a co-ordinated approach to pressuring London-based mining multinationals by a number of organizations was causing concern – concern also expressed in articles in the mining press in the following days.

Representatives of communities evicted to make way for the Cerrejon mine were in Britain in January and February, meeting parliamentarians and NGOs as well as holding public meetings. Their struggle for legal redress continues and they are increasingly publicising their struggle through networks in Colombia, Britain, Canada, Switzerland and the USA. Questions have now been raised about the Cerrejon mine in the British Parliament and the matter is being pursued by Green MEPs in Brussels and Strasbourg.

To get involved in the Campaign's work on mining, or for more information on the London Mining Network, contact Richard Solly, richardsolly@gm.apc.org.

# "We are here to defend the interests of the multinationals"

- Soldiers of the Nueva Granada Battalion,  
Serrania de San Lucas

Delphine Guillemoteau, Laurie Ray and Emilio Rodriguez

On the morning of 26 April the president of the Agro-Mining Federation of the Sur de Bolívar (FEDEAGROMISBOL), was detained by the soldiers of Colombian army's Nueva Granada Battalion as he sat in his office. According to the warrant for his arrest Teófilo Acuña, trade unionist, is 'suspected' of having been a guerrilla; alias 'Teófilo'.

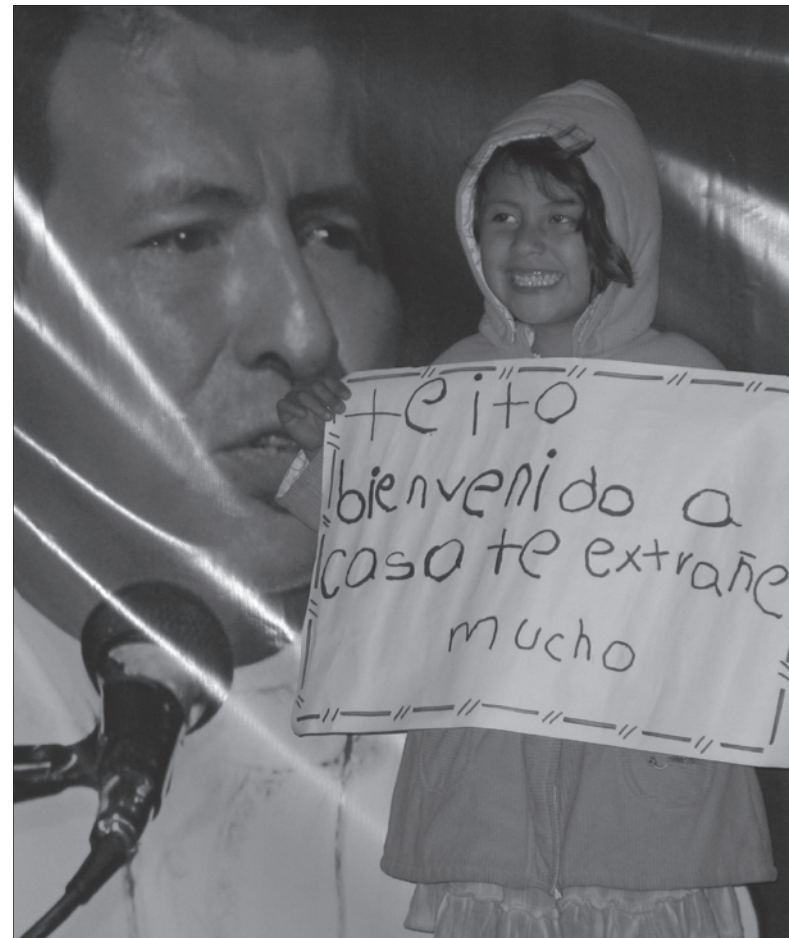
Teo's arrest is hardly an isolated incident and follows a long line of abuses by the army in the region, most significantly the September 2006 killing of Alejandro Uribe Chacón, president of the Community Action Group of Gallo Mine, while he was travelling home alone from a meeting in a remote part of the mining zone. Teó is a leading witness in the case against the Nueva Granada.

It appears that the basis for Teo's arrest was the testimony of *reinsertados* (demobilised guerrillas), who according to the Nueva Granada's human rights adviser, Dr Wilmer Egea Torres, "had seen [Teó] developing a career as a civilian leader and they felt resentful that he did not go through the same legal process as them, so they reported him."

Teo's lawyer, Jorge Molano said: "Teófilo Acuña has absolutely never been part of any armed group. This is the maximum demonstration of the arbitrariness of justice in Colombia. He was deprived of liberty without any legal process existing against him, which violates all international human rights norms. This constitutes an act of persecution against the Federation. And precisely today, when the case against the soldiers who executed Alejandro Uribe was opened, one of the witnesses is under arrest."

The mining zone of the Serrania de San Lucas, a range of densely forested hills dividing the Magdalena and Cauca flood planes, contains Colombia's richest known reserves of gold and Kedadha (a subsidiary of South African registered multinational AngloGold Ashanti, 42% owned by AngloAmerican, UK) with the backing of the Colombian government, is keen to exploit these reserves. Federation leaders believe that Teo's arrest should be seen as part of the campaign of intimidation against FEDEAGROMISBOL, which is a strong defender of the rights of local communities against the multinational.

Two days after Teo's arrest we went the heart of the mining area to provide moral support, let the army know that the communities here are not isolated and accompany delegates to the Federation's emergency assembly to be held on 5-7 May.



Welcoming Teófilo Acuña release

The mining area is physically isolated and it's a day's travel by 4WD and mule from the town of Santa Rosa to Mina Vieja, the community at which we'll be based until the assembly. On a hilltop and over looking the first of the communities we arrived at a permanent army checkpoint. Between twenty and thirty soldiers, some off duty, cooking or phoning their families, are based here. We were asked to produce our identification and the sergeant took down our details. The army is not legally entitled to record this information but, like the locals, we are in no position to argue.

For the past year everyone entering and leaving the zone has had their details taken down, very worrying for local organisers and activists who see it as a method of identifying community leaders and potentially drawing up a detailed list of targets, a practice for which there are clear precedents.

The soldiers were polite, but interested to know where we come from, where we're going, what organisation we work for and the purpose of our visit. Finally they let us go with a warning that we're entering an area full of 'bandits' (army shorthand for guerrilla) and that from here on they

are unable to protect us.

In Mina Vieja we met two activists from Christian Peacemaker Teams who'd held a meeting with the local commander, Captain Cruz, earlier that day. Without producing any evidence, he'd accused Federation leaders of siphoning millions of pesos of Federation funds for their personal use and of being auxiliaries of the guerrilla. In areas where paramilitaries operate it's enough to be suspected of being a guerrilla to be murdered and Captain Cruz himself has told locals that the paramilitary group the Águilas Negras, 'are coming'. Should the army's current approach (selective killings and detentions of leaders, intimidation, attempts to discredit the federation and divide local communities) fail to displace the miners, it is possible that they will.

On 5-7 May members of FEDEAGROMISBOL met, in the face of intimidation and repression and under the constant observation of soldiers of the Nueva Granada, to reaffirm their commitment to fight for the rights of their communities and to demand the release of Teó.

On 6 May Teo was released without charge due to the poverty of evidence against him. The National Attorney's Office has not closed the case.



# Economics

## Geo-politics of exploitation:

### UK multinationals in Colombia and Britain

Andy Higginbottom

This article uses figures to illustrate its points. These are not just any numbers, these are key criteria of profitability by which capitalists measure their own performance, so they are a vital part of the story, but only that part seen from the perspective of the boardroom. Behind the numbers lies an apparatus of exploitation that spans continents and draws tens of millions of people into its sway of relentless accumulation.

The story begins in Colombia, where UK multinationals are concentrated in the most profitable sectors, a characteristic of their global performance.

2006 was a good year for corporations in Colombia, they reported an increase in net profits of 12.9% over 2005. Mining and construction companies celebrated with especially high rates of return on capital invested.

Taking a look at the profits of the top 20 publicly listed companies shows how foreign corporations have moved in on the most profitable sectors. Amongst this elite group, the sectors with the most profits were hydrocarbons (oil and gas), telecoms, mining

Table 1: Top 20 Company Profits in Colombia 2006, by Sector

Sector	US \$ million
Hydrocarbons	1,155
Telecoms	704
Mining	676
Finance	560
Confectionery	100
Vehicles	84
Total	3,279

and finance, as indicated by Table 1.

The figures testify to the highly profitable appropriation of Colombia's natural resources by foreign capital. Telecoms fit into this pattern as well: the highest profits in this sector are made on mobile phone services, by making use of the natural resource that is the electromagnetic spectrum. Colombia's mobiles are dominated by the Mexican based transnational group América Móvil.

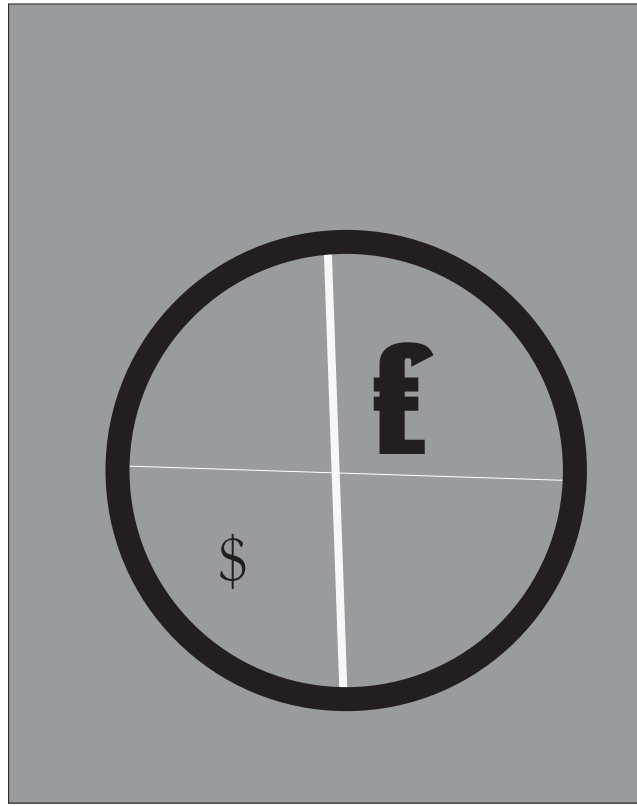
Table 2 indicates that amongst the most profitable companies

Table 2: Top 20 Company Profits in Colombia 2006, by Country of Origin

Country	US \$ million
UK	944
Mexico	704
Colombia	630
US	575
France	261
Brasil	90
India	38
China	38
Total	3,280

in Colombia, UK corporations make more profit than any other investing nation. US corporations are in oil, mining, finance and vehicles. French multinationals make profits in the oil sector, and Brazilian, Chinese and Indian corporations have all bought into this sector. Amongst Colombian owned public corporations, it is banks and related financial groups who make the most profit.

About two thirds of the UK company profits come from mining and one third from oil and gas. For example, BP started oil extraction from Casanare department on the eastern Andes in the early 1990s. In April 2007 the corporation announced it had extracted its billionth barrel in the oilfield of Cusiana. BP's two main subsidiaries reported profits of \$347 million in 2006. Also in April 2007 BP Santiago Oil Company, Tepma (a subsidiary of Total France) and state oil corporation Ecopetrol won a seven-year, \$350 million contract to supply natural gas from Cusiana, involving the construction of a gas plant. The corporation's total profits from Colombia are estimated at more than \$2.5 billion



over the last ten years.

Three UK based mining corporations - Anglo-American, BHP Billiton and Xstrata - declared \$299 million profits from the Cerrejon coal mine in 2006, with BHP Billiton making a further \$298 million from Cerromatoso nickel.

Table 3: Net earnings from direct investment, UK companies in selected Latin America countries

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2001-5
	£ million					
Brazil	344	378	291	652	701	2,366
Chile	156	199	273	820	1,141	2,589
Colombia	190	200	234	379	411	1,414
Mexico	-48	295	207	485	452	1,391
Totals	642	1,072	1,005	2,336	2,705	7,760

#### UK multinationals in Latin America

The profile of highly profitable UK investments in the extractive industries extends throughout the Andean region. The Foreign Office reports on UK direct investments across Latin America, with finance, agri-industry and general manufacturing other important sectors. There has been a surge in profits over recent years. Taking the four most profitable countries, UK corporations' annual net earnings increased fourfold from 2001 to over £2.7 billion in 2005 (see Table 3). Brazil and Mexico are by far Latin America's biggest economies, and attract considerable UK investment. But the star performers - from the UK corporate perspective - are Colombia and above all Chile. UK corporations netted £1.14 billion from

Table 4: Pre-tax Profits of Top 20 UK Corporations 2005, by Sector

Sector (number of companies)	Market Capitalisation £ billion	Profits £ billion	No of employees	Profit per employee £	Profits/Capital %
Banking Insurance (7)	332.87	36.4	719,142	50,574	10.93
Food Ag Process (2)	56.75	4.6	119,285	38,563	8.11
Mining (3)	90.82	15.0	263,322	56,964	16.52
Hydrocarbons (3)	262.70	43.2	210,590	205,138	16.44
Pharmaceutical (2)	130.05	10.2	164,803	61,892	7.84
Retail (1)	31.82	2.2	324,503	6,780	6.91
Telecomms (2)	94.10	-12.6	166,072	-75,871	-13.39
Totals (20)	999.11	99.0	1,967,717	50,297	9.91

Chile in 2005 alone, the ex-South African mining giants Anglo-American and BHP Billiton being the main beneficiaries.

#### UK multinationals in the world

Evidence that UK corporations are world leaders in hydrocarbons, mining and banking comes from the *Financial Times* report on the world's top 500 companies, ranked by their capital valuation (how much they are worth according to the stock market).

BP and Shell are the second and third biggest private oil corporations in the world (after US giant Exxon Mobil). Their combined market value is \$445 billion, 19% of the entire oil sector within the FT top 500. There are 7 mining corporations in the FT top 500 (ranked by market capitalisation) and no less than 4 of them are UK based, or UK/Australian, corporations - constituting 81% of the capital in the sector. In short, UK based corporations preside over world mining.

The biggest finance companies in the world (banks, insurance and general finance) are based in the US, which together make up 36% of the value of this sector within the top 500. At a similar level to Japan, UK banks and like corporations together make up 11% of world banking. This is significantly more than any other single European country, although the combined weight of all European banks apart from the UK is 26% of the entire sector.

#### UK multinationals in Britain

All of this has profound consequences for the character of the British economy, which is to an unparalleled extent based on super-profits extracted from abroad. More than ever, Britain is a society living off economic rents.

The top 20 most highly valued corporations on the London stock exchange were together valued at £ 999 billion, over half the entire market valuation. Seven of these corporations are in banking and insurance, together making over £36 billion in pre-tax profits in 2005. The three oil and gas corporations made even more profits, £43 billion. These two sectors are dominant,

bringing in more than three quarters of the profits of the top twenty UK multinationals.

The net loss in the telecom sector is due to Vodafone's plummet (it is still recovering from overvaluing electromagnetic spectrum). Mining is rising fast in importance, with just three corporations realising £15 billion profits.

Here we see the benefit to UK capitalism of corporations investing in natural resource extraction from Latin America and elsewhere round the world. The two sectors with the highest rates of profit are mining and hydrocarbons, both enjoying over 16% average returns.

Another dimension of this is the incredibly high profit per employee achieved by the three top UK oil and gas companies (sector average over £205 thousand). Are their workers especially productive? Or do other factors allow these corporations to benefit from enormous monopoly rents? Certainly high energy demand has enabled the select few controlling strategic energy production to gain super-profits, and a privileged position even with respect to other capitals.

UK banks, oil and mining corporations are thriving on super-profits. Their 'successes' are based on capital accumulated through centuries of British expansion overseas, their ongoing accumulation proof that imperialism is not a mere legacy but of vital contemporary significance. Given the standing of these corporations, it is

hardly surprising that UK foreign policy is geared to promoting and protecting their exploitation, domination and privilege. But at what cost to the working people of Colombia and the world?

The collapse of manufacturing in Britain occurred in the last generation, but the banks have generally dominated for the last century; their financial power and the UK's militarised presumption of global leadership go hand in hand. The pre-eminence of oil and mining corporations are founded on British imperialism's decades of exploitation of the Persian Gulf and South Africa respectively. This provides the context for linking solidarity across continents, the need for unity against a common enemy.



## Colombia

# Colombia's oil:

## A critical point in history

Luis Humberto Hernández

Colombia has oil reserves that, at current rates of extraction, will only last another seven years. Moreover, in 2008 or shortly after it could become a net importer of oil; aggravating the financial crisis of the State, which receives income from the oil sector and will in the future have to use funds to buy oil. Imports will have to be paid at high prices as the era of cheap oil has ended.

Colombia's state oil corporation: Ecopetrol (recently renamed, ECP S.A.) produces directly 125 thousand barrels a day (tbd), and 405 tbd are produced by foreign multinational corporations.

Under Contracts of Association, agreements between the corporations and the state, ECP takes 40% of the oil produced plus the state takes a further 20% in royalties. The older Concession contracts are more favourable to the multinationals.

Altogether the multinationals take 200 tbd of crude oil for themselves.. These sources are just sufficient to supply internal demand from oil refineries. So, there is a paradox shown in the statistics: of the 225 tbd crude oil that Colombia exports, some 200 tbd are by the multinationals.

Colombia used to be Latin America's third oil producer, and an exporter when prices were low, but from 1975 – 1985 it had to import when prices were high. The US \$5 billion for oil supplies not only soaked up all the surplus from the coffee export boom, but added to the country's constant process of indebtedness, providing the pretext to let in the multinationals.

In 1974, Decree 2310 of President Alfonso López Michelsen opened up privatisation through Contracts of Association. The argument was that investment was very risky for a country without financial capacity. The new system started in 1984 to the benefit of the US corporation Occidental exploiting the rich deposits found at Caño Limón in Arauca in Eastern Plains bordering Venezuela; which at the time experts considered the biggest in the continent. Next in 1992 came a similarly rich find by British Petroleum (BP) at Cusiana in Casanare department. These discoveries were such a bonanza that the State could be fiscally assured throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

History is repeating itself, with the aggravating factor that with all its costs (politico-military, socio-cultural and human environment) given the uncertainties of the country, the State is in fiscal intensive care. It has a perspective of seeking oil fields, but without the palliative of a coffee boom.

Consideration of Colombia's geological provision divides opinion between the optimists and the pessimists. The optimists estimate reserves of between 37 and 47 billion barrels, because only 20% of the country has been explored, with 13 Sedimentary Basins bearing crude oil (see map). They argue that the



Beehive collective

old concessions in Magdalena Medio and Catatumbo only extracted crude from the shallow strata, leaving secondary and tertiary layers intact. This explains the current policy of ECOPEPETROL of reopening the old fields to further exploitation.

The pessimists estimate just 5 billion barrels of reserves, with the added problem of finding them given the extension and diversity of the basins; and taking into account the history of small fields before the recent giant finds. There is also the issue of land access, limited by the armed conflict, the rights of indigenous communities.

The government of Álvaro Uribe committed in its National Development Plan to include a billion barrels of new reserves, 33 months later it only managed one tenth of its target. Perhaps that's why the oil authorities have started to play a game of Luck.

A recent article in *El Tiempo* newspaper was entitled, "Colombia,

cross your fingers for a Tángara!, a successful field in Casanare, because without oil: "the country will suffer a worse crisis than 1978 and could put the next President under pressure".

### Economic Policy: *Rebusque* Oil ?

Oil policy has adopted the *rebusque* economy. [FLA Translator's note: *Rebusque* means to glean or scavenge whatever you can from whatever is around, rubbish for example]. *Rebusque* is common amongst the displaced, marginalised and excluded of Colombian society.

It's a form of economy in underdeveloped countries, where improvisation for short term survival in daily life takes precedence over planning for the medium and long term.

In the hands of the State this ends up pilfering human, physical and environmental resources for the urgent rather than the necessary; in the management of public affairs if not by corruption then by improvisation.

In the end the natural economic order is re-established of those who always win and those who always

lose. There's no other way to explain how, after the great fortune of Caño Limón in the 1980s and Cusiana in the 1990s, the state's only policy is "crossing fingers" for a new miracle.

Faced with today's situation, as in the middle of 1970s, the oil authorities use the same arguments to implement even more radical privatisation policies to exploit resources, as a way of getting out of the crisis.

Oil policy is not only an issue of the self-sufficiency of the sector, but of the economic stability of the country and the State itself. This policy is articulated in *Unidos por la excelencia. ECP Plan de Negocios 2002-2006*.

This establishes that new contracts will allow the corporations to take 70% of the production instead of their current 50%. The Plan sets out a new Royalty/Tax regime. The "new contract" (better called the neo-concession after the old concession regimes) opens the exploration period to 10 years, evaluation 5 years and exploitation 24 years, a total of 39 years; ceding the right to exhaust the deposit. The contractor has total autonomy and responsibility for 100% of production. Royalties are on a sliding scale starting at just 4.8%, plus taxes.

Ecopetrol has been divided administratively, creating a corporation called National Hydrocarbons Agency (ANH) in charge of administration of the sector, and ECP S.A. that is dedicated exclusively to the development of industrial and commercial activities, and must "compete with the private corporations", difficult for the old state corporation given that it barely figures in the top 200 of latin America but will be up against giant corporations like Exxon.

In this game of *rebusque* the multinationals are the good guys, they always win, and the country always loses because we are the bad guys. Due to the desolating effects of a scavenger economy Colombia faces an uncertain future.

## Colombian Oil Discoveries

Year of Discovery	Name of Field	Reserves (Millions of Barrels)
1918	Infantas	242
1925	La Cira	534
1940	Tibú	311
1946	Velásquez	270
1964	Orito	241
1977	Chuchupa	520
1983	Caño Limón	834
1989	Cusiana	1,217
1993	Cupiagua	834



# Colombia

# Casanare and BP: A history that has to change

Manuel Vega & Martín Ayala

## Forgetting and impunity

The recent history of Colombia is a history of forgetting and of impunity; forgetting because official memory has insisted on conserving only the great tales of the national character, the names of illustrious victims, of criminals and presidents, leaving out the lives of those men and women that constitute the flesh and blood of our reality; impunity because for years the possibility of justice for brutal crimes against the people has been systematically obstructed, crimes that have destroyed the bonds that hold the social fabric of Colombia together.

In effect, we have witnessed powerlessly the recurrence of human rights violations and of past tragedies, due to the lack of effective justice and a critical memory. Today, those ghosts are relived in a nation trapped between totalitarianism, paramilitarism and the reign of transnational capitalism. That is the true face of Colombia, hidden behind the mask of President Álvaro Uribe Vélez's policy of democratic security. Those are the elements that explain a good part of our current reality: transnational interests, a corrupt right wing government and paramilitarism.

The department of Casanare situated in the eastern plains region of Colombia is not an exception. Since the 1990's when the transnational oil company BP commenced oil exploration, there have been hundreds of disappearances and extrajudicial executions, multiple cases of resources diverted from the oil economy, thousands of abuses against the rural population, not to mention the harmful changes that oil has brought to society and to the local culture. However, all of that has been placed into the oblivion, subjected to concealment and destined, without the right of appeal, for the land of impunity. When this happens crimes are repeated so it is necessary to establish a precedent against silence and forgetting, against impunity and concealment.

To mobilise solidarity, to prick consciences, to take a step to stop, once and for all the harsh reality that the department of Casanare has experienced is the aim of this article.

## A motive

On 16 March this year the community of El Triunfo in Aguazul, a municipality in Casanare, informed COS-PACC of the murder of two campesinos. 38 year old Daniel Torres Arciniegas and his son Roque Julio Torres Torres who was only 16. According to the 16th Brigade of the Colombian army they had been taken down in the middle of a battle and were guerrilla fighters. According to the inhabitants of the region and the victims' family, neither Daniel nor Roque Julio were guerrillas, nor did they die in combat. They were merely two campesinos extra-judicially executed by the army in what constitutes a clear violation of human rights.

According to their family both of them had

signs of bad treatment, possibly torture and had been shot in the temples. In other words they had received shots of execution. The events, the testimonies from the community, the evidence from the corpses and the fact that Roque Julio was going to be a witness to the extra-judicial execution of another campesino at the hands of the army are aggravating circumstances that are repeated in the various cases we document.

Cases like these raise numerous questions: Why were they murdered? What was the Colombian army's objective in executing in cold blood a sixteen year old child, given it is supposedly responsible for defending freedom and democracy? Why does this type of event occur – more than ten extrajudicial executions perpetrated by the state in Aguazul so far this year – in close proximity to oil wells under BP's control? The answer is found at the juncture of oil, transnational companies, paramilitarism and Colombian state terrorism, all brought together in Álvaro Uribe Vélez's policy of democratic security.

The case of little Roque Julio and Daniel Torres is a sufficient motive for changing the history of BP in Casanare.

## Black Gold or the history of a sovereignty handed over

At the beginning of the twentieth century, in 1905 to be exact, oil exploration began in Colombia. In that year the national government signed a controversial contract with Roberto de Mares of the Tropical Oil Company through which he was awarded the oil region of Barrancabermeja. This would constitute the first concession in a history of giving away resources, and with them our sovereignty, to transnational companies.

For the eastern plains region exploration would begin in the 1920s. During the 60s and 70s the exploration continued in the foothills region without favourable results. It was only in 1983 with the discovery of a billion barrels of oil in the Caño Limón field in the eastern plains basin of Arauca that the country again became a crude oil exporter. Official history tells us only that this was the start of a growing and prosperous economy that increased the country's development.

However, the inhabitants of Barrancabermeja and Arauca remember it differently. They remember it as the start of a war for 'black gold', the commencement of a progressive destruction of culture, the forced and violent imposition of the western way of life that has torn little by little the social fabric to such an extent that the two regions have become and continue to be an battlefield, one of the most complex conflict scenarios the country has experienced.<sup>1</sup>

Something similar occurred in Casanare, except history has omitted many details about this department. In 1980 a well named Cusiana-1 in Tauramena municipality showed signs of the existence of a significant volume of conden-

sate and gas. Subsequently, in 1991, Cusiana-2A well penetrated deeply into the intervals of Mirador, Barco and Guadalupe, and exploration from the Buenos Aires well confirmed the scale of the discovery. In the following year the viability of the Cupiagua field in Aguazul, to the north west of the Cupiagua field, was announced.

Throughout Casanare, and the municipalities of Tauramena and Aguazul in particular, there was a rapid transformation of the social, political, economic and cultural life. However, this process was largely determined by the relationship between transnational companies and a state that had very little or no interest in the defence of national sovereignty. Thus, even though some people saw the emergence of an opulent society in Casanare, the infrastructural development and demographic growth began to produce a complex phenomenon of social conflict, economic imposition and state permissiveness, the scale of which is still not fully appreciated.

## BP in Casanare

Despite the fact that BP Exploration (BPX) had a presence in the country in the 1920s, and later with small agreements in the 1960s, it was only in 1986 that the company established a significant presence, with the acquisition of land in the eastern piedmont range through "Farm In" contracts<sup>2</sup>. The exploitation of Cusiana field commenced under the framework of the Santiago de las Atalayas (SDLA) contract agreed by BPX, Triton, Total and state oil corporation Ecopetrol.

BP's small agreements in Colombia became much bigger in the 1990s. In 1991, as a consequence of the constitutional change occurring in the country, Casanare became a department and a propitious environment for BP's interests. In effect, by 1993, the year in which oil exploitation and production was formalised in Cusiana and Cupiagua, BP had 19% of the SDLA in Tauramena, while Ecopetrol had 50% and Total and Triton 19% and 12% respectively. The total extension of land covered in the contract was 50,000 hectares. Moreover, BP was the owner of 100% of the private interests in the piedmont. The area of these licences totalled 600,000 hectares.

But in those first years, BP not only operated the oil fields in these lands usurping our resources and generating negative environmental impacts such as the destruction of water sources, changes to the ecosystem associated with the burning of gas, damage to the ground due to seismic tests and unplanned road building. Its strategy to tackle the socio-political reality of a region noted for the presence of left wing and right wing armed actors, and organised communities, was very questionable.

## BP's security strategy, paramilitarism and the role of the state

As a consequence of the depletion of oil reserves

in Arauca, the Cusiana and Cupiagua fields were gaining greater preponderance and were getting the attention not only of the national government but the armed actors (guerrillas, paramilitaries, army) too. This was no coincidence, as confirmed by Amnesty International's denunciation in 1996, the booming oil industry of Casanare was accompanied by the proliferation of paramilitaries and private security firms financed by BP.

In effect, BP arranged and sponsored the presence of foreign mercenaries for support of extractive operations. As denounced by several trade unions and human rights organisations, "During the pipeline construction, Roger Brown, a retired colonel of the SAS, was named as president in the documentation". This English interference, as with the presence of foreign mercenaries, was clear in the region. An investigation by a group of Colombian and British journalists revealed that during the pipeline development, Brown tried to contract a group of retired members of the Israeli army to train paramilitaries in the use of important military equipment (helicopters, weapons, uniforms and munitions). This project was interrupted after the findings of the investigation were published in *The Guardian* in London<sup>3</sup>.

Even after the revelations nothing was done about it. Amnesty International affirmed in its document AI: AMR 23/044/1997 that several denunciations were made concerning BP<sup>4</sup>. One of these in particular was the result of a UK television programme *BP's Secret Soldiers* (World in Action), which claimed that BP had signed a contract with Defence Systems Limited (a British private security company) to provide courses to a police unit responsible for protecting its personnel and installations in Casanare. The courses gave instruction in counterinsurgency techniques included the handling of lethal weaponry, sniper fire and man to man combat.

The operation of these groups goes hand in hand with the labelling of those members of the local community who participate in legitimate protests against the environmental impact of the oil companies. When community leaders are appointed, murder, threats, disappearances and torture begin; practices that shape the combined course of action for the state forces, paramilitaries and the private security firms.

In that respect Amnesty International pronounced: "It is especially worrying for us that the procedures employed by Defence Systems Colombia (DSC), a subsidiary of Defence Systems Ltd. which has its head office in the UK, could contribute to committing human rights violations against the civilian population. DSC has a contract with BP to carry out its security operations in Colombia until 1997 and also had a contract with OCENSA, the business consortium - which includes BP among other transnationals - that built the pipeline that



# Casanare



transports petroleum from the oil fields to the coast”<sup>5</sup>.

The counterinsurgency instruction went alongside additional forces as BP also contracted the Colombian army to protect its businesses: sovereignty in exchange for dollars. The New York Times published a report claiming that BP had contracted 500 soldiers and 150 officers of the army in order to secure its oil installations throughout the country. During these years it was estimated that BP paid around US \$54 – 60 million for private security. According to a range of sources, BP presently pays between 700,000 and 800,000 pesos to officers of the 16th Brigade of the army for its role in protecting the oil infrastructure. We have already seen that the 16th Brigade were responsible for the extrajudicial executions of those such as Roque Julio, Daniel Torres and Ernesto Cruz Guevara, murdered on 23 April this year.

We have also described the direct military support provided by the BP. As Amnesty International has stated, it is alarming that DSC/OCENSA bought military equipment for the 16th Brigade of the army which has an atrocious human rights record. At exactly the same time DSC/OCENSA was buying military equipment in 1997, an important group of soldiers from the 16th Brigade was being investigated for involvement in April 2006 in the killing of 15 unarmed civilians in Segovia. The brigade was also being linked to paramilitary organisations.

The denunciations for human rights violations committed by the Colombian army and BP in those years are unequivocal and come from diverse sources. For example, in 1998 the European parliament condemned the Colombian government for its inaction over what was happening. “We ask the president of Colombia to fully publish the report of his human rights commission on BP in Casanare and request that the European oil companies observe the strict human rights and environmental protection norms, especially given the conflict zones in which they work.”<sup>6</sup>

On 15 February 1999 the Oil Workers Union (USO) denounced a series of irregularities in the behaviour of BP related to the evident British support for the presence of the company in Colombia. They denounced the unfulfilled obligations and compromises made in the contracts signed between BP and ECOPEPETROL, the corruption and consent of the Colombian government itself in relation to the company, violations of workers and campesino rights in the region, environmental damage and the clear relationship already described: BP, paramilitaries, army and private security firms.

Without any doubt BP has brought more problems than benefits to Casanare. From the murder of leaders like Carlos Arrigí in April 1995 and the death threats made against Alfonso Chaparro, to the deaths of campesinos and workers right up to the mass detentions, disap-

pearances and extrajudicial executions at the hands of the Colombian army that today are multiplied in the fields of the department, a picture is painted of constant social destruction of the fundamental rights of the population, all on behalf of the transnational economy.

### The extermination of the social organisations. How can we forget?

ACDAINSO is the Community Association for the Social and Agro-Industrial Development of Morro (Asociación Comunitaria Por el Desarrollo Social y Agroindustrial del Morro). What happened to ACDAINSO is a clear example of the relation between the presence of BP and the systematic elimination of one of the most important social organisations of Casanare<sup>7</sup>, and which had in fact been created with the aim of exercising some control over the actions of BP and thus counteracting the effects of economy of oil.

ACDAINSO was set up on 10 August 1995 to represent the campesinos of 17 small villages that constituted the El Morro district in the township of Yopal, Casanare. That year, over 100 delegates formed this legal entity so it could represent them with the government and the private sector - in this case, BPX (BP Exploration) - on the issue of oil and development.

The moment of the creation of ACDAINSO was crucial for the inhabitants of this district. In effect, it constituted a mechanism of resistance in the face of the repression against the organisations that was taking place in the department at the hands of the state and para-state forces. At the same time as the inter-union committee UNIDOS POR CASANARE (United for Casanare) crumbled, the Asociación Departamental de Usuarios Campesinos ADUC de Casanare (Peasant Association of Casanare Department) was exterminated, and the committee formed by 36 villages in Yopal and 2 villages in Nunchía to bring paved roads to el Morro disappeared as well. ACDAINSO emerged as a new option for community organisation.

Nevertheless, this association started to have problems a year after its creation, as the community increasingly pressurised for the agreements signed with BPX in 1994 to become a reality. The exercise of citizenship and sovereignty carried out by members of the Association motivated the Convivir<sup>8</sup> forces of Casanare commanded by Alias Chubasco to issue threats against the ACDAINSO leaders. These threats generated panic amongst the population, and in the end the threats did not materialise because by then the attention of the international community was set on the community of El Morro.

The events that brought BP and this region under the spotlight of the international community were the following: the assassination of the campesino leaders Carlos Arrigí and Gabriel

Ascencio, the attack against Segundo Suarez (campesino from Marroquin); the house-breaking of Fanny Núñez, the imprisonment of Hernando Caceres (activist of ANUC Casanare) and president of the Association Municipal de Usuarios Campesinos de Yopal.

In resistance, ACDAINSO encouraged strikes, marches, forums and events to highlight the fact that the agreements signed between the company BPX and the campesinos were not being met. In this way, at the end of 2002 the community of El Morro went on strike for 45 days (longer than the 1994 strike). Through this strike issues relating to labour conditions of BP workers were highlighted as well as the aforementioned agreements.

But the result of these efforts were not very encouraging, because after the 2002 strike the president of the association Javier Fonseca and its representative Ramiro Sanchez were threatened. Two years later, in September 2004, Javier Vargas, a representative of the community organisation was assassinated and its treasurer Fassio Olguín was wounded in an assassination attempt at his home. These events were only 10 days apart. By a rather suspicious coincidence, in February 2003, the BPX Yopal representative of the community relations department, Jorge Guzman, said he was tired of ACDAINSO as the organisation did not let them work in El Morro. Added to this were the declarations made by local people stating that BP, the mayor of Yopal and the Casanare local government had decided to finish off ACDAINSO and set up an organisation that would serve their interests.

In September 2004, the treasurer of ACDAINSO, Oswaldo Vargas, was assassinated and on 10 May 2005, the president of ACDAINSO, Parmenio Parra was also assassinated together with his partner. Later on, on 6 June, the arrests of Hector Orlando Camargo together with two of his children and 5 other campesinos were made public. Orlando Camargo had in 1994 been a member of the executive committee of the campaign organising to bring paved roads to El Morro. The deaths continued, but nevertheless the justice system took the focus of the attention away from the guilty and onto the victims. In effect, the Attorney General's Office initiated an investigation against ACDAINSO, as told by a campesino:

“the investigations started and they started to talk, and spread rumours that the organisation was perhaps manipulated by the guerrillas, which has never been true, but it was a suspicion and it was one of the excuses used by them in order to start an investigation to the point when the Attorney General's Office took the documents and brought them to investigate them before then returning them”.<sup>9</sup>

Because of the systematic extermination of its leaders, and thanks to the persecution at the hands of the Colombian state itself, the existence of ACDAINSO came to an end in July 2005. At present, and in spite of the constant

fear, the community of El Morro has tried to re-constitute an organisation: Asojuntas del Corregimiento del Morro. The future of Asojuntas is uncertain, as a local campesino said:

“they now force you to create something new and you are left wondering, when will they break this one down, when will be have to again say ‘Asojuntas is dead’. It seems that they have political shields they put on and take off as they wish”.

### The oil transnationals and the reality of Casanare today. A change of strategy? From paramilitarism to democratic security.

It's 30 March 2007. Together with the Political Prisoners Solidarity Committee (FCSP), those in COS-PACC responsible for human rights, carried out a new urgent action in respect of the assassination of two more campesinos in the region. When will this end! The document states:

“The campesinos living in the piedmont foothills zone of Aguazul-Casanare, have since 1996 until now been victims of labelling and subject to all classes of abuse and cruel and inhuman treatments such as: the disappearance, assassination, torture, death threats, forced removals, massive and arbitrary detentions, affecting the bulk of inhabitants”.

According to the inhabitants of a village called Alto Cupiagua, “in Aguazul municipality, Casanare department, on Friday 30 March this year at about 12 midday, agents from the Gaula unit of the 16th Brigade of the National Army detained YEFER ARNOLDO MORA SANABRIA aged 21 years, WILLIAM MARTINEZ SUAREZ aged 17 and 16 year old GUSTAVO MORA SANABRIA”. [FLA adds - Gaula is a notorious special forces unit]. It became known afterwards that Gaula had reported that the persons detained were subversives who had been taken down in combat.

The Catholic human rights organisation CINEP has documented 53 cases between 2001 and 2006 of abuses by the security forces, assassinations, extra-judicial executions and disappearances with responsibility believed to be of paramilitary groups, the national army, DAS [security police], or Gaula, amongst others<sup>10</sup>. Thus far in 2007 there have been more than 12 cases of extra-judicial executions in Aguazul municipality. If we add to this the hundred of dead buried in common graves and disappeared at the hands of the military, as well as the numerous cases that the victims families have not denounced because of their fear, it is obvious that Casanare is suffering an acute human rights crisis.

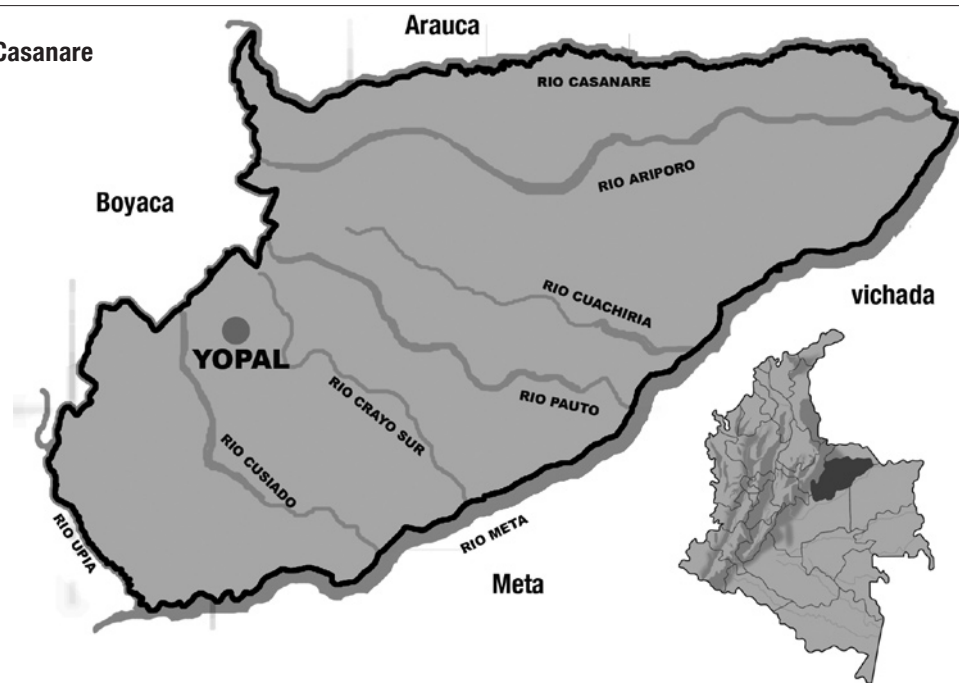
How can this be explained when BP supposedly changed its strategy; the democratic security policy of Uribe and the paramilitary demobilisation have managed to pacify the department and with a “healthy” relationship between the oil economy and regional develop-



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Map of Casanare



ment? Today it is clear to us that the humanitarian situation is linked with a strategy for the oil producing area of Casanare that has been conceived between BP and the Colombian army, which consists of several elements such as security (a strategy of dirty war), social programmes (disarticulating the regional development plan through buying dependency), amongst others.

So paramilitarism and certain sectors of the army decided to eliminate social organisations in Casanare in the 90s to 2004; organisations that made BP responsible for the environment and social investment. The current policy of democratic security is a policy under which, in the name of the counterinsurgency struggle, social leaders and organised campesinos that form an obstacle for the interests of the transnationals are eliminated. In this manner the disappearances and massacres by the paramilitaries up to 2004 have given way to extra-judicial executions at the hands of the army and the security forces.

Or, in other words, the defence of oil in the region has passed from paramilitarism to "democratic security". The strategy adopted by president Uribe is less a policy that will bring peace to our nation than a strategy to guarantee the best environment for the transnationals.

In this some members of Uribe's government are right. During recent years there has been a greater deployment of official security forces in the country, and a process of demobilisation of the paramilitaries<sup>11</sup>. This signifies a better situation for foreign investment, without doubt. The problem is, on the one hand, that militarisation has brought more attacks on the peasantry, on social leaders, including on their children - a very high cost to pacify the country. On the other hand, the demobilisation deepens impunity. The social fabric will not be reconstituted simply by acts of good will, but with effective justice. And finally, the affluence of corporation and foreign investors produces an improving economy for the rich, while for the poor it only brings more deaths, more environmental damage, more submission.<sup>12</sup>

What is the responsibility of BP in all of this? This and other questions need answering. What should be done? It is essential to confront this problem in various ways. In the first place a precise and serious investigation of those elements that explain the situation of oil in Casanare. With this we must commit ourselves to act, to carry out campaigns directed at stopping the consumption of BP products (products stained with the blood of Colombian peasants) and to organise our communities to demand responsible management of the oil economy.

At another level, it is necessary to denounce and judge the Colombian government and BP before supra-national organisations and the international community (breaking the silence and impunity). The Permanent Peoples Tribunal and the oil campaign that is going forward in Colombia are one of the spaces for this.

But if these measures help partially to change the situation of the region, what is at the root is the issue of sovereignty over resources. And it is towards that that the social organisations must direct their efforts in the long run. It is only when Colombians can decide on the extraction, transformation and use of their natural resources that it will be possible to stop the exploitation of the same by the transnational corporations. Only by nationalising oil will it be possible to create a model of development and life that regulates the use of crude oil to preserve the environment, to use the profits from this business in ways that are relevant to Colombians, and to stop the social and armed conflict that is largely due to social inequalities and the subjection of the country to the economic interests of international powers.

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#### Notes.

<sup>1</sup>During the nineteenth century Colombia lived through innumerable internal wars in consolidating its Republic. The twentieth century started with the 'War of a Thousand Days', a confrontation to the death between the Liberals and Conservatives that was ended by a weak peace accord and the loss of the Panama canal. The tensions of an unequal conflict were again expressed in the period known as *The Violence between Liberals and Conservatives during the 1940s and 1950s* that cost thousands of lives across the length and breadth of the country. At the beginning of the 1960s what is today known as the internal armed conflict was configured. This conflict consists in military and political confrontation between leftwing insurgent organisations that arose at different points (FARC, ELN, EPL, M-19, amongst others) and the Colombian state. Currently the two most important guerrilla movements maintaining this struggle are the ELN and the FARC, with the appearance of paramilitary groups backed by the state to combat the insurgency.

<sup>2</sup>There have been concession contracts, association contracts and direct exploitation by state oil corporation *ECOPETROL*. In the first two forms of contract, the concessionary took the major part, hence they enriched the transnational corporations much more than the Colombian State. Clearly, its important to say that the concessionary contracts were suspended in 1974 Decree 2310, and the only ones still active were signed before that date.

<sup>3</sup>These models of private security are the correlate of the initiatives in energy resources that the United States and other powers have brought to other places in the world: "...in unstable surroundings, private security companies can concern themselves with security, so that they are busy controlling protests and crowd, co-ordinating with state forces, or supplying armed security to installations and personnel". Said policy was evident in Casanare, as seen by the workers protests and whatever manifestation of popular opposition to the corporation in the 1990s were violently repressed by mixed security forces.

<sup>4</sup>Amnesty International, "Colombia: La compañía petrolífera British Petroleum (BP) se expone a alimentar la crisis de derechos humanos mediante formación militar.", AI: AMR 23/044/ 30 June 1997

<sup>5</sup>Amnesty International, "Amnistía Internacional renueva su llamamiento a las compañías petroleras que operan en Colombia para que respeten los derechos humanos", ÍNDICE AI: AMR 23/79/98/s 13 October 1998.

<sup>6</sup>Madrid, 3 November 1996

<sup>7</sup>There are other examples such as the removal of the members of the ADUC of Casanare, the destruction of ASOCOCHARTE, etc.

<sup>8</sup>Autodefense Forces Organisations supported by, amongst others, the current president of Colombia Alvaro Uribe

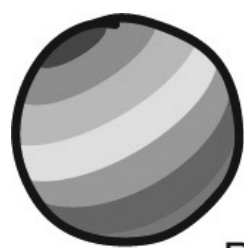
<sup>9</sup>Interview with former ACDAINSO leader.

<sup>10</sup>Some cases involved several victims.

<sup>11</sup>We must make clear that many social organisations consider that the negotiation process rather than a legalisation of the paramilitaries is a handover to them. Many of them continue in delinquency, assassinating, massacring and extortion. Their leaders are treated complacently by the government and up to now very few have been sentenced. Furthermore the great majority have not handed over neither the funds nor the properties that they took from the campesinos and besides, they want to participate in political life, a para-policy project has been developing for some time in the country.

<sup>12</sup>In fact one of the greatest criticisms of the Uribe government is the absence of clear and definite social policies. Although the economic figures have increased and there is the appearance of improvement in public order, the reality is that in the fields people are dying of hunger as in Choco, or otherwise are being assassinated by the army or the rump paramilitary groups. These deaths do not figure in public, nor does anybody in the cities make such a cruel reality their concern.





## Enlazando Alternativas

Red Birregional Europa - América Latina y el Caribe

The formation of 'Enlazando Alternativas' in Guadalajara, Mexico in 2004 opened a new chapter in relations between peoples as it integrates civil society organizations from Latin America and the Caribbean with their European peers in a network that embraces the concept of solidarity and mutual support. Links of solidarity between both regions date back to the periods of dictatorship, national liberation movements and the struggle against "500 years" of colonisation.

The essence of this network aims to go one step beyond these movements, recreating these bonds of solidarity but in a global and bi-regional context that corresponds with the current challenges. The network intends to provide a space for articulation by social organisations and movements from both regions with the purpose of constructing alternative proposals of social and economic organization from the bottom up, as well as to coor-

ordinate political and social dialogue between peoples. We affirm our right to give voice to these initiatives and we strongly believe in our capacity to formulate them.

For further information visit:  
[www.enlazandoalternativas.org](http://www.enlazandoalternativas.org)

To take part in our electronic discussion on the EULAC relations and the activities of the network subscribe to the network e-list ([al-ue@lists.riseup.net](mailto:al-ue@lists.riseup.net)) writing to [ceciliaolivet@tni.org](mailto:ceciliaolivet@tni.org)

To take part in our electronic discussion list on transnationals, write to [transnacionales@gmail.com](mailto:transnacionales@gmail.com)

Contact points:  
For Latin America and the Caribbean: Hemispheric Social Alliance Secretariat - [secretaria@asc-hsa.net](mailto:secretaria@asc-hsa.net)

For Europe: Transnational Institute (TNI) - [ceciliaolivet@tni.org](mailto:ceciliaolivet@tni.org)

### European transnational corporations and neo-liberal globalisation



Transnational corporations (TNCs) are the main actors and beneficiaries in managing and promoting neo-liberal globalization and its ideology. In Latin America and the Caribbean, this expresses itself not only through the bellicose imperialism of the United States and its companies, but also through the European Union's (EU) neo-liberal policies and the activities of its transnationals.

"Enlazando Alternativas" recognizes that any project for "another possible world" must undoubtedly be based on the struggle against TNCs as part of social transformation. For this reason, the network organised a session of the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal (PPT) on "Neo-liberal Policies and European Transnational Corporations in Latin America" at the Enlazando Alternativas 2 Social Encounter in May 2006 in Vienna (Austria).

The Tribunal heard cases presented by over 50 organisations (unions, peasant and indigenous movements, environmentalists, human

rights groups, affected communities, NGOs), a clear expression of the social and political struggles on both continents. The corporations accused include: Telefonica, Aguas de Barcelona, Unión Fenosa, Consorcio OCP, Sol Meliá Riu Resorts, Viva, Ibero Star, Unilever, Calvo Ence, British Tobacco, Bayer, BBVA, Suez, GTZ, Repsol YPF, Monterrico Metals, Gala, Bennetton.

The Tribunal revealed the huge range of sectors affected by transnationals and the penetration of European corporations, from the late 1980s and identified common elements and violations regarding the following rights: basic essential services, land and food sovereignty, workers rights, rights of indigenous peoples and environmental rights: "All of the violations presented here, together with the erratic behaviour of financial markets, have resulted in a massive attack against social and economic rights to development."

The Enlazando Alternativas 3 Social Encounter will take place in Lima, Peru in May 2008.

# European free trade onslaught in Latin America:

## European Union endorses highly dangerous negotiation mandates for free trade areas with Central America and the Andean Community

Thomas Fritz

At the end of April of 2007, the European Council adopted highly dangerous mandates for the negotiation of so-called Association Agreements with Central America [1] and the Andean Community [2]. The negotiations will start in a few weeks. Main pillars of the proposed Association Agreements are free trade areas which aim at a radical dismantling of all trade barriers in both Latin American regions. The negotiation mandates reach far beyond the accords of the World Trade Organisation, by including investment liberalisation and the opening up of state purchases to the benefit of European corporations. Moreover, the EU is explicitly demanding market openings in the water, energy and transport sectors, thus pushing for the unhampered privatisation of essential basic services...

### Neoliberal mainstreaming

According to the EU draft mandates, the Association Agreements shall deal "comprehensively with all trade components, and be fully consistent with WTO rules and obligations". They have to provide for "the progressive and reciprocal liberalisation of trade in goods and services". Reciprocal liberalisation means, that Latin American countries have to implement the same level of market openings as the EU, irrespective of the huge economic gap between both sides. Accordingly, the mandates do not mention any "special and differential treatment", thus ignoring the most basic demand of Southern governments to, at least, mitigate current asymmetries.[3]

Differentiations of Latin American countries' commitments to the EU "shall be limited to a minimum". Therefore, in the case of the Andean Community, Bolivia or Ecuador would have to agree to the same level of market openings as Colombia. Similarly, in the Central American case, Nicaragua's liberalisations would have to be as far-reaching as those of Panama. In other words, progressive governments in Bolivia or Ecuador shall be forced to follow the same path as their neoliberal counterparts in Colombia and elsewhere.

This tendency will also be reinforced by the demand for "parity" with third countries. If an Andean or Central American country has signed a free trade accord with a third country like, for instance, the United States, "EU investors shall be granted at least parity with the treatment granted to investors and service suppliers of this third country". This demand is especially dangerous for Ecuador and Bolivia, because Colombia and Peru have recently signed bilateral trade agreements with the US. Since



differentiations of Andean countries' commitments to the EU "shall be limited to a minimum", Colombian and Peruvian liberalisations would effectively extend to Bolivia and Ecuador as well.

### Blackmailing Latin America

The Association Agreements aim at the dismantling of all import duties over a period of time "not exceeding 10 years". A so-called "review clause" shall enable further market openings for products that haven't been fully liberalised after the entry into force of the free trade areas. Through successive rounds of negotiations the EU wants to abolish all remaining barriers to trade. Consequently, Andean and Central American governments will lose any means to protect family farmers or local enterprises against highly competitive and often subsidised exports from the European Union.

Under the EU General System of Preferences (GSP) Andean and Central American countries enjoy preferential market access to the European Union for selected products. However, these preferences will be covered by the new free trade agreements and the Latin American beneficiaries "shall be withdrawn" from the list of countries benefiting from the GSP. Thanks to this provision, the European Commission disposes of a very effective means of extortion: governments that don't agree with European demands risk losing their current preferences.

### Attacking public goods

In order to facilitate and protect European investment the mandates envisage "frameworks for establishment" which will be based on principles of "non-discrimination, market access" and on "general principles of protection". Furthermore, the EU wants "competition rules", which restrict "anti-competitive behaviour" like, for instance, state aids for public utilities or other local enterprises.

Fostering the grip of private capital on public services, the European Union demands a "progressive liberalisation" of Latin American procurement markets, including "public entities in the water, energy and transport sectors".

The European negotiation mandates constitute a neoliberal offensive against already weakened public services. Ignoring all the bad experiences with failed privatisations they run counter to the many efforts of regaining democratic control over public goods like water, energy or land. They undermine politics of redistribution of wealth, agrarian reforms or nationalisations of natural resources, that are underway in Bolivia, Ecuador or Nicaragua. It is particularly disturbing to see the EU reintroduce the so-called "Singapore issues" of investment, competition and procurement rules, which have already been rejected in the WTO. In this sense, the Association Agreements would represent very dangerous "WTO plus" accords.

Finally, the European trade attack effectively undermines alternative approaches of regional integration like the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas ALBA [4]. While ALBA rests on principles of solidarity and complementarity, the European Union is pushing for unfettered competition and reciprocal market openings to the detriment of Andean and Central American economies. Therefore, the neoliberal European offensive shouldn't be underestimated. Trade agreements with the European Union pose the same threats as the US accords with Central America, Colombia or Peru.

\* *FDCL* Forschungs- und Dokumentationszentrum Chile-Lateinamerika, Berlin. Materials in German, Spanish, English at website [www.fdcl.org](http://www.fdcl.org)

[1] In Central America the EU negotiates with Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama.

[2] Members of the Andean Community are Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador and Colombia.

[3] The mandates only mention the possibility that asymmetries "may be considered, where necessary", for instance, by agreeing to "different timings for transitional periods".

Leaked drafts the mandates at [www.inpade.org.ar/centrodocumentacion.php](http://www.inpade.org.ar/centrodocumentacion.php)

[4] For an analysis see: Fritz, Thomas, 2007: *ALBA contra ALCA, La Alternativa Bolivariana para las Américas: una nueva vía para la integración regional en Latinoamérica*. <http://www.fdcl-berlin.de/index>



# Bio-fuels

## Energy vs Energy

Gareth Peoples

For a long time now pressure has been growing to find alternatives to oil, in the form of biofuels. This need is greatly exacerbated as more and more people turn to private transport.

In recent months the United States and Brazil have signed cooperation agreements in their ethanol industries, which promise to increase production of ethanol as a biofuel.

Brazil is the world's second largest producer of ethanol after the US, and has been producing since the early 1970s. Brazil's ethanol comes from sugarcane, which requires little agricultural and industrial resources. Sugarcane provides close to 50 per cent of Brazil's fuel requirements and uses only one per cent of the country's arable land.

The US on the other hand manufactures corn to produce its ethanol, which is far more demanding on carbon fuels during production. Consequently, with a growing biofuel industry, the amount of corn-based ethanol produced could be offset by the amount of energy going into the production process.

An article by a Brazilian organic farmer claims that Brazil has merely twelve per cent of the total number of vehicles that the US has. Furthermore, it consumes only 2.9 per cent of the total gasoline used in the US. Such figures demonstrate that the aggressive push to escalate sugarcane production in Brazil is not to benefit Brazilian consumers, but to quench the US's constant thirst for energy.

More importantly, one must understand that the US's quest for renewable energy sources is aimed at countering any potential threat of loss to oil supplies due to instability in major oil producing regions.

This was illustrated in January 2006 when Bush proclaimed that the US was "addicted to oil", and that this posed a "national security problem" because it is "often imported from unstable parts of the world".

### Enter the revolution

Following the US-Brazil cooperation announcement, Cuba's Fidel Castro released a series of three articles concerning the expanding biofuel industry, and the potential impact on world food sources. Castro predicted that up to three billion people could face starvation and lack of water as a result of biofuel demand. Venezuela's Hugo Chavez followed suit, echoing Castro's concerns at an energy summit in April 2007. Chavez pointed out that greater production of ethanol could drastically reduce the amount of fertile land allocated to produce food.

Although this split in energy policy has reached a cross-road, Venezuela and Brazil continue to cooperate on energy initiatives, with Chavez stating that ethanol "is important in light of the world energy crisis."

Venezuela is promoting itself as leader of a continental energy alliance, and already distributes to struggling economies. Meanwhile, however, Brazil's President Lula is struggling to meet the promises it made nearly five years ago

### The good, the bad and the ugly

The excitement over biofuels has masked the human and environmental costs of such enormous production.

Mexico has already felt the strain of the US's corn-for-fuel desire, with the international prices for corn rocketing.

In January this year, mass protests were triggered in Mexico when the price of tortillas rose by 100 per cent.

A recent UN report stated that while biofuels can bring real benefits, "there can be serious consequences if forests are razed for plantations, if food prices rise, and if communities are excluded from ownership."

The report concludes that biofuels are more effective when used for heat and power rather than in transport.

In February this year the Brazilian Landless Workers Movement (MST) released a statement that said: "The expansion of the production of biofuels aggravates hunger in the world. We cannot maintain our tanks full while

## "Transforming food into fuels is a monstrosity"

-Fidel Castro, 2007

Steven Mather

They were hoping he was dead but Cuban president Fidel Castro seems to be making a come back. He has put himself at the centre of the debate over whether bio-fuels are a viable alternative to fossil fuels through a series of strongly argued articles that criticise a recent agreement between Brazil and the US.

Bio-fuels such as ethanol are

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio "Lula" da Silva has promoted the bio-fuels agreement in an article he wrote for the right wing Washington Post. In it he said bio-fuels were, "a recipe for increasing incomes, creating jobs and alleviating poverty among the many developing countries where biomass crops are abundant".

Fidel Castro disagrees. He says the plans could have devastating conse-

quences for agrifuels will have to come from the South."

Less land for food production will mean less food around and that will mean higher prices. According to Castro this is already occurring,

"The prices for this grain [maize], the staple diet in numerous countries of the region, have almost doubled. What will happen when hundreds of millions of tons of maize are redirected towards the production of biofuel? And I rather not mention the amounts of wheat, millet, oats, barley, sorghum and other cereals that industrialized countries will use as a source of fuel for its engines."

Castro makes another important point. Mainstream development thinking often points to "fair trade" as the way forward for the South. Tariffs and subsidies in the North should be removed to allow countries from the South to sell their products at a competitive price internationally, it is argued. However, that argument never considers the physical hardship farm labourers have to endure on this supposed path to development,

"[In Brazil] almost 80% of sugarcane is cut by hand. Sources and studies made by Brazilian researchers affirm that a sugarcane cutter, a piece-work laborer, must produce no less than twelve tons in order to meet basic needs. This worker needs to perform 36,630 flexing movements with his legs, make small trips 800 times carrying 15 kilos of cane in his arms and walk 8,800 meters in his chores. He loses an average of 8 liters of water every day"

"Even though the established norm for a working day is from 8 in the morning until 5 in the afternoon, this type of piece-work cane cutting tends to go on for a 12 hour working day. The temperature will at times rise to 45 degrees centigrade by noon", says Castro

The reality is, and Bush has confirmed this by his refusal to countenance lowering tariffs on ethanol imports, that unequal economic trade relations will continue. The South will be trapped into producing agricultural products with low and shrinking profit rates while corporations in the North dominate in the parts of the process where profits are highest. The downward pressure on profits in the South will be felt most sharply by the workers.

There are also question marks over bio-fuels' green credentials given that land and water are polluted in the process while deforestation would probably occur to make more land available for production.

Fidel Castro raises many important issues in the biofuels debate that are shared by many politicians, academics and environmentalists. The fact he is physically strong enough to make them will no doubt irritate Bush and his allies in the North and the South.



Bio-fuel sells alongside regular petrol in a Brazilian petrol station

stomachs go empty."

Along with Brazil, palm plantations in Colombia will need to expand to meet the demand for biodiesel and the food industry.

The debate over alternatives to oil has thus been restricted to power and transport, and has ignored the corporations that control these industries, and their desire to protect profit.

If this continues unabated, we could soon be left with a barren area of land known formerly as the Amazon.

We must challenge the control of big business, and the West's attempt to maintain a grip on the developing world's markets. Seeking alternatives to oil does not necessarily engender 'ethical' progression. To a money-hungry fuel industry, ethics mean very little. ■

produced from foodstuffs like corn, wheat or rapeseed. They can be used instead of petrol in cars are being promoted by the US government as a single solution to two problems.

Firstly, they say it is an environmentally friendly alternative to petrol due to its lower carbon emissions. Also, by reducing their dependence on diminishing oil reserves from politically unstable parts of the world the use of bio-fuels will increase their national security.

President Bush has announced plans to reduce petrol usage by 20% in ten years. 35 billion gallons of bio-fuels will be needed to take up the excess demand and Bush has held meetings with US ethanol producers and automobile manufacturers to forge a strategy to achieve the goal.

quences for the less economically developed parts of the world, including Brazil and he cites academic Atilio Borón, a vocal opponent of the plan.

Borón calculates that it will be the South that produces the foodstuffs to provide fuel for the North diverting food desperately needed for human consumption towards bio-fuels leaving millions and millions of already hungry people literally starving,

"The total agricultural land of the European Union is barely sufficient to cover 30% of their current needs for fuel but not their future needs that will probably be greater."

"In the United States, the satisfaction of their current demand for fossil fuels would require the use of 121 percent of all their agricultural land for agrifuels [...] Consequently, the supply



# Green imperialism

## Threat to food sovereignty

Gerardo Cerdas Vega\*

The 6th Hemispheric Meeting of Struggle Against Free Trade Agreements and for the Integration of the Peoples in Havana held an important panel.

The panellists were Francisca Rodríguez (Chile, Asociación Nacional de Mujeres Rurales e Indígenas - National Association of Rural and Indigenous Women), Maria Luisa Mendonça (Brasil, Red Social por la Justicia y los Derechos Humanos - Social Network for Justice and Human Rights), and Horacio Martins (Brasil, Movimento de Trabajadores sin Tierra - Landless Workers Movement).

The massive production of agri-fuels threatens to set Latin America on the road to productive, environmental, social and cultural devastation.

Maria Luisa Mendonça recalled that the majority of wars in recent centuries have been closely related to the control of energy sources. A central theme in US foreign policy today is the preoccupation that its own oil resources have only 10 to 15 years of useful life, added to which they are very concerned about the growing competition between economic blocs such as China for access to fossil fuels.

So, the urgency and aggression with which the US is pressing for the massive production of agri-fuels in Latin America is due to the energy requirements of its industrial structure, and a population with its overblown consumption patterns. Global energy consumption is concentrated in the privileged sectors, the industries and population groups with greater economic power, so that the whole of humanity pays a high cost for a few million people.

The massive production of agri-fuels follows the historic pattern: since the colonial period the great oligarchies have handed over for nothing our energy sources (coal, oil, gas, hydroelectricity) to the central capitalist countries. The current phase is a continuation of the neo-colonial project of those powers.

Horacio Martins located the problem of agri-fuels in the framework of contemporary capitalism, which is both monopolistic and transnational, in which finance capital seeks control and which ignores its effects on the environment, communities and on social structure. The discussion on the energy crisis and the urgency to find new sources relies on the same basic model of energy production and consumption, that makes energy a predatory industry that sacrifices the cultural and natural wealth of a good part of humanity.

### Agri-fuels and food sovereignty

Francisca Rodríguez pointed out that the massive production of agri-fuels is a direct threat to the rights of the people to food sovereignty. She rejected the use of the term 'bio-fuels', because the use of the prefix 'bio' attempts to give a positive sense, hiding the damage caused by the production of fuels



extracted from the land: environmental damage and harm to campesino, indigenous and afro populations that have been expelled from their lands by the big agri-fuel consortiums.

The campesino, indigenous and afro organisations have identified the magnitude of the danger posed to them by agri-fuel production, and the economic interests and capital movements behind them, what it means for their existence and autonomy as people and nations, and media manipulation to which they are being subjected. The false argument of the environmental contribution of this energy source, gives the agri-fuels producers greater acceptance by rural sectors that traditionally oppose the devastating effects of development models such as this.

So, afro, campesino and indigenous communities have enormous challenges confronting them, such as their struggles for the right to territory, the

recuperation and defence of traditional knowledge and foods, the preservation of their seeds and ancestral cropping methods.

### The avalanche of 'green imperialism'

According to Horacio Martins agri-fuel production demands control of the land, water and many other natural resources, that means that the agricultural areas of the whole world are being subject to savage disputes.

The growth of agri-fuel production not only spells desertification and impoverishment, but in promoting single crop monoculture is a danger for biodiversity and food sovereignty for millions of people.

Martin referred to the production of ethanol in Brazil and projections for the next 25 years, adding that this experience will mark out the future of other Latin American countries. In Brazil

there is a ferocious dispute for the control of some 150 million hectares of cultivable land in Amazonia, exclusively destined for plantations to produce the raw materials for ethanol.

The world Food and Agriculture Organisation FAO estimates that within the next 15 to 20 years, agri-fuels will supply 25% of world energy consumption. The production of ethanol is controlled by Brazil and the US, who between them produce 60% of the current world total of 58 billion litres. It is estimated that in 2010, 70 billion litres of ethanol will be produced, consumed mostly in the United States - the country with more than 40% of the cars in the world -, Japan and Europe. By 2030, ethanol will be mixed up to 30% with fossil fuels, and to meet this production will have to have increased to 260 billion litres. Given that the United States is not disposed to produce on its own territory the grains

necessary to generate this volume of ethanol, the weight will fall on Brazil. This supposes a colossal diversion and squandering of food resources to fill the tanks of motor vehicles, not the stomachs of people.

Another sensitive topic is that of the *latifundio* [huge estate]. The lands are being occupied more and more by transnationals. In the case of Brazil, lands to sow soya, sugar cane and other mono-crops are even being sold by Internet. This signifies the expulsion of thousands of campesino and indigenous families, in favour of capitalist accumulation. This 'green imperialism' brings devastation to the land, especially to the Amazon rain forest and the savannah; "it is believed that within 30 years all the Brazilian savannah will be under agri-fuel production, contaminating water sources", Martins affirmed.

International geopolitics demands social stability in Brazil, signifying greater repression and social control towards the movements struggling for the land and its resources, such as the Movimento de los Sin Tierra (MST), who demand the rights of more than 8 million campesino families.

### Precarious labour and slavery: the brutal face of mono-crops

Maria Luisa Mendonça explained that agri-fuels rely on a scenario of labour conditions that are extremely precarious to the point of slavery. In monocropping sugar cane, for example, the contract regime is based on the exploitation of a cheap labour force, with extremely low wages and high risks at work. The Ministry of Work in São Paulo says that sugar is bathed in blood: in 2005 alone 400 deaths were registered in the cane industry, caused by accidents with con machines, fires, heart attacks due to exhaustion, skin cancer related with the use of agri-chemicals, and so on.

On the other hand, work slavery is a reality in the *ingenio* [sugar-mill] model of production. In 2006 the Public Ministry took 74 mills to court in São Paulo alone for holding dozens of men and women workers as slaves, without contracts, without protective tools, living in precarious dwellings, without adequate food, without water, without being able to escape and obliged to pay enormous debts to their bosses.

### What is to be done against this reality?

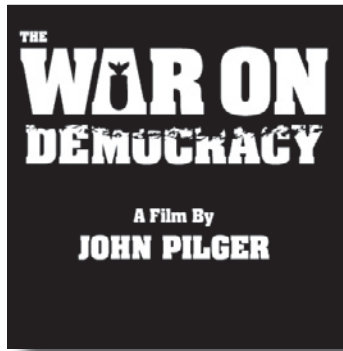
The platform speakers emphasised the need to unite forces at every level (local, national, international) to generate alternatives to the dominant energy model, models oriented to the right to food sovereignty, territory and the survival of the peoples; models that will guarantee human survival by surpassing capitalist forms of production for more democratic and inclusive forms.

\**Grito de los Excluidos (Cry of the Excluded)*



# Reviews

## Film



**The War on Democracy**  
John Pilger, 2007  
94 mins, Lionsgate Films

John Pilger introduces us to Venezuela framed as part of a continental struggle between two views of democracy. The film opens with a sequence of US leaders – a young Richard Nixon in Guatemala, George Bush senior on El Salvador and then George W Bush – proclaiming the virtues of propertied democracy. Against this backdrop of bloody intervention we go to the leafy suburbs of Caracas, and on to the contrasting picturesque but desperately poor mountainside clinging barrios. The class polarisation in Venezuela is the latest stage of the decades-long war over the future of Latin America, and what type of democracy serves it best.

The film interweaves discussion with Hugo Chávez with cuts to rank and file *chavista* militants, and onto the rich who are preparing their escape route to Miami. Mariela Machado a community activist from La Vega explains that before Chávez the *barrio* was literally invisible. On official maps the zone was just blocked out in green, but Chavez government has made new maps, she explains. This theme of hitherto invisible people realising their rights is reinforced with glimpses of community meetings and missions where the excluded learn to read.

Pilger highlights the failed *golpe de estado* in April 2002, when privately owned television sought to delegitimise and overthrow Chávez. Much of this follows ground already trod by the excellent *The Revolution Will Not be Televised*. What Pilger adds is accounts from the people of the barrios, telling why they came down from the hills to converge on Miraflores Palace and ensure the return of their president. Popular power defeated the alliance between big business, the US and the generals who used the mass media as their weapon.

The focus broadens to historical overview starting with the US defeating land reform in Guatemala and losing out to Fidel's victorious revolution in Cuba (although here too there are some debts, this time to the BBC's *Cold War in Latin America*). Pilger's treatment of Chile is well done. Through the recollections of Roberto Navarrete, who as an eighteen year old medical student was amongst those tortured in the national stadium, and other survivors we get a chilling sense of Pinochet's fascist dictatorship. Kissinger is shown to be what he is, a shameless liar who denied US complicity in the coup. The pattern is repeated with witnesses of the US

trained death squads in El Salvador.

Perhaps the film's strongest message comes in interviews with US operatives who are not only arrogant but wilfully deny the human rights consequences of their sordid trade. Former CIA agent Duane Claridge wins the competition for brutishness, "Pinochet fixed the country...don't give me Truth Commissions! They're just propaganda mills!" Remember this man, when Pilger demands to know by what right "you do what you do", Claridge's answer is unrepentant, "national security interests", of the US, naturally.

Bolivia's story is told by the parish priest and taxi driver to the people of El Alto, the highest city in the world. He weeps as he remembers the scores of dead laid out in his church for daring to protest gas privatisation, and has painted a mural in their honour.

Pilger captures the great optimism of the renewal of popular struggle. But does his film give a conceptual map to understand current developments?

Without over complicating matters, I think there are three areas that the viewer should investigate to get a clearer orientation. The first really is a yawning omission to the film on its own terms, and that is the US led war on democracy in Colombia. Today Colombia is central both to the grand narrative of Latin America, and very specifically a threat to progressive gains in Venezuela (Uribe's government is in profound tension with the Chávez project).

Secondly, we need to look at Europe's renewed role in imposing neoliberalism, that savage form of capitalism brought in on the back of Pinochet's coup.

Today it is European, and especially British, multinationals that are profiting the most in Chile and Bolivia. The word missing from official accounts is not then just the Empire of one power (the US), but imperialism as a system that divides the world, and benefits European corporations as much as US ones. We should be anti-imperialist rather than simply anti-Bush, or anti-US.

And it is important for viewers to know there are tensions within the popular camp. The film only hints at the dramas between the resurgent social movements and the new left governments. Is it enough that the poor should have dignity, or must their revolt continue until they have overthrown the conditions of their poverty? We can defend popular revolution while admitting to its contradictions, indeed such shading brings us closer to the reality and dilemmas.

In this story of heroes and villains, Pilger's partisanship is on the side of the oppressed: their humanity, endurance and as yet unfulfilled capacity. His optimism is a welcome antidote to the usual cynicism, he is surely right to champion the alternative democracy in the making. Moreover, Pilger succeeds well in communicating the central message that the US War on Democracy is not ended, but passing into a new phase. Duane Claridge has not gone away, the goons are getting ready to do it again. Active solidarity with people's democracy is the vital conclusion the film invites us to draw.

Andy Higginbottom

## Music



Ali Primera

## Ali Primera: Solidarity in song

In Venezuela today the widespread popularity of the singer-songwriter Alí Primera (1942-85) and his songs is evident in many ways: in murals which depict a bearded man with 'Afro' hair and a traditional four-stringed guitar (*cuatro*) in his hands; in lyrics painted on bridges and walls and quoted by Venezuelans in everyday conversation; at rallies and demonstrations where the public collectively sing his songs; at street stalls where bootleg CDs and amateur recordings of his live performances are sold on DVD; in students' and workers' organisations named for him; on 'Alo Presidente, the Sunday afternoon state TV programme in which Chávez frequently quotes Primera and sings his songs.

Primera was born into rural poverty in the harsh, wind-swept Paraguaná peninsula. His father was killed when he was only three years old. The young Alí worked as a bootblack and a boxer to help support his family. The town where he spent much of his childhood, Punto Fijo, was built around the foreign-owned oil refinery, Amuay, whose employees lived in luxury while Primera's family, and many others, struggled to get by in virtual segregation in the barrios. Primera attributed his political activism to these early experiences of poverty and social injustice.

Alí Primera is considered by many Venezuelans to be the country's first and greatest artist of the *nueva canción* (new song) movement. New Song emerged in Latin America in the 1960s when, following the Cuban Revolution, artists and intellectuals throughout the region began to meet and discuss the role culture could play in effecting revolutionary change in their societies.

In the early 1970s, new song artists, who married socially-committed lyrics to local folkloric musical styles, proclaimed that only through learning to value their own cultures, rich and complex blends of the Euro-Hispanic, the indigenous and the African, would citizens become sufficiently liberated to imagine a true social, political and economic revolution. In a country where governing elites viewed the African and indigenous majority populations and their cultural practices as 'inferior' and 'primitive', and where official policy encouraged the 'whitening' of the race and the imitation/importation of Anglo-European cultural models, the very sight and sound of local folkloric instruments communicated a powerful message of resistance to elite rule and affirmation of identity for the marginalised and impoverished masses.

In 1978 Primera founded the Committee for the Unity of the People (CUP), an organisation which worked to overcome sectarianism and to create links of solidarity between all leftist parties through uniting of people around cultural events. Primera combined elements of Marxism, Liberation Theology and the philosophy of Simón Bolívar with popular, anti-imperialist ideology which he communicated via his songs. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Primera faced increasing persecution from State authorities who perceived him as a 'subversive'. He reported attempts on his life, and on 16 February 1985 Primera was killed by a vehicle colliding with his.

Many Venezuelans see Primera as a martyr. Chávez articulates a concern with the recovery and affirmation of a national cultural identity which was repressed or ignored by previous governments, and in 2005, on the twentieth anniversary of Primera's death, the artist was officially recognised as part of the nation's cultural heritage.

*Ali Primera's music forms part of the soundtrack for John Pilger's new film 'War on Democracy'.*

Hazel Marsh



## Interview

## War on democracy

An interview with John Pilger

Pablo Navarrete

This interview first appeared at [Venezuelanalysis.com](http://Venezuelanalysis.com) and is reproduced with the author's permission.

John Pilger is an award-winning journalist, author and documentary filmmaker, who began his career in 1958 in his homeland, Australia, before moving to London in the 1960s. He has been a foreign correspondent and a front-line war reporter, beginning with the Vietnam War in 1967. He is an impassioned critic of foreign military and economic adventures by Western governments.

"It is too easy," Pilger says, "for Western journalists to see humanity in terms of its usefulness to 'our' interests and to follow government agendas that ordain good and bad tyrants, worthy and unworthy victims and present 'our' policies as always benign when the opposite is usually true. It's the journalist's job, first of all, to look in the mirror of his own society."

Pilger also believes a journalist ought to be a guardian of the public memory and often quotes Milan Kundera: "The struggle of people against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting."

In a career that has produced more than 55 television documentaries, *The War on Democracy* is Pilger's first major film for the cinema. He spent several weeks filming in Venezuela and *The War on Democracy* contains an exclusive interview with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez.

Could you begin by telling us what your new film *'The War on Democracy'* is about?

I happened to watch George Bush's second inauguration address in which he pledged to "bring democracy to the world." He mentioned the words "democracy" and "liberty" twenty one times. It was a very important speech because, unlike the purple prose of previous presidents (Ronald Reagan excluded), he left no doubt that he was stripping noble concepts like "democracy" and "liberty" of their true meaning – government, for, by and of the people.

I wanted to make a film that illuminated this disguised truth -- that the United States has long waged a war on democracy behind a facade of propaganda designed to contort the intellect and morality of Americans and the rest of us. For many of your readers, this is known. However, for others in the West, the propaganda that has masked Washington's ambitions has been entrenched, with its roots in the incessant celebration of World War Two, the "good war", then "victory" in the cold war. For these people, the "goodness" of US power represents "us". Thanks to Bush and his cabal, and to Blair, the scales have fallen from millions of eyes. I would like *'The War on Democracy'* to contribute something to this awakening.

The film is about the power of empire and of people. It was shot in Venezuela, Bolivia, Chile, and



the United States and is set also in Guatemala and Nicaragua. It tells the story of "America's backyard," the dismissive term given to all of Latin America. It traces the struggle of indigenous people first against the Spanish, then against European immigrants who reinforced the old elite. Our filming was concentrated in the barrios where the continent's "invisible people" live in hillside shanties that defy gravity. It tells, above all, a very positive story: that of the rise of popular social movements that have brought to power governments promising to stand up to those who control national wealth and to the imperial master. Venezuela has taken the lead, and a highlight of the film is a rare face-to-face interview with President Hugo Chavez whose own developing political consciousness, and sense of history (and good humour), are evident. The film investigates the 2002 coup d'etat against Chavez and casts it in a contemporary context. It also describes the differences between Venezuela and Cuba, and the shift in economic and political power since Chavez was first elected. In Bolivia, the recent, tumultuous past is told through quite remarkable testimony from ordinary people, including those who fought against the piracy of their resources. In Chile, the film looks behind the mask of this apparently modern, prosperous "model" democracy and finds powerful, active ghosts. In the United States, the testimony of those who ran the "backyard" echo those who run that other backyard, Iraq; sometimes they are the same people. Chris Martin (my fellow director) and I believe *'The War on Democracy'* is well timed. We hope people will see it as another way of seeing the world: as a metaphor for understanding a wider war on democracy and the universal struggle of ordinary people, from Venezuela to Vietnam, Palestine to Guatemala.

As you say, Latin America has often



John Pilger in Venezuela

Pablo Navarrete

been described as the U.S.' backyard. How important is Latin America for the U.S. in the global context?

Latin America's strategic importance is often dismissed. That's because it is so important. Read Greg Grandin's recent, excellent history (I interview him in the film) in which he makes the case that Latin America has been Washington's "workshop" for developing and honing and rewarding its imperial impulses elsewhere. For example, when the US "retreated" from Southeast Asia, where did its "democracy builders" go to reclaim their "vision"? Latin America. The result was the murderous assaults on Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala, and the darkness of "Operation Condor" in the southern cone. This was Ronald Reagan's "war on terror", which of course was a war of terror that provided basic training for those now running the Bush/Cheney "long war" in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Noam Chomsky recently said that after five centuries of European conquests, Latin America was reas-

been higher, business has never been better. What the rich no longer own is the government. And when the majority own the economy, true independence will be in sight. That's true everywhere.

U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, John Negroponte, recently called Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez "a threat to democracy" in Latin America. What are your views on this?

This is Orwellian, like "war is peace." Negroponte, whose record of overseeing Washington's terrorism in Central America is infamous, is right about Hugo Chavez in one respect. Chavez is a "threat" – he's the threat of an example to others that independence from Washington is actually possible.

President Chavez talks about building "socialism of the 21st Century" in Venezuela. To what extent do you think this project is different to the socialist experiences in the twentieth century?

In the time I spent with Chavez, what struck me was how unselfconsciously he demonstrated his own developing political awareness. I was intrigued to watch a man who is as much an educator as a leader. He will arrive at a school or a water project where local people are gathered and under his arm will be half a dozen books – Orwell, Chomsky, Dickens, Victor Hugo. He'll proceed to quote from them and relate them to the condition of his audience. What he's clearly doing is building ordinary people's confidence in themselves. At the same, he's building his own political confidence and his understanding of the exercise of power. I doubt that he began as a socialist when he won power in 1998 – which makes his political journey all the more interesting. Clearly, he was always a reformer who paid respect to his impoverished roots. Certainly, the Venezuelan economy today is not socialist; perhaps it's on the way to becoming something like the social economy of Britain under the reforming Attlee Labour government. He is probably what Europeans used to be proud to call themselves: a social democrat. Look, this game of labels is pretty pointless; he is an original and he inspires; so let's see where the Bolivarian project goes. True power for enduring change can only be sustained at the grassroots, and Chavez's strength is that he has inspired ordinary people to believe in alternatives to the old venal order. We have nothing like this spirit in Britain, where more and more people can't be bothered to vote any more. It's a lesson of hope, at the very least. *'The War on Democracy'* was released in UK cinemas on Friday 15 June.

For more info visit: [www.johnpilger.com](http://www.johnpilger.com) or [www.warondemocracy.net](http://www.warondemocracy.net)



# Letters

Dear Frontline Latin America,

In February 2007 I interviewed William Rodriguez who was on a speaking tour of Britain. William was for twenty years a janitor in the World Trade Centre in New York. On 11 September 2001 he was the last man pulled alive from the rubble. Decorated by George Bush for his heroism he was one of those victims of 9/11 who campaigned for a full enquiry. He raises many disturbing questions about that day which found him in the basement as the first plane hit. As he says "how could a jetliner hit 90 floors above and reduce a man's arms and face to a crisp in the basement below within seconds of impact?" (See 911keymaster.com).

*I understand that you are Puerto Rican?*

Correct. The history of Puerto Rico is simple. We were a Spanish colony and in 1898 we were taken over as war booty by the United States. We don't have the right to vote for the President although we have US citizenship. We are second class citizens.

*After 9/11 you helped to coordinate solidarity for victims of Hispanic origin?*

I campaigned for an amnesty so that those affected could get compensation. Federal compensation was only for those with US citizenship. The Department of Justice kept saying that there was no help for immigrants. We were able to get an amnesty. It was the first time in history that a US Federal programme gave help to non US citizens.

*I understand that you have recently been in Venezuela?*

I went to Venezuela in September 2006 and someone claiming to be from the US FBI came to my hotel and questioned the workers in the hotel. They called me downstairs and said "listen, this guy came and showed a badge and said he was an FBI agent". So I felt afraid enough that I went on television and said what had happened. Then I got a call from the Palace in Caracas and I met with Nicolas Maduro the former President of the National Assembly (he is now the Chancellor of Foreign Relations) and he said the reason why we have contacted you is because we believe your story, we know who comes in and out of the country and we have identified that FBI agent. So we are going to give you 5 bodyguards in order to protect you because we don't want anything to happen to you and for us to be blamed for it, because your government could do a hit on you and blame it on us.

*A senior representative of the Venezuelan government said to you that the US government might do a hit on you and the Venezuelan government offered to protect you?*

They felt that if they did a hit on me they would try to blame Venezuela for it.

*Are you aware that in Colombia the US and the government of Colombia have been involved in terrorist activities for a very long time?*

It's not a surprise. The whole of Latin America has gone to the left because of the policies which the United States has imposed. Here is just a fed up continent that wants to govern themselves but the US doesn't seem to agree.

Martin Summers

## Papers for all

*Jake Lagnado reports on historic migrant worker protest in London amidst increasing repression*

In the last issue of FLA we reported on the unionization of migrant workers in London, and the link between this and the march last October calling for 'Papers for All'. Since then, bank holiday Monday 7 May saw the largest ever participation of London's Latin American workforce in a political protest, as part of the union, religious and community groups that took part in the march for an 'amnesty' for undocumented workers called for by the faith-based civic alliance Strangers into Citizens. It was certainly a historic moment as migrant workers and their supporters filled Trafalgar Square.

The marchers raised a wide variety of slogans, but the official Strangers into Citizens proposal for an 'earned' amnesty is worryingly tied to a tightening of immigration controls. In this respect it is like the amnesty currently being proposed by President Bush in the US. Under Bush's proposal, these tighter controls must be in place well before an amnesty takes effect. Here in Britain, a Home Office Consultation Paper issued in May entitled *Prevention of Illegal Working* would be the bedrock of such increased controls.

In the Minister for Immigration's words, the Consultation Paper seeks support for measures designed to 'flush illegal migrants out'. These measures include forcing employers to carry out more checks through stiffer penalties and the appointment

of 1,200 Home Office 'enforcers'. Identity cards for foreign nationals in Britain, as well as biometric visas, are also proposed. It is predicted that these measures will leave thousands of undocumented workers even more open to blackmail by their superiors, or literally out on the street. If some version of the StC proposal does ever get passed it could well be tied to such measures.

Even by itself the limited amnesty proposed by Strangers into Citizens contains conditions which are highly problematic from the point of view of working class organization. The demand for an employer's reference would have workers who qualify scared to organize for fear of not getting the reference. The demand for fluent English is unrealistic given the ghettoized and time-consuming nature of low paid illegal work. And the 4 year residency rule would leave those with less time in the country open to greater persecution from the Home Office exploitation by employers.

There is certainly space then for a principled migrant rights movement which supports an amnesty without such exclusions, and brings together existing campaigns on different fronts.

Given the focus of the Home Office's current proposals on working, the strength of such a movement will depend to a great extent on the organization of migrant workers and the solidarity shown to them. Apart from initiatives like Justice for Cleaners, commented on in the last issue, there have been some further positive

signs.

To cite just two examples: the *Noone Is Illegal Trade Union Conference* in March heard how several union leaders had helped prevent the deportation of a Biafran asylum seeker ([www.noii.org.uk](http://www.noii.org.uk)). And *latino* cleaners at London's universities have started to link up with on-site unions covering faculty and staff. However, workplace raids and deportations are still not met with an adequate response.

The groups who came together to organize the 7 October march have therefore recently proposed a *Papers For All* coalition based on the original key principles of:

-Regularisation for all migrants. No one is illegal.

-The closure of all detention centres, and an end to all deportations

-Full labour rights for all workers, independently of their migration status.

-End the *apartheid* system of benefits, healthcare, housing and legal representation, and the policy of destitution for asylum seekers whose cases have been refused.

-Official recognition of rape as torture and persecution.

Members of such groups as Justice for Cleaners, RMT, No Borders, Latin American Workers Association, No Sweat and Latin American Community Association, who together organized October's march, now seek to build this coalition.

For further information and to get involved write to [migrants@aktivix.org](mailto:migrants@aktivix.org) (English) or [latin\\_americanworkers@hotmail.com](mailto:latin_americanworkers@hotmail.com) (Spanish).

### NICARAGUA SOLIDARITY CAMPAIGN



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## Tabaco Community Handicrafts

**Beautiful, brightly coloured hand-woven cotton shoulder-bags made by people from the village of Tabaco, displaced by the Cerrejon mine in Colombia.**

**Wording on bags commemorates the forced removals of 9 August 2001. Available in blue, turquoise, pink, brown or maroon. Large: £25 including p&p; small, £20 including p&p. All proceeds go to the people of Tabaco.**

**Also available: friendship bracelets (available in green, blue, yellow, red) 50p each; carved gourd-work £2 per item.**

**Cheques to; Colombia Solidarity Campaign, Box 8446, London N17 6NZ.**

**Inquiries [info@colombiasolidarity.org.uk](mailto:info@colombiasolidarity.org.uk)**





www.colombiasolidarity.org.uk

# Activities

## Branch Reports

### Oxford Solidarity

Following the contributions from José Julio Perez and Armando Perez (from the Tabaco Community Relocation Committee) at the day school on LatinaAmerica on 3 February, Oxford Trades Council voted to set up a Tabaco Appeal Fund to help buy a computer and improve communication. Oxon UNISON-Health branch immediately contributed £500 and published a report in its monthly magazine, The Organiser.

A delegation of Oxon trade unionists lobbied the New Labour Oxford East MP Andrew Smith about the very close links between the Colombian government and the paramilitaries and the fact that these made the current British support indefensible. Far from buying influence to improve the human rights situation, the UK government policy of "constructive engagement" only buys to run roughshod on local populations. The delegation documented our claims fully.

Disappointingly, when Andrew Smith wrote back forwarding the reply form the Foreign Office it became clear he had asked very generic questions. He also sent the response from Sir Mark Moody-Stuart, Chairman of Anglo American, who claims that the Tabaco villagers have been generously compensated, that "Tabaco was not an Afro-Colombian community", and that he did not believe that "there have been dispersals of any indigenous communities in the vicinity of the port in the last 20 years". We wait to hear back from the other joint owners of Cerrejón before giving Andrew Smith some more homework. Must do better.

Oxford campaigner Pete Bearder is currently in Colombia - read his blog *Colombian Social Movements Under Fire* at [http://www.bearder.com/peter/Dona\\_Velluti](http://www.bearder.com/peter/Dona_Velluti)

### Latin America Forum Bristol

Local activists from Bristol came together to organise their second Latin America Forum on 10 March, in a capacity event that attracted over 150 participants throughout the day. The after-party, featuring Cuban hip-hop groups Obsession and Los Paisanos & 16-piece salsa-creole band Orquesta Montpelier, was also a sell-out event raising over £1000 for Bristol LA solidarity groups.

Hosted by the University of Bristol, the LAF brought together local solidarity campaigns from Colombia, Venezuela, Cuba, Bolivia and Nicaragua alongside knowledgeable students and staff alike from the Universities of Bristol, Bath and the West of England for fifteen workshop sessions arranged in 3 themes.

Split into 3 workshop sessions, themed by 'Foreign Intervention and Local Resistance', 'Art, Culture and Identity' and 'Social Movements and Solidarity', participants had the opportunity to choose from 15 different sessions to join in discussions, ranging from popular resistance in Oaxaca (David Broder - No Sweat / Oaxaca Solidarity) to the violence of capitalism in Colombia (Lara Coleman - Espacio Bristol-Colombia).

Alfredo Toro-Hardy, the Ambassador for Venezuela to the UK, left us with the sense of diversity of the many struggles of Latin American movements. *Oliver Edwards*

# BP victims win out of court settlement

Matthew Stiles

A decade of struggle by the peasant communities of Zaragoza and Segovia in north-east Antioquia, Colombia, finally achieved some justice when BP agreed an out-of-court settlement with them in July 2006.

A multi-national consortium called OCENSA, led by BP, had constructed an oil pipeline in 1995 from the oilfields of Casanare to the port of Coveñas, passing through Zaragoza and Segovia.

The length of the pipeline is guarded by heavy military - and paramilitary presence, making it almost impossible to determine the scope of human and environmental problems caused by the pipeline.

It is known however that swathes of farmland were ruined in Zaragoza and Segovia and many inhabitants

displaced. Crucial water systems supplying the farms were also destroyed.

Campaigners were labelled guerrilla sympathisers and consequent threats, intimidation and violence - including the murder of Jhon Kennedy Morales, a farmer and community leader - led to dozens of families abandoning their lands.

With help from Colombia Solidarity Campaign, the inhabitants won support from London law firm Leigh Day and Co, who negotiated the settlement with BP.

Although BP admitted no liability the farmers were compensated by a calculation based on how much damage had been caused to their land, and the potential losses of earnings. This meant that those most in need of sizeable compensation received little

while those with larger farms and higher income received the most.

As a mark of community strength, some farmers joined together to provide financial help to the poorest, thereby partially alleviating the lack of compensation.

For others the struggle for compensation was worthwhile. The settlement enabled some peasant farmers to move from highly impoverished areas to better housing.

Despite this, however, few spoke of returning to Zaragoza. "In Zaragoza, the Army, Police and the Paramilitaries rule". In such circumstances it was simply too dangerous for them to return.

Therefore while the success of the campaign is evident, the underlying situation of immense social injustice remains as deep-rooted as ever.

# A continent awakes

John Smith

The Sheffield branches of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign and Venezuelan Information Centre (VIC) organised a highly successful day school on 17 March, attended by around 80 people. Two rounds of workshops examined the political situation within Cuba, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Nicaragua and Venezuela.

Plenary sessions hosted a wide-ranging discussion on the strategic challenges facing the revolutionary movements in Latin America and the solidarity campaigns in this country. There were two overlapping questions. One concerned the dynamics of the revolutionary processes in Venezuelan and Bolivia: can the existing state apparatuses in these countries be reformed or must they be overthrown? The other concerned the tasks of the solidarity movement in this country. Can they be expressed, as Francisco Dominguez (member of the national committees of the Cuba Solidarity and VIC) argued, to uniting the broadest layers

in opposition to resistance to political and military aggression by the United States, or must it also include, as Andy Higginbottom (secretary, Colombia Solidarity) argued, opposition to the economic exploitation of these countries by British and European transnational corporations?

It is in the nature of things that these and other questions could not be resolved. What's important is that they were asked. The great strength of the Sheffield dayschool was its deliberate inclusion of different opinions, providing a space for much-needed debate on the central questions.



Mayday in Colombia

Paul Haste

## FLA Office Appeal

This is the second edition of Frontline Latin America produced from our office.

The office will be used by the Campaign to improve service to our members and take forward long term projects. It costs us £5,000 per annum. If you want to make a contribution, why not help financially? As well as individual contributions we encourage supporters to hold fundraising events, cultural or anything that works.

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

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



The Colombia Solidarity Campaign is an anti-imperialist organisation, campaigning for a socially just and sustainable peace in Colombia based on respect for the human rights and diversity of the Colombian people. The Campaign actively opposes PLAN COLOMBIA. Our specific objectives are:

- to oppose any US, British or foreign military intervention, believing that this will only escalate the problems in Colombia
- to oppose the policy of fumigation, and work for a solution to the coca problem based on the real needs of the people
- to draw attention to the role that is played by Multinational Corporations in violating workers rights and exploiting both the people and the environment of Colombia

- to draw attention to the horrific human rights situation in Colombia, and that the overwhelming majority of atrocities can be attributed to the action of the army, police, Colombian state organisms and the paramilitaries, which together constitute a policy of Colombian state terror
- to oppose the criminalisation of social protest.

The Campaign recognises the collusion between the Colombian government, the armed forces and the paramilitary death squads, and calls for an end to the impunity that this creates.

We actively campaign through multiple strategies, and give a platform, coordination and support to Colombian organisations and individuals working for the above objectives.

We also support the right of Colombian refugees to asylum, and campaign actively to defend them.

## Colombia Groups

Bristol contact:  
[bristolcolombiasolidarity@gmail.com](mailto:bristolcolombiasolidarity@gmail.com)

Liverpool contact:  
[colsol.liverpool@bopenworld.com](mailto:colsol.liverpool@bopenworld.com)

London contact:  
[info@colombiasolidarity.org.uk](mailto:info@colombiasolidarity.org.uk)

Oxford Solidarity for Colombia:  
[ox\\_colombiasolidarity@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:ox_colombiasolidarity@hotmail.co.uk)

For activities in other parts of the country, contact:

[info@colombiasolidarity.org.uk](mailto:info@colombiasolidarity.org.uk)















FRONTLINE  
LATIN AMERICA



# La verdad va saliendo

## flote

Normalmente es mejor no hacer personal el debate político, pero en el caso de Alvaro Uribe Vélez se centra un proyecto político entero, en el que uno de los elementos es remodelar los escudrones de muerte paramilitares, desplazándolos de sus zonas de control tradicional a las ciudades para modernizar la "guerra sucia" en áreas urbanas.

Las aún limitadas confesiones de los comandantes de las AUC –Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, han escandalizado a la opinión pública internacional: masacres a pedido, con todos los entes del establecimiento profundamente implicados.

Cada semana las noticias sobre Colombia toman un nuevo y cada vez más escandaloso giro. Uribe intenta hacer toda clase de trucos para salvarse a sí mismo y a su séquito de la derrota. Pese a su mano dura, Uribe empieza ahora a parecer deseperado, para evitar "los peligros de la verdad para la institucionalidad".

Desde luego a Uribe le importa el escándalo, no tanto por las víctimas torturadas y decapitadas; le importa por los suyos, por sus amigos de las fuerzas armadas, sus aliados políticos y las élites económicas que lo patrocinan. Con ese ambiente, las revelaciones de los políticos acusados por vínculos paramilitares son muy inconvenientes para él, así que el presidente está intentando mantener la situación –y la legislación– para dejarlos

ellos están buscando la oportunidad de atacar a Bush y ven a Uribe como su presidente favorito. Los demócratas se han vuelto mucho más sensibles a las acusaciones de violaciones de derechos humanos en Colombia, ellos saben que los Estados Unidos están totalmente implicados en la política de Uribe y que no puede ser defendida como un modelo de democracia.

Cada vez más, a Uribe está más desprestigiado en los Estados Unidos y, aun así, sigue siendo presente como un demócrata por políticos y sectores dominantes del Reino Unido y Europa. Eso es una vergüenza. Y solo porque se preocupan más por las inversiones de ganancias enormes que por los derechos humanos. Es nuestra responsabilidad en la campaña cambiar esto, revelar la horrible verdad y aislar a Uribe y confrontar a sus aliados por su responsabilidad en los asesinatos.

Al cierre del periódico, The Guardian acaba de publicar un suplemento de ocho páginas titulado Inside Colombia: A Changing Landscape –Colombia desde adentro: Un Paisaje en Transformación–, el cual da una imagen desde la perspectiva de las posibilidades comerciales sin tratar la realidad de la mayoría de colombianos y colombianas. Tal reportaje poco crítico resalta la importancia de lograr una amplia distribución de Frontline Latin America para informar desde la mirada de los movimientos sociales y las experiencias de la gente colombiana.

El escándalo verdadero es que, increíblemente, a la clase dominante colombiana no le había importado mucho que los asesinos paramilitares y sus partidarios hubieran cometido actos sanguinarios, porque todos sabían que de cualquier forma las atrocidades continuarían y que el establecimiento les daría vía libre. Aunque el mismo Uribe ha tratado de orquestar cuidadosamente el encubrimiento de los hechos, es imposible negar la responsabilidad colectiva. Cada quien ha tenido culpa en lo que ha pasado y legalmente es necesario probar esas responsabilidades individuales. Pero no es un secreto que ha habido una conspiración colectiva, una crueldad enraizada en la conciencia de clase de los ricos, quienes se han encargado, por seis décadas, del uso aterrador, calculado y sistemático de la violencia para no permitir de ninguna manera que la izquierda gobierne y que incluso no tenga viabilidad como alternativa política. El engaño es que la violencia criminal ha perpetrado la política, mientras se conserva la apariencia de una democracia representativa.

La "desmovilización" paramilitar iba a ser, en cualquier caso, una operación riesgosa, pero Uribe calculaba que con el total apoyo de George W. Bush, podría llevarla a cabo. Bush, sin embargo, ahora es un presidente débil, por lo tanto aquello que fuera una vez el punto fuerte de Uribe, se ha convertido en su debilidad. En Washington se controlado por los demócratas y el congreso es controlado por los demócratas y

firmas de lobby por un costo de 100 millones de dólares por mes, y pesar del agitado nombramiento de dos ministros afrodescendientes, Uribe ha fallado en su carrera por persuadir al Partido Demócrata estadounidense. Los Demócratas están de acuerdo en bloquear la ratificación del Tratado de Libre Comercio, y han cortado un 30 % de la ayuda militar del Plan Colombia.

Uribe sigue luchando por su sobrevivencia política, y como su base se desintegra con las amenazas de ir a la cárcel, él ha hecho una doble maniobra. La primera movida es una sorpresa, la liberación de 400 guerrilleros de las FARC que estaban encarcelados e incluso de Rodrigo Granda, quien se reconoce como "el embajador" de las FARC. Granda fue puesto en libertad a petición del presidente francés Sarkozy, con miras a asegurar la liberación de la franco-colombiana Ingrid Betancourt, una de las secuestradas de las FARC. Esta jugada le dio a Uribe elogios de los líderes del G-8 reunidos en Rostock, pero probablemente

no reveló más del 5 por ciento de sus crímenes. En otras palabras, Mancozo está guardando 'ases bajo la manga', fácilmente diciendo que dará más nombres si eso lo ayuda a recibir mejores beneficios. Ya ha acusado al vice-presidente Francisco Santos, de hacer un acuerdo para asentar los paramilitares en Bogotá, aunque Santos se negó tajantemente. La Fiscalía General entregó a la Corte Suprema un documento en el que aparecía un pacto secreto firmado en Santa Fe de Ralito por los altos mandos de las AUC y 32 políticos, comprometéndose a apoyar el proyecto político de los paramilitares. Un estudio revela que la expansión paramilitar había alcanzado 223 municipios para 2002. Desde este punto, "los nuevos grupos que se formaron, eligieron una tercera parte del Congreso en 2002, montaron amas de 250 alcaldes en 2005, e incrementaron su representación parlamentaria en 2006".

La Corte Suprema de Justicia tiene responsabilidad para indagar y juzgar a miembros del congreso y oficiales de Richard Nixon, o sea, viene de



