

Report

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ECUADOR: The Rise of Rafael Correa

By *Nikolas Kozloff*, research fellow
Council on Hemispheric Affairs

Ed. Note: *In a most surprising and important victory, Rafael Correa was sworn in as president of Ecuador on January 15, 2007. He came from behind, having lost in the first round to banana magnate Alvaro Noboa, the richest man in Ecuador. Correa won with 58% of the votes to Noboa's 43%. The article is excerpted. MITF's first delegation to Ecuador organized by Global Exchange departs February 28 and will report on its findings.*

A leftist candidate in Ecuador has handily won his country's presidential election. He will preside over Ecuador for a four-year term. It is yet another feather in the cap for Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, who had long cultivated the aspiring leader's support. What's more, it's a stinging blow

against the Bush administration which now must confront a much more unenviable political milieu in the region. Ecuador now joins other left leaning regimes such as Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia, Nicaragua and Chile, all of which are sympathetic to Chavez.

Bush cannot dismiss the Correa victory as inconsequential: Ecuador is currently the second largest South American exporter of crude oil to the US. The small Andean country hosts the only US military air base in South America. 400 troops are regularly stationed there. Correa opposes an extension of the US lease at the air base in Manta, which serves as a staging ground for drug surveillance flights. The US lease expires in 2009. "If they want," Correa has said ironically, "we won't close the base in 2009, but the United States would have to allow us to have an Ecuadorian base in Miami in return."

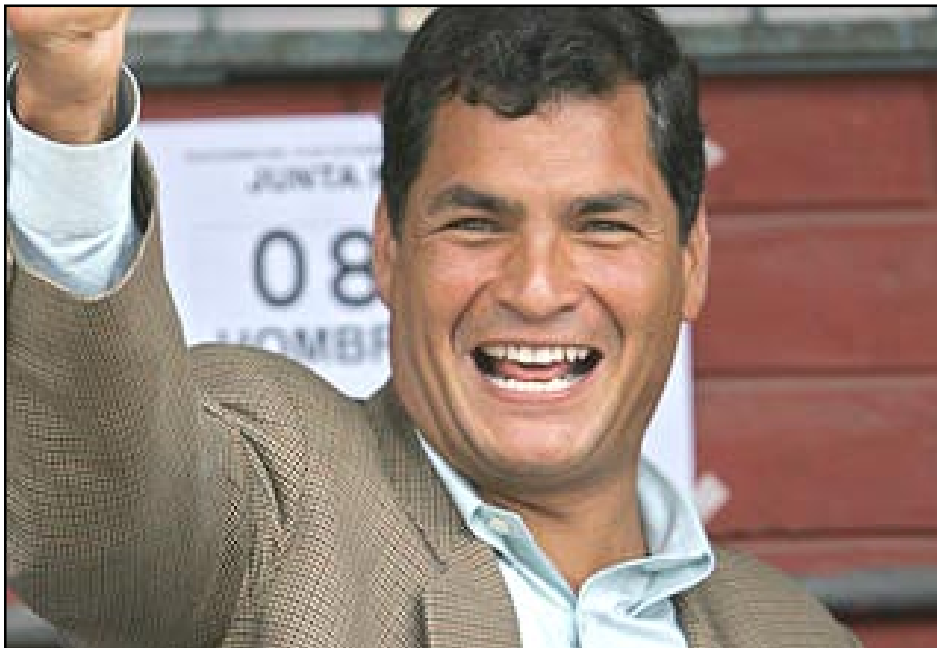
It's no secret that Correa and Chavez

have a personal rapport. During a short stint in 2005 as finance minister under the regime of Alfredo Palacio, Correa brokered a \$300 million loan from Chavez. As a result of his diplomacy, Correa was forced out of the government. Allegedly, Correa pursued the loan deal behind Palacio's back. He later visited Chavez' home state of Barinas, where he met with the Venezuelan leader and spent the night with Chavez' parents. "It is necessary to overcome all the fallacies of neoliberalism," Correa has declared. Borrowing one of Chavez' favorite slogans, Correa says he also supports so-called "socialism for the twenty first century."

Correa does not come from a military background but grew up in a middle class family; the young politician dresses impeccably. He got his doctorate in economics from the University of Illinois and is a follower of left wing economist and Nobel Prize winner Joseph Stiglitz. To his credit, Correa spent a year volunteering in a highland town called Zumbahua and speaks Quichua, an indigenous language. Natives from Zumbahua remember Correa as a man who walked two or three hours to remote villages in a poncho and broken shoes to give classes.

Correa pursued an amusing campaign. During rallies, he would bounce on stage to his campaign anthem, set to the tune of

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*The new president of Ecuador, Rafael Correa
Photo: semana.com*

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Twisted Sister's, "We're Not Going to Take It." As the music blared, Correa would break out a brown leather belt, which he would flex along to the music. For Correa, the belt became the chief slogan of his campaign: "Dale Correa." In Spanish, the phrase means, "Give Them the Belt." Correa promised to use that belt to whip Ecuador's politicians into shape.

Correa campaigned on pledges to prioritize social spending over repaying debt. He has even stated that the Andean country might want to default. He also declared that he would renegotiate contracts with foreign oil producers doing business in the country. Correa says he wants to increase funds for the poor and opposes a free trade deal with the U.S. "We are not against the international economy," Correa has stated, "but we will not negotiate a treaty under unequal terms with the United States."

Correa has nothing but contempt for George Bush. When he was recently asked about Chavez's "devil" diatribe against the U.S. president at the United Nations, Correa remarked amusingly, "Calling Bush the devil offends the devil. Bush is a tremendously dimwitted President who has done great damage to the world" (after he was defeated by Noboa in the first round of voting Correa toned down his rhetoric, stating that his comments about Bush were "imprudent" and that Ecuador would like to continue its strong ties to the United States).

Indians, who account for 40% of Ecuador's population of 13 million, are a potent political force in the country. Correa has capitalized on indigenous support. He represented the Alianza

Pais, a coalition that garnered the support of indigenous and social movements, which brought down the government of Lucio Gutierrez in April 2005. Ecuadorian Indians have long feared that their traditional lands were being exploited to serve a rapacious United States intent on corporate expansion. US missionaries have fueled the resentment. According to indigenous activists, the missionaries hastened the penetration of US corporations. A key example, according to Huaorani Indians, was the petroleum industry that worked with the missionaries to open up traditional lands. Ecuador's indigenous peoples, called for the expulsion of North American missionaries from their country.

CONAIE, Ecuador's indigenous federation endorses many of Chavez's positions such as an end to U.S. militarization in the region and an end to neoliberal economic policies. CONAIE, like Rafael Correa, wants Ecuador to terminate the U.S. lease at the Manta military base. CONAIE, as well as the movement's political wing Patchakutik, support Chavez. CONAIE in fact has condemned the "fascist" opposition in Venezuela and derided US interventionism.

With a Correa administration in place, Chavez will be in an advantageous position to advance his plans for hemispheric energy integration. Ecuador's state oil company Petroecuador has been involved in longstanding negotiations with Venezuela to refine its crude. Ecuador is also interested in acquiring Venezuelan diesel and gasoline to cover its own internal demand. Ecuador's growing energy ties with Venezuela have been applauded by important figures such as Luis Macas, long associated with the CONAIE.

The dilemma for Ecuador is that, while oil represents about a quarter of the country's GDP, many disadvantaged communities have been unhappy with development. The northeastern section of Ecuador, the "Oriente," has long been the scene of serious social unrest. In 1992, North American as well as Ecuadorian environmental groups were concerned about Maxus Corporation, a Texas-based energy company. The influential company had the support of the government, the press, and North American Protestant missionaries. The Huaorani traveled to Quito, where they car-

ried out a protest in front of Maxus headquarters. The Indians demanded that Maxus halt its construction of a highway in block 16, which fell in their traditional homeland. Unrest continued.

In 2002, the government declared a state of emergency following protests in Sucumbios and Orellana provinces. Protesters hit the streets, demanding greater investment in their communities. Indigenous peoples in the area had long felt that they had not adequately shared in the benefits of oil development. The military used tear gas to break up protests, which blocked oil wells. In August 2005 the disturbances continued, with an oil strike hitting Orellana and Sucumbios. At that time, Chavez came to the aid of Ecuadorian president Alfredo Palacios by agreeing to send Venezuelan crude to the Andean nation. At the time, Chavez expressed sympathy with Ecuador "because we (Venezuela) have already passed through this type of thing with the oil sabotage (the oil lock out in 2002-3 encouraged by the Venezuelan opposition)."

In early 2006, Petroecuador was forced to suspend exports when protesters, unhappy about longstanding environmental damage, demanded the departure of U.S. oil company Oxy and took over a pumping station vital to the functioning of a pipeline. Protesters, led by local politicians from the Amazon province of Napo, demanded that the government pay them funds for infrastructure projects in local communities. In March, the government put three provinces under military control when workers initiated a strike for unpaid wages and improved working conditions. At one point, the government declared a state of emergency in Napo, when protesters demanded that the oil companies invest more of their profits in the area.

In May 2006, Petroecuador took over oil wells belonging to Los Angeles based Oxy's block 15 oil concession. Correa's government wants Venezuela's state oil company to refine 75% of the 100,000 barrels per day within the old concession. Venezuela can now count on Correa's support as well as Ecuador's indigenous movements.

Source: *Counterpunch.org*, November 27, 2006; "The Rise of Rafael Correa: Ecuador and the Contradictions of Chavismo."

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BOLIVIA: One Year Later

By Jim Shultz, Democracy Center,
Cochabamba Bolivia

Introduction by Dale Sorensen, MITF

In October 2006, MITF and SOA Watch teamed up to lead a delegation to Bolivia. Maryknoll lay missionaries, who live and work with the poor, organized the itinerary. We covered much territory in terms of history, culture, politics and real miles. We traveled from the lowland jungle to high in the Andes. The group met with coca-growers in the Chapare region, learning much about the spiritual and cultural uses of coca and the new law that allows growers a legal limit of land for production. It was the militant and largely indigenous coca growers who formed the MAS (Movement Towards Socialism) into a political party that eventually succeeded in getting Evo Morales elected president.

At 13,000 feet elevation we visited the Huanuni mine in Oruro where 16 miners had recently been killed in a struggle between two factions of mine workers. Resolution was accomplished when the government made all the miners state employees. The region spawned a vibrant political movement when thousands of unionized miners and their families had to emigrate after neoliberal policies resulted in a miners strike (1986) and a huge lay off of workers. Many moved to the Chapare and became coca-growers, setting up peasant trade unions. Others moved to El Alto/La Paz and that became a key place for struggle. Recently, the social movement of El Alto forced the corrupt multinational French water company Suez out, replacing it with a municipal water company.

Perhaps the highpoint of our trip was the meeting with Casimira Rodriguez, the new Minister of Justice. As a Quechua woman she still wears her traditional dress that includes a wide pleated velvet skirt that falls below her knees and a short sleeve lace blouse. As a young girl she worked as a domestic servant; later, organizing domestic workers, she became a union leader. In 1985 she founded the local union of domestic workers in Cochabamba and 20 years later the national federation of domestic workers based in La Paz. Despite her successes she told how she struggles with sexism and racism every day. She has no for-



Casimira Rodriguez, Minister of Justice
Photo: Rae Levine

mal legal training and is challenged by those with more formal educations. Despite this, she intends to continue working for a judicial system that will work for all Bolivians not just the privileged elites. We also met with the author in his Cochabamba office. Here is his assessment...

It really was a dramatic and hopeful beginning that cold January weekend a year ago when Bolivia got a new president. Atop thousand-year-old, pre-Inca ruins at Tiahuanaco, Evo Morales stood dressed in colorful indigenous vestiges that took museum curators to assemble. In a ceremony that hadn't been held in 500 years, he received a blessing of his powers from leaders of the indigenous communities of Bolivia's highlands. His formal inauguration before the Bolivian Congress the next day drew nearly a dozen heads of state, from Chile to Slovenia.

In the year since, Bolivia has become a global travel destination for journalists, filmmakers and political seekers who think they might find some kind of new democracy in the making. If they look with open eyes they can see close-up some hard lessons about the challenge of converting people's hopes into political reality.

When Morales was elected in December 2006, with a historic majority that was twice that of any president in decades, he had a clear mandate from the Bolivian people to do two things. The first was to reverse, full-speed, 20 years of market-driven economic reforms that had privatized much of the

nation's resources – from water to gas – into foreign corporate hands. The second was to initiate a Constituent Assembly to rewrite the nation's constitution and its most fundamental political rules.

Last May 1, on International Workers' Day, Morales stepped out onto the balcony of the Presidential Palace in La Paz – just across from where a predecessor had been hung to death from a lamppost sixty years before – to deliver on promise number one. Before a massive crowd cheering from below, Morales announced a presidential decree “nationalizing” the vast oil and gas reserves that had been privatized into the hands of corporations like Enron a decade before. “For more than 500 years, our resources have been pillaged,” Morales declared. “This has to end now.” Then, in a grand gesture that was pure domestic political photo-op, Morales sent Bolivian troops to the nation's gas fields to “protect” them.

Foreign media declared that Bolivia had “seized” the assets of foreign companies. Others declared that Morales had “been conned by Castro and Chavez.” From afar it all looked pretty radical. But closer up the plan was mostly moderate stuff: buying back a majority stake in the pieces of the energy industry that Bolivia sold off far too cheaply in the 1990s; upping taxes on foreign oil companies; and renegotiating contracts to get fair prices for the nation's wealth under the ground. Confiscation and seizure it wasn't.

Nor has it proven easy. Morales has struggled, and stumbled, in his effort to put together the cash needed to get the government back into the energy business and to get a solid team of competent and honest people in place to manage it all. Negotiations with foreign firms have been difficult. He also faces fiery opposition from the country's eastern states where the gas and oil resides and where residents want to keep a big share of the wealth that comes from it. Nevertheless, gas revenue to the public treasury is up and, albeit slowly, things are changing.

Morales' efforts to deliver on promise number two, the Constituent Assembly, have been no less turbulent. Last July's election to pick delegates to that Assembly was swept by Evo and the MAS party with 55% of the vote, twice that of his nearest rival. But 55% is not two thirds, and two thirds is the num-

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ber of votes that MAS agreed would be required for the Assembly to act, when it negotiated the deal last year with opponents to start the process.

When MAS and its opposition – the latter, none too keen on rewriting the constitution to begin with – started stalling out, even on procedural issues. MAS declared that only the final proposal needed two thirds and set about to run things with its simple majority. MAS opponents, especially those same civic groups from the oil-rich east, cried “power grab” and began organizing the kinds of mass protests and general strikes that Morales used to help organize against his predecessors.

Gas and the Constituent Assembly dominated Bolivian politics during Evo’s first year in power and they are likely to dominate his second year as well. But those issues were clearly not the only points of national combustion last year. A Morales land reform decree – aimed at giving titles and a bit of aid to some of the country’s millions of landless peasants – sparked fear among both big landowners, who could be affected, and small ones who will never be.

In September, Bolivian police killed two coca growers during an eradication operation, even as Morales seeks to open up foreign markets for products made with the green leaf he held aloft during his speech before the UN General Assembly. In October, rival groups of miners at the country’s largest tin deposit went to war against each other with thrown sticks of dynamite, leaving 16 dead.

Watching all this and interpreting it is tricky work. Ex-military leaders talk of possible “civil war.” Morales allies warn of a potential “coup.” Journalists call to ask me if Bolivia will suffer a political meltdown.

Anyone who thought that the transformation of political power underway here would be quiet or easy was not paying attention. High expectations among people used to having low ones, combined with the determination by others to protect long-standing privilege, are an explosive mix.

And to be honest, sometimes Morales makes things harder than he needs to. When he sent his Vice President, Alvaro Garcia Linera, to Washington to lobby for a renewed trade pact on textiles, Evo undermined the trip with announcements at home that the US was launching a conspiracy against him. His passionate declarations

about indigenous power “that will last 500 years” leaves those who don’t claim Aymara, Quechua, Uru and Guarani roots wondering what place they have in the new Bolivia.

Bolivia spent 2006 at a crossroads and it heads into 2007 still there. The Bolivian elite, which has held power for decades, sees the Morales presidency, not as a turn of history, but as someone else getting their turn, just as the old parties have swapped power for decades, always following the same basic economic and political course. Morales and his backers see things a lot differently. They see this moment in Bolivia as the equivalent of Nelson Mandela and the ANC taking over the reins in South Africa in 1994 – a new constitution, a new weave of power, a new nation.

After Evo’s first year in office his critics on the left, who want deeper change and

want it faster, are more pessimistic than they were that January morning when Morales stood at Tiahuanaco. His conservative opposition is more openly hostile than it was a year ago and it is digging in for battle. The majority of Bolivians in the middle are getting more impatient for change and it shows in Morales’ declining poll numbers.

Yes, governing is harder than some of those doing it here thought it would be, and governing Bolivia is especially hard. But this nation is clearly on a very different course than it was before Morales took power, enough to give real hope still to many who have waited toiling on the nation’s margins for a very long time.

Source: “*A Year of Evo: Challenges of Governing a Revolution*,” *Democracy Center’s Blog From Bolivia*; issue one 2007, “*jallalla bolivia*.”; www.democracyctr.org

Plan Colombia Evaluated

By Hector Mondragón

Ed. Note: *The author is a Colombian trained economist who has spent the last 35 years as a human rights worker in Colombia. Article excerpted.*

What is the primary objective of Plan Colombia? The plan established under the Clinton administration in 1999 had as its primary stated objective to end drug trafficking in Colombia. Later on, though not acknowledged by Washington, the plan had a further objective of defeating the guerrilla movement. The Bush administration’s principal objective has been to explicitly fuse the drug war with the anti-guerrilla struggle and identify the objective as combating “narcoterrorism.” Washington so far has spent \$4.7 billion on Plan Colombia; and if, you include the expenditures of USAID (US Agency for International Development) in that total, it reaches \$7.7 billion. But despite this investment, the US-supported government of Alvaro Uribe has defeated neither the drug traffickers nor the guerrilla movement.

Never before have drug traffickers had so much power in Colombia. Today they have penetrated the stock market, laundered their drug money in the form of treasury bonds and gained a foothold in the electoral process. And although those in

Uribe’s party who have been publicly identified as drug lords were purged, they created their own parallel pro-Uribe parties and have gotten themselves elected to Congress. This is not to say anything of those drug lords who have not been publicly identified and who remain on Uribe’s party’s lists.

In the past drug traffickers financed electoral campaigns from the shadows, financing publicity and paying for hotels and travel. This was a relatively small-scale operation. Today, however, they openly finance entire electoral campaigns. The government’s own statistics acknowledge that in 2005, \$3 billion flowed through Colombia, with no record of how the money entered the country. No one planted money seeds and grew the \$3 billion; this is just a portion of the billions of dollars and euros that the paramilitaries have laundered. Why does Washington, with its moral crusade, the War on Drugs, permit this? Because Colombia serves as its base for protecting US corporate interests and for attacking the democratic processes taking place in neighboring countries that “threaten” those interests.

This is the reality of US intervention in Colombia. Colombia is becoming an external battleground, in order to secure the country as a base of operations for controlling Ecuador, Venezuela and possibly even Peru, Brazil and Bolivia.

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OAXACA: Repression Can't Stop The People

By Carolina Dutton, MITF

Ed. Note: For more background on the popular movement in Oaxaca, see front page of the Fall 2006 MITF Report on our website; www.mitfamericas.org. MITF is planning a solidarity delegation to Oaxaca in July.

We at MITF have been following events in Oaxaca with hope and fear. Hope because it is the most inspiring and best organized popular movement in recent years. Fear because it recently suffered massive and violent repression by federal, state and paramilitary forces in an all-out effort to destroy the movement.

The stranglehold that the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) held over Mexico for 70 years was broken at the federal level with the election of Vicente Fox of the PAN (National Action Party) in 2000. Oaxaca however has remained in the hands of the "dinosaur PRI" which has maintained its power by corruption, electoral fraud, repression and assassination of opposition leaders, and has especially targeted social movements in the countryside.

The population of Oaxaca is 70% indigenous and the poverty rate is 75%, the second highest in Mexico, surpassed only by

Chiapas. There is no government investment in the countryside except for mega projects connected to Plan Puebla Panama (PPP), such as hydroelectric dams, reservoirs for water privatization, mines, maquiladoras, eucalyptus plantations, and super-highways and rails through the Isthmus to move products and resources between the Gulf and the Pacific. This plan exacerbates poverty and benefits only the ruling elite.

In mid December I joined an emergency delegation to Oaxaca organized by Rights Action and the Oaxaca Solidarity Network to meet with community-based organizations that make up the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO).

We arrived in Oaxaca City on December 16, the day that 43 people, detained on November 25 and held 21 days, were released. On December 17 a women's march greeted them with bouquets of flowers after their 16-hour bus ride from the prison in the state of Nayarit. Many expressed their determination to continue the struggle to oust the governor of the state, Ulises Ruiz Ortiz (URO), and to fight to free the remaining prisoners. Among those released were many teachers. They told us that there had been no communication with friends and families or between fellow pris-

oners. When their names were called they assumed others would soon follow, but almost 100 prisoners still remain in prison. Many are *campesinos* and workers without unions or resources to back them up. The first priority was to work for the release of their companions.

The next day the released prisoners began to arrive at the convent where we were staying. Often, as they recounted their stories in detail, they broke into tears. Testimonies lasted from one to two hours each. People needed to talk and we wanted to listen. We heard strikingly similar details from each person, leading us to believe that the police were trained to use systematic techniques of psychological and physical torture.

Even after the federal preventive police (PFP) moved in and expelled the APPO from the city center on October 27, the people mobilized. The most massive repression took place on November 25 during the seventh mega march. The police surrounded entire blocks throwing tear gas and leaving people no way out. People who were only bystanders were beaten and detained. Over 150 people were arrested that day. Many disappeared for hours or days while they were threatened and tortured until they were officially jailed. People were hunted in their homes and teachers were arrested in their classrooms. Many are still in hiding. Some are still disappeared.

People were beaten and thrown on top of each other in the back of trucks with police kicking them if they raised their heads or moved. They could not see or hardly breathe and were lying in blood for hours. There was no opportunity to go to the bathroom so people defecated and vomited right there. Some were taken to a military base where they were told they would die. Many were led to believe they would be thrown out of helicopters. They were threatened with death and torture if they did not give names, sign confessions or accuse others for crimes they did not commit.

Pedro Garcia spoke to us on the morning of December 18. He is a student at the autonomous university in Oaxaca and a broadcaster for Radio Universidad. Masked men kidnapped Pedro and four others as they left the university on October 1: They



December 17, women's march in Oaxaca

Photo: Carolina Dutton

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M E X I C O

were shot at, captured, tied up, blindfolded, thrown in the back of a pick-up truck and taken to a military base. Pedro was beaten and kicked severely. He was told his friends had told on him and that his family and girlfriend would be hurt if he did not write a letter accusing others of robbing buses and burning cars. He was accused of carrying cocaine and a gun. When he denied these charges he was again beaten and released. On the evening of December 18 Pedro and two others were kidnapped again after leaving an APPO meeting. They disappeared for three hours and were then left on the side of the road severely beaten, sending an intimidating message to those continuing to organize.

Bulmero Martinez Hernandez is the principal of a school for boys and a member of the teacher's union. He was kidnapped by federal Police on November 2 and thrown in a van with others. He was made to sleep in the mud and woke with a gun to his head and told he was going to die. They were transported to a prison in a helicopter but were told they would be thrown out over the sea. Fortunately once in prison Bulmero received better treatment because two of the guards were his former students. It is said that in Oaxaca every family has at least one teacher, policeman or prison guard, these being the available jobs.

The police swept up a widow in her 50s as she left work on November 25. She didn't even know what the APPO was. The police tied her up and threw her in a pile of women in the Zocalo. After 21 days in prison she says that she has suffered so much at the hands of the government that she wants to do whatever she can to get rid of URO so that her grandchildren will not suffer as she did. She had never gone to a demonstration before but now she will. She is determined to help the women still in prison, some of whom are very poor and make their living weaving straw fans.

We traveled four hours to the town of

Tlaxiaco in the Mixteca region of Oaxaca, one of the poorest regions in the state. Here we spoke with teachers, human rights workers, indigenous women, and *campesinos*. There is little income in the communities because of the low price of coffee. The forests are being exploited by *caciques* (local PRI bosses). There are 300 widows as a result of agrarian conflicts that the government has fomented in the region. Approximately 60 - 70% of the population has migrated. The mass migration of men has increased violence against women, especially domestic violence when some of the men return.

An eloquent *campesino* activist told us: "Those of us working to preserve the forests have received death treats. The



*Released prisoner is greeted with flowers.
Photo: Carolina Dutton*

forests are the lungs of the Mixteca. They do not just belong to us. They want to dam the Green River and sell the energy to Central America. They want PPP here. That's why Felipe Calderon wants URO here. They want to take our resources and our dreams from us. They could kill us at any moment but ours is a just struggle. Many people in the countryside no longer believe that a peaceful solution is possible. When Bishop Lona Reyes came to visit to ask what people need, people said they needed weapons."

But those who participate in the APPO and the marches are still seeking a peaceful solution. About 600 people went

from Tlaxiaco to Oaxaca City for the fourth mega march at the end of October. Many never arrived because they were intercepted on the highway by the PFP and forced to get off the buses. People were forced into a cornfield at gunpoint, beaten and kicked and told they would be killed. One man testified that the police dressed him up like a Christmas tree with Molotov cocktails and weapons and took photos of him.

The streets of Oaxaca City seem almost normal if you ignore the complete lack of tourists at Christmas, the people painting over graffiti with free paint provided by the government, police barricading the Zocalo, and the loudspeaker thanking them for providing security. Security for whom?

On December 22 we accompanied the APPO as they took the streets again. Liberated prisoners and the families of those still in jail, disappeared, or killed headed the march. The APPO's demands are the release of the prisoners, the PFP out of Oaxaca, and the ousting of URO. Thousands marched peacefully with uplifted spirits to give the message that despite the repression the APPO is alive and well and continues the struggle. They promised that if their demands were not met they would take to the streets again in January, and they have. On January

10 they marched again, 10,000 strong. Clearly, the people of Oaxaca have not been stopped. •

**Summer
Delegations**
Oaxaca - July 7-15
Chiapas - July 16-23
info: contact MITF

Confused About Venezuela?

By Eva Golinger, author of "The Chávez Code"

Ed. Note: *The author wrote this article before the Venezuelan National Assembly approved an enabling law on January 18 that allows President Chávez to pass economic reforms by decree for a period of 18 months. While such laws are not uncommon in Latin America and permitted by the Venezuelan constitution (at least two former presidents had this kind of "fast track" authority) one can expect the US mainstream media to soon launch a virulent attack on Chávez accusing him of "ruling by decree."*

Over the past few days, major newspapers in the United States, such as the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Los Angeles Times and the Wall Street Journal, have published editorials harshly criticizing recent declarations and decisions made by re-elected President Hugo Chávez and his cabinet. A large percentage of the content of these editorials, which reflect the viewpoints of the newspapers, is based on a distortion and misconception of new policies being implemented in Venezuela and the overall way government is functioning.

In the Washington Post's "Venezuela's Leap Backward" published on January 10, the editorial board intentionally and mistakenly portrays the recent presidential elections this past December in Venezuela as illegitimate and unfair. By falsely claiming that Chávez conducted a "one-sided campaign that left a majority of Venezuelans believing they might be punished if they did not cast their ballots for him," the Post wants its readers to think Venezuelans who voted for Chávez did so under duress and fear.

Nothing could be further from the truth. A majority of Venezuelans publicly expresses

its sincere admiration and approval of President Chávez in an open and fearless way on a daily basis in this country. Most Venezuelans believe Chávez is the best president the nation has ever had, and statistics prove that his government has built more bridges, railroads, hospitals, clinics, universities, schools, highways and houses than any administration in the past.

The Post editorial also attempts to downplay the "only 7 million votes" Chávez received, not mentioning that those seven million votes represent more than 63% of total votes—a landslide victory to the opposition candidate's 37%—and that no president in Venezuelan history has ever, ever received such a large number of votes in an election.

The New York Times editorial, also published on January 10, attacks a recent

statements and control over a majority of Internet service as well. Furthermore, the CANTV was privatized only in 1991, during the second non-consecutive term of Carlos Andrés Pérez—a president later impeached for corruption who implemented a series of privatization measures, despite having run for office on a non-privatization platform just three years before.

In fact, as soon as Carlos Andrés Pérez won office in 1988 after convincing the Venezuelan people he would not permit "neoliberalism" on Venezuelan shores, he immediately began to announce the privatization of several national industries, including telecommunications, education and the medical and petroleum sectors. This deception led to massive anti-privatization protests in February 1989, during which the government ordered the armed forces to "open-fire" on the demonstrators and arrest and torture those not killed. The result was the "Caracazo," a tragic scar on contemporary Venezuelan history that left more than 3,000 dead in mass gravesites and thousands more injured and detained.

The re-nationalizing of Venezuela's one landline phone company is a strategic necessity and an anti-monopoly measure essential to ensure that Venezuelans have access to telecommunications service. The new Minister of Telecommunications, Jesse Chacón, announced that any company "nationalized" will be fully compensated for its shares and property at market value.

The third issue put forth in the editorials is the recent announcement by President Chávez that the license of private television station RCTV to operate on the public airwaves is up for review in May 2007 and most likely will not be renewed. The government has based its denial of the license renewal on RCTV's lack of



Photo: Venpres

Hugo Chávez obtained a big electoral victory over the right-wing candidate Manuel Rosales, winning in all the states, even the state where Rosales is governor. In this fourth consecutive vote for the renewal of his presidency, Chávez received the highest percentage of votes over any of the previous elections.

statement made by President Chávez regarding the nationalization of one telephone company, CANTV, and an electric company. However, the Times doesn't explain that the CANTV is the only non-cellular telephone company in the country, giving it a complete monopoly on national landline telecommuni-

communications and control over a majority of Internet service as well. Furthermore, the CANTV was privatized only in 1991, during the second non-consecutive term of Carlos Andrés Pérez—a president later impeached for corruption who implemented a series of privatization measures, despite having run for office on a non-privatization platform just three years before.

continued on page 8

Disaster in Haiti

By John Maxwell, veteran Jamaican journalist

Ed. Note: *The author wrote this article to fellow Jamaicans after the latest UN massacre in Haiti. In the early morning of Friday, December 22nd, 400 Brazilian-led UN occupation troops in armored vehicles carried out a massive assault on the people of Cité Soleil, laying siege yet again to the impoverished community. Eyewitness reports said a wave of indiscriminate gunfire from heavy weapons began about 5 a.m. and continued for much of the day Friday – an operation on the scale of the July 6, 2005 UN massacre in Cité Soleil.*

The visit of Haitian president, René Préval to Jamaica is a poignant reminder of the failure of Haiti's closest neighbor, Jamaica, to do anything in more than a decade to come to the assistance of our eight million brothers and sisters, who inherited the hatred, revanchism and racism directed against the slaves who abolished slavery.

It was in Haiti that plantation slavery in the western world was destroyed. It was Haiti too which caused the doubling of the size of the United States by forcing the nearly bankrupt France of Napoleon Bonaparte to sell off most of what has since become a great chunk of the United States.

It was France and the United States, chiefly, that beggared Haiti into insolvency by trade embargoes and blackmail. The United States refused to relax its embargo on Haiti until France had re-established relations with its once enslaved colony. France, as a condition of recognizing Haiti's blood-won independence; demanded and got the modern equivalent of \$25 billion in blood money extracted from the ex-slaves. When the Haitians couldn't pay, United States' banks lent them the money. When they couldn't repay that, the United States invaded Haiti and imposed a regime as bad as slavery and which, in addition, devastated Haitian forests and agriculture, leaving the proud Haitians reduced to the destitution and misery which they suffer today.

At this moment, the Haitian people have managed to elect a President who is tolerated by the United States as long as his

predecessor, Jean Bertrand Aristide remains in South Africa.

The United States is protecting the elite interest, the 'high-yallers' and other mainly mulatto ruling class and its Middle Eastern proselytes who have been given the franchise to run Haiti on behalf of the United States. This means, for instance, that President Preval and the Haitian people are not masters in their own house. Mercenaries from Brazil, Jordan and other non-Caribbean states are in fact the armed forces of Haiti. They are the real rulers, free to go into the poorest areas to murder and arrest whoever they think supports Aristide and want him back. These mercenaries are also free to rape and murder Haitian women and children under the benign auspices of the United Nations, as decreed by three eminent Uncle Toms: Kofi Annan, Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice.

It is time for Jamaica and Caricom to

awake to their sibling responsibilities and duties. If it weren't for Haiti and the Jamaican Maroons, the slave trade and slavery might never have been abolished on the West Indian plantations. It would have continued at least until slavery was abolished in the United States, Brazil and Cuba, decades after it was abolished here and more than half a century after the people of Haiti asserted their wish to be free and made that freedom real – or so they thought.

Our brotherly responsibilities go further, because the flag of Haitian revolution was raised by none other than the Jamaican Maroon Bookman, a survivor of the Taki rebellion.

Source: *The article is an excerpt from one entitled " Dishing the Dirt – Disasters in Iraq, Haiti and Jamaica," January 7, 2007, CounterCurrents.org*

Support the TRUTH Act. In January, Rep. Barbara Lee re-introduced the first bill of the year supporting justice in Haiti. Formally known as the Independent Commission on the 2004 Coup d'Etat in the Republic of Haiti, H.R. 351 may be the only chance for a credible official investigation of Haiti's coup. The TRUTH Act, if passed, will establish a bipartisan commission much like the 9/11 Commission. Commission members would be appointed by Congress, and would be entrusted with investigating the February 2004 Haitian coup d'état, and determining whether the United States government contributed to the overthrow of the Constitutional President, directly or by channeling aid to subversive groups.

The next step for the TRUTH Act is collecting co-sponsors in the House of Representatives to demonstrate support. That's where you come in. Please call, write or fax your Representative to co-sponsor the resolution. To find contact information for your representative, visit <http://www.house.gov/writerep>, or call the Capitol switchboard, 202-224-2131. Urge your Representative to contact Aysha House at Rep. Barbara Lee's office.



Photo: Carolina Dutton

Zapatista women share experiences and analysis at the First Encounter of Zapatista Peoples with the Peoples of the World in Oventic for four days at New Years. Over 2,000 individuals and groups from 48 countries and 4 continents joined thousands more Zapatistas. Indigenous leaders from all five Caracoles (Zapatista regions of Chiapas) offered detailed presentations about their successes and challenges in autonomous government, health, education, land, tenancy, womens rights, and alternative economy.

Argentina: Another Disappearance

Luis Angel Gerez's disappearance near his home in Escobar, a town north of Buenos Aires, on December 27 was especially disturbing coming after the disappearance of Julio Lopez last September. Gerez, 50, is a key witness in the trial of ex-officer Luis Patti, who is charged with torture. Gerez testified before a congressional committee that the retired police chief and former mayor of Escobar tortured him with electric shocks while he was being held in illegal captivity in 1972. Due to the charges, Patti was barred from the congressional seat he won in October 2005.

On December 29, hundreds of people took part in two marches in Buenos Aires province, including one in Escobar, demanding the return of Gerez and Julio Lopez. Shortly after, Gerez was found alive by a police patrol. Three men reportedly kidnapped him, blindfolded him, beat him and burned him with cigarettes. Gerez's reappearance came minutes after President Kirchner ended a national address.

Kirchner spoke about the disappearances in a televised address, calling them a blackmail attempt by former military and police agents seeking amnesty for abuses committed during the military dictatorship (1976-1983). "Everything seems to indicate that both cases involve...paramilitary

or parapolic elements who want to intimidate, to achieve their goal of maintaining impunity," Kirchner said.

"Let it be known to everyone that this president will not allow any type of amnesty to be carried out. All of Argentine society is victimized by the Mafioso actions of those who want to guarantee their impunity," warned Kirchner. "We won't give in to this extortion, we won't allow the trials to be stopped," he insisted. "On the contrary, we demand that the courts act swiftly in these trials, so we can at once obtain a just sentence that puts the murderers where they belong: in common jails."

Source: April Howard,
www.UpsideDownWorld.org, Jan. 2, 2007

Nicaragua: Ortega Inaugurated

On January 10, 2007, Daniel Ortega retook the reigns of political power in Nicaragua, pledging moderation and reconciliation with his business, religious, political and military adversaries during the Sandinista government of 1979-1990.

The next day, January 11, he signed on to the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) promoted by President Hugo Chavez as an alternative to US-sponsored trade accords like CAFTA in the presence of presidents Chavez of Venezuela, Morales of Bolivia and Cuban vice-president Jose Machado. Last year, the Nicaraguan government approved CAFTA.

Chavez is the new presidents' ace in the hole to help Ortega face some of the country's biggest problems including a serious energy crisis and a shortage of dignified housing. Ortega says he will combat poverty among the country's poorest with a Zero Hunger Program while his economic advisors insist on maintaining the neoliberal policies of his predecessor, Enrique Bolanos.

During the campaign Ortega made many promises leading to widespread expectations among the population: an employment boom, higher salaries for many low-end public employees, investment credit and incentives to the different local and foreign business sectors, lower utility rates, and free education and health care for the poor as in the 80s.

A conservative social policy on issues important to the Catholic Church, like abortion, contraception and sex education, mixed with a push for more inclusive public assistance and economic programs to combat extreme poverty appear to be the initial direction Ortega's government will take.

He may not even have to deal with the unpopular ban on all therapeutic abortions that passed last year with his support. The Nicaraguan Supreme Court will likely overturn the ban this year. For at least 100 years, therapeutic abortions, when the life of the mother was at risk or when the pregnancy resulted from rape or incest, had been legal in Nicaragua. But a tug-of-war will most likely mark Ortega's presidency.

Source: *Circles Robinson On Line Jan. 7, 2007, www.Circlesonline.blogspot.com; Weekly News Update Jan. 9 & 11, 2007*

Cuba: US Lawmakers Pledge

On January 24 an important bill was introduced in the House of Representatives by Charlie Rangel (D-NY) and Jeff Flake (R-AZ). HR 654 allows freedom of travel between the US and Cuba; it ends all restrictions on travel to Cuba. The original co-sponsors were three Democrats and three Republicans representatives. Among those were Jim McGovern (D-MA) and Jo Ann Emerson (R-MO) who had recently visited the island as part of a Congressional delegation.

This is very significant legislation because Rep. Rangel is the new chair of the Ways and means Committee and he and Jeff Flake have worked for years to end the travel ban. There is a lot of momentum; key Democrats who control the committee process are very supportive of a change in policy.

Earlier, on January 22, Rep. Rangel and Rep Barbara Lee (D-CA) introduced HR 624 to lift the trade embargo on Cuba in its entirety.

This is the moment for all those who support the fundamental right of all citizens to travel to Cuba to contact their Congressional representatives and urge them to co-sponsor HR 654 and 624.

You can reach your member of Congress by calling the capitol switchboard at 202-224-3121 and ask to be transferred to your congressman's office.

Source: *Latin America Working Group, February 1, 2007, www.lawg.org*



SOA: Protests Spread

While record numbers (22,000) attended the annual demonstrations at Fort Benning, Georgia on November 19 and 20, thousands more gathered at protests and vigils throughout the Americas. Coordinated actions protesting US militarism and call for the closing of the US Army's School of Americas (SOA), now renamed the Defense Department's Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation were scheduled to take place over the weekend of November 18 and 19 in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Paraguay, Peru, Canada and at other cities in the US.

A movement of Christians for Peace with Justice and Dignity organized vigils on November 18-19 at four key sites emblematic of US militarism: the US-leased air base in Manta, Ecuador; and the capitol cities of Paraguay, Colombia and El Salvador. In Ecuador, actions were also scheduled in Quito, Ibarra, Ambato and Tulcán. In Colombia, in addition to Bogotá, there were actions planned in nine other cities. In one city, 1,000 women dressed in black commemorated the victims of militarism in the region; thousands of other women joined in the protest. The action was organized by the Popular Women's Organization.

In San Salvador, hundreds of students joined human rights activists in a torchlight procession at the Central American University (UCA) to commemorate the November 16, 1989 murder of the six Jesuits, their housekeeper and her daughter. The massacre took place on the UCA campus and a subsequent UN special investigation found that most of the killers responsible were SOA graduates. The annual gathering, organized by SOA Watch, is held each November at Fort Benning to commemorate the 1989 murders in El Salvador.

Source: *SOA Watch Update Nov. 11, 2006*

Latin America Solidarity Conference IV
Alternatives to Empire
APRIL 13-15 2007 Chicago

www.LASolidarity.org

Participating groups: A-APRP (GC), Beehive Collective, CISPES, CIW, Immigrant Solidarity Network, Interoconnect, LeftTurn, MITF, MSN, NicaNet, Nicaragua Solidarity, Pan-African Roots, Quixote Center/Haiti Reborn, TASSC, SOA Watch and others
 For more information visit the webpage or email info@LASolidarity.org

The Latin America Solidarity Conference will take place April 13-15, 2007, in Chicago, Illinois. LASC4 will bring together US grassroots solidarity activists with activists and organizers from Latin America and the Caribbean to plan, evaluate and celebrate the growing US Latin America solidarity movement.

The theme of LASC4 is "**Alternatives to Empire.**" The Americas have a strong legacy of resistance. From the *Mapuche* struggle for land and autonomy against the conquistadors to the successful fight to force US owned Occidental Petroleum out of Ecuador; from Simon Bolivar's struggle for freedom from Spain and slavery to the Cuban, Sandinista, and modern day Bolivarian Revolutions - Americans, dispossessed by neoliberal capitalism, looting of resources, militarization and repression are defying the racist system of violence and domination with increasing frequency and effectiveness. Popular movements are gaining influence throughout the hemisphere.

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