

Update on the Americas

A bi-monthly publication of the Rochester Committee on Latin America

**Special Edition
October-November 2000**

ROCLA is "On the Move!" with retreat, special newsletter edition

Since ROCLA's founding in 1973, our solidarity work with the people of Latin America in the struggle for peace and justice has integrated education and social action. Whenever possible, ROCLA membership has sought out first-hand experiences and analyses of current happenings in Latin America and U.S. foreign policy, honored activism and activists committed to the long haul of social change, and participated in various facets of social action, such as demonstrations, letter-writing campaigns, consciousness-raising arts, challenging unjust laws, human rights witness, and jail solidarity.

This fall ROCLA has initiated a campaign to explore with the membership: how we can become most effective as an organization engaged in social change with the broadest involvement possible of people committed to Latin American solidarity.

¡PRESENTE-ROCLA On the Move! will be a multi-phased effort beginning with this special edition of the newsletter highlighting ROCLA's past 25+ years and looking forward to our possibilities for future activism. Direct dialogue with ROCLA supporters, through a phone tree and a November retreat, will be the most vital pieces of the campaign to explore how to strengthen the organization, energize us in our work, and broaden participation in our efforts.

The campaign takes its name and sentiment from the Latin American cry of ¡Presente! in social movements -- a sort of roll call of those who are present in the struggle. Whether they are recalled in death as people whose lives were given to or taken from our struggle, or they are living and affirming their ongoing commitment to the struggle for which others have died, ¡Presente! is a strong statement of "We are here. We are committed. We are not going away. And we will change this system that denigrates dignity, justice, and peace in our world."

If you would like to join us in this latest effort by ROCLA to analyze and address the needs of this time of broad-based, democratized activism by helping with the phone tree or the November retreat, call Jennifer Banister at 244-3992. We greatly appreciate any and all participation!

ROCLA, ¡Presente!

ROCLA retreat

November 11

10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Tay House, Cobbs Hill Park

RSVP: Tom Ward, 889-5932

South of Culver Road 490 exit; pass Lake Riley on left; turn left on Norris Drive; take right fork onto Hillside Ave; pass Monroe County Water Authority. Look for the ROCLA signs!

Refreshments & check-in at 9:30 a.m.
Lunch provided!

**Let's discuss our Latin America
solidarity priorities and help plan
ROCLA's future!**

¡Presente-ROCLA on the Move! calls on ROCLA supporters

ROCLA volunteers will be participating in a phone tree to help update ROCLA's membership and mailing list. Please anticipate with great enthusiasm a call from one of these committed ROCLA folk in the next several weeks. As you respond to their call, think in particular about what ROCLA has signified for you in your solidarity, and of where your interests lie and how you might get more involved.

Rochester Committee on Latin America: A brief history of the last 3 decades

By Michele Spring-Moore

With additional reporting by Jennifer Banister, David Eisenberg, Bob Kaiser, Tom Little-Moore, Gail Mott, and Peter Mott

Illustrations by Rini Templeton

Murder in Chile: The beginning

Alison Clarke remembers standing with two other local activists on the porch of the Puerto Rican Arts and Cultural Center one evening nearly 30 years ago, waiting for someone to bring keys so they could enter the building and convene the first meeting of a Latin America human rights group that later became known as the Rochester Committee on Latin America.

At that time, Alison was the co-coordinator of the Rochester Peace and Justice Education Center (PJEC), a chapter of the national interfaith organization Clergy and Laity Concerned, which was founded by Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. to work for peace in Vietnam and in the following years continued to address the root causes of war. In those days PJEC had task forces on hunger and human rights, disarmament, and safe energy, and Alison was coordinator of the first task force. With the assassination of democratically-elected president Salvador Allende in Chile in 1973, PJEC members became involved in related teach-ins on U.S. corporate and government complicity in the Chilean government's downfall, and PJEC moved toward a focus on Latin American human rights.

Alison, Henrietta Levine, and Bob Malone held the first meeting at the Puerto Rican Center on Clifford Avenue. Early ROCLA members

included Chileans living in Rochester and U.S. citizens who had worked in the Peace Corps in Latin America, or who had traveled to Cuba, and were concerned about U.S. intervention in the region.

"The inability of people in those countries to grow their own food due to the inequality of land ownership brought the issues of hunger and human rights closely together within PJEC," Alison says, "and so ROCLA was born."

Early projects

In the late '70s and early '80s, Alison recalls, ROCLA brought to town experts on the relationship between U.S. foreign policy and the struggles of Latin American people, holding teach-ins at local high schools, colleges, and other venues and meetings with the editorial board of the Gannett Rochester Newspapers (when Gannett published both a morning and an evening newspaper). ROCLA also educated via public radio programs, and in 1975 held a fundraising concert at the Eastman School of Music's Kilbourn Hall for Chilean human rights work.

ROCLA's organization was "very loose" at first, Henrietta Levine recalls; the few members met at individuals' homes and channeled funds through other groups and churches, such as Calvary-St. Andrews. ROCLA itself was a small group, but was always supported in its education and fundraising goals by the larger local peace and justice community.

"It was a time when you just sort of did what you had to do," Henrietta says, adding that today's ROCLA organization, with a steering committee that discusses and sets policy, is important.

When she helped found ROCLA, she had been involved in various political justice issues and movements for decades, and in 1969 was one of 13 members of the Women's Peace Delegation to Cuba at the invitation of the Cuban Women's Federation. Later Henrietta helped found the Nicaraguan Sister City/Ciudad Hermana project with El Sauce, Nicaragua in 1987 through the Rochester organization Metro Act (now Metro Justice, ROCLA's parent organization; see Vic Vinkey's article), and visited El Sauce with other

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Kaiser, Tom Little-Moore, Gail Mott, Peter Mott,
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Ciudad Hermana members. She continues to work with that task force today, and does extensive work for local contributions to the Pastors for Peace Cuba Caravans.

The '80s: Bloodbath in Central America...

The main focus of Latin America solidarity activists in the 1980s was opposing the Reagan and Bush administrations' arming and supporting the murderous regimes in El Salvador and Guatemala and destabilizing the democratically-elected Sandinista-led government in Nicaragua through the contra proxy war -- as well as continuing traditional U.S. neo-colonial policy throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.



Each spring, ROCLA co-sponsored the local observance of Central America Week, a series of events all over the United States sponsored by a number of national religious groups and including prayer services, lobbying activities, demonstrations, and reports from those who had visited and worked in Nicaragua and other countries. These weeks also included commemoration of the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero by a Salvadoran death squad in 1980.

Many ROCLA members traveled to Nicaragua after the 1979 revolution for study trips and cultural solidarity tours, to work on construction

and reforestation projects, to pick coffee beans, learn Spanish, and see the transformation of a country that had been suffering under the Somoza family dictatorship and U.S. control for a century.

Others were involved in the sanctuary movement, in which U.S. activists, many working with established churches, assisted Salvadorans and Guatemalans fleeing death squads and other repression in their countries. ROCLA member Gail Mott recalls that ROCLA was a strong supporter of the sanctuary movement in Rochester from 1984 to 1990, announcing events in its newsletter and participating in rallies, bus trips, fund-raisers, the Quilt of Martyrs, the Fast for Peace, and activities featuring Alejandro Gomez, a Salvadoran labor organizer who, with his family of five, fled for his life to the US in 1983.

"During that period my main concern was to let people know that our tax dollars -- \$3 million every day -- was going to the murderous Salvadoran government whose army slaughtered over 70,000 of their citizens during the 10-year civil war," Gail says.

ROCLA's focus wasn't limited to Central America, though. The program for ROCLA's "Central America and the Caribbean: A Community Forum" in 1984 included workshops about not only the typical Nicaraguan and Salvadoran issues of the day, but also on Mexico and the politics of oil and the relationship between migrant farm-workers and U.S. agribusiness, on the damage to the small fishing industry and environmental effects of the U.S. Navy bombing of Vieques in Puerto Rico, and on the destabilization of the democratic government of Michael Manley in Jamaica.

In the '80s, ROCLA also turned more and more to educating through the arts. In early 1984 the organization sponsored "Guatemala: A Testimonial," a national traveling photography exhibit that the editor of *City* newspaper, Mary Anna Towler, reviewed under the front-page headline, "Bringing Home the Horror." The exhibit was shown in conjunction with the forum mentioned above, and featured work by fine art photographers and photojournalists from the United States, Mexico, and Europe.

Long-time ROCLA member Marilyn Anderson's photography was included in the exhibit; she worked with photographer Leslie Locketz and other ROCLA members to bring the

show to Rochester. At that point Marilyn had traveled to Guatemala nine times, for brief visits and longer stays, and had photographed indigenous weavers and weaving techniques and documented the devastating effects on rural traditional life of the Guatemalan government's murder and repression. By 1984, at least 100,000 Guatemalans had fled the country; most ended up in Mexican refugee camps.



Marilyn has published several books on Guatemalan textiles and their creators; in 1988 *Granddaughters of Corn: Portraits of Guatemalan Women*, with photographs by Marilyn and text by her husband, Jon Garlock, was published by Curbstone Press.

ROCLA sponsored the Solidarity Arts Festivals -- which included exhibits, concerts, readings, and other performances -- annually for the next four years. (See Marilyn's article on ROCLA and the arts.) Arts for Greater Rochester awarded ROCLA a \$1000 grant to produce the 1988 festival. ROCLA also published arts calendars as a benefit in 1986 and '87, and sold Guatemalan textiles for a number of years at the Rochester Museum and Science Center's annual International Folk Festival.

... and internal debates

Disagreements about strategy among activists eventually led to organizational restructuring for

ROCLA and the Rochester Peace and Justice Education Center itself. Because it was a local affiliate of the national organization Clergy and Laity Concerned, PJEC tended to attract members who were pacifists and approached social and political justice issues from a Christian perspective. Although some ROCLA members' activism was faith-based, others looked at political and economic issues through anarchist, feminist, or socialist lenses, or a combination thereof.

Jon Garlock, who was ROCLA convenor from 1982 to 1987, recalls that some ROCLA activists' beliefs, especially in "just war" -- that in certain situations, armed struggle is justified -- tended to polarize the PJEC membership and proved a particularly difficult debate for some members of the PJEC steering committee who were committed pacifists.

This debate, among other differences, led to structural changes in PJEC that granted each task force more autonomy. After extensive discussion, at the end of 1987 the PJEC steering committee approved a plan that created a separate programming task force for PJEC as a whole, and gave ROCLA and the five other task forces more control over their own programming, fund-raising, and budgets. Prior to this, Jon says, ROCLA's funds had not been separate from the overall PJEC budget, making it difficult at times to cover costs for membership mailings, literature, and other projects.

"A number of things happened on my watch, and one of them was having to deal with all of those kind of struggles about our right as a task force to have free and open discussion about our issues as we understood them," Jon says.

The ROCLA steering committee also began to organize its fund-raising efforts in the mid-'80s, creating more formal plans to raise thousands of dollars for specific material aid needs for Guatemalan refugees, Nicaragua, and the FMLN liberated zones in El Salvador.

In the late '80s, local teacher Bruce Handelman took advantage of the inclusion of Latin America to the New York State high school curriculum by working with other ROCLA members to review and recommend appropriate materials for the classroom. (Popcorn was served at the video screenings.) ROCLA also continued its work with Politics of Food -- at that time another task force of PJEC coordinated by Alison

Clarke -- by sponsoring a workshop, "Hunger and Latin America," for K-12 teachers. ROCLA member Bolgen Vargas, now the president of the Rochester City School District school board, did a presentation on "Debt and Development."

Other activities included organizing local boycotts of California grapes, and Folger's coffee, which was produced in El Salvador and owned by Procter & Gamble; protesting Rochester appearances by convicted Iran-Contra felon Lt. Col. Oliver North; and walking in the Rochester Thanksgiving parade. And ROCLA helped send 300 Rochester-area residents to the national Mobilization for Peace and Justice in Central America and Southern Africa in April 1987.

ROCLA also began its work with the labor movement in the late '80s. The speaker at ROCLA's first Rice & Beans Dinner, in 1988, was Dave Dyson, then a key member of the National Labor Committee in Support of Democracy and Human Rights in El Salvador, which was composed of 20 U.S. unions.

The '90s: Working against globalization of capital

With the defeat of the Sandinistas in 1990 and the subsequent end of the U.S.-sponsored contra war in Nicaragua, the signing of the peace accords in El Salvador in 1991, and the defeat of George Bush the First in 1992, the situation in Central America became less urgent. But life soon worsened for the indigenous people of Chiapas state in Mexico, and for workers all over the world.

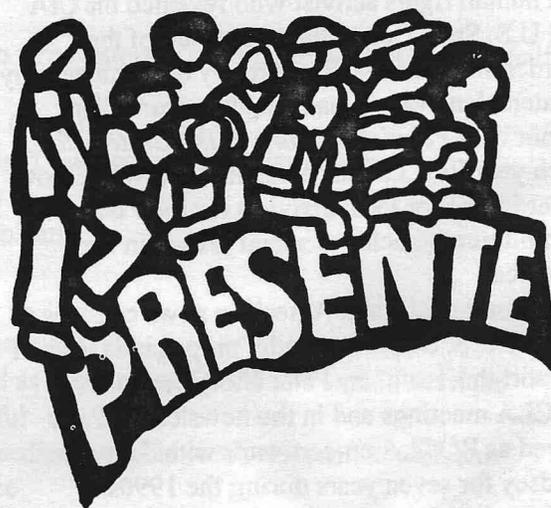
On New Year's Day 1994, the inauguration day of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), a group of mostly indigenous Mayan rebels, calling themselves the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) after the Mexican Revolutionary hero Emiliano Zapata, rose up against the Mexican government. The fighting between the Mexican Army and the Zapatistas lasted about 10 days before the rebels decided on a cease-fire and began negotiations with the government that have continued on and off since. The Zapatistas were protesting the Mexican president's dismantling of traditional and constitutionally-protected peasant communal land holdings and attempts to open the rainforest in

Chiapas to U.S. paper companies and other corporations, in response to the passage of NAFTA.

In a manner reminiscent of solidarity work with Cuba in the '60s and Nicaragua in the '80s, several ROCLA members have visited Chiapas since 1994 to learn about the Zapatista revolution, work as election observers, and/or help indigenous communities construct schools and other buildings.

More importantly, ROCLA has been involved in educational and activist efforts against increasing global capitalism. In the early '90s, Jon Garlock and Jeff Nieznanski of the Rochester Labor Committee on Central America spoke at ROCLA meetings about NAFTA, and by the middle of the decade ROCLA was working with the Rochester Labor Council, individual unions, and other groups to demonstrate at local corporations which contracted for clothing made in Mexican sweatshops, and to hold rallies calling for an end to sweatshops and loss of living-wage jobs around the world. Some ROCLA members and local unionists went on educational tours of the U.S.-Mexico border to witness the horrible living and working conditions and environmental degradation in the *maquila* zones.

ROCLA has also been a strong local supporter of the national 50 Years Is Enough campaign, which advocates an end to the World Bank and IMF's crippling "economic reforms" forced on the poor countries of what activists call the Global South (see Peter Mott's article on corporate globalization).



Other '90s projects

ROCLA has been involved in the grassroots effort to shut down the U.S. Army School of the Americas, for decades the training ground for Latin American military regimes committing atrocities against their own people (see John Honeck's article on the SOA). ROCLA members have joined local college students, church members, and others in protesting to shut down the SOA in Georgia each fall.

ROCLA continued its work in Central America by helping refugees with resettlement. ROCLA joined with the national Guatemala Accompaniment Project in 1997 as Guatemalans continued to return home after more than 15 years of living in Mexican refugee camps (see Jennifer Banister's article about the Western New York Accompaniment Project).

Throughout the 90's, ROCLA helped provide medical equipment and other material aid for the Pastors for Peace Cuba Caravans. One year, one ROCLA member broke the law crossing the U.S.-Canadian border; the following year five Rochesterians did so. The next time, 13 people risked the 10 years in prison and \$250,000 fine. The U.S. Treasury -- like the FBI earlier -- wanted our membership lists and has gone to court twice in vain attempts to subpoena them.

The annual Rice & Beans Dinner has continued to be a popular fund-raiser and social event, bringing in speakers such as Charles Kernaghan, the director of the National Labor Committee, a non-profit human rights organization that exposes sweatshop abuses; Jennifer Harbury, the lawyer and human rights activist who revealed the CIA and U.S. State Department cover-up of the murder of her husband and many other citizens by Guatemalan death squads; and Howard Zinn, author of *A People's History of the United States*. Each year ROCLA has presented the White Dove Award to honor local activists for their ongoing commitment to achieve social justice in the Americas.

A series of Latin American news capsules to counter U.S. corporate media propaganda, named "Report the Truth" by Peter Mott, began at ROCLA meetings and in the newsletter. Peter served as ROCLA co-convenor with Terry Lindsey for seven years during the 1990s.

ROCLA has supported bilingual potluck suppers at Amy Pitt's and other members' homes, as well as Spanish language classes taught by Linda Biehl and Benjamin Narvaez in their home.

Other actions and meeting discussion topics during the decade: marching with city churches in the Coalition for Jobs and Justice, joining the movement to oust the CIA from the Rochester Institute of Technology campus, helping the Genesee Valley/New York Civil Liberties Union bring out 600 people to hear Noam Chomsky speak on the corporate media, and examining the Columbus quincentenary and gay and lesbian rights in relation to Latin American solidarity groups in the U.S.

Strategy, strengths & weaknesses

When discussing ROCLA's history, more than one steering committee member has pointed to the organization's sheer longevity as one of its greatest strengths.

"I think ROCLA is really vital, especially when you consider simply that it is still working," says Terry Lindsey, ROCLA co-convenor for eight years. "And with the exception of maybe Metro Justice and Politics of Food, it is really the only vital organization left from the organizing at that time."

ROCLA has also served as a good training ground for local activists, Terry says, providing opportunities to learn political organizing and public speaking. Terry and his wife, Deb (she edited the ROCLA newsletter for several years under her previous name, Deb Angelo) believe that the training they received through ROCLA has been invaluable in their professional work as teachers and organizers.

ROCLA has brought in some of the brightest progressive political lights of the day and has been on the cutting edge of political analysis for years, Terry adds. For example, he and Deb learned about "neoliberalism" from Salvadoran *campesinos* on a trip to that country in 1991, and were able to bring that discussion home to ROCLA meetings long before unions and other groups began examining the impact of globalization.

In conjunction with several national solidarity organizations, such as Network in

Solidarity with the People of Guatemala (NISGUA), Mexico Solidarity Network, Nicaragua Network, Guatemala Partners, and the sanctuary movement, ROCLA members have brought in activists from throughout Latin America as speakers -- not only to ROCLA meetings, but also to regional schools and universities, churches, cultural events, and demonstrations.

As with any organization, there's room for improvement in strategy. Terry and several other former steering committee members say that at times, ROCLA has been structured around "pet projects," so that the organization has ended up moving from crisis to crisis and country to country, rather than addressing structural causes of problems as it's attempting to do now with globalization.

Other tensions within the group have included the question of how "radical" or

"militant" ROCLA members wanted to be, at specific demonstrations and overall.

"I think we might have had more impact over the years if we'd taken a more radical stance," Terry says. "It really doesn't hurt ROCLA to do that. Maybe someone will quit -- which has happened over the years -- but otherwise it is important for our work."

He and Henrietta Levine also mention the problem of what to do when a revolution succeeds, but the leaders lose touch with the people they came into power to represent. Terry believes that ROCLA could be more active in providing critical analysis when this happens, as in Cuba or with the Sandinista party in Nicaragua. And when a revolutionary government is eventually undermined, Henrietta says, activists in the United States have to be careful that their solidarity doesn't turn to charity.

Items from the wish lists of past and current ROCLA activists:

- One or more paid staff member(s)
- Alliances with local Latino/a community
- Coalition building with other groups & movements
- More and better education and outreach so we do less "preaching to the choir":
 - More letters to the editor and op-eds in local print media
 - Letters/articles in labor publications
 - More appearances on radio programs such as WXXI's *Bob Smith Show*
 - Speakers bureau for giving talks to environmental, peace, student, women's, labor groups, & churches, synagogues, other spiritual groups
 - Video catalog of monthly ROCLA meeting speakers & other events
 - Mixed-media resource library, including videos, audio speeches, books, pamphlets, & arts material
 - Creation & upkeep of ROCLA website
- Organized phone tree
- Solid Urgent Action Network & rotating point person to write letters & send faxes on ROCLA's behalf in response to alerts
- Strategy for addressing current crisis situations, such as Colombia
 - Ability to organize people when political situation isn't "exploding" as it was in '80s
 - Continued education of our legislators
 - Connecting to speaking tours of more national organizations
- Sponsorship of more arts events
- Applications for grants for specific projects
- Ongoing examination of where we are and what priorities we have
- Continued systemic analysis -- looking at causes as well as symptoms of problems in the Americas
- Create more actions that are direct, innovative, & colorful
- ROCLA affinity group training in nonviolent civil disobedience to join local, regional, & national actions addressing social, economic, & ecological justice
- Help strengthen our parent-partner organization, Metro Justice

ROCLA history in depth

Metro Justice: Our Parent-Partner Organization

By Jennifer Banister

Through its handful of task forces, its board, and its organizer, Bill Appel, Metro Justice organizes around government's complicity in corporate globalization as it plays out locally. MJ was responsible for publicly bringing to task Monroe County's corporate welfare committee (aka COMIDA) for its unscrupulous allocation of funds to high-stakes campaign contributors, and has been central in bringing Living Wage legislation before the Rochester City Council.

MJ is currently spearheading a number of initiatives, including:

The Energy Co-Op, forwarding economic and ecological justice through democratically-controlled access to affordable, renewable energy sources. (You can become a member of Co-op Plus for \$10. Call 340-3317).

Efforts to help local schools and universities remove sweatshop-made apparel from their stores (contact the staff person of MJ affiliate, the Labor Religion Coalition, at galelynch@earthlink.net).

TV Dinner is renewing its commitment to giving progressive issues an effective voice in the media through training workshops with community groups and city youth, developing an independent media web site on which to show video, and producing documentaries on current issues and cutting edge activism. (Call Ruth Cowing at 473-1498).

Exploring the possibility of a Metro Justice low-power FM radio station to counteract corporate conglomeration of the airwaves. (Contact Ron Linville via MJ at 325-2560.)

ROCLA is proud to be a task force of Metro Justice, which strengthens our capacity to build coalitions and take on issues of justice in our end of the Americas in solidarity with one another and our neighbors to the South. Over the years, one of the most common suggestions we've received from activists and others in Latin American has been, "If you want to be in solidarity with us, then

you must go home and change things there. Without that, nothing will ever change here."

ROCLA members are technically members of Metro Justice as well. But each of us can officially become members by paying annual dues which support domestic and especially local justice issues. To become a Metro Justice supporter, contact Bill Appel at 325-2560 or e-mail metroj@frontiernet.net.

Metro Justice: 34 years of building community

By Vic Vinkey

In 1966, in response to the Rochester "race riots" of 1964, local Black activists formed an organization called FIGHT. Supportive elements of the white community then formed a related group, Friends of FIGHT, which helped the community to focus on the long-ignored needs of Rochester's Black citizens.

Eventually Friends of FIGHT found that changing conditions demanded work on a broader range of progressive issues. Thus, in 1968, Friends of FIGHT became Metro-Act of Rochester, a new and broader progressive force in the community.

Metro-Act first focused on local issues of fairness and citizen participation. An early campaign challenged re-licensing of Gannett-owned WHEC-TV, charging the company with biased reporting and neglect of public interest. The negotiated agreement required them to revise and expand their coverage of local issues.

M-A led the publicity and protest -- including publication of an "Incest Chart" -- in the challenge of corporate control, skewed priorities, and lack of accountability of a powerful local institution, the Community Chest (a predecessor of the United Way.) Eventually, the Chest relented and enlarged their board to provide more citizen input.

A push for local towns to provide an adequate supply of low- and moderate-income housing led to a lawsuit against the restrictive zoning and land use provisions of suburban Penfield, which went all the way to the U.S.

Supreme Court. Unfortunately, M-A lost by just one vote. But action against Pittsford and Monroe County kept the housing issue in the public eye.

Metro-Act was the catalyst in the formation of coalitions working on issues including replacement of the regressive property tax by a county income tax; establishment of the Genesee Valley People's Power Coalition to promote safe, affordable energy; creating the Greenlining Coalition to oppose redlining -- a practice of denying home mortgages to poor and minority city residents -- and formation of the Housing Council in the Monroe County Area to promote fair housing practices.

In 1996 Metro-Act merged with the Rochester Peace and Justice Education Center. The combined organization changed its name to Metro Justice and incorporated its parallel progressive issues and task forces, including ROCLA.

ROCLA and the arts

By Marilyn Anderson

From 1985 to 1988, ROCLA sponsored an annual arts festival that included musical performances, dance, poetry readings, and visual art exhibits. Proceeding those festivals, we sponsored a traveling photography exhibit about the genocidal war in Guatemala -- a show that turned into a mini festival because of the activities associated with it. In a number of instances, artists created special visual arts works and poetry dedicated to our solidarity with the suffering of our our brothers and sisters of South and Central America. These events generated considerable interest in the community.

A number of memorable benefit classical music concerts of organized by Henrietta Levine in the '80s and '90s brought together many wonderful performers, including the renowned Cleveland Quartet. I have particularly vivid memories of a concert for Chile at Kilbourn Hall.

Other performers, such as Puerto Rican musician and poet Henry Padron, have been especially generous, sharing their artistry with the ROCLA community countless times over the years.



Another aspect of ROCLA's cultural outreach since the early '80s has been selling textiles made by Guatemalan refugees living in Mexico or by members of cooperatives. The beauty and color of the hand weavings communicates not only the artistry of the women who produced them but also the spirit of a whole people. ROCLA still sells Mayan textiles at Metro Justice's yearly Alternative Fair.

We also sold textiles in the late '70s to help support the work of agronomist Kai'Yutah Clouds, an Ithaca native who was murdered by a death squad while working as an agronomist in Guatemala in 1980. Ten years later, we organized an ambitious event -- a dinner, marimba concert, photo exhibit, and textile sale, "Guatemala, Guatemala," -- to honor Kai's memory.

Several other of our cultural activities had their roots in the previous two decades. We began to co-sponsor films, such as *Romero* and *When the Mountains Tremble*, at the Little Theater in the mid-1980s. Now we co-sponsor the Labor Film series and encourage our members to attend by providing complementary tickets.

Around 1986, Susan Plunkett generously lent her Jazzberry's restaurant for Sunday afternoon programs of music, discussions, poetry readings, and video showings. Susan also invited ROCLA artists to show their visual art.

Now we're beginning a series of peñas at Peg Fink-Gefell's Savory Thyme cafe, our 2000 version of the same idea. These interactive bilingual gatherings will be held on the third Sunday afternoon of every month, 3-6 p.m. at 105 East Ave. Come and share in them!

ROCLA opposing corporate globalization

By Peter Mott

During the 1990s, it became clear that the biggest problem for all Latin American countries was and is corporate globalization -- what one Nicaraguan theologian calls "savage capitalism."

Poverty is increasing in most of the countries of the Global South. Health services and education are being privatized and made unavailable to the poor, and in some countries even clean water is now available only for a private fee. All of this is the result of U.S.-pressured International Monetary Fund rules.

Six years of NAFTA have increased the number of Mexicans in "extreme poverty" from 17 to 26 million. The economic competition of cheaper US products, such as corn and chickens, swamping Mexican markets drives thousands of small farmers and business owners out of work and into the slums of Mexico City or to the US illegally. And foreign corporations take over the country's best land.

For several years ROCLA and its parent organization, Metro Justice, have joined in national protests, increasingly allied with the labor movement, against corporations contracting with sweatshops. In April 2000 in Washington, D.C., many ROCLA members protested against the World Bank and the IMF's crippling "economic reforms" (structural adjustment) forced on debtor countries. (IMF structural adjustment are the rules for "economic reform" that nations must agree to for loans or debt relief, including cutting public services such as education and health care, privatizing, and forcing agricultural production for export over self-sufficiency food production.

In the past six years, ROCLA has co-sponsored three local conferences on the global economy, and has materially and philosophically supported the work of the 50 Years Is Enough campaign.

We've learned that part of this enforced globalization is military and police repression of dissident groups. In retrospect we've seen that this is what motivated U.S. policy in El Salvador and Nicaragua, as it did years earlier in Chile and Guatemala, and as war rages now in Mexico and

Colombia, disguised as "drug wars." And this is why we have the U.S. Army School of the Americas.

We have many potential allies here at home as this "neoliberalism" leads to job loss, lower real wages, decreased public services, and increased privatization in Rochester and throughout the U.S., and rapidly worsening environmental destruction throughout the "two-thirds world."

Fair Trade ;Presente!

By Jennifer Banister

Long before I came to be known as the Equal Exchange "coffee lady," ROCLA members had been pioneering fair trade education and retail sales since the movement's arrival in the U.S. during the 1980s.

One World Goods was begun out of Gail Mott's home and run out of people's trunks, from church bazaars and tables in mall corridors. More than 12 years ago, ROCLA members who attend Downtown United Presbyterian Church convinced their congregation to serve Equal Exchange fairly-traded coffee as a statement of their values. By the initiatives of Marilyn Anderson and others, the ROCLA booth at Metro Justice's annual Alternative Fair has featured fairly-traded textiles and crafts for years.

"Fair trade" is an economic philosophy and practice that values the dignity, necessity, and artfulness of people's work. Over and above a short-sighted, simplistic definition of "profits," fair trade prioritizes the benefits of (1) a living wage that allows producers to maintain their livelihood and comfortably provide the food, shelter, health care, clothing, and education that will nurture their families; (2) long-term partnerships between producers and distributors in which the benefits of trade are mutual and more equitable; and (3) sustainable communities that protect the health and integrity of the surrounding ecology, economy, and culture.

In February 2000, ROCLA honored Equal Exchange -- a worker-owned cooperative that works only with farmer-owned cooperatives -- with the White Dove Award for its social and

economic justice work promoting cooperative economics, ecological sustainability, and a living wage. Equal Exchange co-founder Rink Dickinson and his fellow worker-owners challenged the packed house at the Rice & Beans Dinner to use our networks to promote fair trade products in Rochester.

This challenge encouraged us to show a mainstream chain like Tops supermarkets that consumers want fair trade options (Equal Exchange coffee can now be purchased at Tops' Brighton and Penfield stores). As a tangible incentive, Equal Exchange set the challenge to double sales of the coffee in Rochester, including at Tops and the handful of shops and cafés that have supported fair trade for years (like One World Goods, Genesee Co-Op Food Store [now Abundance Buying Club], Savory Thyme, Salena's Taquería, and Slice of Life Café). Equal Exchange will send a member of ROCLA on a delegation to a Guatemalan partner cooperative; ROCLA still needs to decide how to choose the delegate, as well as succeed in helping to double Equal Exchange coffee sales in the region.

Since the Rice & Beans Dinner, ROCLA members have joined an effort with other fair

trade advocates in the Rochester area to figure out how to improve outreach and fair trade education. Several ROCLA members have staffed the Equal Exchange booth at a variety of events -- such as the Park Avenue Festival and the Public Market Harvest Jamboree -- to reach out to the majority of people, who have never heard of fair trade as a growing alternative to sweatshop economics.

In this collaboration, Equal Exchange contributed \$1000 to ROCLA funds, a portion of which we directed toward the Western New York Accompaniment Project, a portion to support fair trade education, and the rest to general projects. Equal Exchange is donating coffee to all ROCLA supporters who renew their memberships. Ask the ROCLA volunteer who phones you for more details!



School of the Americas

By John Honeck

For the past several years, ROCLA has been involved in the grassroots effort to shut down the U.S. Army School of the Americas in Fort Benning, Georgia. ROCLA has invited Syracuse activists Ann Tiffany and Ed Kinane to its meetings to spur Rochester activists to join the annual protests at Fort Benning and the White House, and has hosted Sing It Down, a program of videos, singers, and speakers.



The SOA was founded by the United States in the Panama Canal Zone in 1946 and moved to Fort Benning in 1984. The school claims in its mission statement to promote democracy, professionalize soldiers, and strengthen cooperation between the U.S. and Latin American militaries. Yet the SOA curriculum includes counter-insurgency, sniper training, torture techniques, and commando tactics. Graduates have been implicated in the rape, torture, "disappearance," assassination, and massacre of educators, religious workers, students, union members, the poor, and others throughout Latin America.

Activists have responded, "New name, same shame!" to Congress' and the Clinton administration's recent move to change the name of the School of the Americas to the Defense Institute for Hemispheric Security Cooperation.

The Rev. Roy Bourgeois, a Maryknoll priest who served in the U.S. Navy and was honored for his service in the Vietnam War, founded SOA Watch in 1990. Father Roy was a Maryknoll missionary in Bolivia, and because of his work

with the poor was deported by dictator Hugo Banzer, an SOA graduate.

SOA Watch members speak to groups around the United States, lobby Congress, and hold local and national vigils using civil disobedience, stage plays, etc. Nationally, SOA Watch operates out of Washington, D.C. and Columbus, Georgia, and there are regional SOA Watch chapters around the nation. A Rochester SOA Watch meets at St. Joseph's House of Hospitality in the weeks before the annual November vigil and rally in Columbus and the rally and lobbying in Washington, D.C. each spring.

I am one of almost 50 people given federal prison sentences for acts of civil disobedience aimed at closing the SOA; I'm currently serving a three-month sentence at Allenwood Federal Prison Camp. Father Roy has served almost four years. My time in prison hasn't equaled the suffering of our Latin American sisters and brothers at the hands of SOA graduates using U.S.-made weapons paid for with our tax dollars -- that's why I know there is so much more to be done. Paz!

WNYAP: Accompanying Against Impunity

By Jennifer Banister

ROCLA joined with the national Guatemala Accompaniment Project (G.A.P.) in 1997 as Guatemalans continued to return home after more than 15 years of living tenuously in refugee camps in Mexico. Returnees sought, and continue to seek, the solidarity of the physical presence of outsiders to provide them with a measure of security and moral support as they faced home -- a beautiful land of cruel and violent memories, and continued uncertainty.

In November 1997, ROCLA's Western New York Accompaniment Project (WNYAP) partnered with *La Comunidad Esperanza 9 de Septiembre*. The Community of Hope, Ninth of September (the date of their return) is a mixed-ethnic community settled on an old *finca* (plantation) called Huacut in the northern frontier region of the Petén. WNYAP has sponsored Jennifer

Banister of Rochester, Amy Pearson of Alexandria, Virginia, and currently, Todd Bauer of Webster, to join the residents of Huacut in community life, in understanding the issues returnees face in the tarnished peace process, and in educating the outside world about their struggle as our struggle. In November, another accompanier will be selected from the national G.A.P. training to follow Todd.

WNYAP accompaniers return to Rochester to give presentations to schools, faith groups, and solidarity organizations. In addition to their invaluable work in Huacut, WNYAP accompaniers have authored reports used in developing human rights analyses in the current Guatemalan context, facilitated letter exchanges between Huacut and Rochester students, and produced a narrated multi-media photography exhibit and accompanying documentary by Metro Justice's TV Dinner task force (watch for it soon on cable access Channel 15).

Today, with new human rights imperatives in Guatemala, WNYAP is joining with *compañera* G.A.P. community in Seattle, UUCAN, to continue a presence in the Petén, and to provide support to one of the most important human rights legal cases in the world at this moment that could signify the end of impunity for the architects of genocide. With UUCAN, WNYAP will sponsor an accompanier beginning in 2001 to travel alongside witnesses from remote villages who are testifying in the landmark genocide legal case against former president General Lucas García and other high military officials who orchestrated the massacres against rural indigenous people during the early 1980s.

The Guatemala Accompaniment Project has been possible only through intensive fundraising efforts shared by ROCLA and the accompaniers themselves. Fundraising remains one of WNYAP's biggest challenges. The additional demands and levels of risk that will come with accompanying the genocide case require a strong network of people prepared to respond through an Urgent Action Network, as well as to support the work of the WNYAP steering committee. Please consider becoming involved with WNYAP. Call or e-mail: 271-4374, manderson@igc.org; or 244-3992, banister@eznet.net.

Some reflections by current WNYAP accompanier Todd Bauer, Sept. 2000

It was September 15, an overcast humid afternoon. There was a volleyball tournament. I played and had a great time. I wish we played more, but it's a soccer culture. There were no classes in observance of Independence Day. There was a planned evening activity in the school. All the teenagers and children were slow to gather but finally we were ready to start as the night was slowly descending. The ceremony started with the National Anthem, which happens to be more than 5 minutes long. While the children are singing the flag is lowered from its usual spot on the flagpole. The children hold their right arm below their heart with their palm facing downward. It has a strong military feeling. There are six youths, two lines of three that go over to the lowered flag... The six begin to march according to the cadence of one of the teachers. The march reminds me of something I saw in a movie once about a military academy. All the participants say the Pledge of Allegiance -- ironic since all the kids under 18 were born in Mexico because of what the Guatemalan government did to their parents. The history of military dictators in Guatemala is very apparent when one sees the traditions associated with patriotism.

The homemade torches of sticks with attached tin cans are lit. The younger kids carry homemade noisemakers or paper flags of Guatemala and Mexico. The march starts toward the center of the village. By this point, it is dark but the fifty or so torches dimly light the way. Every so often the 150 students stop. The director of the school yells out chants and the students respond. "¡Viva Guatemala! (Long live Guatemala!) ¡Viva Maya Tikal! (Long live the school!) ¡Viva los niños! (Long live the children!) ¡Vivamos en paz! (May we live in peace!) ¡36 años de guerra, nunca más! (36 Years of war, never again!)." I heard a little kid yell "¡Viva el acompañante!" (Long live the accompanier!), the others "¡Viva!", followed by giggles and laughter.

We arrive at the center, the generator is started and there are a few scattered lights. We just had the anniversary celebration the 9th so the lighting system was up and there was a bit of gas leftover. For the final part of the ceremony, there

are speeches. One by a 9th grader, and the other by a teacher. Both talk about the significance of Independence Day and what it has meant to for their people. "It was the independence of one group of rich from another. We have been struggling for 500 years for our independence, for our equality. There is still an economic, political and social oppression that we are struggling against." It never ceases to amaze me, the perspectives that I hear in community. They show their patriotism and loyalty to the government, but also express their frustrations with their situation. As I walk back to my hut, I keep thinking about what July 4th is like on a Native American Indian reservation. I shared that thought with a friend and he told me that it is good to think about their life-situation. Here there is a sense of bitterness, but sweetness also. And maybe in the US for the Indians it is just bitterness. After 500 years of discrimination and at points, outright genocide, there is still a resilience and fortitude mixed with a capacity for love that is truly inspiring, to say the least.

I find myself thinking about the following St. Francis quote often and I feel this process happening slowly both in myself and hopefully with all whom I share my experience:

"What is our responsibility in the creation of a more just and peaceful world? Our response might be summed up by the word "accompaniment": to deviate from other pathways for awhile (and then forever) to walk with those on the margins, to be with them, to let go. Through this encounter with God at the margins, we as individuals and societies experience profound, ongoing, spirit-led conversions of the heart, soul and mind. Slowly our centers of gravity move outside ourselves and we find ourselves suddenly dancing with friends in unknown place and with great joy."

-- *St. Francis and The Foolishness of God*

I hope this letter brings a smile to your heart, but also speaks to your heart in other ways. After a war, in the rebuilding process, it is really important that the victims aren't forgotten. I have come to see this as an essential part of my work, to help keep their story alive in people's hearts and spread the story to people who were previously unaware.

Paz, Tomás (Todd)