

UPDATE on the AMERICAS

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

A Metro Justice Task Force

SPECIAL EDITION JUNE 2005



**SPECIAL
EDITION!**

The 16th IFCO/Pastors for Peace (PFP) US-Cuba Friendshipment is coming....are You??

We need your help with a life-giving project to help end the 45-year-old US embargo of Cuba! Once again ROCLA is raising funds - and hoping to purchase a used school bus. Rev. Lucius Walker, Director of IFCO/PfP, has told us that school buses are particularly needed - as well as folding wheel chairs and supplies to serve the elderly and physically handicapped.

All contributions will be gratefully received! And there are other ways to help. Do you have a pick-up truck to help us collect medical equipment, such as wheel chairs and prosthetics? Can you set aside two hours to help us pack and label boxes between July 5-7? Can you bring the artists in your family - young and old - to help decorate the bus on July 7? And can you help pack the bus and attend a press conference on the morning of July 8 when the Pastors for Peace Caravan rolls out of Rochester on its way to the Mexican border and on to Cuba? Maybe you have some other good suggestions?

As Henrietta Levine said in a letter, "Last year, with the support of people like you, we were able to challenge the US embargo on trade and travel to Cuba and provide material aid to the people there. This year the people of Cuba have once again been subjected to newly implemented restrictions imposed by the Bush



administration and they live in fear of US intentions. In solidarity with the Cuban people we say, 'LET CUBA LIVE!'"

Pastors for Peace reports that along the way the caravan will be hosted in 130 communities who support a new US-Cuba policy based on respect and nonaggression. "Five of the school buses will be decorated and named in honor of the five Cuban patriots who have been unjustly incarcerated in US jails because they sought to counter terrorist activities against Cuba being planned in southern Florida by fanatical right-wing Cuban-Americans."

On July 21st at the US - Mexico border 150 Pastors for Peace volunteers from the US, Canada, Mexico and seven European countries - plus 200 tons of humanitarian aid - will challenge the immoral and illegal US blockade and travel on to Cuba without US Treasury Department licenses.

For more information or to help in any way please contact Vic Vinkey at 271-8723 or the Motts at 381-5606.

"As people of faith and conscience, it is our duty to resist and condemn this cruel US policy." □□□

Rev. Lucius Walker, Jr.

INSIDE this issue

**Cuba Action Day:
Grass Roots Activism
in Washington**

Opposition to NED

Dam Construction in Belize

**Update on Guatemala, CAFTA
...and more**

*ROCLA Programs and Actions Every
First Wednesday 7:00 PM Downtown
Presbyterian Church 121 N. Fitzhugh St.
Free and open to the public.
Wheelchair accessible*

Metro Justice of Rochester, Inc.
THE ROCHESTER COMMITTEE
ON LATIN AMERICA
167 Flanders St.
Rochester, NY 14619

NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT #1812

Cuba Action Day: Grass Roots Activism Comes Together in DC

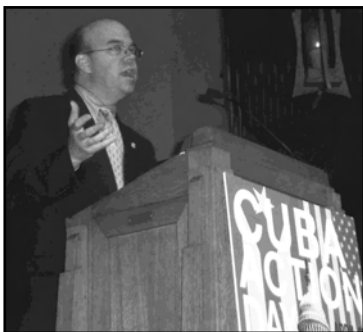
by John Locke

About 700 people from across this nation who care about positive relations between the US and Cuba came to Washington on April 27 to call for repeal of the travel ban. Those from Congress interested in a new approach—such as Representatives Flake and Delahunt, McGovern and Emerson – were astonished and energized by the turn out.

My wife Debbie and I, as ROCLA members, visited Republican Representative Randy Kuhl, who expressed interest in finding ways to relax the trade embargo, but not necessarily the travel restrictions. Kuhl feels that tourist dollars wouldn't go to helping the Cuban people, and would only strengthen Castro's hold. We presented Kuhl with a copy of "Strait Talk," (the documentary we produced—see last month's issue of the ROCLA newsletter) and he promised to watch it. But I think it will take a lot more to convince him.

We also visited with aides from Senators Clinton's and Schumer's staff as part of a delegation from New York which consisted of about 30 people of all ages, ethnic backgrounds and walks of life.

The next day the organizers of Cuba Action Day wrote in an email to their supporters, "...this is not the end but just the beginning. Now our task is to capitalize on what [was] accomplished. In the coming weeks and months, Congress will consider legislation to lift the ban on travel, and other proposals to restore the travel rights of Cuban



James P. McGovern Congressman (D), from Massachusetts addressed hundreds of activists from all over the nation at an organizational meeting as they prepared to meet with their congressional representatives.

Americans and the academic exchange rights of educators and students. Congress will also try to overturn new restrictions on the ability of American agriculture to sell more food to Cuba. We need the strength and power we saw in April to express itself again in these legislative battles. We need you!"

You can learn more about Cuba Action Day by visiting the Web site at www.cubaactionday.org



Activists turn lobbyists on April 27th as hundreds descend on the House and Senate office buildings. The young girl in the center of the picture is holding a sign, which says, "Cuba is Family Too." (photos by John Locke)

Halt Unnecessary, Destructive Dam Construction in Belize!

At ROCLA's June meeting Professor Ann McPherson of SUNY Brockport opened our eyes to the enormity of what is going on in Belize with the construction of the Chalillo Dam. A Canadian who is professor of Latin American history, she described by power point presentation the grave threats to the beautiful, life-sustaining jungles of Belize – particularly to the indigenous people, unexcavated sites of the ancient Maya, and native animals. This is a unique stretch of rainforest that is home to jaguar, tapir, and the last 200 scarlet macaws left in Belize.

As is happening in Guatemala and Mexico, this is construction of a dam for hydroelectric power by foreign corporations with heavy loans from the World Bank and IMF. Those bodies see all the "developing" world in the neoliberal economic sense – as natural resources to be developed (exploited) to spur the growth of private corporations, private markets and "free" trade with no consideration for sustainability. One thousand hectares of rainforest would be flooded.

In the legal challenge to this devastation the British Privy Council (the "Supreme Court" of Belize and other former colonies) ruled 3:2 against halting construction.

Continued on next page

Update on Guatemala, DR-CAFTA, Its Background and What You Can do To Stop It

By Marilyn Anderson

Many ROCLA members know that the Peace Accords signed in Guatemala in 1996 still fall short in bringing human rights, justice and peace to the majority of the people. And we have heard about DR-CAFTA, the proposed free trade agreement for the Dominican Republic, Guatemala and the rest of Central America.

The UN force MINUGUA which recently left Guatemala, concluded in its final report that, despite advances in the political sphere, fundamental reforms envisaged in the 1996 Peace Accords had not been implemented. It noted the persistence of problems of severe racism and vast social inequality. It warned that if left unchecked, the problems could lead to social conflict, stunted economic development and the corrosion of democratic government.

Some of the major problems and issues confronting Guatemalans throughout last year and in the first months of 2005 (Please go to www.nisgua.org for more details):

- Increased human rights violations, including intimidation and threats against those involved in organizations pressing for action against impunity, economic and women's rights. Assassinations of such workers have taken place. Especially disturbing is the report that in 2004 national police recorded more than 527 women murdered in Guatemala, a significant increase from 2003.
- Using forced evictions to resolve ongoing agrarian disputes. At least one death occurred in at least thirty one disputes.
- Ongoing disputes over the rights of indigenous Mayans to have a say before the government grants mining rights to foreign companies leading to severe environmental problems.

DR-CAFTA Background

The Guatemalan government signed onto the CAFTA (Central American Free Trade Agreement) but widespread opposition exists among the majority of the population.

Former ROCLA-sponsored human rights accompanier, Todd Bauer, from Webster NY, now living and working as an agronomist in Guatemala, told us about the murder of a demonstrator against the trade treaty by the army.

The good news is that more and more Representatives are realizing that DR-CAFTA is a raw deal for workers in the US and Central America and a threat to the environment, public health and safety, and local, participatory democracy. Bush Administration officials, in a last desperate attempt to gain support, have tried linking DR-CAFTA to increased democratic stability and the fight against terrorism. On the contrary, DR-CAFTA has already destabilized the region as thousands of farmers, workers, students,

women, indigenous communities, and religious groups have taken to the streets in protest of DR-CAFTA — often meeting violent repression from local law enforcement. Lost livelihoods in rural communities, reduced access to lifesaving medicines, an erosion of labor and environmental protections will outweigh the potential benefits. Additionally, DR-CAFTA will maintain, if not worsen, the debt crisis.

What ROCLA members can do: Pressure Senate Finance Committee member Chuck Schumer and Sen. Clinton to vote no on DR-CAFTA. (Representative Slaughter has already declared herself opposed. Please thank her.) A vote in the Senate Finance is expected on June 14th.

Sen. Schumer's Rochester office: (585)-263-5866. Sen. Clinton's Rochester office (263-6250). Rep. Slaughter's number is (585)-232-4850. Visit www.house.gov for information on other Representatives. Please Act Now! (Information source: NISGUA – Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala).

Belize! (continued)



*Bulldozing the rainforest and Belizean laws
(photo from www.stopfortis.org)*

The culprit in Ann McPherson's research is a huge Canadian corporation, Fortis Inc, headquartered in St. John's, Newfoundland, her hometown. She urges us to write to its CEO, H. Stanley Marshall at PO Box 8837, 139 Water St., St. John's Newfoundland, A1B3T2, to cease construction of the Chalillo Dam on the Macal River, and to make public the final design and contract with the Chinese Sino-hydro. (Fortis Inc. has a subsidiary in New York State.) For in-depth coverage go to www.stopfortis.com and also the "Campaign to Stop the Chalillo Dam."

ROCLA and the Rochester Labor Council Oppose the National Endowment for Democracy (NED)

-by Peter Mott

ROCLA has given ongoing support to the birth of a movement of nearly 2000 US-based groups working in solidarity with the people of Latin America - the Latin America Solidarity Coalition (LASC). One of its Working Groups is concentrating on The National Endowment for Democracy (NED). NED is an unofficial arm of the Administration, funded by tax dollars and formed in the 1980s by the Reagan Administration to help with CIA-type projects. NED has funded dissidents in Cuba (many of those now jailed were on the payroll of the International Republican Institute which is a grantee of NED), as well as participants in the 2004 coup in Haiti. In the case of the attempted coup in Venezuela in 2003 NED funds were funneled through the AFL-CIO's DC-based Solidarity Center.

Labor members of the LASC Working Group on NED produced the resolution, "Building Unity and Trust Among Workers Worldwide" - to stop the AFL-CIO's acceptance of NED funds. This is going before The AFL-CIO annual convention in Chicago in July. LASC and the South Bay Labor Council have sent a letter to 5000 AFL-CIO organizers urging adoption of the resolution, and they will stage a peaceful demonstration there. This resolution already has been passed by the California State Labor Council.

We shared this information with the Rochester Labor Council through Jon Garlock, who reports its passage. Now, on both coasts, labor leaders have led the way for labor movement change.

Chuck Kaufman, National Co-Coordinator of the Nicaragua Network, and a member of the LASC's NED Working Group, said, "Latin America solidarity activists hoped that things had changed when the old Cold War labor body, American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD) was replaced by the Solidarity Center. But, Solidarity Center support for corrupt, business-allied union leaders in Venezuela, who helped plot the coup against Chavez dashed that hope and shows that US government money fundamentally corrupts labor solidarity."

For more information go to www.lasolidarity.org .

Close the SOA!

Stand together with thousands at the gates of Fort Benning, GA, home of the notorious School of the Americas/ WHINSEC, this November 18-20 to say, **"Stop the Violence -- Not in our Name!"** For more information call John Honeck at 964-7982.

Coming in September: A COLLEGE STUDENT'S VIEW OF Latin America

Tentative plans call for Kelli McCarthy, Pittsford resident and student at Geneseo, to share experiences and reflections from her Spring semester in South America. Kelli studied in Peru and traveled extensively through neighboring nations. This Fall she will be working as an intern at the American Embassy in Guatemala.

ROCLA meets the first Wed. of every month at the Downtown Presbyterian Church at 7 p.m.

Regular ROCLA monthly meetings will resume in September. Watch for the next newsletter for details.

Spotlight: Columbia

Since 2000 the United States government has given over \$2 billion of mostly military aid to Colombia. This "aid" has inflamed Colombia's 50-year-old civil conflict, contributing to more deaths, more kidnappings, and an increase in human suffering. The Bush Administration and hawks in Congress have repealed Clinton-era rules that prohibit US arms from being used to battle guerrilla groups and now US military aid to Colombia can be used in Colombia's counterinsurgency war. These deadly policies must be reversed. US involvement in Colombia is expensive, ineffective, inhumane, and will not lead to peace in the troubled nation. For more information and to find out what you can do, visit:

www.globalexchange.org/countries/americas/colombia

ROCHESTER COMMITTEE ON LATIN AMERICA (ROCLA)

ROCLA for many years has sought to be a bridge between the Rochester community and the people of Latin America. Monthly meetings on the 1st Wednesday of each month at the Downtown Presbyterian Church provide an opportunity to learn more about what is going on in that part of the world. In addition to providing information, ROCLA is committed to working for systemic justice and supports numerous organizations that are on the front line of this endeavor. School of the Americas Watch, the Mexico Solidarity Network, Rights Action and the Rochester Labor Film Festival are among the many groups that receive financial encouragement.

ROCLA Steering Committee

Marilyn Anderson, David Eisenberg, Hernan Escalante, Marilyn and Bob Kaiser (convener), John Locke, Gail and Peter Mott, Vic Vinkey, Mike Wahl, Tom Ward.