

UPDATE on the AMERICAS

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

A Metro Justice Task Force

January/February 2007

Oaxaca: Revolution, Resistance, Repression February 7th presentation by Rochester's Indy Media

There is great excitement in the air for ROCLA's February event. Rochester Indy Media will present eye-witness accounts and motion picture evidence of the violence against teachers during the last six months of protests in Mexico's state of Oaxaca. You are invited to DUPC (Downtown United Presbyterian Church) on Wednesday, February 7, at 7:00 PM for this special presentation.

Background: 70,000 teachers have been on strike in the state of Oaxaca since May 22. They are now joined by the Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca and supported by teacher strikes across Mexico and internationally. The Zapatistas have joined the marches in solidarity. However, the State's governor, Ulises Ruiz, has used police and gunmen to create violence and try to force the university to refuse refuge to the strikers as well as the use of the campus radio station. On October 29 3500 agents of the Federal Prevention Police raided the university



Photo from www.workingtv.com

with water cannons and tear gas. The result so far: 400 arrested, 17 deaths, 61 disappeared, 400 injured, and 53 political prisoners still in jail.

Join us to see and discuss this crisis in our neighboring country.

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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

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Hugo Who?

Lou Dobbs on CNN and even the so-called “liberal” New York Times call him a “strong man.” American politicians and pundits refer to him as a “tin horn dictator.” If so, he’s one of the few dictator who has allowed the opposition to freely publish and broadcast within his own country against his initiatives on a regular basis. He may also be the only dictator to allow the organizers of an unsuccessful coup to live freely after regaining the Presidency.



So who is Hugo Chavez? On May 2nd, a panel will offer alternative views to those of the mainstream US media.

Panel members include:

Daniel Hellinger is professor of political science at Webster University, in St. Louis, Missouri. He is the author of many articles on Venezuela, and his books include *Venezuela: Tarnished Democracy* (1991) and *Venezuelan Politics in the Chávez Era: Class, Polarization and Conflict* (2003), which he co-edited with Steve Ellner. He is a participating editor at *Latin American Perspectives*, for which he edited a volume on Venezuela. Among his areas of research on Venezuela is Oil politics; he is currently doing research comparing the political economy of copper policy in Chile to oil policy in Venezuela. He has held two Fulbright positions in Chile and has been a

visiting Senior Associate at St. Anthony’s College Oxford and the Center for Development Studies (CENDES) of the UCV.

Charles Hardy has been writing and speaking about the political and social reality of Latin America for over forty years. He has visited almost every Central and South American country. As a former Catholic priest who has lived in Venezuela for the past twenty years and spent eight of those years in a cardboard-and-tin shack in one of Caracas' barrios, Charles Hardy is in a unique position to explain what is taking place. *Cowboy in Caracas: A Personal Account of Venezuela's Democratic Revolution* gives the reader insight into the Venezuelan reality, using an anecdotal presentation drawn from the writer's personal experiences.

Olivia Burlingame Gombri, from the Venezuelan Information Office, author of the book, *The Building of a People's Democracy* has extensive experience in Venezuela. Gombri presented a video at last year’s annual ROCLA Rice and Beans dinner documenting the Venezuelan government’s Oil for the Poor program in New England during the winter of 2006 .

John Locke, ROCLA Steering Committee member and documentarian will moderate the discussion, which will be filmed and edited into a video presentation broadcast locally and available throughout the United States and Canada via the Venezuelan Solidarity Network.

Additional information will follow in the next issue of *Update on the Americas*.

Can you give a half hour for Haiti?

“Haitians often invoke the proverb ‘*men anpil, chay pa lou*’: many hands make the load light. Haiti’s human rights problems are severe, but experience shows that collective efforts by Americans and others in powerful countries can make a real difference.” – from the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti’s website, www.ijdh.org.

The poorest nation in this Hemisphere needs many hands right now. Two items deserve our attention and action:

One, the huge \$1.4 billion national debt must be cancelled. This is an “odious debt” caused by earlier dictators (some of whom have fled Haiti with the much of the treasury). It is also “onerous debt” because the people endure privation so extreme that malnutrition and high death rates are the result. The US Congress must re-vote on Rep. Maxine Waters’ Haiti Debt Relief

Resolution (H RES 888) which had 65 co-sponsors in the last Congress. **PLEASE PRESS YOUR CONGRESSPERSON TO ACT NOW.**

Two, the UN Peacekeeping forces on the island, pressured by the US, France and Canada, have carried out massacres in Cite de Soleil, the poorest slum in the capital, Port au Prince. Why? Because some of them are suspected of being supporters of President Aristide who, although democratically elected twice, was removed by US Marines in a US plane in a US-ordered military coup two years ago.

Will you join the Half-Hour for Haiti Action Alerts network and make a difference? You will receive alerts only once a week. Please send an email to HalfHour4Haiti@ijdh.org.

HOPE for Haiti

The January ROCLA meeting featured a second progress report by Sarah Brownell and Kevin Foos. This couple, living at the Catholic Worker House (St. Joseph’s House of Hospitality), will return to Borgne in February. Kevin, a community organizer, has carried out multiple projects to build leadership skills among teen-agers, including the *Looking Through Their Eyes* project that seeks to empower youth in Haiti to become forces for change in their community. Sarah, a civil engineer, is working with community members to create new water purification systems, new latrines and reforestation. They work closely with Project HOPE based at Spiritus Christi Church here in Rochester. Their eloquent presentations and moving photographic exhibition impressed the audience, which contributed \$156 to their work, augmenting funds given by ROCLA over the past two years.

ROCLA at the December 2006 Alternative Fair

By Marilyn Anderson

At our once-a-year sales benefit, ROCLA raised funds for some of the many projects we support; and we're happy to report a profit of about \$1300 (gross \$2080). Many thanks to everyone who worked at the table and to the purchasers.

A highlight of our sale was Peter Mott's new book: *Cancer in the Body Politic* that, before the end of the Fair, sold out the stock on hand. Peter donated all proceeds to ROCLA. Marilyn Mould made a donation of a beautiful Guatemalan table cloth and napkins set which was quickly snatched up. This year, we offered textiles and other crafts from three Fair Trade sources in Guatemala: our reliable Upavim and Mayan Hands, plus a new one, Samajel Batz – which is made up of a number of women's cooperatives. We were able to offer a number of new items along with old favorites. Many people also appreciated our union-printed Maya Artists calendar published by NISGUA (the Network in Solidarity With Guatemala). Please note in your November calendar that this year we will take orders in advance for it.

Your input is welcome and appreciated. Let us know what you would like to see next December when you come to the ROCLA tables – possibly some of the most colorful at the Alternative Fair! Remember: By buying Fair Trade you help Maya women keep their ancient traditions, you help ROCLA, and you go home with beautiful things!

[Ed. Note: *The new Samajel Batz textiles were a donation by the author.*]

February Labor Film Special: Black Gold

ROCLA supporters know that, as an organization, we support all aspects of Fair Trade throughout the world. Although this movie is not filmed in Latin America, the situation depicted is typical of those faced by coffee farmers everywhere. If you do not now buy Fair Trade coffee exclusively, after you see this film it is likely you always will. Please come! Fair Trade coffee will be sold at all showings by Abundance Coop.

Three Screenings, all at the Dryden Theatre, 900 East Ave:
Friday, February 2 at 8 p.m.
Saturday, February 3 at 5 p.m.
Sunday, February 4 at 7 p.m.

BLACK GOLD (Mark & Nick Francis, UK 2006, 78 min., Beta-SP projection).

This eye-opening new documentary may cause you to think twice before your next trip to Starbucks. By contrasting thriving coffee shops in Europe and North America against devastatingly poor coffee farms in Ethiopia, the filmmakers shed light on the unfair trade and labor practices that have kept Africa mired in poverty for so long. Black Gold's central figure is Tadesse Meskela, manager of a farmers' cooperative. He travels the world trying to negotiate fair prices for his members and explain to Westerners that most of their coffee dollar is going into the pockets of commodities traders and multi-national corporations.



Photo from www.blackgoldmovie.com

Daniel Ortega is President of Nicaragua; Pledges a New Start in Education

by Arnie Matlin

Despite extensive U.S. interference, Daniel Ortega and the Sandinistas triumphed in the Nicaraguan presidential elections held November 5th, 2006. Voter turnout was massive (over 75% of eligible voters), the votes were counted honestly, and when the dust settled the Sandinistas had won. Daniel Ortega and the FSLN received 38% of the vote. The U.S.-backed candidate, Eduardo Montealegre of the National Liberal Alliance received 29%, José Rizo of the far-right Liberal Conservative party received 26%, and Edmundo Jarquín of the Sandinista Renovation Movement obtained 6%.

President Ortega has to walk a tightrope between Nicaragua's dependence on international financiers and the expectations of the people who voted for him. So far, he has convinced the bankers that he will pursue a moderate socialist course, and they appear satisfied that there's little likelihood of financial turmoil.

The U.S. government has decided that, after all, Mr. Ortega is not an evil enemy of democracy. Faced with the reality of the Sandinista victory, the State Department has declared that President Ortega is someone with whom the United States can work in harmony.

In an exciting move taken just before his inauguration, Mr. Ortega promised to immediately begin rebuilding the Nicaraguan educational system, which has languished during 16 years of neo-liberal neglect. The new government promised to make free education a reality for all Nicaraguan children, and to make eradication of adult illiteracy a top priority.

[Ed. note: The author, honored last year as the only US citizen ever to be made a "Hero of the Revolution," left on 1/5 for his 26th visit to Nicaragua and the inauguration of Daniel Ortega as President.]

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ROCLA MEMBERSHIP QUIZ

How many paying members does ROCLA have?

- 354 ___
- 137 ___
- 49 ___

How many people receive the bi-monthly ROCLA newsletter, *Update on the Americas*?

- 375 ___
- 86 ___
- 128 ___

If you did not renew your membership last October/November, if you appreciate ROCLA programs, enjoy the newsletters, attend the Labor Film Festival, or look forward to ROCLA's booth at the Alternative Fair

P L E A S E

MAIL IN YOUR MEMEMBERSHIP RENEWAL: ONLY \$20 FOR A SINGLE AND \$30 FOR A FAMILY. Memberships go from October to October. Send check payable to ROCLA/Metro Justice to:

Marilyn Kaiser
 150 Attridge Rd.
 Churchville, NY 14428.

MUCHAS GRACIAS!

ANSWERS

We currently have 49 paying members. 375 people receive the newsletter. Is there a disconnect here?

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 United 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 assistance and 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.

Update on the Americas Publishing Team
 Editors: Gail and Peter Mott; Designer: John Locke

**SAVE THE DATE!
 ROCLA RICE and BEANS
 AWARD DINNER**

Friday, March 16, 2007
 6:00 PM
 Downtown United Presbyterian Church (DUPC)
 121 N. Fitzhugh St.
 \$25-\$15/person. No one turned away.
 Call Now for Reservations: Bob Kaiser, Convener:
 585-293-3194.

Five reasons why you should come to ROCLA's annual Rice and Bean dinner:

- **The popular and delicious Rice and Beans - plus salsa, corn bread, and salad catered by Peg Gefell.**
- **Mouth-watering homemade desserts;**
- **Latin music;**
- **Camaraderie;**
- **Very special White Dove Awards presentation.**

This year ROCLA's Annual International White Dove Award will be presented to **Dr. Magda Enriquez, Sandinista Representative to the United States.**

Dr. Enriquez has been a Sandinista militant since 1974. Between 1985 and 1990 she was Nicaraguan Ambassador-at-Large, and served as a Special Envoy of the President of Nicaragua. In this capacity she served on delegations to many major international meetings at the U.N. and all over the world.

Dr. Enriquez will be able to speak with first-hand knowledge of the Nicaraguan revolution, the Contra War against Nicaragua, and events leading up to the recent election of Daniel Ortega as President of Nicaragua.

Michael Argaman, Treasurer of Metro Justice, will receive the Local White Dove Award. Michael has been an activist for many years, and tireless in his Nicaragua solidarity work as Convener of the Ciudad Hermana Task Force. He has led numerous delegations to El Sauce, Nicaragua, and is well-known in the Rochester area and in Nicaragua for having more energy and for being able to do more work than any three other people!

Call 293-3194 soon to reserve a place for yourself or a table of eight for your organization or group.