

UPDATE on the AMERICAS

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

A Taskforce of Metro Justice

January—February 2008

¿Hugo Who? World Premiere for February ROCLA Meeting

US policies continue to deliberately undermine Venezuela's young democracy; and our corporate media spread the propaganda that President Chavez is a "dictator." Join us on **Wednesday, February 6 at 7 PM at the Downtown Presbyterian Church, 121 N. Fitzhugh Street**, to see the world premiere of the DVD, "Hugo Who?" produced by videographer and ROCLA member John Locke. Then weigh the evidence and add your voice to the discussion.

Last May, with the support of a \$1000 grant from the Unitarian Church's Wenger Fund for Peace,

ROCLA presented the program ¿Hugo Who? Defining a President, His Policies and the People of Venezuela, a forum to discuss the politics, issues and alternative views surrounding Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez - particularly the controversy over US involvement in Venezuelan policies and the international competition for oil.

Panelists included:

Charles Hardy, former ordained Catholic priest who spent eight years living in a cardboard and tin shack in the barrios of Caracas. His new book is *Cowboy in*

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Conference organizer and video producer, John Locke, and panelists, Olivia Burlingame Gombri, Daniel Hellenger, and Charlie Hardy.

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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 Free parking across the street in City Hall Parking Lot

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

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NAFTA and Immigration: A New Latin American Blog Starts in Rochester

- by Peter Mott

We've discussed many times how the economic situation in Mexico has worsened drastically since 1994 when the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was pushed through Congress in a close vote after enormous pressure from President Bill Clinton. We've discussed how the increasing poverty is, in good part, a result of competition by subsidized US corn and retail businesses (Mexico now has 700 Walmarts), which have put millions of Mexicans out of work - forcing them into the slums of cities, the sweatshops near the border, and a desperate migration across the deserts of our southwest (300 deaths last summer in Arizona alone). We also know what NAFTA has done to millions of manufacturing jobs in the US and Canada. Yet few, if any, critics are calling for an end to NAFTA. No conferences or campaigns have been called for this purpose.

To fill in this void and stir up some thinking and action, INTERCONNECT (the Rochester-based Latin America quarterly national newsletter) is trying a blog (www.interconn.org). Already, Peggy Valdez of the Mexico Solidarity Network has written the following in response to our question, "Should we consider a national campaign to end NAFTA?"

"Why not a new campaign to defeat NAFTA? We have fresh allies in this struggle! In Chicago, on January 2nd Centro Sin Fronteras, a small but very vocal grassroots, community based organization staged a protest and press conference in the middle of Chicago's financial district to oppose NAFTA's final stage - the disappearance of the last protective Mexican tariffs on the importation of basic crops like corn, beans, and sugar to Mexico. Their focus was the direct connection to the effects NAFTA has had and will have on immigration. I saw the local news coverage and it was pretty good. The reporter made the connection between NAFTA destroying the ability of farmers in Mexico to compete against US subsidized crops and the [increasing] number of immigrants.

"It's significant that community-based groups here (social movements in Mexico already made the connection years ago!) are now

making that huge jump from local issues to global policies. We have a real bread and butter issue in the current immigration situation that makes the connection for us easier.

"I know folks have been working on NAFTA for a long time and feel discouraged since this last phase of NAFTA went through without much opposition. But I think that ten years of education and real facts on the direct effects of NAFTA have paved the way for a renewed effort to oppose this trade policy. [Now] we just have to agree on two things that will unite the immigrant rights movement, solidarity groups, and labor and trade policies activists:

- We need an immigration policy that takes into account that our foreign trade policy has caused the increased numbers of immigrants and we have to take responsibility for this by creating a path to legalization for everyone here until the root cause is remedied.
- Get rid of NAFTA. We must redefine our development goals with trade agreements that will assure sustainable economic benefits for all our partners, economic benefits that will strengthen their economies and that will eventually benefit the US by creating stronger partners and markets for the US."



RICE & BEANS DINNER—FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 29th!

(THIS IS A LEAP YEAR, AND ROCLA IS TAKING FULL ADVANTAGE OF THAT FACT)
GREAT FOOD*GREAT SPEAKERS*GREAT FRIENDS* GREAT AUCTION

Rochester Committee on Latin America (ROCLA) invites you to join your friends and fellow activists for the annual Rice & Beans Dinner. The event will take place on:

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 29th, 6:00 PM
DOWNTOWN UNITED
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
121 NORTH FITZHUGH STREET,
ROCHESTER

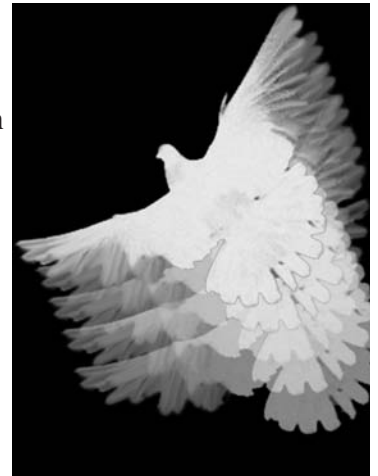
COST: \$15.00 - \$25.00/person (sliding scale)
[No one turned away because of lack of funds]

This year's winner of the International White Dove Award is Charles ("Chuck") Kaufman. Chuck Kaufman has been one of the most steadfast leaders of the fight for freedom and justice in Latin America. He has served as National Co-Coordinator of the Nicaragua Network for the past 15 years. He is also currently serving as Interim National Coordinator for the newly formed Venezuela Solidarity Network (VSN), and represents both organizations on the boards of numerous coalitions such as the Latin America Solidarity Coalition. It was Kaufman's vision that led to the formation of the Alliance for Global Justice, a D.C.-based umbrella organization that presently includes Nicaragua Network, VSN, and Committee for Labor Rights. Kaufman first visited Nicaragua on a coffee-picking brigade in December 1987, and has led many delegations to Nicaragua since. His most recent trip was in June 2006, to investigate US interference in Nicaragua's presidential election. Kaufman also led a similar delegation to Venezuela in November of that year.

After graduating from George Mason University, Kaufman embarked on a lucrative career in advertising. He gave up this career and began to volunteer at the Nicaragua Network in 1987, when he became outraged at the Iran/Contra scandal during the Reagan Administration. Since then, he has devoted his life to opposing misguided U.S. policy towards Latin America.

The winners of the Local White Dove Award are Sarah Brownell and Kevin Foos, recognized for their extraordinary work with the people of Borgne, Haiti, where they are spending most of their time.

Two weeks after her graduation from RIT as an engineer, Sarah arrived at the HOPE health clinic in the farming and fishing community of Borgne, Haiti, to install solar panels as part of an independent study project on renewable energy. Since then, she has continued to travel throughout the world carrying out similarly important engineering projects. Sarah recently co-founded a non-profit organization, Sustainable Organic Integrated Livelihoods (SOIL), to promote simple environmental technologies and techniques in Northern Haiti.



Kevin Foos is Director and Chairman of the Board of SOIL. He is an organizer who works on community development. A photographer, he initiated "Looking Through Their Eyes," a photography project for classroom use to empower children to work to bring change to their community.

When you attend the Beans & Rice Dinner, you'll be able to honor these exemplary people, enjoy an extraordinary meal catered by Peg Gefell of Savory Thyme, and get together with your friends and fellow activists. Last year, the auction was one of the highlights of the evening, and ROCLA is planning an even bigger and better auction this year.

The Beans & Rice Dinner is ROCLA's major fundraiser. Please plan to attend to have a good time, support ROCLA, and, in turn, support ROCLA's work on behalf of the people of Latin America! Please help us by reserving your tickets in advance. Call the Kaisers at 293-3194 or the Motts at 381-5606. Tickets will be held for you at the door. (Tickets may also be purchased at the door before the dinner.)

DON'T MISS THIS IMPORTANT EVENT!

— Arnie Matlin, for ROCLA Steering Committee

Sustainable Organic Integrated Livelihoods

Excerpted from the SOIL 2007 Newsletter

— by Sarah Brownell, Co-Founder

CAN YOU HEAR HAITI?

Suffering from hundreds of years of slavery, dictatorships, political turmoil, economic exploitation, and human rights violations, Haiti has long been the United States' poorest neighbor.

The Haitian people, however, have an unquenchable desire for freedom, an amazing resilience, and a faith in democracy such that they would walk an entire day, stand hours in line in the hot sun, and rub their calloused thumbs on stones to reveal their fingerprints—just to participate in elections. Whenever there is a small space made for acceptance in the climate of repression, grassroots groups spring forth. SOIL is a part of a new renaissance of hope and energy that is pushing up out of the land in Haiti **RIGHT NOW.**

No matter how you calculate it, poverty is still the most insidious and devastating human rights violation in Haiti, killing and undermining the spirit of millions of people, including those of us who might only hear about Haiti in passing on a TV news show or in a newsletter. When so many people do not have access to clean water, enough food, a grade school education, a job, health care, or even a private place to go to the bathroom, how can anyone's spirit be at ease? We at SOIL don't just believe in building environmentally sustainable infrastructures and programs, but in nurturing the skills, hope, and spirit of the people—including ourselves.

Through your support of SOIL's programs, you enable grassroots organizations in northern Haiti to explore alternative solutions to the problems of poverty that protect both human health and the environment. Our technology centers give local people the choice over which life-saving technologies are best for their community and support them to conduct their own research experiments. Our participatory education programs allow folks trained in US universities and those trained on the land to exchange knowledge and ideas. Our collaborations with women's groups, peasant organizations, and youth groups, allow simple technologies that protect health and the environment to find their way to the poorest slums and most remote villages...

SOIL's opportunities for work in Haiti are blossoming. We need your help to meet the needs and support the dreams of our Haitian brothers and sisters as they spread out before us. **Come with us, dream with us, grow with us!** Help us to Build a New Society in the Shell of the Old!

Send your mailing address to soil_info@yahoo.com for a beautiful paper version of our newsletter.

[Ed. note: Come to the Rice and Beans Dinner and learn about the many opportunities to become a part of this life-giving program.

Also, visit www.oursoil.org

??? Did you know that...

- New “leftist” President Correa of Ecuador has informed the US that our Manta Military Base will not be allowed to remain on their soil – until the US government allows Ecuador to build a military base in Miami. Correa was elected with a popular mandate to oppose “neoliberalism” (the Washington consensus economic policies of corporate globalization and free trade);
- Bolivia's new “leftist” President Evo Morales has joined Costa Rica, Argentina, Uruguay, Venezuela, and Bolivia in agreeing with School of the Americas Watch (SOAW) to stop sending their military for training at the School of the Americas (now known as the “Western Hemisphere Institute for

Security Cooperation”). This was announced to the 22,000 activists (including Rochester's John Honneck) who gathered at the 18th annual Vigil at Fort Benning in November to Close the SOA;

- The Mexican army and paramilitary forces have renewed their low-intensity conflict in poor Mayan villages in rural Chiapas, driving out the people to make room for oil and energy exploration, and highway construction through the Lacandon Jungle – home of the Zapatista rebels (EXLN).

Have you noticed that this kind of news is never reported in the Democrat and Chronicle's bi-weekly page of news of our neighbors in the Americas?

KIVA LOANS

- by Lynda Howland, ROCLA member

Perhaps some of you have heard about an organization called Kiva. They arrange for loans for people in “developing” countries so that they can start businesses. Ordinary people like you and me donate money to Kiva, which is then distributed to the individuals the donors designate. The “businesses” then have certain amounts of time to repay the loan. The donors then get their investment back, or they can donate it to someone else. Donors are notified whenever the business makes a payment on the loan.

Kiva recently received publicity from Oprah, and is also mentioned in Bill Clinton’s latest book (about how we can help others in need). Kiva has gotten a great response to the publicity. When I went on their web site two days ago, they were limiting contributions to each individual business- person to \$25 so that everyone listed on their site could benefit. I donated to a man from Ecuador who needed money to buy wood to make coffins. He received all the money he needed. All the individuals looking for donations are listed on the web site. When you go to the home page, you’ll see a couple listed - then a hyperlink “See all businesses in need.” Click on that, and there will be at least 4 pages of businesses. So if anyone who wants to make a donation that will make a difference to someone, I would strongly encourage you to check on Kiva. The web site is www.Kiva.org



Francisco Monserrate Casket Workshop, Ecuador

Francisco has had a small furniture making workshop in his home for 3 years and has 20 years of experience in the profession. More specifically, Francisco learned about making and decorating coffins because he worked in well-known funeral homes in the city. With his own money from his savings, he started his business. First, Francisco buys plain coffins; then, with his wife, he finishes and sells them. Francisco offers his products to the funeral homes at which he worked and is successful there because they know that he works very responsibly. Francisco will use the loan to purchase plain coffins, cloth, thread, lace, solvent and other items so that he can meet the needs of his customers both

inside the city and outside it, now that people are recommending him because of his good work. He has worked with Mifex before and is a proven hard-worker and responsible borrower.

Francisco is 43 years old and has a daughter. His wife supports him a lot in his business and is in charge of putting designs into the cloth that goes in the bottom of the coffins. Francisco is confident that his investment will help him provide for his customers and thus increase revenues, which will allow him to improve his house.

TORTURE and ANOTHER SOA

On November 19, 2006, Jesuit Fr. Steve Kelly and Franciscan Fr. Louie Vitale walked into Fort Huachuca in southern Arizona, home of the U.S. Army Intelligence Center and School. Their aim was to speak with enlisted personnel and deliver a letter to Major General Barbara Fast (then commander at the post and a key figure in the torture of detainees at Abu Ghraib Prison in Iraq) opposing the teaching of torture and the Military Commissions Act of 2006. They were stopped as they approached the gatehouse, and arrested after kneeling in prayer. Both men later pled not guilty to charges of trespass and failure to comply with a police officer. After pretrial hearings, Federal Magistrate Hector Estrada granted the government’s motion in limine forbidding the defendants and their attorney, Bill Quigley, from mentioning at

WHY NOT BECOME A MEMBER OF ROCLA?

ROCLA is committed to providing information on issues in Central and South America and then following up with action. One way you can help is by becoming a member. Just e-mail Bob Kaiser at Rkaiser3@rochester.rr.com for further information.

This year’s membership drive has been our most successful and we would welcome your support.

Continued on last page

CALLING FOR DESSERTS!

Do you need taste-testers for that scrumptious dessert recipe you're longing to try?

Never fear - we have the solution!

Drop off your succulent offering just before the Rice and Beans Dinner

(or, if you can't attend we'll gladly pick it up).

Please let Gail Mott (585-381-5606) know what you'll be bringing.

THANK YOU!

ITEMS NEEDED to make the RICE AND BEANS AUCTION A ROUSING SUCCESS!

IDEAS:

A WEEKEND IN THE COUNTRY • TUCKED-AWAY TREASURES • HOMEMADE ANYTHING • A DINNER FOR TWO • A BOTTLE OF WINE • A BOX OF BOOKS • A GIFT OF TIME • TICKETS • BREAD • CAKE • PIE

PLEASE CALL Bob Good 585-473-1159

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

¿Hugo Who?

(Continued)

Caracas: A Personal Account of Venezuela's Democratic Revolution;

Daniel Hellinger, professor of political science at Webster University in St. Louis, Missouri and a leading scholar on Venezuela. Author of *Venezuela: Tarnished Democracy* (1991) and *Venezuelan Politics in the Chavez Era: Class, Polarization, and Conflict* (2003);

and **Olivia Burlingame Gombri**, Executive Director of the Venezuelan Information Office in Washington, DC, dedicated to educating the public about contemporary Venezuela. Editor of *Venezuela Reader: The Building of a People's Democracy*.

IndyMedia of Rochester filmed and John Locke edited the program to be used to help inform the public and hopefully prevent a US invasion of Venezuela, a second US-backed coup, or prevent the perpetuation of the same sort of belligerent policies that have been in place for the past 47 years against Cuba. Locke will be available to answer questions, along with Vic Vinkey. Vic, who was part of a delegation to Venezuela, has prepared a statement about events concerning the recent peoples' referendum on the 69 proposed changes in the Venezuelan Constitution - a vote lost by President Chavez.

The meeting is free and open to the public. DPC is wheelchair-accessible and looped for those with hearing loss. Free parking is available in the City Hall parking lot across from the church.

TORTURE and ANOTHER SOA (continued)

trial anything about torture, international law and related topics. Because this gag order kept them from using their intended defense, the priests changed their plea to *nolo contendere* (no contest) on October 17, the date of their scheduled trial and also the first anniversary of the signing of the Military Commissions Act. They were sentenced to five months in prison, which they began serving immediately."

Fr. Kelly and Fr. Vitale ask that every woman and man of conscience do all that they can to protest the injustice of torture and to end US policy that sanctions torture.