

UPDATE on the AMERICAS

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

A Metro Justice Task Force

MAY — JUNE 2005



Five Local Students to Report on Conditions at The Border

by Michael Freeman

On May 4 at 7:00 PM at DUPC, five Rochester-area high school students (from Fairport, Greece, Irondequoit, Penfield and Wayland) who traveled to Mexico to take part in the **Border Witness Youth Delegation** to Reynosa and Matamoros last February will be sharing their experiences with ROCLA. They learned first-hand about the impact of NAFTA and the Maquiladora system on the working, environmental, and social conditions of Mexico's poor. They met with labor and environmental leaders and talked with dozens of factory workers, fishermen, and farmers. On Wednesday, May 4, they will be sharing with ROCLA what they saw and learned.

Note: Michael is a high school senior who has received many awards for the activism he began four years ago. He has worked tirelessly for peace, justice, the homeless, and student rights. Most recently he received the National Jefferson Award for his community service. He has done much to raise the consciousness of hundreds – young and old alike.

Cuba, si! Embargo, no! Join in the 16th Cuba Friendshipment

by Vic Vinkey

This year once again we will join the Pastors for Peace Friendshipment to Cuba. The purpose, as always, is two fold: **First** - to send needed aid to the people of Cuba, who are suffering from more than 40 years of the US declared embargo, and **Second** - to do so in open violation of the immoral "Trading with the Enemy", Torricelli, and Helms-Burton Acts.

The caravan will follow 13 different routes across the US and Canada to the US-Mexico border, then on to Cuba. Upon arrival, the aid will be sorted and distributed by ecumenical groups.

We are now collecting medical supplies and equipment, medicines, medical books, bicycles and IBM-compatible computers (Pentium II or newer). **If we have sufficient funds we hope to buy an ambulance!** As the caravan visitation date of July 8th approaches we will be packing and labeling the donations.

Please, if you can help in any way by donating, transporting, or packing the supplies contact Vic Vinkey at 271-8723. Also, plan to join us in welcoming the caravanistas and loading the vehicles at the Downtown United Presbyterian Church on July 8th.

Last year, we were proud to be one of 127 communities in 42 states and three Canadian provinces joining in the 15th Friendshipment.

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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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Strait Talk presents another point of view on US/Cuban Relations

ROCLA is sponsoring a screening of the video documentary, *Strait Talk: Politics, Propaganda and Perceptions Across the Florida Straits* on May 1 at 1:00 pm at the Little Theater at 240 East Avenue. Proceeds will be contributed to the Pastors for Peace Friendshipment Cuba Caravan (see story on front page for details).

Produced by local documentarian and adjunct professor John Locke, *Strait Talk* examines US/Cuban relations and the effects of the US Embargo on the tiny island 90 miles from the southern US border.

John and Debbie Locke visited Cuba in April and May of 2003 and interviewed many officials and ordinary Cubans alike. "We brought back 30 hours of video including interviews with the former mayor of Havana and the General Secretary of Labor, as well as ordinary Cubans." John Locke said. "We were surprised at just how desperately the Cuban people wanted to tell their story. Apparently, many Cubans have a very different opinion of their government than the US mainstream media reports. Cubans watch CNN and realize that their point of view is not being presented to the US people. They were grateful to have the opportunity."

Upon their return to the United States, John began to catalog his footage and realized that in order to present a balanced documentary, he needed to include the official position of the US government. Kevin Whitaker, Coordinator of Cuban Affairs at the US State Department was happy to participate. "Mr.



Kevin Whitaker
Coordinator of Cuban Affairs, United States State Department

Whitaker answered questions on tape for more than an hour. He expertly articulated the State Department's official position under the Bush Administration. I was struck by how little change has taken place considering there is no longer a 'Soviet threat.' It's almost as if the State Department is stuck in a time warp," Locke observed.

Not everyone in the US government takes as hard a position against Castro's Cuba. US Congressman Jim McGovern from Massachusetts also participated in the project and suggests a policy of constructive engagement similar



More than 1 million Cubans and guests were on hand for the annual May Day celebration on the Plaza de la Revolution.

to that used with other Communist countries and South Africa. His comments provide insight into an alternative approach subscribed to by many in Congress on both sides of the aisle.



The documentary features Cuban music, scenes from Havana, and footage from Fidel Castro's 2003 May Day address. English subtitles are added where needed.

"Wherever I've shown this video, most people walk away saying, 'I had no idea.'" Locke predicts, "*Strait Talk* may not change viewers' minds about how we should engage one of the last true Communist nations on the planet, but it will most definitely open their eyes to a point of view they won't hear in the main stream media."

For more information on US/Cuban relations, video clips and photos from *Strait Talk*, and to contact John Locke, go to www.strait-talk.org.



May 1 at 1:00 pm
at the Little Theater
at 240 East Avenue.

Q&A
After the Screening

TELL THE U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT HANDS OFF NICARAGUA!

On November 14, 2004, Daniel Fisk, US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, arrived in Nicaragua on what was called a "private official visit." In several meetings, Mr. Fisk spoke to the political leaders of what he called the Nicaraguan "democratic forces." By this, Mr. Fisk meant the right-wing Nicaraguan political parties. Mr. Fisk did not speak to any leaders of the Sandinista party (FSLN), although the Sandinistas had just won a huge victory in the municipal elections.

According to Wilfredo Navarro of the right-wing Constitutional Liberal Party, he and Mr. Fisk discussed—among other subjects—"The need for Nicaraguan democratic forces to reunite, and the willingness of the U.S. government to support democracy in Nicaragua."

It's obvious that Mr. Fisk was sent from Washington to Managua to lay down the law to the right-wing Nicaraguan politicians—put your differences aside and beat the FSLN—or else! Even though the Nicaraguan Presidential elections won't take place until November 2006, the US State Department is already repeating its traditional role of strong-arm Big Brother interference in Nicaraguan internal affairs.

The question isn't whether we, as U.S. citizens, support a Sandinista presidential victory in 2006. **The question is whether the U.S. should be allowed to dictate Nicaragua's political destiny.**

**WRITE TO: DANIEL FISK, DEPUTY ASST.
SECRETARY OF STATE
US STATE DEPARTMENT
2201 C STREET, SW
WASHINGTON, DC 20520
FAX: 202-647-0791**

Tell Mr. Fisk that, as a US citizen, you cannot accept your government's meddling in the internal affairs of another sovereign nation. The US has no right to tell Nicaraguan political leaders whom to nominate and whom to reject. Tell Mr. Fisk you demand that the US keeps its hands off Nicaragua!

Send copies of your letter to your Representative (Washington, DC 20515) and Senators Clinton and Schumer (Washington, DC 20510).

For more information, contact Nicaragua Network,
1247 E St SE, Washington DC 20003. Phone: 202-544-9355.
email: nicanet@afgj.org
and
Rochester Ciudad Hermana Task Force,
www.pregnantcow.com
Prepared by A.H. Matlin, M.D. ahmatlingvcp@igc.org 04/05

Latin America Lending Library (continued from last newsletter)

Last month we listed videos and DVDs that are available to ROCLA members and friends. Books are featured this month. We hope to increase awareness of the struggles of our brothers and sisters in Latin America by sharing these resources with the larger community. If you would like to borrow any of these materials or know of teachers, church groups, or others who might want to use them please call Sandy Morales at 235-7932.

BOOKS

(list compiled by Sandy Morales)

Nicaragua: What Difference Could Revolution Make? by Joseph Collins. 1986. Food and Farming in the New Nicaragua.

Bridge of Courage by Jennifer Harbury. Life stories of the Guatemalan companeros and companeras. Intro. by Noam Chomsky.

Voice of Many Crying. John S. Munday shares his experiences in Central America and engages in theological reflection on what he saw and heard there.

Our Culture is Our Resistance: Repression, Refuge and Healing in Guatemala. Photos by Jonathan Miller. Preface by Rigoberta Menchu. Narrates the death and resurrection of the indigenous people of Guatemala.

Testimony: Death of a Guatemalan Village, by Victor Montejo. An eyewitness account by a Guatemalan school teacher, of an army attack on a village and it's tragic aftermath.

Endangered Peoples, by Art Davidson. Foreword by Rigoberta Menchu. Photos by Art Wolfe and John Isaac. Brings to light a hidden crisis of our times. As never before, the Earth's richly varied peoples and distinct cultures are vanishing overnight.

Thoughts on Human Dignity and Freedom, an Amnesty International compilation of poems and photos of people from around the world. Foreword by Arthur Miller.

Tribe of Women :A Photojournalist Chronicles the Lives of her Sisters Around the Globe, by Connie Bickman.

THANKS TO MANY, RICE AND BEANS DINNER A HUGE SUCCESS!

Great spirit! That was the main impression as we looked around Celebration Hall at the Downtown Church on March 4. The room heralded spring with pots of primroses, festive table settings and forsythia blooming at the podium. Loyal volunteers Mel and Barbara Witmer (the "bean counters" as they called themselves) registered more than 118 of us. Inside we settled in to Savory Thyme's delicious organic rice, beans, salsa, salad and cornbread. Then headed for the dessert table to choose from 20 delectable desserts prepared by ROCLA members. Bob Good graciously MC'd once again, and ROCLA convener, Bob Kaiser, welcomed everyone.

Local White Dove Award recipient, Henry Padron, was honored for his 25 years as a Rochester educator, author, musician, poet, and activist especially regarding issues of justice and peace here and in Puerto Rico. He also has contributed his talents, time and effort to numerous ROCLA events. A high point of the evening was his spirited reading of his poem, "Two Worlds" ("Dos Mundos"), read originally at the 1986 ROCLA-sponsored Latin America Solidarity Festival.

As he was presented with the National White Dove Award, Cuban musician Pablo Menendez was overcome with emotion. Accustomed to addressing audiences who don't know much about the realities of Cuba, he was deeply moved at this gathering of activists and supporters who were so obviously in solidarity with the people of Cuba, Haiti and all of Latin America, as evidenced by the many announcements of upcoming events and actions. He gave us a fascinating and illuminating narrative about the development of Cuban music, highlighted with many video clips. Then he played and sang for us; and the music sounded as it was meant to thanks to Michael Lopez and his sound system.

There are so many people who made this evening work. An enormous **THANK YOU** to:

John Locke for publicity and designing such an artistic program.

Mike Wahl for radio announcements.

Vic Vinkey for publicity and set-up.

Marilyn Anderson for creating the beautiful White Dove Awards, decorating the walls, and introducing Henry Padron.

Bob Kaiser, who picked up all the food and cleaned up until the end.

Barbara and Mel Witmer for spending the evening tallying checks and cash.

Bob Good, our host, who was simpatico with the Cuban focus having spent Sept. and Oct. of 1970 with the 3rd Venceremos Brigade to Cuba working on citrus farms.

Peter Mott, who called for the desserts and washed all the dishes.

Marilyn Kaiser, who kept track of tickets, brought the primroses, and organized the set-up.

Gail Mott for making the punch, introducing Pablo Menendez, and helping out.

Joseph Sorrentino for setting up and cleaning up.

David Eisenberg for promoting the raffle that generated \$100 for ROCLA work.

The Bristol Valley Theatre, donors for the raffle.

And **all the helpers** during the evening.

An appropriate end to a splendid evening was a contribution of \$500 made to Pablo's work. After other expenses, the profit from the dinner was just under \$900 which will be used for on-going projects. If you have an interest in projects dealing with structural change, hands-on self-help, movement-building, accompaniment, or other justice efforts please let Bob Kaiser know by emailing him at mbkaiser@juno.com.

Smells Good! Tastes Good! Does Good!

- by Joseph Sorrentino

Workers in the coffee growing regions in Mexico toil under some of the most difficult conditions imaginable while growing some of the best coffee in the world. Much of the coffee is shade-grown and organic, which is the best thing for the planet, yet small coffee growers still live in extreme poverty. I spent three weeks in several remote mountain villages in Oaxaca and Puebla documenting life there. I went to those villages because I'd written about Mexican farmworkers in Western New York and, after hearing stories about their lives back in Mexico, decided I needed to see it for myself. It was worse than I had imagined. Rather than going into details here, anyone interested in the articles I've written about farmworkers and my trip to Mexico for *City* may go to www.rochester-citynews.com.

While I was in Mexico, I made contact with two coffee cooperatives and have since done some reading about Fair Trade, especially about Fair Trade coffee. There's no doubt that Fair Trade gives farmers a better price for their coffee. I would like to start a local campaign promoting Fair Trade coffee and would like to organize a small committee to explore this possibility. My basic idea is to promote coffee shops and stores that sell Fair Trade coffee and to contact those that do not and encourage them to at least carry some Fair Trade coffee.

Anyone interested in this may contact me at: joso1444@usa.net. I will have an exhibit of photographs from the villages this July at the Williams Gallery at the Unitarian Church. Details will be given in upcoming newsletters.

Note: Joseph Sorrentino, a writer and photographer, is a new member of ROCLA. Among other things, he works with homeless people in Rochester with RAIHN (Rochester Area Interfaith Hospitality Network) and is a member of the Zen Center.



Todd Bauer Reports from Guatemala

Hola, Everyone,

I hope all is well in your lives. It has been a horrific week here [note: report received March 20]. Monday there were nation-wide demonstrations against the signing of CAFTA (Central America Free Trade Agreement), and the law of concessions which will privatize all governmental services and assets. In many parts of the country the demonstrations were peaceful but in the capitol certain groups took advantage of the opportunity to loot and damage public property. The demonstrations continued here on Tuesday in Huehuetenango, organized by the teacher's union and different non-government organizations that make up civil society. Part of the demonstration was blocking the highway so that the vehicles couldn't travel and therefore the government incurred economic losses. Around noon the police and army came with orders to unblock the road. They didn't try to negotiate with the protestors. They fired tear gas among them and then began shooting. There were 12 people injured and one man killed. He was beaten with a billy stick and then shot in the side of the head. He was assassinated. Many friends who were there say the police came with orders to kill. Not one of the protestors was armed or acted in a way to provoke that response of the police. The demonstrations continued for the next two days in Naranjales with more people arriving to support the movement and call for justice for the victims of Tuesday's incident. The demonstrators have denounced the police and army actions and have asked for an official investigation into the death and injuries that occurred on March 15.

On a personal note, I can't believe what happened. I knew there were protests, but on Tuesday afternoon when people told me what happened I couldn't believe it. What a dysfunctional "democracy" that people have to go to the street and block the highways to get their voices heard. Then to see the government respond with violent actions is horrifying. The day after there was an unsettling silence, with the question, "What is going to happen today?" When people went to the bridge that day to demonstrate they went prepared and decided that if they were going to die, they were going to die fighting. Fortunately the police and army didn't arrive again. In the afternoon there was huge relief - "Thank God that nothing happened today." It gave me an insight into how it must feel daily to live in the state of war. My respect and admiration for the Guatemalan people increases as they continue to struggle for a democracy that represents the people's voice.

Feel free to share this story, and/or **write your Congressperson** because the US embassy is pressuring the Guatemalan Congress to sign the CAFTA without consulting civil society.

If you are interested in seeing photos or video of the incident, see www.freedomsojourn.com

Take Care, Todd.

Note: Todd was a member of the ROCLA-sponsored NISGUA (Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala) Accompaniment Project and is now an agronomist in Guatemala. He is from Webster.

A Fascinating, Informative Evening

by Peter Mott

A priest in the mountains of Peru for 22 years, driven out by years of escalating violence of the Shining Path Rebels vs. the Army, and for the past ten years a Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Rochester, Curt Cadorette returned to ROCLA on April 6 with far-reaching observations which drew many lively questions from the full audience. The topics included:

- Vastly increasing poverty of most of the people due to US-supported Corporate Globalization or Neoliberalism (World Bank, IMF loans with conditions attached forcing privatization of public services and cutting of public health and education);
- "Structural sin" of the socio-economic system backed by the oligarchy and many right-wing Catholic bishops;
- 9000 political prisoners, military courts, and torture;
- corrupt police often engaged in cocaine smuggling;
- an army which has the legal right to intervene in politics;
- President Toledo who is indigenous but hated by both the rich and mainly white oligarchy – and the neglected masses;
- American Lori Berenson's 20-year sentence to a Peruvian jail for alleged support of another rebel group, the MRTA;
- New military bases in Colombia;
- And also the hard, on-going work of many – especially women and many local priests who keep Liberation Theology alive.

Hopeful signs are the newly elected Center-Left governments of Brazil, Venezuela, and Uruguay.; a new common market being formed by Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela and perhaps Ecuador against US wishes; and a rise in indigenous consciousness. One example is the people of Bolivia forcing an end to water privatization by foreign corporations, including Bechtel.

FARMWORKER RALLY OF SOLIDARITY

SUNDAY, MAY 1, 5 PM

Downtown United
Presbyterian Church
121 N. Fitzhugh Street

**CO-SPONSORED BY
DUPC AND
SPIRITUS CHRISTI**

**IF YOU BELIEVE THAT
FARMWORKERS DESERVE:**

- One day of rest per week;
- Overtime pay;
- Disability insurance; and
- Collective Bargaining protections

PLEASE JOIN US!

**Let's give the marchers
an enthusiastic welcome
and show of solidarity.**



On Saturday, April 30, farmworkers and allies will begin a 4-day march for justice from CITA's offices in Albion to demand passage of a bill for equal labor rights. Since the 1930s farmworkers have been excluded from the same rights and protections that most other workers take for granted such as one day of rest per week, overtime pay, disability insurance, and collective bargaining protections. The New York Farmworker Fair Labor Practices Act would remove these exclusions and grant farmworkers the equality they deserve.

Petitions and informational flyers will be available at the rally and at church. For complete march schedule and details contact CITA (*The Independent Farmworkers Center*) at 585-589-7460 or cita@verizon.net.

For more information about May 1: Marilu Aguilar maguilar9855@yahoo.com or Gail Mott at interconnect-mott@juno.com

The Chalillo Dam Controversy in Belize: Hydroelectricity and Wildlife

**Save
The Date!
June 1st**

It's been a long time since we've heard about Belize. Ann McPherson, SUNY Brockport Professor of Latin American history and an environmentalist, will talk about the building of a dam in Belize that will displace indigenous people. Using a powerpoint presentation she will document the threat to wildlife - as well as the many effects of hydroelectric development. A corporation from Newfoundland is at the heart of this controversy that extends throughout Canada and Britain as well as in Belize. Come to ROCLA's meeting on Wednesday, June 1, 7:00 PM, at DUPC, for this informative meeting.

ROCLA on the Web

The Rochester Committee on Latin America will soon be on line providing up-to-date information and links to relevant content throughout the World Wide Web. Our Web address will be posted on the Metro Justice site www.metrojustice.org in the Task Force section as soon as it becomes available.

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.