

UPDATE on the AMERICAS

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

A Metro Justice Task Force

January/February 2006

“Oil for Peace, Not for War” Venezuela to receive National White Dove Award At ROCLA's Annual Rice and Beans Dinner

Mark your calendars! And join us on Friday, March 10, as we present the White Dove Award to the president and people of Venezuela. Long time activist, Vic Vinkey, is the Local White Dove Award recipient. In an evening of solidarity, camaraderie and fun, enjoy Peg Gefell's delicious organic rice and beans, salsa, cornbread, and salad greens with a fantastic dressing - a ROCLA tradition. Homemade desserts will come from ROCLA members; fair-traded coffee from the Women's Coffee Connection. Enter the raffle for a chance to win an Ecuadorian wall hanging/rug; and shop for fair-traded arts and crafts from El Buen Amigo of Buffalo.

ROCLA is proud to present its National White Dove Award to Venezuela. We are looking forward to providing a perspective not found in the mainstream media. As we all know, this South American nation is in the news almost daily. It's perhaps the hottest crisis point in this hemisphere right now. The White Dove Award will recognize President Hugo Chavez, democratically and overwhelmingly elected twice, winner of last year's recall referendum, and also of nationwide referenda on each of his major reforms. ROCLA Steering Committee member John Locke states, *“Through his courage and conviction, he has resisted the pressures of the right wing extremists in Venezuela, and the pressures exerted by the Bush Administration and their allies in the Organization of American States.”* Accepting the White Dove Award on behalf of him and his country will be a staff member of the Venezuelan Information Office in Washington - either Eric Wingerer or Olivia Burlingame Goumbri (author of the new book, *The Building of a People's Democracy*). Both have extensive experience in Venezuela and can discuss with us why the US State Department and mainstream media call President Chavez a “dictator” - and what about the oil?

The Local White Dove Award Recipient, Vic Vinkey, has been a mainstay of ROCLA for many years. He joined in the 1980's when he became concerned about US involvement in Central America. Before that he had been active in promoting housing for low and middle-income Rochesterians through the Housing Task Force of Metro Justice. Vic was the ROCLA Convener for five years and served as Treasurer after that. For the past several years he has coordinated the Cuba Caravan - no easy task! A frequent traveler to Latin America Vic shares his knowledge, insights, and excellent photography with us upon his return.

Festivities will start at 5:30 PM on Friday, March 10, in Celebration Hall of the Downtown United Presbyterian Church, 121 N. Fitzhugh Street - right across from free parking in the city Hall lot. DUPC is wheelchair-accessible and looped for the hearing impaired. We also can provide an interpreter for the deaf if you let us know by March 1. All proceeds go to further the work of ROCLA.

Call today to reserve your tickets (they will be at the door for you on March 10th): \$20 Dinner and Program - more if you can, less if you can't. No one turned away.
\$30 - Be a Companero/Companera! Dinner, Program and your name and quotation or thought printed in the Program Booklet (Deadline March 3).
\$10 - Program (Presentations and Talk) only.

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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*

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ON LATIN AMERICA
167 Flanders St.
Rochester, NY 14619

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Fr. Jean-Juste Flown from Haiti to Hospital in Miami



For all of you who wrote or called on behalf of Fr. Jean-Juste - **THANK YOU!!** [Note: Fr. "Gerry" had been held in prison without charge since last July and was the subject of an Amnesty International Urgent Action appeal.] On January 29 he was flown from Haiti to a cancer center in Florida where Dr. Paul Farmer is supervising his treatment for leukemia.

Brian Concannon, Director of the Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti wrote:

"Today's victory proves the Haitian proverb, *"men anpil, chay pa lou"*: many hands makes the load light. This mobilization has been by far the strongest and most persistent Haiti advocacy effort in the ten years that I have been involved in Haiti work. Everyone who called, faxed, wrote or emailed Haitian and US officials, everyone who signed a petition, everyone who forwarded information about Fr. Gerry to their church, their friends, and their family, should be proud. Together we demonstrated that the world does care, that justice is possible, and that collective action does work. No small accomplishment."

Fr. Gerry said in a letter from prison the day before his release: "Understand that I wish you all to extend your support not only to me but to as many political prisoners as possible wherever on planet earth.... I am very grateful to Amnesty International and to all of you for helping fight for the human rights of all political prisoners, here in Haiti and across the world..."



SOA Watch Activists on Trial, Sentenced to Prison

The week after a military jury in Colorado decided not to jail an Army interrogator even after they found him guilty of negligent homicide in the torture and killing of an Iraqi detainee, a federal judge in Columbus, Georgia is sentencing nonviolent activists to federal prison.

On February 6 and 7, 31 human rights activists were sentenced to between one and six months of incarceration during for nonviolent civil disobedience against the School of the Americas last November.

Tierra Viva – A Chilean Coop

Excerpted from an article in GVOCSA News, February 2006
By Elizabeth Henderson

Author's note: Andrea Tuzcek, a Chilean organic farmer and organizer of an annual symposium and expo, invited me to Santiago to give a talk on Community Supported Agriculture. She arranged to meet me at Tierra Viva, which turned out to be a farmer cooperative store. This is an account of what I observed during my all-too-brief trip.



Elizabeth Henderson
Photo by Nancy Kasper

Andrea gave me a tour of the store, a former residence. There were two rooms with benches full of produce along the walls; a room with shelves of value-added products – jams, jellies, juices, packaged grains and beans, dried fruit; and a small dining room where patrons were being served lunch.... The store kitchen prepares simple luncheons using the farmers' products.

...after a tasty meal... Andrea drove me to her farm. Along the highway we saw extensive vineyards, and hillsides covered with new plantings of avocado trees, an ecological disaster in the making, according to Andrea who decries the elimination of all native vegetation... Andrea's farm nestles in the flatlands at the base of the foothills surrounded by magnificent vistas. Her conventional farming neighbors grow grapes, fruit trees, and grains. Andrea's farm is quite diverse with a small orchard, a flock of chickens, strawberries just coming into bloom, greenhouses with tomatoes already ripening, and fifteen or so other vegetable crops. She manages the farm business, handles marketing and deliveries to Tierra Viva, and does a hefty share of the picking and packing. She also processes some of the berries into jams and beverages, and cans and dries tomatoes. Besides running her own farm, Andrea does most of the bookkeeping for Tierra Viva...

The next morning Andrea drove me to the Organic Symposium at the Food and Agriculture Organization headquarters... I was one of eight speakers... At lunch I got into a lively conversation with a group of eight agriculture students from the Catholic University in Santiago [and] they took me to visit their organic garden on the campus... Altogether they may have a total of 48 square feet, which they have planted in garlic, onions, cilantro, and other herbs. They proudly showed me their little flock of chickens and cages of rabbits...

Developing local markets for organic products is clearly a challenge in Chile... Larger organic farms are concentrating on export markets for high value crops, such as asparagus...

*[Elizabeth is the author of *Sharing the Harvest: A Guide to Community-Supported Agriculture; a farmer-educator; and farmer at Peacework Organic Farm.**

For more information: <http://www.gvocsa.org>.]

Why an Award for Venezuela?

by Peter Mott



Given mounting US government pressure, our media's repetition of the insults and demonization of President Chavez, and remembering US involvement in the attempted 2004 coup d'etat to overthrow his government, why would ROCLA celebrate Venezuela? We may differ in the answer to this, but it seems to me to break down into specific questions:

- Is it wrong for a nation to refuse to let foreign oil corporations privatize its main natural resource?
- Is it wrong for oil profits to be used for whatever the people of Venezuela decide?
 Over a million more children are now in school and 600 new schools have been built with oil money. There also is start-up funding for new businesses and construction of many rural health clinics.
- Is it wrong for a nation to trade oil for doctors and for the medical training of hundreds of Venezuelans to become physicians?
- Is it wrong if they use Cuban-trained personnel and Cuban medical schools for this purpose?
- The Associated Press (D&C 2/4/06, "Cuba warmly welcomes Venezuelan president") states that "the Venezuelan president was being celebrated as an anti-imperialist worthy of the highest honors..." Is there something wrong with being anti-imperialist?
- Is our own nation now openly pro-imperialist?
- Is it wrong for Hugo Chavez to change the constitution and the judicial system if the people vote overwhelmingly for each of those in public referenda?
- Should we be frightened and angry if Venezuela refuses to go along with corporate globalization, the neoliberal economic system which the "Washington Consensus" favored?
- What if other countries watch and copy – as the new president Evo Morales of Bolivia may be doing with natural gas profits?
- Should the Venezuelans be sending discounted home heating oil to the poor in the Bronx, Boston, and Maine?
- What if Hugo Chavez personally likes, and plays baseball with, Fidel Castro? Is that "communist?"
- Is it dictatorship or democracy at work when Chavez was re-elected twice - as well as in last year's Recall Referendum – in elections international observers, including Jimmy Carter, judged free and fair?

Join us on March 10 and let's have a good discussion.

[Peter is a member of the ROCLA Steering Committee, co-editor of INTERCONNECT, national secretary of the Alliance for Democracy and a member of LASC, the Latin America Solidarity Coalition.]

REVOLUTIONARY ART OF HAITIAN VODOU

- by Santiago Masferrer

From now until March 11 El Buen Amigo (114 Elmwood Ave, Buffalo) will host The Revolutionary Art of Haitian Vodou exhibition - Vodou Flags or Drapos (beaded flags), an art form unique to Haiti. Each work requires between 18,000 to 20,000 sequins and beads and takes about ten days for the collective of artists to complete.

Vodou as a religion began as a revolutionary movement for oppressed enslaved Africans. Artists represented have all struggled to create and grow a tradition-rich artwork while enduring stressful economic situations and lack of support.

[Santiago Masferrer is Director of El Buen Amigo/Latin American Cultural Center.]

The Strength of a People

- by Marilyn Anderson

Those who attended ROCLA's February educational event presented by Pacho Lane, Rochester ethnographic filmmaker, learned how the culture and beliefs of the indigenous people in the Mexican town of Tepoztlán, helped to sustain them while presented by incredible odds. Eventually they won out when a corporation wanted to undertake a huge development including luxury homes and a golf course.

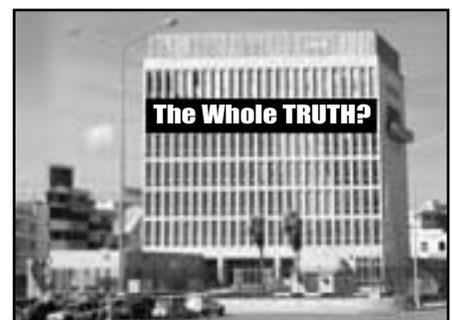
"At the forefront of this "Golf Club War" was El Tepozteco. Many say he personally led the defense of the barricades, even driving away a federal SWAT team. Certainly his spirit, and his legend, served as a rallying cry for his people and helped them successfully defy the combined might of a multinational corporation and the Mexican State."

If you missed the showing of Pacho Lane's films *A Defender of His People and Language of Seeds*, go to his website, www.doc-film.com and you can obtain a copy or give him a call at 442-5274.

[Marilyn, a member of the ROCLA Steering Committee, is an artist, photographer and author. She also co-directs the Pro Arte Maya education project for children in Guatemala.]

US State Department's Latest Propaganda Blitz in Cuba

The State Department's Interest Section in Havana has unveiled a ticker to "broadcast freedom and hope to the people of Cuba," according to Lucia Newman on CNN. News and quotes from various public figures continuously crawl across the facade as Cubans pass by on the Malicon. I wonder if there will be any mention of the potential extradition of Louis Posada Carilas. —John Locke



APRIL AT ROCLA

The Right to a Day of Rest: Farmworker Solidarity

- by Joseph Sorrentino

Luis Torres, the director of Rural and Migrant Ministries (RMM) will speak to the general ROCLA membership on April 5th at 7:00 PM at Downtown United Presbyterian Church. RMM works closely with Centro Independente Trabajadores Agricolas (CITA) and other farmworker advocacy groups to address issues faced by farmworkers, most of whom are Mexican and Mexican-American.

Luis will speak about strategies that may be used this year to encourage the New York legislature to pass the Farmworker Fair Labor Practice bill. This bill would remove the provisions in New York labor law that specifically excludes farmworkers from certain rights that are guaranteed to almost all other workers. Among other things, farmworkers have no right to a weekly day of rest or overtime pay and cannot bargain collectively with a grower. This bill has passed in the New York Assembly the last few years but has never even been brought to a vote in the Senate.

There are approximately 50,000 farmworkers in Western New York; and although we depend on them for virtually all the produce we eat, they live in abject poverty. New York farmworkers earn about \$10,000/year, among the lowest wages in the nation. The work has always been difficult and dangerous and, in many ways, it is getting worse. In Florida, contractors who supply workers to some large corporate farms have been convicted on federal anti-slavery charges. There has been at least one similar situation in Buffalo: Last year, a contractor and her son pleaded guilty to enslaving workers.

Luis hopes to forge a closer connection between ROCLA, RMM and farmworkers. Anyone interested in the lives that these workers live and in learning how to help should attend this talk. For more information go to www.ruralmigrantministry.org.

[Joseph is a freelance writer and photographer involved with farmworker issues and on the ROCLA Steering Committee. From February 12 to March 12 eleven of his color prints from Mexico will be on display at the Starbucks at Monroe and Oxford Streets. You may contact him at joso1444@usa.net.]

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

Free Lori Berenson!

The Committee to Free Lori Berenson (the American journalist who has been imprisoned for ten years in Peru as a “terrorist”) is being revived nationally. Rochester area co-coordinators Mike Connelly and Arnie Matlin report that the political situation has improved in Peru, but Lori is still in jail and still facing ten more years of unjust imprisonment. In December Lori sent a message to her supporters which reads, in part:

“Peru is entering into an electoral year. The April 2006 presidential elections could mean certain changes in my existence - the possible harshening of jail regulations or even the removal of prison benefits - as it may not. What will continue, sadly enough, whoever gets elected, is the increasing amount of dire poverty, lack of opportunities for the young, and a lot of unemployment. These things are inherent to the economic model that exists, whoever the head of state may be.

“Yet I continue to be optimistic about the future of our world and that is because I know we can, and will, make it different.”

If you’re interested in learning more about Lori Berenson—and in helping her—please check out the website: English Website: www.freelori.org. Spanish Website: www.lorilibre.org. You also may contact Arnie at ahmatlingvcp@igc.org; Mike at mconnel5@rochester.rr.com.

Venezuela Solidarity Conference in DC on March 4-5.

Several Rochesterians will be attending this two-day working conference, with the goal of forming a national Venezuela Solidarity Network (VSN).

The idea of a VSN came from the LASC, the Latin America Solidarity Coalition, that ROCLA has helped organize and expand. LASC is the formal structure of the US-based Latin America solidarity movement. A dozen Rochesterians have been part of its growth, its three national conferences, and a national Emergency Caucus on the War in Chiapas (where the Mexico Solidarity Network was founded). Also, the movement newsletter, INTERCONNECT, is edited here and goes free to nearly 2000 solidarity groups across the US.

LASC has formed Working Groups in response to major crises: In 2004 to close down the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a CIA-like organization which has supported coups in several nations which refuse to bow to the neoliberal system/corporate globalization.

In 2005 to sponsor the International Haiti Tribunal which uncovered much evidence of the US role in the military coup against democratically elected President Aristide and the UN Peacekeeping troops’ massacres of poor Haitians in Cite de Soleil.

Now LASC’s major concern is the US role in the 2004 coup in Venezuela, and NED funding of the wealthy opposition in attempting the recall of President Chavez. Pat Robertson’s call for the assassination of Hugo Chavez may reflect a serious possibility. Chavez delights in striking back – by offering 40% discounts on home heating oil to the poor of the Bronx, Boston, and Indian tribes in Maine through the auspices of CITGO (the US subsidiary of Venezuela’s national oil company).