

UPDATE on the AMERICAS

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

A Metro Justice Task Force

March/April 2006



Reverend Lucius Walker in Rochester

Rev. Lucius Walker – wounded by Nicaraguan Contras in 1988, arrested for taking computers to Cuba in 1996, recipient of the Gandhi Peace Award and the Thomas Merton Award and indefatigable resister of the US Embargo of Cuba.

ROCLA is honored to announce that the Rev. Lucius Walker, Jr, the founder and director of IFCO/Pastors for Peace, and a compelling speaker, will address **ROCLA's 7:00 PM, May 3 meeting at the Downtown United Presbyterian Church (DUPC).**

Over the past 13 years long caravans of medical and school equipment have rumbled across the border into Mexico and on to Cuba, breaking the US embargo and taking over 2,000 tons of life-giving equipment and aid to the people there. You will remember seeing or hearing about the Rev. Lucius Walker, tireless leader of the Friendshipments, who annually challenges that illegal and immoral embargo.

From the website: "Pastors for Peace works with the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Center in Havana, the Cuban Council of Churches and a distribution committee with representatives from ten different Cuban denominations to deliver *US-Cuba Friendshipments*. These humanitarian aid shipments mitigate the impact of the embargo and mobilize thousands of US citizens in favor of an alternative. We call for an end to the embargo and

normalization of relations between our two countries.

"As a matter of principle, the Friendshipment refuses to apply for a license under the terms of the embargo. To do so would be a de facto recognition of an immoral policy. All Friendshipments have encountered resistance from US officials, but arrived safely in Cuba after those officials backed down. These are examples of the impact that people can have when they are organized, motivated and determined. Speaking truth to power and standing firm in the face of injustice are central to the work of Pastors for Peace."

After hearing Rev. Walker, if you feel moved to help with the 14th

Friendshipment in late June, we do have opportunities! Would you like to collect medical equipment, raise funds for medicines, pack and label supplies, load the truck, publicize the event or host the drivers? Would you consider driving a truck and accompanying the Caravan to the Mexican border – or all the way to Havana to deliver the goods to the Ecumenical Council of Cuba? Please call Vic Vinkey at 271-8723 if you can help in any way.

- Gail Mott



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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
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Latin America Update – BASTA! ENOUGH!

ROCLA tries to educate the public and Congress and to take action against some of the worst problems in the Americas. Our problem is that there are so many! As we all know, the most egregious of them involve US economic and foreign policy.

For example:

- **Immigration.** What is it that has greatly increased poverty in Mexico – and the desperation of “undocumented workers?” NAFTA. The North American Free Trade Agreement barely passed Clinton’s Congress; but “free trade” has enriched corporations (mostly US) and added 27 million Mexicans to the lowest rungs of the poverty ladder. ROCLA supports several local refugee rights organizations.
- **Elections.** Why are so many South American nations (Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela, Bolivia, Chile, Uruguay – and perhaps Peru next) voting for “leftist” governments? One common theme is opposition to US-backed ‘neoliberalism’/corporate globalization – and US “imperialism,” including US interference with coming elections in Nicaragua, not to mention the US military coup in Haiti.

On the other hand, creative and persistent efforts have resulted in two victories:

- **Victory One:** Last year the annual vigil and civil disobedience at the US Army School of the Americas (Ft. Benning, GA). SOA Watch drew 19,000 protesters (including Rochesterians). Father Roy Bourgeois and SOAW staff members have persuaded Venezuela, Argentina and Uruguay to stop sending their troops to the SOA! Bolivia will make its decision soon. Next fall they will visit and urge Chile and Ecuador to do the same.
- **Victory Two:** Area residents including Arnie Matlin from Metro Justice’s Ciudad Hermana Task Force and John Locke and Peter Mott of ROCLA helped set up the Venezuela Solidarity Conference in DC on March 3-6. 471 activists from across the US attended and voted to form the Venezuela Solidarity Network. The VSN is now at work to prevent a US invasion of that nation.

ROCLA also has supported the Haiti Tribunal, a large-scale effort to make the public aware of (1) the pivotal roles of the US State Dept, USAID “foreign aid,” and the US National Endowment for Democracy in the coup that forced out President Aristide; (2) the increasing poverty, and (3) massacres of the poor (mostly backers of deposed President Aristide). The Tribunal also places blame on the UN peace-keeping troops who are doing the killing under political pressure from the US, Canada and France.

The cry, “**El pueblo unido jamas sera vencido! The people, united, will never be defeated**” is echoing throughout Latin America.

SI SE PUEDE : COMMENTS FROM ROCLA MEMBERS ABOUT THE APRIL 10TH MARCH FOR FARMWORKER JUSTICE

SANDY MORALES

It was great to see so many different groups of people brought together – from the Sisters of St. Joseph to the socialists and the farmworkers. I feel strongly that NAFTA has caused a lot of poverty in Mexico and that’s why so many people have been crossing the border. I think we should also remember that a lot of the immigrants from Central America and Mexico are American Indians, indigenous to this continent. The borders were created by people who came from across the ocean, but these people have always been here. We should also remember that southwest US was part of Mexico until it was taken over by the US government. The people who are here are law-abiding, and hard workers who deserve decent wages and benefits like everyone else. I hope the new law will provide for that rather than the guest worker program that Bush suggested which sounds like old indentured servitude.

JOSEPH SORRENTINO

The great thing about the protest – for me – was seeing so many farmworkers. The fact that they’re coming out of the shadows, willing to take the risk to protest, is inspiring.

BARBARA DEMING

What a great day it was as hundreds participated in Rochester’s version of the National Day of Action regarding Immigration Reform. We marched in solidarity with our immigrant sisters and brothers. I was moved to tears as I saw a huge number of farmworkers, all sporting CITA vests, crossing State Street to join us. What courage they showed in being there! We marched for understanding and compassion. We were clear in our demands for immigration reform that will give dignity to the workers who are supporting our economy, most of whom had to leave their own countries to search for work because the devastation caused by our national policies and trade agreements. No human being is illegal, humanitarian aid is never illegal, immigration reform must include a path to citizenship: These were dominant themes of the day. The most powerful message was captured in the chant, “This is what democracy looks like!” Listen up, Washington.

GAIL MOTT

Roberto Resto, Puerto Rican activist who worked so hard on the Vieques campaign, was one of the tireless organizers of this incredible rally at the Federal Building and march up State Street and over to Upper Falls Blvd. and then up Clinton to St. Michael’s Church. Along the way people came out of their stores to cheer us on. Cars honked in support. Strangers became acquainted. Language barriers were broken with smiles. The community came together as one people without borders. Please use the sample letter to your state senator on the Urgent Action list at www.rocla.org to write to yours about human rights for farmworkers.

NOTE: May is Farmworker Solidarity Month in NYS.

Join the Justice for Farmworkers Campaign in a month of community action. Donate what you can to support the movement. For more information please contact: Luis Torres (585) 637-8360, mmwestny@yahoo.com



Hugo Who?

The First Unitarian Church of Rochester has awarded \$1000 from the Paul Wegner Fund for Peace through International Understanding to ROCLA to help fund a program, which will explain the Venezuelan Bolivarian Revolution and its effects on both Venezuela and the United States.

ROCLA's program entitled, *Hugo Who?* will explore in depth the history of current US/Venezuelan relations, what misconceptions have been propagated by either government and the media, and what actions can be taken to assure that US military intervention is avoided.

"Our intent is to present testimony from those who have travelled to Venezuela to learn about the Bolivarian Revolution and hear from experts from the US and Venezuelan governments in a moderated forum setting, with questions and answers from the audience. The venue will accommodate 100-200 attendees in the Rochester area," according to John Locke, ROCLA steering committee member and producer of the event.

The presentation, scheduled for the fall of 2006, will be video taped and edited into a 30-minute documentary and shown on Rochester and Canandaigua Public Access TV, streamed on the ROCLA Web site and presented at area colleges and public libraries.

The grant will be used to defray the cost of the venue, pay for transportation and a stipend for panel members, and for advertising and promotion through direct mail, radio and print media of both the live event and broadcast of the taped documentary.

"If the US government can be persuaded not to intervene in Venezuela's domestic affairs, it will be through education and action at the grass roots level," Locke says. "As a supporter of the National Venezuelan Solidarity Network, ROCLA is one of many organizations throughout the United States and Canada working to educate the public and encourage letter writing campaigns with the aim of discouraging the sort of invasive State Department policies that we've seen so many times in the past throughout Latin America."

If you are interested in supporting the production of this presentation, either financially or by volunteering your time or expertise, please contact John Locke at chelocke@rocla.org.

In addition to Locke's work on the ROCLA steering committee, he is the producer and director of *Strait Talk: Politics, Propaganda and Perceptions Across the Florida Straits*, a documentary on US/Cuban relations available at www.strait-talk.org.

Opportunity to Keep Up and Improve Your Spanish

A number of ROCLA members regularly attend Mary Jo Bull's "tertulias" (Spanish conversational chats) for intermediate or advanced Spanish speakers.

Join us Saturdays at 11 AM. \$8.00 per Tertulia (Minimum requirement - at least 3 years of Spanish language education) Call ahead to reserve space.

Meet at Spanish Communication Services.
224 Vassar Street, 14607.256-3090. mbull1@rochester.rr.com;
www.spanishcom.net

The Miracle of Bicycle-Pumped (Bicibomba) Water!

by Marilyn Anderson

Todd Bauer, a former ROCLA-sponsored human rights accompanier in Guatemala, is a volunteer with Global Mission Partnership. Todd's work touches the lives of many subsistence farmers in his area to make their lives better, and to preserve and restore the environment: cistern building, cook stoves, and reforestation, as well as gardening and educational projects in San Miguel Ixtahuacán. All of these projects are part of the Ecological Balance and Poverty Reduction Service (supported in part by the German Catholic Church, and the North American "Trees for Life").

The Diocese of Huehuetenango has offered Todd the opportunity to continue to work in the Sustainable Agriculture program. Todd is looking for financial support; and ROCLA will be considering his request. This August, he will return to visit his parents in Webster, NY. We will let the membership know when he will report to ROCLA.

Excerpts from Todd's recent letter:

Holá to All from Ixta!

It hasn't rained since the beginning of November, and it's so dry and warm my clothes dry within 2 hours in the shade. Yesterday I went to Polaja, a village in the valley bottom, 6,000 feet above sea level. There, the breeze feels like the air when you open the oven door. As you can imagine water is a big issue here. It is the difference between extreme poverty and poverty. The farmers who have a source of water can plant their crops during the dry season and make a decent living. The farmers who don't have a water source for irrigation spend the dry season in the plantations as migrant workers or here as day laborers.

Juan Ortiz, a farmer, has a low area in his land where the soil never dries out. He had the idea to dig a well. He accepted a "half and half" arrangement: we pay half of the cost and he pays the other half. After a week, he had reached a depth of 15 feet. In one night, the well reached 6 ft of water, or ten 55 gallon drums. Quickly Juan thought about the possibilities of water for irrigation. There is more than enough water for the irrigation of a small vegetable garden but the well was in the lowest part of his land and needed to be pumped to higher areas. We talked about the idea of a "bicibomba" (manual pump using bicycle power) and Juan decided that he would try it. Three weeks later Juan was irrigating a bed of onions.

Juan bought 200 cabbage plants, 150 broccoli plants, and cilantro and radish seeds. He is determined to take advantage of water and plant all the available land. Traditionally Juan has been a migrant farm worker during the dry season. Now it is possible for him to stay home and work with his family on their own land. We are accompanying Juan. First we taught him a soil conservation technique to limit the soil erosion when he cultivates the land. Now we are teaching organic fertilization and pest management strategies.

Be part of the historic Friendshipment!



17th caravan to Cuba to end the US embargo.
 Helpers are needed for mid-June.
 Call Vic Vinkey at 271-8723

A very short excerpt from Randall Shea's newsletter.

Please contact Interconnect at the address below if you would like to read it all.

Dear Family and Friends,

I can now spend a high percentage of my time with my family in the village, as opposed to being in Guatemala City or elsewhere. It is nice living in the country – a safe and healthy environment for my daughters to grow up in; and the simple lifestyle we lead pleases me. We have a solar lighting panel that collects the sun's rays and charges up a battery which then provides us with solar lighting for several hours every evening. We collect rain water off our roof which we use for bathing and for dish washing, and which we boil to obtain drinking water. For washing clothes we go to a spring on my father-in-law's land, where we have abundant water even during the dry season. Our diet is fairly simple, and includes corn tortillas, rice, beans, eggs, chicken, fish, and some vegetables like squash, carrots and potatoes. We have easy access to the fruits that grow abundantly in our area, to include watermelon, pineapple, oranges, mangos and bananas. We do the bulk of our cooking using dry wood collected from the forest. One of the things I especially like about where we live is that we watch no television, although my wife and two eldest daughters would have it otherwise. I am very happy as a family man, the father of three beautiful daughters, and I count our blessings daily. The work that my wife and I do—teaching—is also very satisfying and gives additional meaning to my life.

Perhaps the most exciting new development this year is that we now have on our staff a young man from the village, Emiliano Panjoj, who finished his five years of university level coursework and will soon be graduating as an agronomist with a specialty in renewable natural resources. Emiliano is also a certified teacher who believes strongly in combining theory with practice; and he plans to involve the students in tree planting campaigns and in producing organic fertilizer, among other projects. Just last week he led an all-day field trip hike with the 8th grade students out into the rain forest, where they had a chance to observe and reflect upon our beautiful natural environment and the importance of preserving it.



A Day Without Migrants

A call has gone out for an international day of action on **May 1st** in support of farmworkers called "A Day Without Migrants."

Farmworkers are being asked not to work on that day and, in support, Mexicans are being asked not to buy anything made in the US or to shop at American chain stores.

The ROCLA steering committee supports this action but with the possible twist of asking people who must shop to shop at locally-owned stores rather than at chains.

This action will show how dependent we are on Mexican workers for our food. If we all get behind it, it's a simple way to show them our appreciation and support. And maybe we'll find something better to do with our time than shop.

ROCLA's JUNE MEETING

An opportunity to learn about what is happening in the impoverished but undaunted rural communities in the Dominican Republic. On Wednesday, June 7, representatives from a delegation to the Dominican Republic will talk about their experiences. Details to come.

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

CONNECT WITH INTERCONNECT

For eleven years Peter and Gail Mott have been editing a quarterly newsletter, INTERCONNECT, which is now available free by e-mail. The newsletter was planned at a national conference in the Adirondacks for the purpose of building the US-Latin America solidarity movement. It contains many brief news articles, organizing information for events in NYC, DC, and elsewhere, and available resources – including delegations to all areas of the Americas from Haiti to Chile. Send your e-address to interconnect_mott@frontiernet.net to start your subscription.

Together We Can Make A Difference

Join other ROCLA members in support of migrant workers in our community. See the **Urgent Action** listed on the home page at www.rocla.org. Download a sample letter, personalize it and send it to your State Senator. Express your support for the **Farmworker Fair Labor Practices Act**. Please call Joseph Sorrentino at 585-241-9445 or email him at joso1444@usa.net for more information and other ways you can help.

