

UPDATE on the AMERICAS

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

A Metro Justice Task Force

August/September 2006

September 6 at ROCLA: EIGHT PLAYERS, NO SCORECARD, AND A HOOLIGAN ON THE FIELD

Most US solidarity activists know the name Daniel Ortega, but do the names José Rizo, Eduardo Montealegre, or Edmundo Jarquín ring any bells? These three men are also running for President in the Nicaraguan elections. You may have heard of singer-songwriter Carlos Mejía Godoy, who is running for Vice-President on the MRS ticket, but what about Vice-Presidential candidates Jaime Morales Carazo, José Antonio Alvarado, and Fabricio Cajina?

The Nicaraguan elections will take place on November 5, two days before the US elections. Four parties are actively campaigning, so the playing field is crowded. The death of Herty Lewites, Presidential candidate for the MRS, makes the game even more complicated.

As complex as the situation may be, there's an added complication—a non-Nicaraguan who is actively helping one team although he has no legal or moral right to do so. This is US Ambassador Paul Trivelli. Most Nicaraguans would agree that the single most important factor in any Nicaraguan election is the foreign policy of the United States administration. Ambassador Trivelli has not been subtle in declaring which candidates the US would—and would not—support. This US interference in the internal affairs of another sovereign nation is illegal. However, the US has overtly interfered in Nicaragua's affairs many times before, and the US will continue to interfere until enough citizens of both countries demand an end to it.

ROCLA member Arnie Matlin, who spent part of July in Nicaragua, will share his views about the elections at the regular ROCLA meeting, Wednesday, September 6th, 7:00 PM, at Downtown United Presbyterian Church (DUPC), 121 N. Fitzhugh St, Rochester. Everyone is invited to attend. DUPC is wheelchair-accessible and looped for the hearing-impaired.



Is US Ambassador Paul Trivelli more than a neutral observer?

There is free parking across the street in the City Hall lot.

In the meantime, those who deplore US intervention in Nicaragua's affairs can write to Senators Hillary Clinton and Charles Schumer, U.S. Senate, Washington DC, 20510, with the clear message to rein in Ambassador Trivelli and let the Nicaraguan people decide their own destiny.

ROCLA September Meeting: Nicaraguan Self-determination

Arnie Matlin, who spent part of July in Nicaragua, will share his views about the Nicaraguan elections.

**Wednesday, September 6th, 7:00 PM
at Downtown United Presbyterian Church (DUPC)
121 N. Fitzhugh St, Rochester.**

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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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Latin America News

Haiti:

- After successful grassroots organizing, President Rene Preval was inaugurated 5/14; his choice for prime minister, Jacques Eduard Alexis, was approved by both chambers of the National Assembly; and Alexis' 8 choices for cabinet were approved 6/20 unanimously in the Senate and with 84/86 votes in the House of Deputies. On Preval's first day in office he signed an agreement with Venezuela for low-cost oil imports.
- The 4th International Tribunal on Haiti – planned with a working group of the Latin America Solidarity Coalition (LASC) – presented evidence in Montreal on 5/27 against the UN, the US, France and Canada for support of the military coup of 2/29/04 and subsequent massacres. The case goes next to the International Criminal Court in the Hague.
- Half of Haitians survive on 43 cents a day and have no safe drinking water. 10% have electricity. Half don't read. 80% of prisoners have not been charged.

Bolivia:

- On 3/6/06 the Bolivian Congress passed legislation to convene a constitutional assembly. On 7/2 Bolivians elected 255 representatives to write a new constitution. The assembly will meet 8/6/06. A new constitution must be approved by 51% of voters in a referendum.
- President Morales has given 18,600 square miles of land to indigenous peasant communities. Big landowners walked out of the talks. Morales said they had to accept that the lands their ancestors stole during the Spanish Conquest would now be returned to their original owners.

Banana workers: Chiquita – the successor of the United Fruit Co. – is 40% unionized but, in the last five years, it has been selling off its wholly-owned unionized plantations to evade unions. Its subcontracted plantations are 100% non-union (NACLA, Report on the Americas, 5/6/06).

US-Mexico border: US Border Patrol announced 7/22 that, from 10/1/05 to 7/16-06 there were 319 deaths of immigrants trying to enter the US. The number is down in Arizona, but up in Texas (UPI).

Guatemala: The Spanish courts have issued arrest warrants for former military dictators Generals Efraim Rios Montt and Humberto Mejia Victores and other high ranking officials on charges of genocide, torture and illegal detention during the 1980s war. The charges were brought in 1999 by Nobel Peace Laureate Rigoberta Menchu (Guatemala Human Rights Commission 7/7/06).

School of the Americas: For the first time, the debate over closing the SOA made it to the floor of the House. It lost 188-218, but 26 Republicans voted to close.

Equal Exchange: with its fair-traded coffee and other products, is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year!

Si, Se Puede! Success in Santa Maria Tzeja

Many of you know Randall Shea, a former Rochesterian who lives and works in Santa Maria Tzeja with his wife Juana and daughters Kristina, Phoebe, and Aida. ROCLA contributes to his school; and whenever he is in the US he makes time to speak with us. His wonderful news is that in May Emiliano Panjoj became the first of his students to graduate from university! As background for readers who don't know his story, the San Carlos Foundation website gives a brief history of his village: "Santa Maria Tzeja, in the El Quiche state of Guatemala, is an indigenous Mayan village in the highlands. Like many villages, Santa Maria Tzeja was targeted in 1982 during the Army's "Scorched Earth" campaign, forcing many inhabitants into exile. In 1994, volunteer Randall Shea returned with former refugees and helped establish the Santa Maria Tzeja Middle School to provide a progressive 7th-9th grade education for local youth."

This fall Randall has been invited by the American Democracy Project at the SUNY Brockport, in conjunction with the university President's Distinguished Speaker Series, to speak about his work in Guatemala. The Santa Maria Tzeja Middle School is thriving; and now, thanks to a donor, there will be a high school as well.

From Randall's newsletter:

"Here in Guatemala, we all had reason to celebrate this past May as our first village youth graduated from the university in Guatemala. Emiliano Panjoj...graduated with honors as an Agronomist with a specialty in renewable resource management...I was honored that he invited me to be one of his two graduation godfathers.

Randall's new project is coordinating the multiple tasks involved in establishing a high school in his village.

"The vast majority of Guatemalan high schools are privately owned and run for profit. The Ministry of Education operates only a small number of public high schools...My first task...was to tape interviews with key individuals who have been involved in the project work over the past few years...This has been a very rich and rewarding process, and I am acquiring a lot of good information."

Randall interviewed Emiliano Panjoj regarding the general philosophy or ideology of the school, and Emiliano said: I suggest that we use the framework of transformational education (educación popular) as the model from which to create our curriculum in the new high school. The story of the origins and all of the history of our parents should be transmitted to the new generations. From what we have seen, a great deal of acculturation of the young people has occurred, and it is possible that they don't know the recent history of our country. This generates problems, like when youth join gangs and do not contribute to development in their communities. On the other hand, if we use a holistic framework as our approach, I believe that in the medium term we can expect to have a better society.

In closing, Randall told us about this recent incident:

"...My family and I went to the Guatemala City zoo for a Sunday outing, and while there we paused to eat our lunch in one of the many informal outdoor restaurants at the zoo. When we were done, the operator, a woman, gave us the check, and the total was very excessive, about two-and-a-half times what we expected to pay. Both Juana and I expressed our incredulity and displeasure to the woman, and she made a racist comment that Juana's behavior was very inappropriate and very "Indian". Juana responded, "Yes, I'm indigenous, and I'm very proud to be indigenous. I'm also an honorable person and I'm not acting like a thief as you are." I am very proud of Juana for standing up for herself and speaking out like she did, and Kristina and Phoebe feel the same way. It is satisfying to see Juana's self-esteem and sense of dignity, and we look forward to her sharing the story with her students when we return to Santa Maria Tzeja. We hope that our education project is working to mold many more Juanas out of our current and future students. We hope that, in the words of Padre Luis Gurriaran, we will continue to "educate people for living and for the future."

CUBA, SI! EMBARGO, NON! Cuba Friendshipment a Success

By Vic Vinkey

On Monday morning, July 17th, the Pastors for Peace Caravanistas crossed back into the United States after yet another successful effort, having delivered 60 tons of humanitarian aid to the people of Cuba. The motto of this 17th caravan was "Cuba is our neighbor: End the blockade now."

On return, these hardy individuals were met by more than 75 Homeland Security and Treasury agents who interrogated and searched them, as in previous years. "Today's welcome home ceremony by our government is yet another desperate attempt by a failing empire to defend an indefensible policy," said Rev. Lucius Walker. "It is shameful that they continue to cater to extremist interests in South Florida."

Upon returning home the Caravanistas expect a repeat of last years' letters threatening them with fines for traveling to Cuba.

Thanks to the assistance of many in Rochester, ROCLA was able to assemble 47 boxes of medical equipment and medicines, picked-up from the Downtown United Presbyterian Church by caravan vehicles on June 22nd and 25th. A special feature of this year's effort was the purchase of \$4000-worth of drugs which Cuban physicians said are desperately needed for the treatment of cancer and cancer symptoms in Cuban children. We are proud to have raised sufficient funds from this and previous year's donations. The caravanistas promised to give special attention to these few but valuable boxes.



ROCLA members work to pack, catalog and load boxes of medical supplies destined for Cuba.

Our heartfelt thanks and the thanks of the people of Cuba go out to those who sent donations and those who helped with the locating, moving, packing and loading of the aid.

We hope and believe that one day our efforts and the efforts of others around the world will end our government's foolish, illegal and immoral effort to destroy the Cuban government and to prevent us from exercising our right to travel freely to Cuba. Recently, for the 14th year, the United Nations General Assembly voted overwhelmingly against our embargo - 182 to 4. The United States, Israel, Marshall Islands and Palau voting in favor of continuing the embargo. As former Secretary of State Madeline Albright said recently, "After 45 years of the embargo, it's time we try something new. We need to look beyond the embargo to a new era of travel and commerce."

Looking ahead, if you are able to help us next year (late June and early July) please call me at 271-8723.

ROCLA's Financial Contributions for 2006

So far this year we have sent funds to the following organizations and individuals for their critical work with the people of Mexico and Latin America:

Local organizations

Farmworker support groups:

Rural and Migrant Ministry in Brockport
CITA (Centro Independiente de Trabajadores Agrícolas) in Brockport
VIVE, the large and very busy refugee center in

Buffalo that provides food, safe shelter, clothing, healthcare and legal services to refugees as they await their appointment to enter Canada or their US asylum hearing.

National organizations we partner with:

Nicaragua Network
CISPES (Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador)
NISGUA (Network in Solidarity with Guatemala)
Mexico Solidarity Network (which 13 of us from Rochester helped to found)

Venezuela Solidarity Network (which 3 of us from Rochester helped to found)

INTERCONNECT - national newsletter, published in Rochester, linking 1850 Latin American solidarity groups and individuals in all 50 states.

International development projects with local connections
Santa Maria Tzeja Middle School in Guatemala, established in 1994 by Randall Shea (see accompanying article).

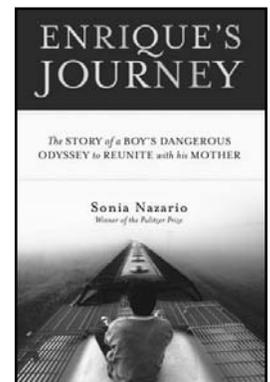
The Guatemala Accompaniment Project with agronomist Todd Bauer of Webster. Walking with people on their journey toward self-sufficiency, including the use of bicycle powered water pumps for mini-irrigation systems.

BOOKS SANDWICHED IN

FALL 2006 - TUESDAYS - 12:12- 12:52 P.M.
Gleason Auditorium, Central Library- 115 South Avenue

October 31—*Enrique's Journey*
by Sonia Nazario

This is a gripping, visceral story of a teenage Honduran boy who, by himself, attempts to join his mother in the U.S. It is an epic tale of a journey fraught with dangers, and it is true. The descriptions of the risks he must take are unforgettable. And what awaits Enrique if he successfully reaches America as an illegal immigrant? Is his story unique? Our reviewer will share the perspective on those questions and the book gained by twenty five years of immigration law practice. *Reviewer: Walter Ruehle, Attorney and Director of the Immigration Program of the Legal Aid Society.*



Free and open to the public.

For more information, call 428-8350

Sponsored by The Friends of the Rochester Public Library

The October ROCLA Meeting: What is Hugo's Venezuela Really Like?

At the October 4th general meeting (7 PM, Wednesday at DUPC) Vic Vinkey, who recently appeared as part of a Venezuela discussion feature on CBS World News Tonight, will talk about his experiences traveling in that country and his observations about our country's interference in their internal affairs.

His Global Exchange delegation visited with the head of the Electoral Commission, a representative of a bank for women, a government ombudsman, a private polling firm, the Minister of Housing and Habitat, cooperative farmers, a rural women's group, the studios of Telesur, the Petroleum Ministry PDVSA, the Cuban Venezuelan School of Medicine, and many other individuals and groups. They also had the opportunity hear from Eva Golinger, author of *The Chavez Code* and Charlie Hardy, a former priest and activist who spent years living in a cardboard shack among the poor.

The talk will be illustrated with photographs of sites of recent and past history - including the bridge that was the battleground of the attempted coup to oust Chavez, Simon Bolivar's house,

and a variety of Colombians he met and talked with along the way - on the street and in the countryside.

Vic will open the meeting to a discussion of why the US media view of President Chavez is so negative and why Pat Robertson called for his assassination.

The talk is free and open to the public. DUPC is wheelchair-accessible and looped for the hearing-impaired. There is free parking across the street in the City Hall lot.

The Rochester Committee on Latin America's MISSION STATEMENT

We stand in solidarity with our neighbors of the Americas. We commit to educate ourselves and others of their histories, cultures and struggles as we take action toward our shared dream of justice and peace.

We seek to accomplish this as a task force of Metro Justice, working through research, analysis, education, grassroots organizing, humanitarian assistance, accompaniment, and political action. When necessary, some of us choose to use non-violent direct action/civil disobedience.

Our priorities change from year to year. The projects we support are both country-specific and related to underlying systemic causes of social, political and economic problems throughout the Western Hemisphere, including at home in the U.S.

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

2006 ROCHESTER LABOR FILM SERIES

Once again, ROCLA is proud to be a sponsor of the Rochester Labor Film series. We are happy to enclose one ticket and will have more on hand for you. Just look for ROCLA member Marilyn Anderson in the lobby of the Dryden Theatre before any of the movies. The films to be shown this year speak to serious issues of work and economic justice, along with one comedy. Enjoy! All films will be shown at the Eastman House Dryden Theatre, 900 East Avenue, at 8 PM. (WWW.ROCHESTERLABOR.ORG)

Friday, September 1

WHICH WAY IS UP?, (Michael Schultz, US 1977, 94 min.) Richard Pryor in an American remake of Lina Wertmuller's political satire.

Friday, September 8,

SIR! NO SIR! Rochester Premiere (David Zeiger, US 2005, 84 min.) New documentary chronicling largely forgotten anti-war activities during the Vietnam era.

Friday, September 15

ISN'T THIS A TIME! Rochester Premiere (Jim Brown, US 2004, 90 min.) In 2003, Pete Seeger, Peter, Paul and Mary, Arlo Guthrie and others honored Harold Leventhal (1919-2005) in a Carnegie Hall concert.

Friday, September 22

BUBBLE (Steven Soderbergh, US 2005, 72 min.) One of the best films so far released in 2006 is this a spell-binding account of the triangle that develops around three workers at a doll factory in Southeastern Ohio.

Friday, September 29

LOST IN AMERICA (Albert Brooks, US 1985, 91 min.) Brooks' brilliant satire takes aim at materialistic yuppies in Reagan-era America and hits the target every time.

Friday, October 6

WHO NEEDS SLEEP Rochester Premiere. (Haskell Wexler & Lisa Leeman, US 2006, 78 min.) Powerful documentary showing how sleep deprivation and long work hours are a lethal combination.

Friday, October 13

GOIN' DOWN THE ROAD (Donald Shebib, Canada 1970, 90 min.) One of the most acclaimed Canadian features ever made.

Friday, October 20

FIVE EASY PIECES (Bob Rafelson, US 1970, 98 min.) Jack Nicholson's first major leading role - as a society dropout. One of the key films of the 1970s.

Friday, October 27

OUR DAILY BREAD (UNSER TÄGLICH BROT) Rochester Premiere. Nikolaus Geyrhalt, Austria 2005, 92 min.) Without dialog, this fascinating new visual essay examines how food is mass-produced in the contemporary world.