

UPDATE on the AMERICAS

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

A Taskforce of Matro Justice

October—November 2007

Tom Melville and George Mische: Two Prophetic Voices:

How We Must Change US International Entanglements in Vietnam, Latin America and the Middle East— NOVEMBER 7 AT ROCLA

Protest! Civil disobedience/jail! Work in the Region: Land distribution, co-operatives! Speak! Write!

Tom Melville and George Mische have embraced it all. Come and discuss the issues with them at the next ROCLA meeting on Wednesday, November 7th, 7:00 PM, at DUPC.

Their remarkable and significant history includes being:

- Part of the Catonsville 9 resistance during Vietnam
- Maryknoll priests in Guatemala – expelled (1967);
- In Chile with Allende, and under Pinochet.

Melville and Mische have extensive backgrounds in US foreign policy. They have spent over 40 years bringing awareness to the American public regarding the deadly US international entanglements around the world and have worked extensively to change the US government's public policies.

Building on their combined experiences, they will connect the dots of US intervention in 1953 Iran, Guatemala/Latin America, Vietnam, Africa, The Middle East, and Iraq. In

their presentations they will deal with the question of what needs to be done to force a change in the current policies of our government, our corporations, and our religious institutions that are bringing, or collaborating, with such violence in the world.

Melville is author of *Through a Glass Darkly: the US Holocaust in Central America*. In Melville's words: "I spent 18 years writing this book with several fundamental purposes. They include the desire to acquaint interested US readers with the secret principles of hegemonic American policies; to reveal the murderous, sometimes genocidal, implications of those foreign policies for the victims; and to bring interested citizens up close to the broken faces and bodies of the impersonal statistics that hide the torturous realities that are consequent to such policies...The book is an upfront challenge to the patriotic fealty of all thoughtful Americans to the government that demands their unquestioning loyalty."

An abbreviated list of Mische's work: He has been a labor organizer and a lecturer. He has been actively involved in

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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 of Rochester, Inc.
THE ROCHESTER COMMITTEE
ON LATIN AMERICA
167 Flanders St.
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Start a Family Tradition!

How many Birthdays, Anniversaries, Congratulations, and Holidays are you pondering over in terms of a gift? Here are a few thoughts that would make an enormous difference in the lives of many people – and would make your recipients very happy! What could be more gratifying (and humbling) – for both the giver and recipient – than to know that your gift is actually changing lives! These two amazingly productive initiatives, which ROCLA supports, are always working on the edge. Your gift, no matter how large or small, will be used well and wisely for PEOPLE, not profit.

FROM RANDALL SHEA IN GUATEMALA (excerpts)

My family and I send you many greetings and best wishes from our small village. Life is going well for us here, and we are all quite busy. I have been working intensively on the project to establish a high school in our village, and we are busy gathering a lot of important information at this point in time. Juana continues to receive her university classes two weekends a month, and is doing well, and is also learning a lot about computers as part of doing her assignments. Now she is teaching me many things. My three girls are busy now watching the classic *The Sound of Music*, which I purchased during our family trip north last year.

I write to you today for a very specific purpose. The education program, as I mentioned above, is going well. At the same time, it is always a struggle to find the money to keep our program up and running. The Guatemalan Ministry of Education does provide us with some level of funding, but it only covers about 24 % of our total middle school expense budget. Student tuition and fees help us raise an additional 15% of our income, but the biggest portion of our operating funds is provided via my friends and contacts in the United States and Canada. I also raise a considerable amount of money for student scholarship support at the high school and university level. Money is tight now, and while we do have a fighting chance of finishing the 2007 year in a state of equilibrium between income and expenses, it's going to require a concentrated fundraising effort on my behalf.

Here is a mini-update on recent events of interest in our middle school program here in the village of Santa María Tzejá.

1. New principal in the Middle School: Our former principal was tiring, quite understandably, after 7 years in the position, so in May we started the search for a new principal. I am happy to report that we found and hired a good one, Hugo, a 25 year old young man native to the village and a member of our first middle school graduating class of 1997. He is Mayan indigenous, and a graduate of the progressive, all Mayan teacher training school in Guatemala City, the Santiago Indigenous Institute. He brings a lot of energy and fresh ideas to our school, and has shown great interest in working closely with the students in order to develop their leadership skills and promote their active participation in the school. We hired Hugo to work full-time, which is a big improvement over our previous situation, where the principal worked half days as a primary school teacher and only had afternoons and evenings available for being the middle school principal. Since Hugo's coming on board, things seem to be humming along with a faster, stronger rhythm in our school, and everybody's energy level seems to have increased.

2. All 29 of our ninth graders returned just recently from a three-day field trip visiting the famous Mayan archeological site of Tikal, where they learned much about the history of their culture. They also took the time to visit some ecological reserves in the Tikal area, so that their trip had both social studies and natural sciences learning components. In my opinion, there's no substitute for traveling and seeing things with one's own eyes. The best text books in the world can't make a place come alive the way being there in person can. And, as Samuel Clemens once said, "Travel is fatal to ignorance."

3. The ninth grade English students did do a good job of singing *I Need to Wake Up* for the visiting Needham Congregational Church delegation a few weeks ago. As I mentioned in my last update, this is the song that achieved some fame due to its being featured in Al Gore's documentary *An Inconvenient*

Truth. Actually, from a musical quality point of view, they didn't sound all that great, but they made a good effort and put a lot of energy into their singing and the applause they received from the Needham delegation was real. The August Needham delegation was a real highlight for all of us in the middle school; there were five teenagers on the delegation, and each one had special skills that she or he was able to share with our middle school students.



Nedham, Aug 2007. Jessica from Needham teaching singing technique to 9th grade village girls

4. Just recently, the Scholarship Administration Committee in our village awarded three-year high school scholarships to the top seven students in our ninth grade middle-school graduating class. They will start in January of 2008. It was exciting for me to see that the top seven students this year are all young women. Thanks in good part to the work we do in our middle-school, every year we see self-confident, very intelligent and dynamic young women graduating.

(You may send a check to: Gates Presbyterian Church, marked "for the Randall Shea Educational Program," Attn: Rev. Ralph English, 1049 Wegman Rd. Rochester, NY 14624.) Make check out to Gates Presbyterian Church and mail to:

FROM SARAH BROWNELL AND KEVIN FOOS IN HAITI (excerpts)

Hello friends and family!

SOIL/SOL are building a partnership with Oxfam to tackle one of the most difficult sanitation problems in the world...the urban slum. The slum we are working in is called Shada. It is in low lying land on the coast next to what used to be a saltwater mangrove swamp. My first impression of Shada is of children

flying kites on top of a pile of garbage, skipping and running next to an opaque, fuchsia-colored pond of drainage water, and jumping off an old car into black water. A little foot bridge over the drainage ditch takes you into the winding maze of 3 foot (or less) wide alleys that lead you through the community of people selling fried food, nursing babies, playing dominos, or constructing charcoal stoves from scrap metal in tiny spaces. Sanitation in this community consists of plastic baggies thrown on roofs, open defecation by the ocean, and ramshackle elevated shacks on stilts above the water. For a goud (a few cents), people can get a little privacy in the shack, squatting over holes in the floor boards, with the pigs waiting happily below.

At our first meeting with Oxfam, they told us that they had given up on working in Shada... The water table was too high to dig latrines and there was little space for each house to have their own latrine.

After we explained the technology of SOIL/SOL's dry toilet and, after a site visit to our toilets in Lory, Oxfam agreed to work with us to try out a few public dry toilets in Shada. However, before we build any new toilets of any type, we need a safe place to put human wastes after they are removed from a latrine, septic system, or dry toilet.

Peter Haas from AIDG arrived to stay with us and explained how we can take latrine and septic tank contents and make methane gas. With all of our groups working together and sharing resources, we hope to design a site that will receive the wastes from dry toilets, latrines, and septic systems, and will process them by composting and methane gas production. The methane gas will be fed to a generator to electrify a nearby village. At the same time, we will produce fertilizer for use in agriculture and reforestation projects. We hope to start building the first public dry toilets in Shada in early October.

SOIL/SOL has already started two community-building projects in Shada, finished and opened dry toilets in Milot at the Palas San Souci and at the Pierre Toussaint school for street boys, hosted two university interns and four visitors, installed a UV-Tube at the prison in Cap Haitien.

Patricia Dalhberg also visited us and brought her spirited energy, nursing skills and suitcase full of medication to bare on the health problems in Shada. She held a seminar for midwives on identifying problems during pregnancy and childbirth and a workshop for new moms on breastfeeding. She also spent two intense days holding clinics for children under 5 in a dark, hot school classroom. During one of the days, she saw 72 patients! Many children were malnourished and in need of vitamins and iron tablets. Many had ear and respiratory infections. Many had skin problems, scabies, and staff infections. One boy, a 3 year old twin, was brought in breathing very rapidly, and had to be sent immediately to the hospital for oxygen and antibiotics. Kevin, Ashley, and Josapha, ran him, his mother, and brother, to the hospital in the SOIL truck, and made sure his medications were covered. The diagnosis was pneumonia. Patricia said he would have eventually gotten too tired to keep breathing, and would have likely passed away that night...

Kevin has also been doing the "Looking Through Their Eyes" project in Shada with a group of teenagers. Mdm Bwa holds a program for kids that don't go to school in her neighborhood. They learn songs, hygiene, and good manners. They learn the confidence to speak in front of strangers. On the days they meet, she hangs a sheet off her roof and ties it to a neighbor's roof to make a shelter from the sun. (We are buying her a tarp.) She pulls out a dirty rug for the kids to sit on. They have no other materials to work with. You can see her strength and spirit shining out from the moment you meet her as she tries to build leaders for tomorrow. She is also a midwife and a health agent, dispensing simple first aid, over the counter medications, and taking blood pressures for her neighbors.

She selected 20 of the older children from her group to participate in the camera project. Only one of the participants, her grandson, goes to school. We taught them all to use the digital cameras and asked them to take photos of the following: What do you like about Shada?, What do you not like about Shada?, What makes you happy, sad, and angry?. After everyone finished taking photos, we projected them

on the wall and had each participant explain his or her photos. Many of the photos are blurry or crop off people's heads, but there are some truly inspired and artistic photos also. One boy, John, took touching portraits of his friends and neighbors. Another girl took photos that clearly show the difficulties of life in Shada—photos that it would be difficult for us as foreigners to take. Yesterday, we held a group discussion on all the good and bad things about Shada and brainstormed a few ideas for things that kids could do to make change. We challenged them to come up with a project and also gave them \$100 to plan a party for their parents, friends, and community leaders to show off their photos.

As a side project, we have been trying to give a little help to the Cap Haitien prison, over 400 prisoners in 7 cells...The agronomists from Makouti Agro Enterprise helped us plant our roof top garden of tomatoes, arugula, broccoli, beans, plantains, spinach, and squash! We are eagerly awaiting some veggies to eat! ...A Boy Scout came to our house and changed all our lights to compact florescents, saving us tons of money and power! The Cuban government funded the scouts to replace all the light bulbs in Cap Haitien...



(You may send a check to: SOIL, c/o Sarah Brownell, St. Joseph's House of Hospitality, PO Box 31049, Rochester, NY 14603, or donate on-line at www.oursoil.com.)

Rural and Migrant Ministry's Harvesting Justice Conference: Welcoming the Stranger in our Midst

November 8, 2007 First Presbyterian Church Batavia, NY From 1 to 9 PM

*"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute.
Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy."* Proverbs 31: 8-9

Immigrants, undocumented workers, migrants, H2A workers, immigration reform---we are living in a time where fear divides our community. Where is God in this all? How does our faith speak to this whole set of moral issues? When we look at history, clearly our churches have been the greatest institutions for social change. Therefore, as we struggle over how to approach this dilemma, we turn once again to the institution that has been our strength in our pilgrimage as a people.

Rural and Migrant Ministry's conference will gather community, religious, labor and student leaders together to gain global understanding of local challenges, develop connections to bridge new relationships, and gain new tools for social transformation in our current social and political climate.

Conference Keynote Speaker: Rev. John Fife, courageous prophet and dynamic speaker will share life-threatening border stories of the marginalized and oppressed, and of those reaching out in compassion to meet their needs. Rev. Fife, retired minister of Tucson's Southside Presbyterian Church, was tried and convicted for offering hospitality and protection to refugees fleeing the violence and death squads of the civil war in El Salvador and Guatemala in the 1980's. Today, he continues to be both voice and witness to those who die each year to be part of the United States.

Schedule For Thursday, November 8

12:30 PM to 1:00 PM: Registration

1:00 PM to 1:50 PM: Plenary Session with Rev. John Fife

2:00 PM to 3:00 PM: First Workshop Session

3:30 PM to 4:30 PM: Second Workshop Session

4:50 PM to 5:30 PM: Reports and New Vision

6:00 PM to 7:00 PM: Vigil to Thank Farmworkers, Albion

7:30 PM to 9:00 PM: Dinner Celebration with Rev. John Fife

Workshops include...

- From the Pulpit to the Kitchen Table: The theological basis for reaching out to our foreign brothers and sisters. What does it mean to be prophetic in the midst of politics and economics?
- Radical Hospitality: Case studies of congregations creatively welcoming immigrants.
- Farmworker 101: An introduction to farmworkers and immigration.
- The Criminalization of Immigration: Impact on immigrants and local alternatives?
- Helping People Survive in a Foreign Land: What basic services are available, and how are they accessed?
- What are Immigrants and Farmworker's Rights?
- How do we not only protect basic rights, but expand them?
- Equipping the Saints: Developing educational programs within our congregations that empower.
- The Relationship between Labor and Immigration: Examining current trends and issues.
- Engaging Youth in Social Transformation: Case studies about empowering immigrant youth and their allies.

Invite your colleagues, friends and family, and join us. Contact Rural & Migrant Ministry for additional information or if you would like to sponsor the conference in one of the many ways possible. To register, please call 585-637-8360 or email ltorres@ruralmigrantministry.org.

THE AMERICA I BELIEVE IN LEADS THE WORLD IN HUMAN RIGHTS: Torture Must Be Stopped

Amnesty International’s Campaign to Close Guantanamo, reverse the damage done by the Military Commissions Act (MCA), and end torture.

The MCA stripped non-citizens in US custody that the President declares to be “enemy combatants” of the right to challenge their detention in court, created unfair trials that allow evidence obtained through coercion or other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, and established a very broad definition of what constitutes an “unlawful enemy combatant,” a status not recognized by international law. These human rights violations are being perpetrated in the name of security.

We must:

- Restore habeas corpus
- Reverse the Military Commissions Act (MCA)
- Close Guantanamo

FACT SHEET FROM AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

- In the year since President Bush signed the MCA into law several court cases have been dismissed because Congress suspended the writ of habeas corpus — the right to challenge one’s detention in an independent court — for foreign nationals the President designates “enemy combatants.” These dismissals have left hundreds of people, many in their sixth year of detention, with no recourse to the courts to challenge the basis of their detention.
- Stripping habeas corpus rights has also prevented people who face a substantial risk of torture from being able to go to court to prevent return to their home countries. There is evidence that such people have been subjected to torture upon return.
- The MCA created military commissions, a substandard justice system to try foreign nationals that allows a person to be convicted on the basis of information obtained through coercion or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. So far this ad hoc system has failed to bring a single person to trial and the only conviction was the result of a plea deal that appeared to be influenced by politics and not justice.
- The MCA authority to decide who is an “unlawful enemy combatant,” does not exist in international law.
- Congress should act quickly to reverse the damage done by the passage of the MCA. Only by remedying this wrong can the United States begin to reclaim its reputation as a world leader on human rights.
- Addressing the MCA is not enough — the US government and Congress must act quickly to close Guantanamo. Anyone in custody must be charged and given a fair trial or released unconditionally and not returned to a country where they would face torture or persecution.
- Guantanamo detainees are being held in living conditions that amount to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

(We hope you will want to sign this commitment, get others to sign, and return to:
DENOUNCE TORTURE; AIUSA, 600 Pennsylvania Ave. Washington, DC, 20003)

PLEDGE YOUR COMMITMENT TO HUMAN RIGHTS

THE AMERICA I BELIEVE IN

- Does not torture people or use cruel, inhuman treatment.
- Does not hold people without charge, without fair trials, without hope and without end.
- Does not kidnap people off the street and ship them to nations known for their brutality.
- Does not condone prisoner abuse and excuse high-ranking government officials from responsibility for that abuse.
- Does not justify the use of secret prisons...And does not rob people of their basic dignity.

Name

Address

LETTER TO THE EDITOR – RESPONSES ENCOURAGED!

I saw on C-Span 2 a presentation at the US Spy Museum, a book presentation by Scott Carmichael, of his book: “The True Believer” - the story of how he discovered “Cuba’s master spy”, Ana Montes, who worked at the US Defense Intelligence Agency for 16 years. She was a highly-regarded super-achiever, upwardly mobile in the ranks.

She started out spying for the Sandinistas against the Somoza-US combine. Then, when Somoza was defeated she went to work for Cuba. Upon conviction, when asked why she did it, she said, in effect, “out of moral outrage”. She is about 50 years old serving a 25-year term. She had refused to accept any pay for her spying. The author has a pop-psychology theory that Ana was compensating for her childhood failure as oldest child to protect her brothers from the bullying of their father. It was a military family, of Puerto Rican origin, living on bases in Europe and the US. How about the notion that the US is an evil imperial power? He and Ollie North would not likely think of that as a first cause.

The amazing feature of the presentation and the audience response was, to use Bill Bennett’s favorite pious simile, their lack of any internal “moral compass”. Carmichael comes across as the banal bureaucrat of evil, like Nazi administrators, just doing what he is paid to do at a pay grade of perhaps GS-16, having completely internalized what he was taught in Spy School 101 and US secondary-school history class.

He readily admits that Cuba has no military capability, but that what they learn (while trying to assess the veritable US threat) will be passed on to our enemies, enumerated to include Venezuela, China, and insurgents in Colombia, El Salvador.

He had one allegation of Montes having caused, without documentary proof, the death of a US Green Beret soldier who was killed in an insurgent raid on a camp in El Salvador where training in the style of the School of the Americas was being conducted for the government that killed Archbishop Romero. It is interesting that he will contribute the author’s commissions for the book to the children of the dead green beret. Indeed, children should not suffer for the misdeeds of their parents.

ROCLA could conduct a book review discussion - and send Ana some fan mail (there was a concern in the audience that Ana might be sitting in a “comfortable” jail.)

Ron Johnson (967-4946)

BISHOP GUMBLETON SPEAKS OUT AGAINST “STRUCTURAL INJUSTICE”

- by Peter Mott

On October 18 retired Bishop Thomas Gumbleton of Detroit spoke to a capacity crowd at Nazareth college on the subject of justice and peace. I had spent a week with him in a Borderlinks delegation to Chiapas ten years ago, so I knew of his involvement and leadership in activist causes, both domestic and foreign (including six trips to El Salvador and nine into Iraq).

His theme was that we can’t have peace without justice – and that the lack of justice in the daily lives of the majority of people is getting worse and worse; that the separation between the Haves and Have Nots is widening, both at home and abroad. He said this is not only wrong, but that it is a sin. Then he moved to the basis of all this – structural injustice: How our leaders are deliberately planning such. One example is NAFTA – not “free” trade but centrally planned trade - that has impoverished the vast majority of Mexicans, forcing emigration from Mexico to the US. He said this is evil.

The next day his focus was the Iraq War. He stated that we are in Iraq only to control oil. He spoke also about how our government hates President Hugo Chavez and that our corporate media play along, demonizing him despite all his social advances, because he wants Venezuelan oil to go to the Venezuelan people, not to US corporations.

His response to the government statement that “we have to protect our vital resources,” was that those resources belong to everybody and all people on the planet must share.

What to do? We need to organize, he said – in a much bigger way, with thousands resisting in the streets. Our people need to learn to demand the truth – from government and from all the media.

INTERCONNECT ON THE WEB

Fourteen years ago the national quarterly newsletter INTERCONNECT (supported by ROCLA) was imagined into life at the Central America Solidarity Roundtable to be a communication device for helping build the US-Latin America solidarity movement. Over the years this has proved true - INTERCONNECT helped to organize four national conferences and to create the LASC Coordinating Committee. We continue to work toward better and more effective communication. Our new website (www.interconn.org), including the new Latin America Policy Blog should help greatly in this regard – and we look forward to your input.

If you would like to receive INTERCONNECT quarterly by e-mail, please write to interconnect_mott@frontiernet.net (Peter and Gail Mott, Co-Editors).

NOVEMBER 7 AT ROCLA

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the political system at all levels. He established a non-profit legal justice-prison reform organization that investigated federal and state prisons. Now he is working on a book about the Catholic peace movement.

DUPC is at 121 N. Fitzhugh Street, across from the City Hall parking lot, where free parking is available after 5 PM. DUPC is wheelchair-accessible and looped for the hearing-impaired.

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

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- PETER MOTT'S
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Strait Talk
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Please call Marilyn Anderson at 271-4374,
Marilyn Kaiser at 293-3194
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**PLEASE NOTE: THE ALTERNATIVE FAIR
TAKES THE PLACE OF THE DECEMBER
ROCLA MEETING. NO MEETING ON
DECEMBER 5!**