

# The PUBLIC

The *Public i*, a project of the Urbana-Champaign Independent Media Center, is an independent, collectively-run, community-oriented publication that provides a forum for topics underreported and voices underrepresented in the dominant media. All contributors to the paper are volunteers. Everyone is welcome and encouraged to submit articles or story ideas to the editorial collective. We prefer, but do not necessarily restrict ourselves to, articles on issues of local impact written by authors with local ties.

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## EDITORS/FACILITATORS:

Brian Dolinar  
Darrin Drda  
davep  
Balden Fields  
Bob Illyes  
Paul Mueeth  
Tim Schwab  
Laura Stengrim  
Marcia Zumbahlen

## THE PUBLIC I

Urbana-Champaign IMC  
202 Elm St. / P.O. Box 973  
Urbana, IL, 61801  
217-344-8820  
www.ucimc.org



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A fond farewell and best wishes for the future to Darrin Drda who has done layout, cartoons, and articles for this paper for the past five years.

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# The PUBLIC

A Paper of the People

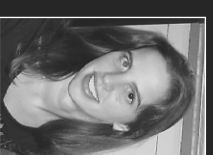
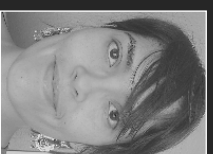
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## WHILE THE DRAGON SLEEPS... LATIN AMERICA CATCHES FIRE



"It is time to stop this shit," banner in Nicaragua (top left)—Throneberg; Federal riot police in Oaxaca (top Right); A masked youth in Oaxaca (bottom left); Nicaraguan election judges and party observers marking out unused ballots (bottom right)—Throneberg



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# The Oaxacan People's Insurrection for Dignity

By Korinta Maldonado



On the dawn of Friday, October 27, 2006, news about the assassination of the New York Independent Media reporter Brad Will by paramilitary forces in the southern state of Oaxaca, Mexico reverberated throughout the world. This day

marked the beginning of the direct state-sponsored offensive towards the Oaxacan people who had tired of the repression and corruption of the governor Ulises Ruiz. For nearly 8 months they have peacefully organized to remove him from office. Ruiz has been the subject of an escalating conflict. He was elected in August 2004 through fraudulent means and since then has persistently used brute force against social and political organizations.

On that dark Friday, six barricades across the city of Oaxaca were under attack at the same time by paramilitary forces including the barricade where Brad Will lost his life reporting. The results of these premeditated attacks were three dead and 23 members of the popular movement injured. But even worse, the death of Brad Will would serve as the perfect excuse for the federal government to enter Oaxaca with all its repressive might despite almost six months of neglect amidst the plea of civil organizations and the people of Oaxaca for the federal government to intervene.

The brutal sacking of Oaxaca by the federal police forces and their allies has led to even more violence and a virtual state of martial law. Today the social cost of dissent stands at 23 deaths, more than 250 imprisoned, 100 disappeared, and women and minors raped. President-elect Felipe Calderon has stated his unwillingness to negotiate with the movement. Likewise, his right wing cabinet has declared the regimes intention to squash social movements.

## TEACHERS STRUGGLE FOR DIGNIFIED EDUCATION

The conflict between the state and the Oaxacan people began May 22 as 70,000 teachers belonging to section 22 of the teachers union initiated a strike pleading for a raise of their wretched salaries, as well as a monthly bonus for teachers living in the tourist areas where the cost of living is disproportionately high. There are 15 more demands related to funding for school materials, children's uniforms and free school breakfasts.

Every year, the teachers strike for such demands and until 2006 negotiations would occur. This time around, Ulises Ruiz's government first threatened the teachers and later brutally evicted them from the town plaza where the governor's headquarters is located. Haunted by the nightmares of recent state violence in Atenco, Mexico, where peasants sympathetic to the Zapatistas stopped the development of an airport, 300,000 outraged inhabitants of Oaxaca poured into the streets. They protested the state violence and marched through Oaxaca demanding the governor's immediate resignation in what was perhaps one of the biggest civil protests in Oaxacan history. During the march the previously evicted teachers would once again reclaim the central plaza. This event would unite dispersed and divergent organizations and groups into one organization, the Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca. Their goal: the immediate resignation of the state governor Ulises Ruiz.

## YA BASTA! (ENOUGH!): THE FORMATION OF APPO

On June 17, the Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca (APPO by its Spanish acronym) was born. It would challenge the state government through pacifist means, with words, ideas, and most importantly, dignity. Local unions, peasants, students, women's and environmental organizations, indige-



One of the many mass demonstrations in Oaxaca City, Mexico.

nous communities, teachers and whole families from across the state united to form this radical organization. Their collective process of decision-making and political action has a long tradition among Oaxacan indigenous towns. After the Zapatista armed uprising it has been further revitalized.

On July 5, as the Mexican people contested the election where rightist Felipe Calderon was declared victorious, the APPO occupied the government headquarters situated in the central plaza of the city and declared itself a parallel government of the state of Oaxaca. Oaxacans were infuriated watching the governor cynically respond to the interests of foreign investors and tourists. During July and August, the APPO also reclaimed the *Guelaguetza*—a yearly celebration where the 7 regions of Oaxaca are represented through performances their culture—that had been one of the main tourist attractions. It had become a corporate enterprise guided by the leading businessmen of Mexico. APPO would also reclaim the local media, 12 radio stations and for small periods of time the local TV station.

The radio stations would become the heartbeat of the APPO, through which they would organize across Oaxaca, calling people to regional and general meetings, and informing the people of local agreements, mobilizations, road blockades, food and first aid needs. In August, that is how they organized the takeover of the city of Oaxaca. The radio would also serve to inform human rights organizations if violations were committed. Many of us following the movement from afar could access the Oaxacan radio broadcast through the web, and international supporters could mobilize almost instantly.

Although the struggle of the APPO is rooted in the local politics of Oaxaca, they have clearly bridged it with anti-globalization and social justice movements across the nation and the world. The past experience of fraudulent electoral politics in Oaxaca fueled a rather sentiment against the presidential elections. The people would chant vociferously: "He fell, he fell, Ulises fell and if there is no solution so will Calderon".

The effects of the conflict on the lives of the Oaxacan people are very complex: the salaries of the approximately thirty thousand teachers in the struggle have been cut off, many small businesses in the region have no customers, vendors of local produce have not sold of corn or squash, many members are jobless due to the conflict. Yet, they are able to resist because the people draw upon years of experience of autonomous collective organizing visible in the forms of everyday resistance. The indigenous communities, the peasant communities, the popular neighborhoods and other supporters of the APPO deliver daily to the barricades and encampments tortillas, stews, water, hot coffee and chocolate. At the same time, representatives of organizations come and go in groups from all over the state of Oaxaca. Some people travel up to 12 or so hours to get to the city. They come with their hand-made banners in support of the struggle and with musical instruments from their towns. They take turns guarding the barricades, the radio stations, the government headquarters, and the main roads to the city.

Members of the APPO speak many different languages, that come from the 16 indigenous groups that make up the state of Oaxaca. They all come from different experiences of struggle, from different social positions, and therefore, from different experiences of oppression. As a woman said on people's assembly Radio Universidad, "we are not teachers, we are the people, look at us, we are the people that are struggling for our rights... until Ulises steps down we are not going to stop".

## OAXACANS CRY FOR A NATIONAL PEACEFUL INSURRECTION

On October 30, the federal government ordered the federal police to enter the city of Oaxaca. With full armor, thousands of federal police forces entered the city accompanied by tanks and bulldozers to crush the barricades. Simultaneously, police

Continued on page 7





# Community Court Watch Corner

By Brian Dolinar



On December 1, Champaign-Urbana Citizens for Peace and Justice held a press conference to pre-empt a plea bargain expected to be finalized for Sgt. William Alan Myers, accused of illegally using a Taser on an inmate in the Champaign County jail (Case No. 05CF2105).

Over 25 members of the public were present at the press conference, along with four local news outlets. Michael Rich, one of Myers' victims, read from a prepared statement included below.

A continuance was given to Sgt. Myers for time to resolve the plea bargain, clearly a move to dodge growing community outrage.

The charges against Sgt. Myers are for aggravated battery, obstruction of justice, and disorderly conduct. State's Attorney Julia Rietz has offered to drop the first two charges if Myers pleads guilty to disorderly conduct and accepts the punishment of a two year conditional discharge. Despite the tough talk by Rietz that the inappropriate use of Tasers "will not be tolerated," the plea bargain involves no admission that Myers wrongly used a Taser.

The Sheriff's Department, which oversees the county jails, conducted its own investigation into Myers and turned up a total of four incidents when he used a Taser on inmates. Myers is currently being prosecuted for tasing inmate Ray Hsieh on November 14, 2005, but he also tased another man, Michael Alexander, in the same week.

In September 2005, Myers tased Trina Fairley, a pregnant woman. A fourth inmate, Northern Illinois student Michael Rich, has also testified that Myers tortured him with a Taser in the Champaign County jail.

For the full story on Sgt. Myers see the October issue of the Public i or visit [ucimc.org](http://ucimc.org).

## IMPORTANT DATES TO REMEMBER

- Patrick Thompson's Motion for a Re-Trial January 4, 9 a.m. in Courtroom A
- Sgt. Myers Next in Court January 3, 11 a.m. in Court room A.

## Police Brutality at the Hands of Sgt. Myers and the Corruption of the Champaign Sheriff's Department Under Dan Walsh That Allowed It to Continue

By Michael Rich

On November 6, 2004 I was taken into custody by the Urbana Police Department for an incident that occurred at the Canopy Club. I was not right with my actions that night at the club, but that does not make what happened later any less wrong. Attached is a copy of the complaint I filed with the Sheriff's Department in May of 2005 detailing what happened when I was transferred into the custody of the sheriff's officers under the supervision of Sgt. Myers. It describes how I had my wrists and ankles handcuffed to a chair, a bag thrown over my head, and the unnecessary use of a taser and the merciless beating I suffered by Sgt. Myers. What my complaint doesn't describe is the nearly two years of my life that I lost fighting unjust charges of aggravated battery of a police officer. charges that Sgt. Myers himself admitted were not brought against me until after he had handcuffed me to a chair and put a bag over my head, charges that, due to the corruption and incompetence of both the Sheriff's Department and the State's Attorney's Office, were not dropped until July 5, 2006.

In early August of 2005, I received a response to my complaint from Capt. James Young. The response did not give any indication that an investigation had been done into my complaint. If an investigation had been done, Capt. Young would have noticed that Sgt. Myers had said that when I came into the jail I was already bleeding as a result of the fight I was in prior to being brought to the jail. But the arresting officers made it very clear in their report that I was never in a fight before coming to the jail, that I used no physical force against any person, that none was used on me, and that I had no visible wounds. I had listed the names of several witnesses who could testify as to my physical state at the time of my arrest, they were never called. Detail after detail that raised questions as to the truthfulness of Sgt. Myers's statement were ignored by Capt. Young. On August 28, 2005, I met with Sheriff Dan Walsh personally and brought my complaint to his direct attention. I left that day with his assurance that my complaint would be further investigated. Had Sheriff Walsh kept his word, what happened in the weeks to follow could have been avoided. On September, 19, 2005, Myers tased a pregnant woman for requesting to go to church services. The week of November 12, 2005, two more men were tased by Myers. Finally, Sgt. Myers' abuse of power became so blatant that even the inept Sheriff could see it (or, he just saw no other way of ignoring Sgt.

Myers's behavior), and the Sheriff's Department decided to act and charged Sgt. Myers with several felony counts. This would begin the Sheriff Department's cover up.

On December 1, 2005, I met with Lt. Ogle and again recounted my complaint to a member of the Champaign Sheriff's Department. I was left with the impression that the charges against me would be dropped, but told that because of jury trials, the prosecutor might not get to it for a couple weeks. In early January 2006, I threatened to go to the FBI if the charges against me were not dropped. Hours later, I received a call from Susan McGrath of the State's Attorney's Civil Division attempting to buy me off. I told her I was not interested in money, only seeing the charges against me dropped and Sgt. Myers fully prosecuted. Many more months passed, and I took my case to the FBI. I was told that, after the agency talked with the State's Attorney, the FBI would not investigate my case because the State's Attorney was not interested in making a plea bargain with Myers. But the State's Attorney also told the FBI that I would be allowed to testify against Myers at his trial. Imagine my amazement when I learned that the State's Attorney had not yet dropped charges against me for the same crime that they now were going to let me testify against Sgt. Myers for. Finally, on July 5, 2006, nearly 8 months after Sgt. Myers had been charged with the same crime I had accused him of 20 months earlier, I was free from the charges brought against me by Sgt. Myers. But I was never contacted by the State's Attorney's office to testify against Myers, until November 6, 2006.

It came as no surprise to me that the prosecutor, Steve Ziegler, waited until that day to contact me, I had always through this was about the county trying to avoid an expensive civil suit, and November 6 was the first day after the statute of limitations had expired to file a civil suit. But, as before, I heard nothing after that day about testifying against Myers. Now Julia Rietz wants to offer Sgt. Myers a "sweetheart" plea bargain for the despicable crimes he committed against me and at least three other individuals. It has now become clear that this was never about money; it was about keeping people quiet until they could give Sgt. Myers the deal THEY thought he deserved. It was about delaying justice until I could no longer file a civil suit, and then disregarding justice completely. Perhaps justice is better off; it doesn't seem welcome in Champaign County.

## Poems from Prisoners

### Keep It, It's Yours

By Nate Collins

Ashley, hey can you hear me?  
I am running late, sorry, I am on my way  
Got something I need to ask you  
Remember the first time we me?  
Your eyes pulled my heart from my chest  
That day I learned what love really meant  
I owe you an apology, for I acted a fool  
My intentions were to stay on top of that barstool  
Nevertheless you helped me up and  
Whispered "Nate, keep your mouth shut!"  
Or how the little things made me so pissed  
You cured them with an amazing kiss  
Sorry it took so long to notice  
Thank you for helping me get focused  
I owe you a lot no doubt

Remember that thing from my chest you pulled out?

Keep it, it's yours.  
For today and many more  
I love you!

### The Clock

By Jason Walker

A circle of such significance  
Sixty marks of mental anguish  
The short arm vaguely stating where the sun sits in  
the sky  
While the long arm moves with unbelievable regularity  
Followed by my anxious eyes  
The red arm flies over both nonstop  
The burning sun of this inside world  
Beige, white, black, red, and full of numbers

### Cries of Life

DeAndre Lewis

It's sad to say and even worse to see  
Black on black crimes even within families  
We've fallen so far that funerals are the only place  
you'll catch us  
giving hugs coming from real love  
Sure, our ambition is to survive  
through the good and bad times  
But I wonder, when will this pain die?



# U of I Grad Takes Presidency in Ecuador; What's Left?

Belden Fields

## A FACT AND A QUESTION

Rafael Correa, a 43 year-old who took a Ph.D. in economics at the University of Illinois in Urbana, won big in Ecuador's presidential election on November 26. Correa received 68% of the votes cast. His opponent, Alvaro Noboa, received 32% of the votes. The conservative Noboa, is in the banana business and has a fortune that the *New York Times* claims is \$1.2 billion. This, claims the *Times*, makes him the richest man in the country.

So, why did he not win with all that money?

## HYPOTHESES

1. Technology. Correa, who is quite familiar with the United States, posted poor old Boboa's campaign gaffs on YouTube, circumventing the traditional media which, concludes the *Times*, was "hesitant" to criticize the richest man in the land. Noboa, after all, controls the bananas. The use of YouTube reached a lot of voters, especially the young who tend to get much of their information from the web.

2. The Ecuadorians wanted to poke Bush in the eye. Correa has good relations with Hugo Chavez and, with the exactitude required of a Ph.D. in economics, has characterized Bush as "dimwitted." He did, however, say that he had "nothing personal against Bush." Whether his comment was meant personally or not, perhaps the people of Ecuador were so proud of Dr. Correa's precision and courage that they wanted him to say it to Bush face-to-face, one head of state speaking directly to another.

3. The Ecuadorians agree with Correa's political and economic positions more than they agree with the conservative Noboa's. This is a tough one because they had already elected a legislature in which the majority was more like Noboa

politically. But maybe they changed their minds between the legislative elections and the November presidentials. Did the voters elect Correa because he was to the left of Noboa?



Rafael Correa

## WHAT'S LEFT?

We are back to the question in the title, "What's Left?" Correa has stated that he wants to strengthen the already national oil company, to gain control over the country's energy, and to provide the poor with affordable housing and cash subsidies. He also said that he did not want to renew the agreement, which will expire in 2009, that permits the U.S. military to have a Pacific coast surveillance base in the country. Early in the campaign, he had also proposed a "citizen's revolution" to convene a constitutional assembly that would shift some of the power from the very powerful legislature, which can force presidents from office almost at will, to the presidency itself. This legislative power has resulted in Correa becoming Ecuador's eighth president in ten years.

But perhaps the biggest fear of conservatives is that Correa would join with Venezuela, Bolivia, Cuba, and, they fear, now Nicaragua (despite Ortega's protestations to the contrary) in being vehemently opposed to the neo-liberal vision and practice of free trade and hostile to U.S. policies. The other option, which the conservatives fear less, is that he would be closer to Argentina, Brazil, and Chile where populism is mixed with a greater accommodation to the neo-liberal free market vision and practice.

So, where indeed does Correa stand? Is he a Leftist? "No", says his former adviser at the U of I, Professor Werner Baer. On a WILL recorded interview of November 28, Baer says that Correa is religious, believes in the free market, and respects private property. Baer contended that the portrayal of Correa as a Leftist is an invention of the U.S. press.

He draws a contrast between Chavez, a military man who once attempted a coup in Venezuela, a "demagogue" who tries to get the support of the poorest of the poor in the hills, with Correa, a civilian who respects constitutional processes. So Professor Baer says, while Correa will want ties with both Chavez and the U.S. (and he asks rhetorically, "why not?") "my guess is that we will be able to compare him more with Lula in Brazil, who became very reasonable. Now he's [Lula] the darling of Wall Street."

According to Professor Baer, that's not Left. Of course, we don't know that Professor Baer's characterization of his former student is accurate. We will have to watch Correa's performance over time to know that. But what is obvious is that it is becoming increasingly difficult to give any precision to the word "Left" in the Latin American context. How can we characterize extra-institutional social movements in many of the countries, armed revolutionary groups in Columbia and Mexico, the Cuban regime, Venezuela, Nicaragua under the ever-so-Catholic Ortega, Bolivia, Argentina, and Brazil if all we have in our political vocabulary is "Left" and its opposite "Not Left," either with a laudatory or a condemning insinuation? The political dynamics in Latin America today are demonstrating as perhaps never before the poverty of our language in dealing with contemporary political complexities.

# "Escualidos for Chavez?" What I Saw at the Venezuelan Election

Robert Naiman, Merida, Venezuela, December 7, 2006



## AN OVERWHELMING WIN

By now you surely know that President Chavez won re-election in Venezuela for another six-year term. What you might not realize is how decisive the victory was. Chavez won 63% of the vote, which was more than he won in previous elections. You might have expected the opposite—that some people would become disillusioned by the slow pace of progress in some areas, like reducing unemployment, reducing crime, reducing corruption. But in fact what has happened is the opposite: the government has broadened its support as the government and the social movements behind it have turned promises into reality, extending education, health care, and job training into parts of the population that had never seen them before. To put it crudely: they delivered the goods.

Chavez carried every state, even including Zulia, the state of which opposition candidate Manuel Rosales is governor. It's as if Gore carried every U.S. state in 2000, including Texas. Progressives in the U.S. haven't enjoyed an electoral rout like this since FDR, something progressives in the U.S. might reflect on.

For the first time, the opposition accepted the result. Rosales conceded defeat. The opposition did not, by and large, try to manufacture absurd charges of fraud. In 2004, the polling firm Penn, Schoen and Berland had produced a controversial exit poll in the referendum on Chavez that contradicted the official result and more credible polls and was used by the opposition in Venezuela and abroad to try to discredit the official result. This time, after Penn, Schoen had been so discredited that major media in the U.S. stopped reporting their polls, Penn, Schoen managed to produce an exit poll that showed the same results as everyone else, including the official count.

## POSSIBLE THREATS

The U.S. government, to its credit, also changed its tune somewhat. Thomas Shannon, US Assistant Secretary of State for the Western Hemisphere, said, "The political battle that is unfolding within Venezuela is now conducted through democratic institutions." He also said that Washington was ready to reinstate talks with Caracas to normalize bilateral ties.

This apparent change in the stance of the U.S. government and the domestic opposition, if it persists, is really important. The Venezuelan government and the social movements supporting it have demonstrated that the process of social reform they have initiated can go forward in the face of U.S. government opposition. It can also go forward in the face of the type of opposition that the historically privileged elite in Venezuela has prac-

ticed before now: trying to overthrow the government by military coup, trying to bring it down through a crippling economic strike, trying to discredit the democratic political process.

But the process of social reform will bring more benefit to more people more quickly if the U.S. government and the domestic opposition do not try to sabotage it.

Every dollar that Venezuela doesn't have to spend on national defense is a dollar they can spend on education, on public health, on building infrastructure, on job creation, on preserving the environment, on enriching Venezuelan culture.

And a prolonged siege mentality on the part of the government or its supporters as a result of implacable opposition from the U.S. government or the domestic economic elite would be politically corrosive. Government policies, it should go without saying, are never going to be exactly right. There will always be some mistakes, some corruption, some waste, some favoritism. The question is whether these mistakes are going to be many or few. If charges of corruption or waste or favoritism are simply perceived as disingenuous political attacks designed to undermine the government, the poor majority will suffer because every dollar that isn't wasted is another dollar that could be used to improve the standard of living and the quality of life for all Venezuelans.

The social reforms set in motion by the Venezuelan government and the social movements supporting it will have achieved their highest level of success when their broad goals are accepted even by the majority of the economic elite, when even the *escualidos*—the disparaging term *Chavistas* use to refer to their rich opponents—accept that all Venezuelans have a right to education, to health care, to dignified employment.



President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela

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# Observing the Nicaraguan Elections: How the U.S. Has Overstepped its Bounds Once Again

Erica Throneburg



On November 5th, the Nicaraguan people went to the polls in huge numbers and voted for a new President, Vice President, and deputy representatives to various legislative bodies. After the ballots were counted in this historic election, Daniel Ortega was declared the next president of the small, impoverished Central American nation. This election was particularly significant because Ortega was president of the country after the Sandinista revolution in 1979, and has made several unsuccessful bids to regain power since.

Along with 15 others, I traveled to Nicaragua on October 29th with a non-partisan group called Witness for Peace (WFP). This group formed during the 1980s when U.S.-backed Contra forces were trying to defeat the Sandinista movement in a bloody war that left tens of thousands of Nicaraguans dead. WFP delegations observe and report about the effects of U.S. policy in several Latin American and Caribbean countries. A delegation was formed to observe the Nicaraguan elections this year because of rampant and clearly threatening U.S. intervention in the democratic processes of the country. We had the opportunity to meet with representatives from the four major political parties, the U.S. Embassy including the ambassador, the Supreme Electoral Council, civil groups, and rural and urban Nicaraguan organizers before conducting observation on Election Day.

## BRIEF NICARAGUAN HISTORY AND U.S. INVOLVEMENT

The U.S. has a long history of involvement in Nicaragua. In 1912, the U.S. sent 2,500 Marines into the country to ensure that presidents favorable to U.S. interests would be installed. Resentment to such intervention was fierce, and in 1933 a peasant uprising led by Augusto Sandino, for whom the Sandinistas were later named, forced the Marines out. While U.S. forces were technically removed, they trained and outfitted the Nicaraguan National Guard to continue with the U.S. strategic mission. The guard was led by Anastasio Somoza Garcia who, the next year, orchestrated the assassination of Sandino. In 1937, he began the Somoza family dictatorship that lasted over forty years. Power was passed through various Somozas, and all were brutal and repressive to the poor. When international aid poured into the country after the 1972 earthquake that killed thousands, the Somoza regime pocketed most of it and today many of the damaged areas remain devastated, including parts in the capital of Managua.

National and international support for the Somoza dictatorship declined, and in 1979 the Sandinista rebel army took power. A massive literacy campaign was launched, unproductive land was redistributed among the peasants, and a constitution was drawn up. Ortega came into power with great support, but soon the U.S. put a trade embargo in place and financed the Contra forces, many of whom were former National Guard members. The economy was crippled and thousands were dying. In 1990, the people were tired of war and the Sandinistas were voted out of power. It was the first democratic power exchange in Nicaraguan history.

Corruption has been frequent among Nicaraguan officials and those with a stake in corporate interests. The poorest people have always lost, and international lending institutions, like the International Monetary Fund, have taken advantage of the country's desperation to enforce strict Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs). These include prioritizing exports; cutting state spending on social



An organizer of a women's coop in the rural mountain community of Arenal



Election day... a woman going through the process

services like schools and hospitals; and privatizing state companies like electricity, which has been disastrous for the poor. Privatization of water resources has been attempted, but the Nicaraguan people fought so strongly against it that the project has been stalled.

## U.S. INTERVENTION

Today, 80% of Nicaraguans live on less than \$2 per day, 43% on less than \$1, and 12.5% on less than 50 cents, according to World Bank statistics. The country is the second poorest in the Western Hemisphere after Haiti. Illiteracy is on the rise again and access to education and decent health care is poor.

People were ready for a change, and it was the possible return of Sandinista power that the U.S. administration feared enough to use undemocratic and manipulative tactics in an attempt to sway the 2006 elections. Meddling started early, in 2004, with U.S. Ambassador Barbara Moore trying to influence political leadership selection through meetings with right-wing forces. Paul Trivelli became the Ambassador to Nicaragua in 2005 and continued the same line of interference. In April of 2006, he offered to finance primaries of the more right-wing political parties if they would result in the choosing of only one presidential candidate, therefore increasing chances to defeat Ortega. When the Liberal Constitutional Party (PLC), which held power before the current president, refused to back away from its candidate, Trivelli criticized the party as "...not in the category of democratic parties..." After meeting with Eduardo Montealegre who left the PLC and formed the Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance (ALN), Trivelli referred to Montealegre as the "democratic choice" for president.

Our delegation had an opportunity to meet with representatives of the four main political parties: the ALN, the PLC, the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), and the Sandinista Renovation Movement (MRS). It was clear why the current U.S. administration was behind Montealegre's party. Throughout our meeting, the ALN party members said things that were nearly verbatim what U.S. citizens have heard countless times from Bush administration officials regarding terrorism threats and fighting terrorism abroad before we have to fight it at home. They spoke

graciously of Ronald Reagan and his policies in Nicaragua, such as supporting the Contra fighters. They are eager for the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) to move forward and swear that it will help small farmers despite all the evidence to the contrary for Mexican farmers after NAFTA took effect.

U.S. Embassy spokesperson Kristin Stewart has publicly connected Daniel Ortega with terrorist groups and stated that "if a foreign government has a relationship with terrorist organizations, like the Sandinistas did in the past, U.S. law permits us to apply sanctions. [...] Again, it will be necessary to revise our policies if Ortega wins." A few from our group were able to ask Ms. Stewart directly about these statements. She verified that the quote was correct, and fended off criticism by saying that she was free to say what she wanted about the issue. She then defended her contention that Ortega was linked to terrorists by stating that a suspect in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing was carrying 5 fake Nicaraguan passports. Further connections were not offered.

Such interventions were openly criticized by at least one U.S. official, Congressman Jose Serrano of New York, who issued a press release condemning the interference of U.S. representatives in the Nicaraguan elections and urging neutrality. In reference to Embassy spokesperson Stewart's remarks, Serrano stated, "Electioneering is not the proper role of an Embassy or its spokesperson."

The U.S. Embassy reports that \$12 million came from the U.S. to Nicaragua "for technical support programs for the elections." The money went to many areas including civic education. We met with a group called Movement for Nicaragua that worked with campaigns to get out the vote, register voters, and distribute voting documents. At their offices we were given comic books of Nicaraguan history, and on looking through them we were interested to find a severely skewed depiction of history vilifying Ortega and the Sandinista government. This was not the only example we heard or saw of USAID money being used to pass

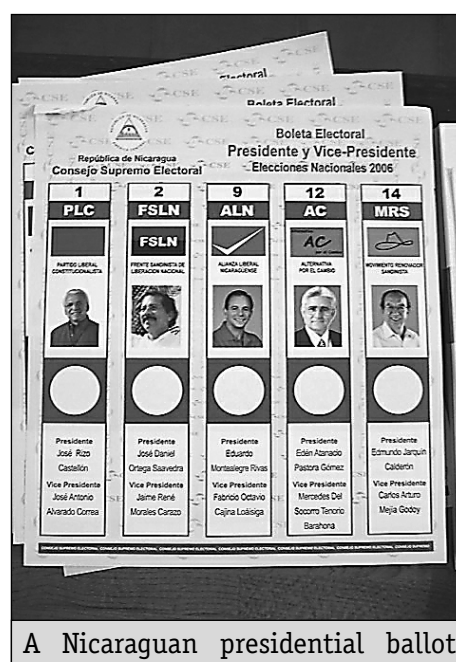
out propaganda with such a partisan view of history.

Perhaps the most vicious threats were those of two U.S. congressmen, Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA) and Dan Burton (R-IN), who suggested that the U.S. look into blocking remittance money being sent to Nicaragua and cutting aid to the country if Ortega were to win. Remittances are money sent from Nicaraguans working in the U.S. back home to their families. For Nicaragua, this money brings more into the economy than exports. And on a human level, it is what allows many families to survive.

## THE ELECTION

The lead-up to the November 5th elections was not without justified criticism. Ortega and former PLC president Arnoldo Aleman, bitter rivals politically, signed a law in 1999 known as The Pact that secured their continued control of the government and lowered the percentage of votes needed to win the election, thus giving Ortega the advantage he needed to win. The Pact also is reported to protect both from further investigation of criminal charges: against Aleman for stealing millions from Nicaraguan coffers and against Ortega for sexual abuse charges from his stepdaughter. Campaigns were dirty and vicious. It was said that voting documents were being withheld from some people on a partisan basis. For these reasons, observation for the election was essential and overwhelming. There were approximately 17,000 observers on November 5th, or 1.7 per polling location. National and international,

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A Nicaraguan presidential ballot





# Twenty Years After Iran-Contra, Washington's Role in Nicaragua Still a Scandal

By Mark Weisbrot



Mark Weisbrot is Co-Director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research, in Washington, DC. He is a former Urbana resident who ran for the Democratic nomination for the U.S. House of Representatives from this district.

Imagine Osama bin Laden visiting the United States ten or 15 years from now, telling Americans who to vote for if they want to avoid getting hurt. It would never happen, but in Nicaragua something very similar happened in the run-up to their election on November 5.

Former US Lt. Col. Oliver North, who helped organize and raise funds for a terrorist organization that decimated Nicaragua in the 1980s, returned to that country's ground zero in late October to warn the citizens there against re-electing Daniel Ortega.

Ortega first came to power in a 1979 revolution led by the Sandinistas, which overthrew the brutal Washington-backed dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza. The Somoza family had ruled the country since US Marines invaded and occupied Nicaragua from 1927-1933.

But the US Central Intelligence Agency soon brought guns and money to the enforcers of the toppled dictatorship, Somoza's hated National Guard. Before long these re-named "contras" were killing health care workers, teachers, and elected officials—the CIA actually prepared a manual which advocated the assassination of the latter. The *Contras* preferred attacking these "soft targets" rather than the national armed forces. In that sense they were very much a terrorist organization; they also used torture and rape as political weapons.



Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua

These atrocities brought the *Contras* universal condemnation from human rights groups such as Amnesty International and Americas Watch. The Sandinistas took the United States to the World Court for its terrorist actions—the same court where the US had won a judgment against Iran just a few years earlier, for the taking of American hostages. The court ruled in favor of Nicaragua, ordering reparations estimated at \$17 billion.

The heinous nature of these crimes and the direct involvement of the Reagan Administration disgusted millions of Americans, even more so after Ortega was democratically elected in 1984. Led by activists in the religious community, some hundreds of thousands of US citizens organized against US funding for the *Contras* and convinced Congress to cut it off. That's where Ollie North came in: on behalf of the Reagan Administration, he illegally sold arms to Iran and used the proceeds to fund the *Contras*. This became the infamous "Iran-Contra" scandal of twenty years ago.

North was convicted of various felonies for his Iran-Contra crimes, but never served time because his conviction was overturned due to a technicality on appeal. In 1990, the Sandinistas were voted out of office by a public weary of war, with President George H.W. Bush making it clear that the violence would continue if the Sandinistas were re-elected.

Nicaragua's economy never recovered from the war and the US embargo. Today it is the second poorest country in the hemisphere, with a per capita income less than it was in 1960.

Now Washington is trying to capitalize on its past terrorism, combined with present threats, to achieve the same result as in 1990. US Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez warned that "relations with our country have been limited and damaged when the Sandinistas have been in power" and Republican Congressman Dana Rohrabacher warned of another economic embargo and the cutoff of vital remittances that Nicaraguans here send home to their families. The US Ambassador to Nicaragua Paul Trivelli has also breached protocol by openly warning that the United States would "reevaluate relations" with Nicaragua if Ortega won the elections, as he handily did.

U.S. officials' intervention went so far as to prompt a public rebuke from the Organization of American States, which asked them to stay out of the election. Meanwhile, millions of US taxpayer dollars are funding "democracy promotion" activities in Nicaragua, which have previously been used to influence elections there. And TV commercials showed footage of corpses from the 1980s war, a warning of what might happen if Nicaraguans voted the "wrong" way. Washington's intervention in this election remains—as it was in the 1980s—an international disgrace for the United States.

*This article is an updated version of one that was published on November 3 in the Bergen County Record (NJ)—and the Passaic County HeraldNews.*

## "Escualidos for Chavez"? What I saw at the Venezuelan Election

Continued from page 3

Think of Social Security in the United States. As my grandfather Max Naiman told Studs Terkel in his book *Hard Times*, the activists who agitated for the passage of Social Security legislation in the 30s "were called every bad name you could think of." In the last six years we witnessed the best political moment for trying to dismantle the Social Security system in the United States. Yet privatization advocates never succeeded in undermining the broadly accepted notion that every worker in the United States is entitled to a minimum income in retirement.

If this kind of social consensus could be achieved in Venezuela, it would be a permanent step forward for the majority. Every *escualido* who actively opposes the entire social reform project drains resources from the project. Conversely, every *escualido* who supports the broad reform project strengthens it. It might be hard to imagine such support now when you hear some of the derisive rhetoric of some of the *escualidos* against their less privileged compatriots.

### REASONS FOR HOPE

But there are some signs that a significant shift is possible. In the presidential campaign that was just fought in Venezuela, the opposition did not directly challenge the social reforms that have extended access to education and health care. Instead, the signature campaign promise of

the opposition was that they would issue cards to every Venezuelan that would entitle them to a direct individual share of the country's oil wealth. If you mention this proposal to a *Chavista* they will roll their eyes. But the proposal, like decision of the opposition to participate in the electoral process and accept the result, suggests a shift. Some in the opposition are starting to accept the new political reality of Venezuela. They are not going to overthrow the government by force. They are not going to bring it down by economic sabotage. The U.S. is not going to invade nor succeed in undermining the government by funding opposition groups. Nor can they win national elections by shouting about the specter of "Castro Communism." Anyone who opens their eyes in Venezuela can see that is not what is going on here. The posters and murals and graffiti in support of the government and the process of social reform are common, but they are dwarfed by the billboards advertising cell phones and plasma TVs. The poor majority has been mobilized, they have tasted the fact that politics can matter in their daily lives, that they can democratically shape their destiny. Villages that never had a high school have kids studying medicine and law. More and more young people from the poor majority are becoming educated, articulate activists. If the opposition wants to compete electorally they have to make a real appeal to the majority.

Prior to the election the U.S. firm Evans/McDonough did an extensive poll of the Venezuelan population, on the election and other issues. The poll showed, not surprisingly, that three-quarters of the well-off planned to vote for the opposition. But there is another way to look at this: one in every four well-off people planned to vote for Chavez.

A Quaker was once asked if she was discouraged that only a fifth of the U.S. population opposed the Reagan Administration's unprovoked bombing of Libya. She said, "Our task is to make that opposition more visible." If the *escualido* supporters of the social reform project became more visible, it would be a great thing for the future of the country.

For example: the Venezuelan government has proposed making community service a requirement for all university students. Instead of grousing, these students could organize themselves. They could say, we're willing to do community service, but we want to have a role in shaping it, we want it to be meaningful. How could the government refuse?

Or another: some supporters of the opposition complain that they have been excluded from government jobs and assistance. What if they tried a different approach: what if they acknowledged that in the past that they weren't sensitive to the needs of the poor majority, but now they are ready to cooperate with everyone for the

benefit of all Venezuelans. There is no reason in principle to assume that such an approach couldn't work. During the first Palestinian Intifada, Palestinians who had collaborated with the Israeli military occupation were forgiven provided they publicly confessed and swore not to repeat it.

For all his fiery rhetoric, Chavez has governed as a gradualist. Political developments have in many ways vindicated his strategy. Well-off Venezuelans who can't enjoy their nice things unless others have nothing will continue to be disappointed. But well-off Venezuelans who can live happily in a society where everyone has a right to education, health care, and dignified employment have nothing to fear, and a great contribution to make.

### WIDER REGIONAL IMPLICATIONS

More is at stake than Venezuela. Throughout Latin America and beyond people are looking to Venezuela not as a blueprint, but as a positive example. If broad social reform that extends basic economic rights to the majority can succeed here through a democratic political process without violence, it can happen elsewhere. As such a process involves more countries, it will become progressively easier, as these countries can rely on each other for trade and assistance. Already Venezuela has enough medical students that it may be soon able to replace the Cuban doctors here. Eventually, Venezuela, like Cuba, could export doctors and teachers around the world.



# Colonized Wombs? Reproduction Rights and Puerto Rican Women

Antonia Darder



Antonia Darder is a professor of Educational Policy Studies at the U of I. She and her students produce the radio program *Liberacion* that appears on WEFT at 10 am on certain Sundays.

Following World War II, Puerto Rico and the rest of the Third World emerged as a problem for U.S. philanthropists, foreign policy makers, and social scientists to solve. A major concern of the times was that Third World populations were too poor, making them easily vulnerable to communist tendencies. To prevent such a turn of events, Puerto Rico's poverty was perceived as a real danger to U.S. interests. The consequence was an abrupt expansion of the U.S. academic, military, political, and economic intervention into the everyday life of Puerto Ricans. This intervention was carried out under the code word "development," the modern paradigm for the new colonialism.

Puerto Rico became the explicit "laboratory" in which development efforts—foreign aid, industrialization, and population control—were tested as global policy. The wombs of Puerto Rican women served as convenient objects for the projection of political and economic interests. Liberals longed to rescue Puerto Rican women, whom they perceived as victims of their men and their many children. For conservatives, Puerto Rican women were "demon mothers" whose dangerous fecundity could only be halted with aggressive measures—sterilization, high doses of hormones, and perhaps even placing contraceptives in the water.

In both cases, the sexuality and reproduction of Puerto Rican women were seen as the great culprit of poverty, rather than the exploitative foreign policies of colonization that catered to U.S. political economic interests on the island. Accordingly, poverty in Puerto Rico was blamed on overpopulation. Hence, Operation Bootstrap, formulated in the late 1940's, was founded precisely on this belief. Two major components to the policy were incorporated in efforts to ameliorate overpopulation on the island.

First, migration of Puerto Ricans to the mainland was encouraged, resulting in over 50% of Puerto Ricans living off the island by 1970. This served to ensure Puerto Rico's dependence on relations with the U.S. and to provide a low-wage workforce on the mainland. Second was a direct attack on reproduction. Government officials, public health officials, hospital administrators, missionaries, and social workers encouraged the use of contraceptives and surgical sterilization. By 1969, 35% of all Puerto Rican women of child-bearing age had undergone *la operación*.

Operation Bootstrap was carried out by the "modern" generation with its belief in the value of scientific, expert knowledge and faith in the "development" plan. Governor Luis Muñoz Marín's fear of leading the island into economic ruin was the primary impetus for the establishment of this untenable alliance with U.S. academics, missionaries, and philanthropists. All who, along with Muñoz Marín, fiercely stood by the belief that population control was the only viable solution to the growing economic demise of the island.

Simultaneously, the political, economic and social structures of the island became firmly anchored on U.S. export-led industrialization. Factories, that employed disproportionate numbers of women, were considered the primary engines of economic growth. Accordingly, women employed outside the home increased by 21% each decade between 1940—1960; while the labor participation of Puerto Rican men dropped from 80% in 1950 to 60% by 1975.

As development policies wantonly destroyed agriculture in favor of wage-labor and government subsidies, unemployment increased and cheap airfares were made available to those wanting to leave for the mainland. This combination of events spurred massive exodus of Puerto Rican men to the States. But despite the growing number of Puerto Rican women utilizing

birth control or undergoing sterilization, the self-subsistence of the people decreased. As a consequence, dependence on welfare aid steadily increased as the island was turned into a welfare economy—by 1990, 75% of all Puerto Ricans were on some sort of public assistance program.

In the midst of Cold War politics, U.S. colonialism did not emerge as a politically popular answer for Puerto Rican poverty—but overpopulation did. From the eugenics movement to population policy to sterilization, the sexuality and reproduction of poor and working class women became the battleground upon which the meaning of U.S. presence on the island was forged. However, it must be noted that the language of overpopulation dominated the political and public health landscape of Puerto Rico throughout its history as a colony. The ills of the "natives" always led to sexuality, as officials targeted venereal disease, prostitution, and immoral sexual conduct as key areas for reform.

Hence, the inferiorization of Islanders was systematically produced through racialized, gendered, and class-bound moralisms attached to the wombs of Puerto Rican women. Throughout the last century, Puerto Rican difference was represented both in popular culture and public policy debates through women's sexuality and reproduction. The fertility of Puerto Rican women was considered dangerous to the interests of the capitalist state—thus, in need of suppression and control.

Out-of-control reproduction and sexuality were used to defend the necessity of colonialism in Puerto Rico, promoting U.S. regulation and governance of the island as inevitable. As such, Puerto Rican women were considered the prime choice for innovative birth control research. Consequently, Puerto Rican reproduction and its response to family-planning interventions were carefully monitored with the intention to provide a model of population control for the rest of the Third World.

But there is another unfortunate aspect to this scenario that cannot be ignored. Whether through scientific claim, political rhetoric, or religious orthodoxy, the existence of Puerto Rican women has been defined almost exclusively in terms of sexuality and reproduction. More often than not, even in liberal circles, this relied extensively on paradigms of victimization, rendering Puerto Rican feminism as either non-existent or always in a state of co-optation. This is most apparent in the U.S. Feminist Movement, where narrow depictions of the use of sterilization by Puerto Rican women was consistently framed simply as a matter of U.S. imperialism.

Missing from this popular mainstream feminist interpretation was the fact that Puerto Rican feminists were instrumental to passage of the 1937 bill that legalized birth control and sterilization in Puerto Rico. In fact, feminist leader and Independista, Carmen Rivera de Alvarado, allowed herself to be arrested to test the bill's standing under federal law. Also missing from the discourse was the history of contentious struggles between Puerto Rican feminists and the Catholic Church over the right to birth control on the island. Interestingly, the church also framed the sterilization debate in terms of U.S. imperialism.

This view is not meant to absolve the U.S. government or capitalist's interventions in Puerto Rico or other parts of the world. It is rather to stress the need for greater complexity in understanding the struggle of Puerto Rican woman for reproductive rights, in the midst of neoconservative rhetoric and changing social and material conditions.

Moreover, it bespeaks the caution that must be taken in progressive efforts to universalize and authorize U.S. feminist politics, by squeezing out a narrative from the bodies of Puerto Rican women—many of whom have openly testified that the decision to undergo *la operación* was an act of their self-determination. Also, it calls for a politics of mobilization and solidarity that refuses to homogenize the histories of Puerto Rican women—opening the road to democratizing the reproduction rights struggle in this country, at a time when these rights are most under attack at the federal level.

This is a slightly modified version of an article that appeared in Laura Briggs's edited volume *Reproducing Empire: Race Sex, Science and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (2002)

Within a few decades following World War II approximately one-third of Puerto Rican women underwent surgical sterilization. Was this birth control driven by U.S. imperialism or self-determination?

## Observing the Nicaraguan Elections

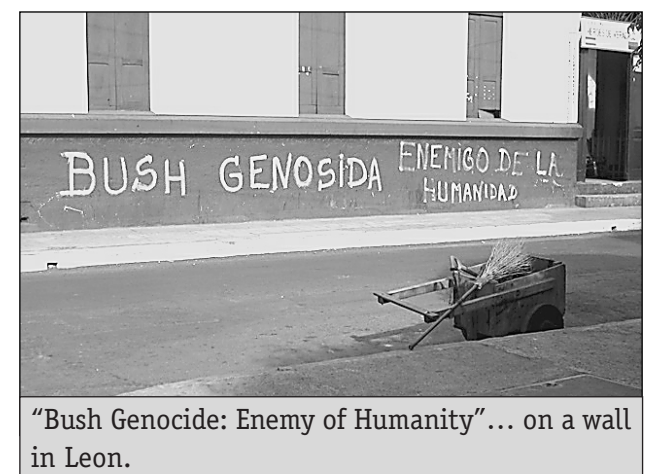
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partisan and independent, there were an unprecedented number of eyes on the voting process.

When election day came, our group was dispersed to eight different municipalities, both rural and urban, to observe voting centers. We watched the process from the initial counting of blank ballots in the early morning to the final count at the end of the day. Our group concluded that, while some irregularities were seen, these irregularities were not driven by partisanship and nothing intentionally fraudulent was witnessed. Most polling centers had multiple party observers who were on the lookout for fraud and could make challenges to the process throughout the day. Few challenges were witnessed by our observers. We did see eager and massive participation by the Nicaraguan peo-

ple. Most centers were accessible to the elderly and disabled, with election officials assisting these people as needed. The conclusions of our WFP delegation seemed to correlate with those of other international observer groups with whom we compared findings: that the voting process on November 5th was free, fair, and transparent.

Now the results are final and Ortega will soon resume the Presidential post. So far the U.S. has taken a "wait and see" approach to the new government-elect. As decisions are made, it will be important to remember the history and current economics of the country that we are discussing. International assistance is critical for the survival and advancement of the Nicaraguan people, and we all must participate in seeing that humane and dignified U.S. policy is carried out.



"Bush Genocide: Enemy of Humanity" ... on a wall in Leon.





# The Oaxacan People's Insurrection for Dignity

Continued from page 1

helicopters flew throughout the city. Oaxacans were expecting them. Days before, rumors of the police takeover had spread throughout the highlands, cities and coast of Oaxaca. Groups of people from every corner of Oaxaca had come to the city to defend it from the government forces. The barricades were reinforced. School buses were placed in the middle of streets. Tires, chairs, pieces of wood, doors, anything and everything were used to stop the federal government's repressive forces to enter. At the same time, however, the radio announcers coordinated the resistance and desperately called for a national peaceful insurrection to stop the government offensive. The Oaxacan people had agreed to resist peacefully, so as the tanks entered they would gather at each entrance by the hundreds trying to intimidate the police activity. Some would burn tires in order to prevent the visibility of the helicopters. Some would fearlessly jump on the tanks and spray paint on the windows to disable them. Many times they were successful, many times they were not. At the end of the day, dozens were imprisoned and taken to the army headquarters, dozens disappeared, many were injured and at least four were found dead. The police forces secured the center plaza displacing all the resistance to the Autonomous University of Oaxaca where legally the state could not enter.

A few days later, on November 2, in an attempt to demolish the university radio station, the organ of resistance organization, the police forces once again confronted the Oaxacan people. On the radio, nationally and internationally we followed the resistance. We heard the Oaxacans battling, calling for reinforcement, for vinegar and coke to wipe the tear gas from their faces, for solidarity across the globe. This time however, after hours of confrontation, the police forces withdrew. Elated, thousands of Oaxacans celebrated what seemed impossible: the unarmed resistance for a government of the people and for the people. We heard through the radio a shrill scream of a woman saying, "Comrades today we are filled with glory. There are present a million people. We defeated them. We defeated them. We want Ulises Ruiz to leave Oaxaca right now and never to return because we will kick him out like we did today with the police forces."

## THE MEXICAN GOVERNMENT'S STATE OF EMERGENCY

The Day of the Dead battle, however, would be the last massive organized act of resistance. Thereafter, the Mexican government secured the Oaxacan capital by promoting a politics of terror organized by the federal police who would ensure "social order" by silencing and repressing any act of organized defiance by the Oaxacans popular assembly. Furthermore, the virtual police state is reinforced through paramilitary forces, referred to as "death

squads", who police the streets of the city intimidating and threatening any participant in the popular assembly or any sympathetic civilians.

On November 25, as the popular assembly marched towards the downtown Zocalo to once again demand the resignation of Ulises, the federal police confronted them with full force, gunfire and the naked violence of the state. Hundreds were jailed and hundreds wounded. This day marked the inauguration of the federal government witch-hunt throughout the state. In several regions of Oaxaca, illegal searches and detentions were reported. The federal police went as far as to enter forcefully into elementary schools to detain teachers that had participated in the strike. At this moment the government has forced the popular assembly into clandestinity, closing avenues for peaceful public protest.



A demonstrator at on of the barricades

Today, the APPO's demands are not only for the governor to resign, but also for dignity. They will not stop until the illegitimate government of Ulises Ruiz steps down from office. Additionally, APPO's initiative of nationalizing the movement has already been taken up by many organizations throughout the country, including the Zapatista Rebel Arm (EZLN). Likewise, in a solidarity move throughout Mexico and the United States, popular assemblies are emerging and protesting against the repressive politics of

the Mexican government. This past October in Los Angeles, California, various indigenous groups, members of the Binational Front of Indigenous Organizations (FIOB), together with the Mexican and Mexican-American organizations like *Unión del Barrio* and UCLA's Raza Graduate Students formed a transnational APPO.

Today this movement is the largest grassroots movement in Mexico since the 1968 student movement and promises to grow. We look once again to the South, where dignity infuses the global struggle for justice.

## Just Goodbye

by Darrin Drda

Musician, art-activist and longtime local Darrin Drda will be moving to the Bay Area in January to pursue an impractical masters degree in Philosophy, Cosmology, and Consciousness. As much as he will miss C-U, he plans on having a glorious time learning precisely how much he doesn't know, discovering questions to those age-old answers about the universe and why it smells the way it does, and communing with like-minded and love-hearted oddballs who share an irrational compulsion to save the world while pondering the cosmos.

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*I never meant to stay this long.  
There's somethin' 'bout this town that's home.  
Unpacked my bags, eighteen years young.  
Now I've seen eighteen springtimes come.*

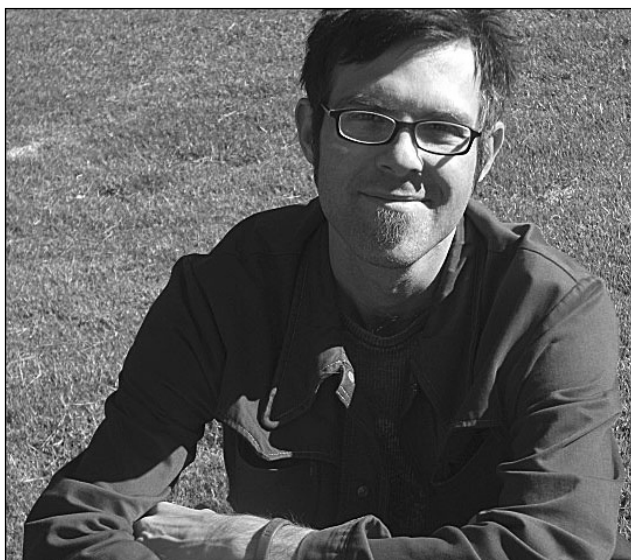
*I've dreamt of riches and romance,  
Flying in jet planes to foreign lands  
Now I'm leaving just to show I can.  
Don't you cry—it's just goodbye.*

*I've had courage to hear the sound  
Of my own voice singin' out loud.  
Now I'm leaving and I hope you'll be proud.  
Don't you cry—it's just goodbye.*

The lyrics above were written by erstwhile C-U resident Joni Laurence shortly after she moved to Portland to further her folk music career (or perhaps to prove that the phrase is not an oxymoron). But like the teenage boy in *The Squid and the Whale* caught plagiarizing Pink Floyd, I feel like I could have written the song. The words ring true, right down to the eighteen years I've spent living and loving in these disarmingly charming twin towns. I've flown to and from Europe, India, Nepal, Thailand, Indonesia, Guatemala, Mexico, Hawaii... each time returning with a newfound appreciation of Shampoo & Bananas.

As longtime residents know (and newcomers will hopefully discover), there are many treasures to be unearthed here, from the bountiful farmer's market to the eclectic community radio stations; from the vibrant music and arts scene to one of the most active Independent Media Centers in the world – housed in a pillared, three-story government building, no less! Indeed, the list of perks seems to grow longer by the day. In the end, however, it all comes down to personal connections. Let's take it to the bridge:

*Lifelong friends, my precious gems  
Shining sapphire blue  
And the love of my life here by my side  
is a dream that came true.*



Alas, Joni loses me on the last couple of lines (clarification forthcoming in a not-very-dramatic miniseries). But surely we can all relate to the radiant beauty of friendships and

their importance in making a place feel like home. After all, the attractions mentioned above would hardly be worth mentioning if not for the familiar peeps who infuse them with creativity and vitality, and the unfamiliar folks who nonetheless contribute to that priceless commodity called Community. While I plan on missing specific people acutely (you know who you are), I know I'll also feel generally and perhaps frequently wistful about that "C" word, which in my experience is harder to come by in bigger cities, despite (or perhaps because of) the proliferation of cool cafes, co-ops, cinemas and coffeehouses.

Among the things I'll miss is this very newspaper, the Public i. As an outlet of community expression for myself and many others, it's been a bright spot in an otherwise dark and depressing political landscape. While the neo-cons neo-liberally plunder the planet and the rest of us literally drive towards mass extinction, it's been heartening to hear the voice of resistance, however faint it often seems beneath the rumbling machinery of war and commerce. For me, doing good in the world is just as much about doing well; it's the process itself and the underlying intentions that truly matter. We may all perish tomorrow in a colorful atomic fireball, so let's do so while holding hands and singing.

*I pledge allegiance to humankind, and to the people of all lands  
and to a united state of mind, and to the earth on which we stand.  
One species indivisible, in the universe  
with freedom and justice for all.  
We're in this together, for better or worse.*

These lyrics this time are mine. The sentiment, I hope, is universal, although regrettably species-centric. My profound apologies to the birds, beasts, and fish. And to you, dear reader, my warmest wishes of health, happiness and peace.