



# NICARAGUA NETWORK NICARAGUA MONITOR

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# 154

## *Not Just Peace but Justice!*

# LASC/NACLA event draws large crowd

By Sean Hannley

*[Sean Hannley, a student at Claremont McKenna College is an intern at the Alliance for Global Justice.]*

A teach-in organized by the Latin



*John Lindsay-Poland of the Fellowship of Reconciliation Task Force on Latin America and the Caribbean said impunity is systemic in Colombia. Photo: Christy Thornton*

America Solidarity Coalition (LASC) and the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA) and co-sponsored by SOA Watch, CISPES, the Alliance for Global Justice (of which the Nicaragua Network is a part) and other organizations drew a crowd of over 125 people to Howard University to hear about the problems in Latin America which are caused by US militarism including US-funding of Latin American military and police as well as militarization of social problems such as drug use and immigration. The teach-in on Feb. 15, 2009, is the first of three LASC/NACLA teach-ins on 11 foreign policy changes the LASC is working on as part of its campaign "Toward a New US Latin America Foreign Policy." Teach-ins in Chicago and Berkeley in April will address the LASC demands on sovereignty and democracy manipulation and trade and economic justice, respectively.

The crowd first heard from Father Roy Bourgeois, founder of SOA Watch, an organization whose purpose is to close

the School of the Americas (or as it is sometimes referred to in Latin America, "The School of the Assassins"), which has trained many of the hemisphere's worst dictators and human rights

offenders. At the SOA (now named the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation), US instructors have trained Latin American military officers on the finer points of torture, murder, and defense of US corporate interests. He told the audience about the feelings of many in Latin America that the US in an imperial power and that powerful countries most often become involved in the affairs of weaker nations to take rather than to give. He also spoke of the "sea change" in Latin America, as many countries are now rejecting US influence because of the decades of failed

policies coming out of Washington.

Professor Lesley Gill, the chair of the Department of Anthropology at Vanderbilt University, questioned whether or not we are likely to see much promised "change" from President Barack Obama in Latin American policy. She pointed out that he has already begun hostile rhetoric towards Venezuela and promised to continue the Cuba embargo. She pointed out that the United States has been a destabilizing force in Latin America for decades; however, the Left is on the rise all over Latin America. Latin America has become more economically independent from the US, with the Bank of the South, UNASUR and access to new markets in Europe and China.

Argentina has begun to prosecute offenders from the "dirty war" and democratic governments throughout the region have started to deal with issues of inequity. Gill told the audience that George W. Bush's response to this was aggressive. He responded with more

**See LASC/NACLA, p. 7.**

## Delegation Finds Positive Programs but Continuing Problems

By Katherine Hoyt

*[This is the second part of a two-part article. The first part included information about what we learned about health, education and the ALBA in Managua. This part includes rural, community and women's issues as seen from Matagalpa, and some observations about what we learned on the delegation.]*

After several days of meetings in Managua, we traveled to Matagalpa to learn about rural and community programs and some of the issues confronting non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including women's organizations.

Alejandro Reyes of the Ministry of Agriculture explained to us that Zero Hunger is a program which has as its goal

helping Nicaragua achieve the United Nations Millennium Development Goals of poverty reduction by providing rural women with a "production package" of animals and seeds, materials, technical training and a savings program. Reyes said that 32,000 women and their families have benefited from the program so far. He said that all animals and materials are provided in the name of the woman to ensure that benefits will go to all the members in the family especially the children. Women who have access to at least 2.5 acres of land can receive a pregnant cow, a pig, and chickens. He said that boards are formed in all the communities served and participants are

**See Delegation, p. 4.**

# Government or Grassroots: Political Transformation in Latin America

By Midge Quandt

[Midge Quandt is an independent scholar and solidarity activist who lives in Princeton, NJ. For a version of this essay with footnotes, see <http://www.quandt.com/midge.html>. Contact information: [midgequandt@aol.com](mailto:midgequandt@aol.com).]

The end of military dictatorship in Latin America and the “transition to democracy” in the 1980s and 1990s formed the background for the explosion of grassroots protest and popular movements in many countries of the region. The new regimes were unable or unwilling to resist the blandishments of the “Washington Consensus” and its neo-liberal economic policies: privatization; cuts in social services; and deregulation among others. With unemployment skyrocketing and what passed for the welfare state, including labor rights, dismantled, poverty increased dramatically. And not just poverty but exclusion and dispossession. The newly insurrectionary subjects were excluded from society — made redundant, useless. (A continuation of a process that predated the 1990s.)

The intensification of the rebellions produced major political upheavals throughout Latin America and toppled governments in Bolivia, Argentina and Ecuador. The protesters rejected neo-liberal governments but did not embrace the Marxist, orthodox, left with its centralized leadership and other verticalist practices. The “old” left was too vanguardist and too removed from the daily life and experience of the new political subjects — the poor and marginal

who were without work, without union representation, without land, existing on the periphery of society in general and urban life in particular. These groups insisted on a more participatory politics; all voices heard; all decisions arrived



*New social groups like the Zapatistas of Sub-Comandante Marcos (left) reject state power. Pres. Hugo Chavez (right) told attendees at the World Social Forum they should have taking state power as a goal.*

at democratically. In addition, the new subjects wanted to create territorial, neighborhood-based communities in place of the disappearing union movement, workplace organization and solidarity. As the factory floor lost its salience, the sphere of everyday life became a central site of struggle.

Equally important was the renunciation of state power — something that both Marxists and non-Marxists consider central. Along with that went a thoroughgoing disgust with political parties and political institutions. As a member of an Argentinian neighborhood assembly put it: [There was] “this inability to trust officials; the feeling that all the leaders were corrupt precisely because they were leaders; . . . they had abandoned

you, and were totally out of touch with your problems and needs.”

The rebellions of the last 15 years have sprung from the margins or “basement” of society (“desde de sótano,” in Subcomandante Marcos’ phrase). And they have been constituted, and for the most part, led by the poorest and most powerless. Not only have these movements, and the older activists who joined them, broken with the “old” left; they have also distanced themselves from the “new social movements” (NSM) — of women, gays, environmentalists and so on — of the 1980s and 1990s about which so much has been written in recent years. The similarities are several: anti-authoritarianism; distrust of state power; insistence on autonomy,

especially with respect to vanguard parties; and rejection of class, i.e., the industrial proletariat, as the basic category for practice and theory. The new actors are heterogeneous: peasants, the indigenous, migrants, women, students. But the politics of the marginal differs from the new social movements in significant ways. Class composition sets them apart. First, NSM may be multiclass, but they typically do not speak for the poorest and most disenfranchised of the population. Secondly, they do not totally break with traditional political institutions despite a commitment to autonomy. Finally, the recent insurrections, unlike the NSM, turn their backs on the state as a mechanism for social change.

## **The Grass Roots**

A brief description of two of the recent rebellions illustrates the new politics at the grassroots. Among these are the Landless Workers Movement (MST) in Brazil and the *piqueteros* and their allies in Argentina. This section forms the background for a consideration of strategies and goals of the social movements.

In the 1990s, the MST, founded in 1984 as a response to the plight of those who had been pushed off the land by the capitalist modernization of agriculture — unemployed rural workers and small farmers — became more confrontational. It carried out mass mobilizations and land

**See Transformation, p. 8.**

The **Nicaragua Monitor** is published by the Nicaragua Network (a project of the Alliance for Global Justice) to educate US citizens about the effects of US policy on the people of Nicaragua and to build ties of peace and friendship between our two peoples.

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# March on the Pentagon

Saturday, March 21, 2009

12:00 Noon

## On the 6th Anniversary of the Iraq War

The ANSWER Coalition is joining with other coalitions, organizations, and networks in a March 21 National Coalition to bring people from all walks of life and from all cities across the United States to take part in a March on the Pentagon on the sixth anniversary of the Iraq war: Saturday, March 21.

The Latin America solidarity contingent is gathering at the North edge of the rally along Constitution between 23rd St. and Henry Bacon Dr. at noon. Email Chuck Kaufman at [chuck@AFGJ.org](mailto:chuck@AFGJ.org) if you or your group will join us! Bring banners and signs.

More than 1,000 organizations and individuals have now endorsed the March 21, 2009, March on the Pentagon to say "Bring the Troops Home NOW!" on the sixth anniversary of the criminal invasion of Iraq.

The thousands who march will demand "From Iraq to Afghanistan to Palestine, Occupation is a Crime" and "We Need Jobs and Education, Not Wars and Occupation." They will insist on an end to the war threats and economic sanctions against Iran. They will say no to the illegal U.S. program of detention and torture.

Visit the March on the Pentagon website at [http://www.pephost.org/site/PageServer?pagename=m21\\_homepage](http://www.pephost.org/site/PageServer?pagename=m21_homepage).

While millions of families are losing their homes, jobs and healthcare, the real military budget next year will top one trillion dollars--that's \$1,000,000,000,000. If used to meet people's needs, that amount could create 10 million new jobs at \$60,000 per year, provide healthcare for everyone who does not have it now, rebuild New Orleans, and repair much of the damage done in Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine. The cost for the occupation of Iraq alone is \$400 million each day, or about \$12 billion each month.

The war in Iraq has killed, wounded or displaced nearly one third of Iraq's 26 million people. Thousands of U.S. soldiers have been killed, and hundreds of thousands more have suffered severe physical and psychological wounds.

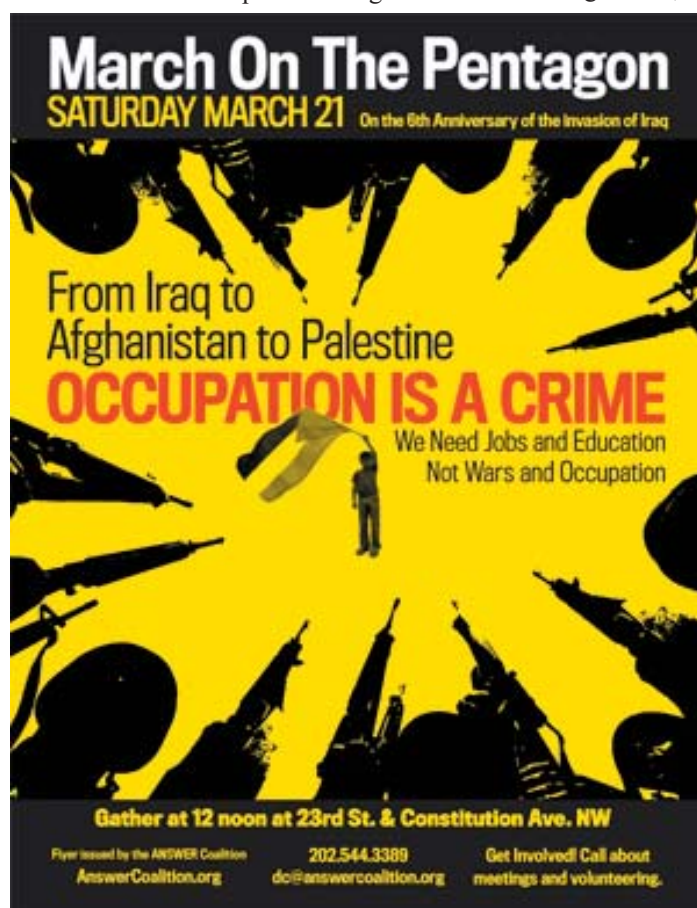
The U.S. leaders who have initiated and conducted this criminal war should be tried and jailed for war crimes.

The war in Afghanistan is expanding. Robert Gates, Bush's defense secretary, who was kept at his post by President Obama, has announced that the troop levels in Afghanistan may double in the coming months. Both he and Vice President Biden predicted higher

civilians, including hundreds of children, in this high tech massacre. And "We the People" paid the bill, as the U.S. provides \$2.5 billion a year for Israel's massive military machine.

In Latin America the bloated military budget funds Plan Colombia and the Merida Initiative which have dramatically increased the killings and kidnappings of labor organizers, farmworker organizers,

and journalists while displacing thousands if indigenous and Afro-descended people in Colombia and Mexico. The US continues to build military bases encircling Venezuela. The Fourth Fleet, decommissioned 50 years ago has been reconstituted to threaten Latin America and the Caribbean. The School of the Americas (also known as the School of the Assassins), renamed Western Hemispheric Institute for Security Cooperation, continues to train Latin American military officers and the new International



casualties--or what they cavalierly call "an uptick" in casualties--in the coming period.

We must also act to end U.S. support for Israel's on-going war against the Palestinian people. The Bush Administration also gave the green light and provided the weapons and the money for Israel's recent war against the Palestinian people in Gaza. More than 5,000 Palestinians were killed or wounded; the majority of casualties were

Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA), in El Salvador, brings that philosophy to police training. We must act to stop the use of our tax money for militarization of Latin America.

The March 21, 2009, March on the Pentagon will be a critical opportunity to let the new administration in Washington hear the voice of the people demanding an immediate end to wars and occupation, and demanding economic justice. Joint actions will take place on the West Coast in San Francisco and Los Angeles.

## Delegation, from p. 1.

trained. The women in Matagalpa have saved almost US\$14,000. The women in each community decide how they will use the money saved. For each cordoba saved, the women can borrow two cordobas.

Reyes said that there have been some problems. About 300 cows died last year because they were given to families in zones that were not appropriate for cows. So, he said, in some areas they are providing goats or wool-less sheep called



*Alejandor Reyes of the Agriculture Ministry said Zero Hunger benefits poor rural woman. Photo: Jim Byrne*

pelibueyes instead of cows. The animals are purchased from private farmers, Reyes said, adding, "We have revitalized the agriculture sector." He said that the Zero Hunger Program has purchased 100,000 chickens as well as thousands of cows and pigs.

At the beginning, Reyes explained, Zero Hunger was going to be run through the NGOs; however, later it was decided that it should be a government program through the Agriculture Ministry because of the size of the project. "But many organizations participate," he said, "including UNAG [the National Union of Farmers and Ranchers] of which I am a Matagalpa board member." Beneficiaries, he said, fill out an application form and are chosen by the Councils of Citizen Power in the communities and then at the municipal level based on certain criteria. They have to be poor, have access to between 2.5 and 7 acres of land, and have access to water. The Agriculture Ministry checks to make sure that each woman chosen has the conditions to participate in the program. Reyes said that the hope is to soon be able to benefit everyone in a given poor rural community in order to overcome charges of favoritism. The women who have received the production packages this year will proceed to a higher level of organization in the coming year and will be forming cooperatives.

Reyes explained that the value of the

production package is approximately US\$1,500 plus US\$500 worth of technical assistance. Funds for the program are coming from national monies and also from outside donors, including Taiwan, Venezuela, and the Inter-American Development Bank. Urban dwellers and those with less than 2.5 acres of land were pressuring for a special program, he said, and now they have a mini-package that does not include the larger animals. In total, including those getting

the full production package and the mini-package, they hope to include 100,000 women in five years, Reyes stated. In answer to the charge that the families will sell the cow at the first family emergency, Reyes said that each cow is branded with the program's brand and does not belong to the family until the first calf is born and the family has saved 20% of the value of the production package.

We next traveled with the agricultural extension workers of the town of San Ramon to visit the small farms of two women who have benefited from the program. Pilar V., a widow, said that she and her sons planted corn, beans, yucca, taro root, and bananas. She said that from the training she has received, she has learned to care for her animals which, she said, have not gotten sick. The agriculture



*Pilar V. (in pink), a Zero Hunger participant, plants corn, beans, taro root and bananas. Photo: Jim Byrne*

workers visit her, she said, and she goes to meetings also. She said that in August she received her cow, which was about to give birth at the time of our visit, and then on December 23, the pig. This is the first time her family has had farm animals.

Maria Isabel B., whom we next visited, is an indigenous woman whose land is part of the traditional indigenous land holdings in the Department of Matagalpa. She has use and fruit of the land which a non-indigenous person would have to

lease. Her production package included a cow, chickens, and several pelibuey sheep. Besides corn and beans, she and her children grow oranges, avocados, papaya, and yucca. When asked if she sells the fruit she produces at the local market, she said that no, they eat it along with the six eggs that they get each day from the hens. When asked about the accusation that the Zero Hunger Program was only for Sandinistas, Maria Isabel laughed and said that she had been a Liberal for many years but never got so much as a pinch of salt from them so she and her children all switched in 2006 and voted for "Don Daniel Ortega."

The agricultural extension workers told us about their work and how they got their jobs. They had completed degrees in agricultural engineering but were unemployed or under employed until the Zero Hunger Program hired them to do what they all agreed was very satisfying work. The program tries to achieve gender equity hiring half men and half women. Besides the degree in agriculture, experience in the countryside is valued and natives of the area where they would be working are given preference. The workers said that they didn't have to be Sandinistas. "We see improvement," one of the workers told us, "in that the people are not eating just corn and beans but cheese and eggs and they have elevated self esteem; I feel elevated as well!"

We next met with Cesar Tercero of the Association for the Diversification and Development of Communal Agriculture (ADDAC). Tercero told us about the philosophy and work of his organization and, in answer to questions about government programs in general and Zero Hunger in particular, he said that his organization had always worked apart from the government because governments give a high

partisan content to what they do. That implies, he said, that you do party work. He said that all of the work of ADDAC includes changing consciousness and that he didn't think that the government was doing that. Zero Hunger is good in its fundamental intentions, he said, but five years [of the presidential term] is a short period for a real transformation. That is the real weakness of the program, he explained. "[Orlando] Nuñez knows that,"

**See Delegation, p. 5.**



# Nicaragua Network Turns 30!

## Three Decades Working to Build a Strong, Unified Grassroots Movement

On February 24, 1979, almost five months before the Triumph of the Sandinista Revolution, the Nicaragua Network was born at a conference of solidarity activists, including then Congressman Tom Harkin.

Thirty years later, the Nicaragua continues to work to build a grassroots movement to change US policy toward Nicaragua and to support progressive forces in Nicaragua which are working to protect the gains of the Sandinista Revolution and, for the past two year, to once again extend the “preferential option for the poor.”

The Nicaragua Network is one of the few sources for reliable English-language news about Nicaragua. We take a firm position against US intervention in Nicaragua’s sovereign affairs and against corporate globalized exploitation, while at the same time we avoid taking sides



*In 1980, the Nicaragua Network donated funds for the “cotonas” [traditional shirts] worn by the “brigadistas” in the Literacy Campaign.*

in debates within Sandinismo about how Nicaraguans want to build their democracy and society.

Send the Nicaragua Network good wishes on our birthday by making a \$30 tax-deductible donation today. You can make it by credit card at our secure donations page which you can find at

[www.nicanet.org](http://www.nicanet.org) or mail your check or money order to:  
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During the 1980s US-sponsored contra war, Nicaraguans often told us that what we could best do for them is to change our own government. The Nicaragua Network took that message to heart and has worked to build a strong, unified progressive grassroots movement in the United States. We work on hemispheric and global issues of war and peace, human rights – all UN human rights conventions, not just the individual rights that the US government has ratified – “free” and fair trade, international debt, participatory democracy, and much more.

Help us continue to work on these important issues for the next 30 years by making a gift of \$30 (or more!) today.

### Delegation, from p. 4.

he said, but the political call has been strong and the government only has so much time.”

We also met with Santiago Dolmus of CECOCAFEN, an association of coffee cooperatives. Dolmus said that he thought that the bill for the social problems of many years was being passed to this government and that many of the protests were enlarged by the media. It is true, he said, that the responsibility to change the situation of poverty is in the hands of the government but “we shouldn’t demand that they make changes in two years and we shouldn’t increase the government’s problems as they respond to needs.” He went on, “We’re trying to contribute because there is an opportunity now to create something better for the poor.”

To learn about the Councils of Citizen Power (CPC) and whether they are an innovative mechanism for participatory democracy (as their supporters say) or a partisan move to weaken democratic institutions, we met first with representatives of the Association for Integral Community Development (ADIC) and then visited a community center in a Matagalpa barrio to meet with neighborhood residents, some of whom were activists in the local CPC. ADIC leaders told us that their organization was

founded in 1991 in a community with poverty and scarce services to mobilize citizens to defend their rights and take their demands to local and national governments. The group is an active member, we were told, of the Municipal Development Committee which was set up in Matagalpa by Sandinista mayor Sadrach Zeledon in his first term and has worked well. ADIC leaders thought that the Municipal Committee would continue to play its role of linking the local government with the community when the Sandinistas came into office at the national level but they were told that municipal officials would be working through the CPCs. ADIC’s concern was that since there was a working body already in place that was pluralistic, why construct another? “We really worked with Sadrach,” Blanca said, “and now that work was discounted completely. Why not strengthen what already exists? I’m not saying that the government is not doing anything good because it is, but we have this concern!” ADIC leaders were particularly concerned, also, by the Sandinista government’s attacks on the women’s movement, including Grupo Venancia in Matagalpa. (See below.)

At the Pancasan neighborhood community center, a large group of local citizens told us about their community’s

efforts to improve their neighborhood with the support of ADIC. Ricardo, a long time neighborhood activist who is now a member of the neighborhood CPC, told us about their continuing work with ADIC and with government programs such as Zero Usury, which provides small loans to micro businesses. Two women, mother and daughter, both named Sandra, who have worked through the years with ADIC and now are members of the CPC, said that the CPC and the Blanca Arauz Women’s Association are working on a much needed sewer project which they see as similar to the improvement projects of ADIC. There was general agreement that the Communal House was the most important factor favoring community organizing. Sandra, Jr., said that people are more willing to come to a meeting of the CPC at the Communal House than at a private home. People come, she said, and bring their requests; “best in writing—we’ve learned this from ADIC,” she added. “We’ve gotten several streets paved,” she stated.

Anabel, however, wanted to make clear that the Communal House and the CPCs were two different things and that the CPCs had to get permission each time to use the House. “They are two separate entities,” she insisted, “although we’re all working for the welfare of the

**See Delegation, p. 6.**

## Delegation, from p. 5.

community.” Sandra, Sr., responded saying that no one group has the unique right to the Communal House. The CPCs, she explained, were founded to carry messages to the government and as a way to organize people. Sandra, Jr., added, “We’re free to choose if we want to join the CPC or not. But I think that the government should use more than just the CPCs to communicate with us. They



During a time out from the delegation, Miguel Marin, President of FEDICAMP, received a donation for reforestation from Nicanet coordinators Chuck Kaufman and Kathy Hoyt. Photo: Jim Byrne

should use forums and other ways and keep nothing hidden.”

In a further effort to learn about the criticisms of the Ortega government from the left, we met with leaders of Grupo Venancia, a Matagalpa women’s cultural organization. The meeting began with a pleasant surprise for this writer as the Venancia leaders remembered a presentation a few years ago by my daughter Victoria Gonzalez, a historian, on first wave feminism (e.g. the struggle for suffrage) in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Nicaragua. They said it was important because some recent governments have claimed that feminism in Nicaragua came from outside and only appeared in the last few years.

Luisa Perez told us about Venancia programs which include educating women about their rights, weekly cultural programs in music, dance and theater, and a weekly radio program that has been on the waves for eight years. Venancia also works with families who were affected by the war of the 1980s and with the Women’s Police Stations of the National Police. “We work to advance our feminism by strengthening other women’s groups so most of our work is in networks!” Perez said. Campaigns have

been waged on economic rights, political rights, reproductive rights, gay and lesbian rights, for the right to therapeutic abortion, to stop violence against women and others.

Perez stated that her organization is among the women’s groups being persecuted by the Ortega government. She said that the government won’t accept criticism from any side. “We are all on the left but they say we are on the right,” Perez said. She added, “This is very offensive to us. It seems more like they are on the right.” Last year, she continued, Grupo Venancia was one of several groups accused of being on the right, collaborating with the United States and money laundering. “They asked us and CINCO [the Center for Communications Research] and MAM [the Autonomous Women’s Movement] to hand over our

financial documents,” she said. “After discussion and legal advice, we turned over documents over to show the legality of our work,” she added, saying “We’re still waiting for an answer but we were

strengthened by the whole episode.” [Since our delegation all charges against CINCO and the women’s organizations have been dropped for lack of evidence.]

Perez said, “We’re not opposed to the anti-poverty programs but not everyone is benefitting, only the CPCs and the Sandinistas.” She said that Grupo Venancia believed that Ortega’s long term objective was to stay in power and consolidate a docile opposition in order to change the constitution to allow his reelection. But she exclaimed, human rights are not negotiable. She added “They are playing with the poor. Women don’t know what to do. Should they collaborate and stop speaking out just to get a pig?”

With relation to health care, Perez was less critical. She said that health care has improved. After 1990, things got worse and worse until people simply preferred to stay at home and die. Now, she explained, things are better: there are reactives to do laboratory tests and free x-rays. In answer to a question about acceptance of gays and lesbians by the government and by society, Perez said that there has been much discussion about the contradictions in the new criminal code (passed in September 2007). The previous one criminalized homosexual relations but the new code does not. In fact, there is

**See Delegation, p. 11.**

## Ask Senators and Representatives for a new U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America!

*Organizers’ Kit for a New Latin America Policy!*

*From the Latin America Solidarity Coalition (LASC)*

*New campaign for use by grassroots activists*

**Ideas for a more positive US policy toward our neighbors to the South  
Download the Organizer’s Kit for the LASC’s “Toward a New US Latin America Foreign Policy” from [www.nicanet.org](http://www.nicanet.org).**

Set up a table at an event in your community or school. Let’s send thousands of letters to Congress so our elected representatives know we want our relations with our neighbors to be based on peace and respect, not threats and exploitation. Please send reports on how many letters you’ve gotten out from your community to: [info@lasolidarity.org](mailto:info@lasolidarity.org)

## Stop CAFTA Coalition Releases Report on Three Years of Failed Trade Deal

**“DR-CAFTA: Effects and Alternatives” Report describes the trends and impacts of the first three years of the U.S.-Dominican Republic-Central America Free Trade Agreement (DR-CAFTA)**

*Third in a series of reports by the Stop CAFTA Coalition*

Visit <http://www.nicanet.org/?p=590> or <http://www.stopcafta.org> to read the report!



## LASC/NACLA, from p. 1

intervention in the region: supporting coups in Haiti and Venezuela, viewing people in Latin America as a security threat, and continuing “Plan Colombia”, a program which has the stated purpose to combat drugs, but ends up funneling money to paramilitaries. These paramilitaries make alliances with drug lords, murder civilians and burn through the country side.

Gill told the group how private security forces (such as Blackwater, one of the groups under investigation for crimes



*Ben Beachy of Witness for Peace talked about the implications of the U.S. “supply side” drug war. Photo: Christy Thornton .*

in Iraq) have been used in Colombia. These groups are not held accountable for murder and human rights violations and have become the “[US] empire’s paramilitaries” in the region. She told the crowd how Obama needs to be “pushed from below” in order to address problems such as our “divide and conquer” strategy in the region and to accept the center-left governments which have come to power in the region. She told the audience that US policies, namely agricultural “dumping” (where subsidized US crops destroy a country’s agricultural base) create unemployment, which forces people to become migrant workers or drug traffickers.

She made note that Obama is one of the historical revisionists who claim that US torture began after 9/11 when, in fact, the US has always employed torture. She said his anti-torture policies, while a step in the right direction, do not address the other countries we have trained in torture including Colombia and Israel.

Ben Beachy, the Mid-Atlantic Coordinator for Witness for Peace, discussed the military and human rights problems of narcotics in Latin America,

problems created by US demand and made worse by the US’s concentration on a military “supply side drug war” in Latin America. The “Merida Initiative,” signed by Bush and Mexico’s President Felipe Calderon in March 2007, a component of the NAFTA countries’ “Security and Prosperity Partnership” (SPP), is giving billions of dollars to Mexico and Central America militaries and police to fight drug production and trafficking rather than addressing demand in the United States.

However, since the program began, the situation in northern Mexico has become many times worse, with 5630 execution style murders in 2008 alone. He drew comparisons between this program and “Plan Colombia.” Both programs stem from the belief that the drug problem in the United States should be solved by military action in Latin America, rather than drug treatment and prevention in the United States. However, military solutions have proven totally ineffective, as they

merely spread production to new areas, what Beachy called the “balloon effect.” Even if the United States is successful at dismantling a cartel, it creates higher profits for those who move in and take over their business. Creating power vacuums in the region create high levels of violence as other cartels fight over who will have control.

Beachy pointed to a RAND Corporation report, which says that spending money on drug treatment programs is 10 times more effective than attacking smugglers and 24 times more effective than attacking farmers. He suggested that the reason for this insanity might be that these defense contracts go to American arms manufacturers, which have been world renowned for their lobbying of the US government. He pointed out that human rights violations are a real part of the drug war. Lines become blurred between police and military, and rape, torture and murder are the consequence. Abuses are committed not just against the drug cartels, but also against political movements and labor activists, and that these abuses are protected by an environment of impunity. Lastly, he pointed out that 90% of guns in

the drug war come from the United States, lining the pockets of our arms industry and that as long as there are crack addicts in Los Angeles, there will be cartels in Tijuana.

John Lindsay-Poland, the co-director of the Fellowship of Reconciliation Task Force on Latin America and the Caribbean, addressed the audience on the problems in Colombia that stem from US intervention. He said that much of the violence in Latin America comes from US campaigns against communism from the 1950s through the 1980s, where we encouraged torture, murder and sabotage against communists in the region. Then, in the ‘90s, US intervention in the region became cloaked in the theme of a war against drugs, and now, a war against terrorism. In Colombia, “impunity is systematic” for murders by police, military forces and paramilitaries. Ninety-five percent of cases see no one prosecuted, and even if the prosecution rate doubled, impunity would still be a fact of life.

Poland told the audience that the Colombian Army is “under pressure to create body counts” in the drug war and their war against the FARC, which gives them an incentive to falsify guerrilla activity in order to have someone to kill. He described “false positives” in which the army kidnaps a civilian, kills him, and claims he’s a guerrilla killed in battle. He discussed how President Alvaro Uribe intentionally confuses human rights supporters with the FARC and encourages the atmosphere of violence and impunity. He told the audience that half of the civilian killings are perpetrated by units which are directly funded and trained by the United States. No evaluations are made of the records of units funded by the United States after they receive funding, and US training has not been shown to improve the human rights record of Colombian military units. Lastly, Poland discussed the prevalent attitude of “win the war,” an attitude which does not lend itself to the protection of civilians.

We then heard from Sonia Umazor, who is a representative from the FMLN. She told us her story about being an immigrant from El Salvador who escaped the paramilitary squads in 1981. She told the audience how she made it here, including walking for 16 days, and the economic and political realities that caused her to undertake her harrowing journey.

**See LASC/NACLA, p. 8.**

## LASC/NACLA, from p. 7.

“You could build the Great Wall of China and we would still walk through it, she said, “because we have no choice.” She also discussed the elections in El Salvador and spoke about the consequences of either victory or defeat for the people of the country. If the FMLN is successful, the right-wing will not accept it and the death squads will multiply. A defeat of the FMLN candidate who is running well ahead in the polls will be met with much suspicion by many in El Salvador.



*Sonia Umazor said a defeat of the FMLN would be met with great suspicion in El Salvador. Photo: Christy Thornton*

Pablo Espinosa Ruiz, a Chilean human rights activist coordinating SOA Watch’s North-South campaign to convince Latin American countries to withdraw from the SOA, told the crowd about how left wing organizations in Chile are seen as security threats even when they are totally non-violent. He also discussed social networking sites such as Facebook, which allow governments to spy on their populations very easily, since people post pictures of their activities, a list of their associates, and their political affiliations.

Patricia Isasa told us how when she was only 16, she was arrested during what has come to be known as the “dirty war” in Argentina, having committed no crime, and was tortured by soldiers who learned their trade at the infamous School of the Americas. She talked about her struggle for justice and to ensure that no more innocents are subjected to the same kinds of horrors because of incompetent and malevolent US involvement in the region. She has now seen nine of her torturers put behind bars, but as much as it means to see justice done, the important thing is to ensure that these activities never happen again, she said.

Attendees then broke into small group to discuss the many issues raised. Many took copies of the LASC-written letters detailing the 11 changes to US foreign policy the LASC is promoting along with brief talking points to send to their Senators and member of Congress.

## Transformation, from p. 2.

takeovers. After Lula’s election in 2002 as a left-leaning president, it refused to become part of the government. At the same time, the MST continued to push from below for agrarian reform and the right of the poor to own land.

The movement insisted on independence from the state. “We always insist that the MST and other social movements have to be autonomous in their relations with political parties, the government, the state,” said Pedro Stédile, one of the MST’s founders. In addition, it broke with the hierarchical way of organizing. A national coordinator explains: “We could not have a union-style leadership . . . It would not work. That is why we formed, in opposition to the old model, collective leadership. Our whole organization is collective.”

The MST is emblematic of the type of organization that flourished in Latin America in the 1990s. Specific to Brazil was a political ethos that was heavily influenced by the Brazilian Catholic Church and by Paulo Freire’s educational work. Liberation theology and groundbreaking educational practices combined to create an anti-authoritarian political culture.

In contrast to the *piqueteros* in Argentina and other movements in the region, the MST has not been co-opted or divided by the left-center government. Nor has its militant, oppositional stance been diluted over time.

Neo-liberal economic reforms also hit Argentina in the 1990s, creating a surge of unemployment. From the neighborhoods of the unemployed and otherwise disadvantaged came uprisings in Buenos Aires and elsewhere. Among various groups such as neighborhood associations and ex-workers who took over factories, the *piqueteros*’ (road picketers’) actions were the most dramatic. Road blocks interrupted the flow of goods and access to cities. Blocking highways also enabled protesters to defend their own autonomous spaces, which in turns reinforced the territorial aspect of their struggle.

As unrest grew, reaching a peak in December, 2001 with the financial melt-down of the country, protesters created all kinds of organizations to replace traditional and corrupt institutions — in which they had, with good reason, no faith: picketer organizations, barter clubs, self-managed assemblies, unemployed

associations. There was disillusionment with everything that involved the system. As one member of a neighborhood assembly remarked, “The unemployed, in particular, reached a point where they said OK, we organize or we’ll die . . . They had no one to trust but themselves.” A now-famous slogan that reflected this sentiment, “Que vayan todos” (they all should go) expressed the disgust with authorities of all kinds.

As with other mobilizations of the marginal, verticalist and vanguardist practices were jettisoned in favor of non-hierarchical organization. Over time, movement participants came to use the word “horizontal” to describe the new forms of organization. The theory and ideology of horizontalism came later.

Despite the belligerence and creativity of popular rebellions, the movements were large co-opted and demobilized under Kirchner’s government after his election in 2003. This development led some observers to question the efficacy of “power from below.” (More on that later.)

Indigenous revolts in Chiapas, Mexico, Bolivia and elsewhere exhibit characteristics similar to these insurrections. Likewise, the World Social Forum and the anti-corporate-led globalization movement have abandoned the statist model of social change.

### The Case for Horizontalism

We next turn to the theorizing around the new movements by activists and writers North and South. Their orientation can be summed up in John Holloway’s well-known adage “Change the world without taking power.” The terms “autonomism,” “self-organization” and especially “horizontalism” are used at the grass roots and by observers to categorize the political posture of the mobilizations. Horizontalism refers to decentralized decision-making, participatory democracy without hierarchy or vanguardism. It represents a break with the idea of “power-over.”

Both the practice and idea of horizontalism are rooted in the everyday experience of the marginalized: the failure of all forms of authority, of government, party leaders, union organizers, bosses and managers, to meet their basic needs; the consequent importance of neighborhood and geographical space, rather than the factory, as the foci of uprisings and organizing. Experience, practice and

**See Transformation, p. 9.**



## Transformation, from p. 8.

theory interacted as ideas migrated back and forth between protagonists and writers. It is important to remember here, as activist and anthropologist David Graeber reminds us, that academics usually overestimate the role of intellectuals in the production of ideas when actually the process is a two-way street. An Argentinean activist put the back-and-forth process this way: “Before the rebellion, only a few circles discussed the idea of the state and read things by people like John Holloway and Antonio Negri about old concepts of power. The [old] idea was to take power. There was a reaction of the extreme opposite, that is, forget about the state and build territorial power.”

Many who write about these new movements champion their commitment to “politics from below.” Winning control of the state apparatus as the fulcrum of social change is rejected not only because Latin American governments could not deliver economic and social benefits to the poor, but also because all states and political parties, whether vanguardist or parliamentary, are regarded by this camp as inherently hierarchical and authoritarian. The post-Marxist dislike of verticalism and preference for autonomy, together with a participatory process, is important for understanding the new movements. It predisposes many observers (some of whom cut their teeth on Marxist analysis) to uphold the idea of change from the bottom up. The notion of “power over,” in some cases, even the idea of power at all, is seen as hostile to self-determination and solidarity. Parties and governments on the left are as suspect as others. They still are tainted with the logic of domination.

Both activists and scholars write in this vein. Some texts are rooted in particular movements, such as Marina Sitrin’s book on uprisings in Argentina, aptly entitled *Horizontalism*; and Raúl Zibechi’s study of Bolivia’s rebellion, *Dispensar el Poder: Los Movimientos como Poderes Antiestatales*. And the Uruguayan sociologist Zibechi’s other writings have also made important contributions to this discourse. In addition, two theoretical works have been very influential among post-marxist writers and activists: *Change the World Without Taking Power* by John Holloway (2002) and *Empire* by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000).

Both theoretical contributions have been widely discussed in the North and South. (Holloway, a Scotsman, teaches at the Autonomous University in Puebla, Mexico.) Using the Zapatista rebellion as a model, *Change the World* situates itself within the “open marxism” of Negri and others. Thus, Holloway moves beyond the traditional working class to include peasants, women, students — indeed all of those oppressed by capitalist society (which turns out to be almost everyone) as agents of revolution. In addition, he rejects not only state power but the whole notion

that have appeared inside and outside the academy in recent years.

### The Case Against Horizontalism

The third part of this essay presents some critiques of “anti-power” and “politics from below.” The Zapatista model has inspired millions in Latin America and elsewhere. Since its 1994 uprising, however, the Zapatistas have not stopped the march of global capitalism in Chiapas or any other part of Mexico. The same can be said for the *piqueteros* in Argentina. In addition, the latter have been largely co-opted by the Peronist



The *piqueteros* of Argentina exemplify a horizontal movement. Photo: Argentina Indymedia.

of “power over” as opposed to “power to” in his reworking of Marxism.

The weakening of the state that supposedly accompanies globalization is the starting point of Hardt and Negri’s *Empire*. The process of globalization is the rationale for their contention that control of state is superfluous because empire, in contrast to the imperialism of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has no center of power and by-passes national sovereignty. It is a supranational, non-territorial network of power (with the U.S. admittedly at the forefront). Hardt and Negri do not deny that empire is coercive, but they argue that “the insurgent multitude,” once it is politically organized, can and will resist the new forms of capitalist domination. Although the concept of the multitude is not a synonym for civil society here, it is close enough to give theoretical fuel to the non-statist arguments for systemic change

Government of Nestor Kirchner and then Christina Kirchner. This criticism is a historical one: grassroots movements, even the most belligerent, have not been able to effect (so far) large-scale, systemic changes. The Zapatistas in Chiapas and the *piqueteros* in Argentina exhibit this political weakness (though proponents of horizontalism would not necessarily see this as a limitation).

Then there is a theoretical argument: in comparison with the state, civil society does not have, indeed, cannot have, the power and scope to alter social relations on a national or global scale. Horizontal networking cannot effectively challenge structures of domination like world-wide capital or elite-run political systems. This theoretical stance is only partly rooted in empirical observation of the popular movements and their shortcomings, real as

See Transformation, p. 10.

## Transformation, from p. 9.

these are.

Also important, it seems to me, is an often residual, theoretical commitment to Marxist analysis that privileges the state. In this argument, only the capture of state power can lead to wide-ranging structural change because only the revolutionary state has the ability, the reach, to transform the system. This bias in part explains the critiques of the movements for their strategic shortcomings: their ideological and organizational incoherence; their unrealistic belief that state power is both unnecessary and undesirable. The notion of “changing the world without taking power” is, in their view, a utopian daydream.

There are many analyses of the drawbacks of Hardt and Negri’s thesis. A not atypical one is “Global Capital and Its Opponents” by Stanley Aronowitz, in *Implicating Empire*. Not only does Hardt and Negri’s book, *Empire*, downplay the role of the state in his opinion; it also elevates the “insurgent multitude” and “global citizenship” to primary roles in resistance, ignoring more organized forms of struggle like parties and unions. A similar critique appears in Emilia Castorina’s analysis of Argentinian politics from “below.” Holloway, Hardt and Negri and other proponents of “open Marxism” are taken to task for underestimating the strength and flexibility of the neo-liberal state under the aegis of Peronist politics. At the same time, she contends,

they overestimate the revolutionary potential of the new political subjects in general, and of those in Argentina in particular. As she notes, “The case of the *Piqueteros* raises the key questions regarding . . . the viability of autonomous strategies, the extent to which the new politics from ‘below’ is a politics of social transformation rather than mere survival.” Castorina goes on to ask whether even a survival strategy can be viable as long as the old power structures continue to constrain choices.

For almost all left observers of the political scene, the mobilization of civil society is important. And this in at least two respects: as a catalyst for change at the state level; and as a way to keep up the pressure on leftist governments once they are in office. Though critics of “power from below” typically do not marginalize popular struggles — at least not explicitly — they nonetheless privilege the state. For example, William Robinson in a recent essay on Latin America, seems to give civil society its due. He then explains further. No emancipatory project is possible “without addressing the matter of the power of dominant groups, the organization of that power in the state (including coercive power) and the concomitant need to disempower dominant groups by seizing the state from them, dismantling it, and constructing alternative institutions . . . without some political hammer, the popular classes cannot synchronize the forces necessary for a radical transformatory process,” as

he thinks may be happening in Venezuela. Robinson calls the Bolivarian revolution the first radical, socialist-oriented revolution since the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua.

Pointing to division in the U.S. solidarity movement between advocates of the state versus civil society, National Co-Coordinator of the Nicaragua Network and Interim Coordinator of the Venezuela Solidarity Network Chuck Kaufman endorses the statist position. He quotes approvingly Chavez’ admonition to the 2006 World Social Forum to have state power as a goal and not to be “just a debating society.” As for Nicaragua itself, the discourse has shifted since the election of Daniel Ortega in 2007. Defenders of the government are pitted against those who regard the social movements, however, weakened, as a bulwark against Ortega’s authoritarianism.

For many on the left, the matter of power should not and cannot be evaded. The corollary — that popular movements do just that — is implied if not said directly (though the question of what constitutes “evasion” needs to be examined more closely). In the final analysis, the question of power must be addressed because “you can pretend to ignore power, but it will not ignore you. . . . experience shows that it will not hesitate to take you in the most brutal fashion.”

This said, the jury is still out on which strategy, or combination of strategies will work best in bringing a new order to Latin America.

## Take action now to urge the Millennium Challenge Corporation to restore the Nicaragua funding which has only harmed poor families in Nicaragua!

*On Dec. 11, 2008 the Millennium Challenge Corporation suspended aid to Nicaragua for 90 days because of alleged irregularities in Nicaragua’s Nov. 9 municipal elections. The Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) is a US development fund set up to “reduce poverty through economic growth.”*

*The decision to cancel or continue MCA funding will be made on March 11. Please go to <http://www.mcc.gov/contact/index.php> and send a message to the Millennium Challenge board that to cut-off its poverty reduction aid will only hurt the poor in Nicaragua. Additional details are available at [www.nicanet.org](http://www.nicanet.org).*

*Even the president of the Nicaragua-American Chamber of Commerce, Cesar Zamora, has urged that the US “unfreeze (the funds) as quickly as possible because it affects the poorest people, and the entire world is in agreement that, in the end, it is the people of fewest resources that are affected by the cutting of aid.”*

**E-mail the Millennium Challenge Corporation directly at <http://www.mcc.gov/contact/index.php>, or by writing them at: 875 Fifteenth Street NW, Washington, DC 20005-2221.**



## Delegation, from p. 6.

an article confirming sexual freedom and freedom from sexual aggression, Perez noted. However, the right women had for many decades to a therapeutic abortion was removed and this Grupo Venancia has worked to rescind and sees this is as one reason for government harassment.

On our last day, we had the opportunity to travel by boat from Granada to one of the islands in the famous “Isletas” for lunch and for time to do a review of what we had seen. Some of the early conclusions of the delegation were:

1) Based on our very small sample of visits, the government’s anti-poverty programs were making a difference but it was necessary to travel outside the capital to see and feel that difference. Zero Hunger may not be a national development plan but it is a policy to bring an important sector of the population out of deep poverty.

2) At all levels, we found that people were not happy with the amount of information that they were receiving about what the government was doing (some of it very good!)

## News, from p. 12.

Nicaragua’s public water and sewage company, ENACAL on Feb. 20 inaugurated a new sewage treatment plant to improve the water quality of Lake Managua (Xolotlan). ENACAL spokesperson Jessica Caldera said the new plant treats raw sewage from Managua so that it will be clean by the time it goes into the lake. She said that the plant is of European design and will be the first of its type in Central America.

The Infrastructure Committee of the National Assembly passed the Law for People’s Housing on Feb. 5 and sent it to the whole Assembly for consideration. The bill provides for the building 150,000 houses of between 387 and 646 sq. ft. with a value of not greater than US\$20,000 which would be paid for by the occupant over a number of years at low interest. The houses would be built by cooperatives, municipalities, private companies and individuals, with the government guaranteeing the mortgages. Criticisms were not long in coming. El Nuevo Diario headlined: “Arbitrary impositions in Social Housing Law.” El Nuevo Diario cited objections to obligations put on employers to advance money to employees based on longevity at the job in order to help pay for a house

3) On the question of the policies of free education and health care, we found mostly praise although there was concern that the problems of class size could substantially affect the quality of education that children were receiving.



*For summary and evaluation, the group took a boat ride to an island in Lake Cocibolca. Photo: Cynthia Chavez-Metoyer*

4) ALBA was seen as a positive proposal of an alternative model to that of neo-liberal free trade, but some people wanted more information about the different projects that ALBA funds were supporting (such as Nicaracoop) and some were concerned that the ALBA debt could

and to deduct mortgage payments from employees salaries and make those payments on time and in full.

Not all criticism of the government comes from the right-wing. Complaints of thin cows and dead chickens from beneficiaries of the Zero Hunger Program have resulted in the resignation of the director of the program, Gustavo Moreno. Moreno said he would resign due to discontent by Councils of Citizen Power (CPCs) with his management. The CPCs are organized groups of citizens in each community. In the rural areas, they have a role in the selection of peasant women to enroll in the Zero Hunger Program. Agriculture Minister Ariel Bucardo said that after receiving complaints about the quality of the animals, he put the problem before President Daniel Ortega who ordered an audit. Bucardo estimated that 3-4% of families in the Zero Hunger Program were not receiving quality animals.

### Foreign Aid

Six members of the US House of Representatives, led by Eliot Engel (D-NY) who is chair of the Western Hemisphere Sub-Committee of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, met with President Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua last week. Engel reportedly conveyed the

become a national debt. There was a serious concern that programs could lose funding from Venezuela if the price of oil continues to drop.

5) In Managua, the CPCs were seen by some of the people we met with as only including Sandinistas.

In Matagalpa, the CPCs were seen as just another community organization working in cooperation with many others; the main concern was that they were replacing the long fought for Municipal Development Committees. 6) The polarization that we found was disheartening, but we found less polarization once we left Managua. We were

disappointed that, during our last days in Nicaragua, convicted felon and former president Arnoldo Aleman was absolved of the crime of stealing US\$100 million from the Nicaraguan state in a political deal to end the paralysis of the National Assembly.

interest of the administration of President Barack Obama to improve relations between the two countries. They also discussed accusations of fraud in the municipal elections last November. Engel said that he supported renewing disbursement of funds from the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) which were frozen based on concerns about the election. Others in the delegation were: Ruben Hinajosa (D-TX), John Salazar (D-CO), Virginia Foxx (R-NC), Mark Souder (R-IN), and Jean Schmidt (R-OR).

US Ambassador Robert Callahan confirmed Feb. 4 that his government will continue aid to the Ministry of Education independent of “some little problems we have in our bilateral relations.” Callahan presented Minister of Education Miguel de Castilla with a donation from USAID of US\$254,000 to buy educational materials.

### Diplomacy

Saul Arana will replace Arturo Cruz as Nicaragua’s ambassador to the United States in late April or early May. Arana is currently Nicaragua’s ambassador to Japan. Arana is an economist who served as ambassador to Costa Rica, Greece and Yugoslavia during the 1980s, as well as director of the North American Section of the Foreign Ministry. Arana participated in the founding of the Nicaragua Network 30 years ago.

# The News from Nicaragua

## Politics

On Feb. 21, Nicaraguans commemorated the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the assassination of Augusto C. Sandino in 1934, ordered by National Guard leader Anastasio Somoza Garcia. Sandino's long struggle forced out the US Marines, who had occupied the country from 1912-1933.

President Daniel Ortega spoke at the ceremony in Ocotal. Ortega said that his government's programs were inspired in the ideals of social justice of Sandino, naming the Zero Hunger Program, the literacy campaign, and free education and health care. Ortega said that the FSLN has to make "agreements, pacts with our adversaries" but "we must not confide in them because they are at the service of the empire, of those who put Somoza in power." He also condemned those whom he called "opportunists" who pretend to be revolutionaries until things go badly and then "they begin to disown the revolutionaries."

Ortega called on Sandinistas to march on Feb. 28 to start celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Sandinista Revolution that will culminate in July. The Movement for Nicaragua, a group founded and funded by the US International Republican Institute (IRI), a core group of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), has called marches in seven cities for that same day under the slogan "Where is my vote?" Violeta Granera, coordinator of the Movement for Nicaragua, complained that Ortega's call for parallel marches was "a total irresponsibility" adding that "the president knows perfectly well what the two [rival] marches will mean. If the president was sensible, the marches wouldn't be on the same day," she stated, adding "they have every right to march; what they don't have the right to do is to attack us as they have done in the past."

There were multiple attempts to unify the right-wing last month but they failed when Eduardo Montealegre's "Let's Go With Eduardo Movement" (MVE) joined the Independent Liberal Party (PLI) and the Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance (ALN) refused to support Constitutional Liberal Party (PLC) efforts to overturn the Nov. 9 municipal elections. ALN party leader, Eliseo Nuñez, said they did not want to risk losing the four city halls that they had

captured in the elections.

Montealegre, who failed to win the presidency as the ALN nominee and failed in his bid to become mayor of Managua as the PLC candidate, called on his supporters to join the PLI, causing some consternation among PLI old timers. The PLI was formed in 1944 to oppose the reelection ambitions of Anastasio Somoza Garcia. PLI President Indalecio Rodriguez announced a party congress in May to discuss the influx of new members. There is concern that Montealegre only wants to use the party because it has legal recognition and a place on the ballot which his MVE does not have. Montealegre has been touring the country with Alvaro Somoza Urcuyo, son of the late President Luis Somoza and grandson of Somoza Garcia, adding to the PLI members doubts.



On Feb. 20, ENACAL inaugurated a new sewage plant for Managua that will help clean up Lake Cocibolca. Photo: La Prensa

Montealegre said corruption charges against him were "political" and said he was ready to have his immunity lifted for prosecution. Montealegre has been indicted along with 38 others in a case where the government was stuck with tens of millions of dollars of private debt from four failed banks when he was Minister of the Treasury.

On Jan. 22, Prosecutor Douglas Vargas announced that his investigation of money laundering allegations against several nongovernmental organizations including CINCO, the Autonomous Women's Movement (MAM), the Civil Coordinator and the Venancia Group would be dropped because the evidence did not support bringing them to trial. He did say that the investigations revealed some irregularities and recommended an audit. He sent the

investigation results to the Ministry of Government with the recommendation that regulations covering the registration and control of associations be reviewed.

The affected NGOs considered the announcement a victory but expressed concern that the Ministry of Government could continue an administrative investigation or that the regulations could be changed. In a statement read by CINCO Director Sofia Montenegro, the NGOs demanded on Feb. 12 that the government investigators be fired for abuse of power. Considering the focus the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the NED place on forming "women's" groups and "youth" groups in countries where the US tries to thwart Left movements and governments, the Nicaragua Network considers it a matter of national sovereignty to investigate

the foreign sources of money for NGO's. Assuming that there is no further harassment of women's groups, we consider the fact that the NGOs were cleared by the investigation to be a victory for institutionality and the rule of law.

## Poverty Reduction/ Social Investment

Since Hurricane Felix devastated the North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN), less than two years ago, the Emergency Fund for Social Investment (FISE) has built 18 modern healthcare centers and 29 schools replacing those destroyed by the hurricane. Funding was provided by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the German KfW bank, and the Bolivarian Alternative for Our Americas (ALBA). At a cost of US\$1.27 million, the 18 healthcare centers serve the 20,000 inhabitants of Bilwi/Puerto Cabezas and surrounding communities. FISE also spent US\$3.15 million constructing 29 schools, financed from the same sources. This initiative guarantees access to education in indigenous communities where schools were destroyed by Hurricane Felix. ALBA financed 23 of the schools.

**See News, p. 11.**