

La vida loca: Fighting privatization in Colombia

A conversation with Colombian union leader Jhon Jairo Castro Balanta

Enrique Quintero

A dangerous existential choice

If you happen to live in the US, and are asked about what you consider to be the most dangerous jobs in the world, your mind probably gravitates to loggers, crab fishermen in Alaska, land mine removers, helicopter cable repairmen, and workers in meat processing plants in the Midwest. This vision is basically correct—in alignment with the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the US Department of Labor. But if you were to pose the same question in Colombia, at the top of the chart of fatal occupational injuries would be *workers union leader*.

According to the International Trade Union Confederation, every three days, for the last 23 years, at least one union member in Columbia has been killed. Paramilitary groups with close ties to the police and the military have committed most of the killings; lately, some of these groups have been linked to US corporations interested in minimizing union activity. This long lasting policy of terror has transformed the Colombian union movement from one of the strongest in Latin America, to one of the weakest with just 4% of its labor force unionized.

Jhon Jairo Castro is a native of Buenaventura, probably the most violent city in the country, and the most important port on the Pacific coast (ironically the name of the city means "good adventure" or "good journey" in Spanish). Mr. Castro is 40 years old and has been a longshoreman and union organizer for over a decade. Currently he is President of the Buenaventura chapter of the Port Workers Union in Colombia. He has received two anonymous threat notices stating they are keeping an eye on him and his family, and are "just waiting for the order to go ahead."

History, John Travolta, importance of the future, and a cell phone call

When WIP asked Jhon Jairo Castro about the reasons that made him choose such a dangerous path of work, he had this to say:

"First it has to do with my father. I come from a humble family, and my father was an independent small-scale miner. He would spend hours and days mining just to find a few little flakes of gold. I couldn't understand my father. I asked him why he would refuse to work for the mining companies and he'd say he didn't like to

receive orders from any one.

I didn't agree with him because I thought it was impossible not having a supervisor. It took me years to understand his position. His attitude was a response to the abuses against miners by the mining companies. He preferred to do things his own way.

My mom and dad called me Jhon because of John Travolta—they loved the music of Saturday Night Fever and wanted to have a son who would be as good a dancer as him.

Later in life, in 1997, a General Civil Strike took place in Buenaventura. The whole city was paralyzed! People demanded the improvement of living conditions--basically a better salary, and

a minimum wage that would allow people to live and survive. This event marked the beginning of my life as a union worker and organizer. I realized that things get done when we act as a group.

Also by then I had a family, I had kids. My wife worked as a maid but even with both of our salaries combined we couldn't

"We have noticed strange people circling our house, people unknown to the neighborhood. It makes all of us a little apprehensive, a little nervous, but we must continue forward; it has to do with the kind of future we want."

make a living. Buenaventura used to be a nice city. That's not the case anymore; we have to think of the future, how to make things better for our kids, think about how to change things. This sense of rebellion is something I have in my blood."

At this point in the conversation his cell phone rings. I stop the recorder and move to a different table so he can take the call in privacy and have a few sips of his "Chocolate Caliente" which

according to him, came in the "biggest cup I've ever seen--must be at least a gallon," he added. "Hey! We are in the US--everything is big here," I offered as a semiserious explanation. When I sit back at our table a few minutes later, the cell phone lies mute next to what seems like half a gallon of hot chocolate still in the cup. He continues:

"We have noticed strange people circling our house, people unknown to the neighborhood. It makes all of us a little apprehensive, a little nervous, but

we must continue forward; it has to do with the kind of future we want."

Privatization and de-evolution of life in Buenaventura / Coexisting with death as an unnecessary necessity

Mr. Castro was part of a trade union workers' delegation sponsored by the AFL-CIO to visit Washington, DC, and present reasons why the US Congress

► **COLOMBIA**, continued on page 6.

Olympia-Rafah Solidarity Mural Project: Part II in a series

Mural gathers momentum in website renewal and community outreach

It is more than a piece of art; it's a part of the community that can bring people together

Desdra Dawning

The Olympia-Rafah Mural is more than a big, pretty tree on the side of a building in downtown Olympia, Washington. Much more. Each leaf on that huge olive tree was created for an organization or individual to speak out for social justice, environmental awareness, or global peace. Sprouting from the death of Rachel Corrie as she stood her ground before a home and in front of a bulldozer in Palestine, the mural has grown and leafed-out into a voice for many groups, all working for sanity, reason, and heart in the world of humans.

I spoke recently with Josh Elliott who has been with the Mural Project

since 2009 and has obvious and sincere passion for his work. Filling me in on his background in social justice work, he told me that when he arrived in Olympia in 2007, he became involved in the Olympia Movement for Justice and Peace and

The lighting project is in the developmental phase, with initial plans to place a solar collector on the roof of the building so that the Mural can be lit at night. The building owners are in support of this project.

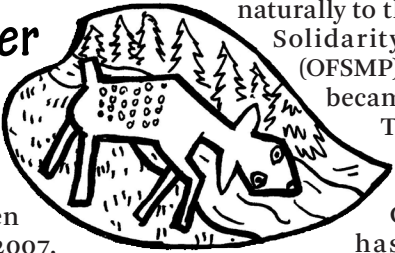
also with the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES). With this organization (he now serves on their Board of Directors), he traveled to El Salvador and returned "politicized," as he puts it. The framework of "international solidarity" he experienced

there resonated with what the mural project stands for, leading him quite naturally to the Olympia-Rafah Solidarity Mural Project (OFSMP), where he quickly became involved.

The Mural Project, proposed and directed by Susan Greene since 2007, has been blessed with numerous volunteer interns over the years. These interns

have participated in the ongoing effort to see it grow and thrive. The current intern, Kaye Michalak, a former student at TESC, has been very flexible, Josh says, in going where the need takes her. Originally brought on for outreach, she has done outreach for Art's Walk, fundraising for the Project, and is at this time "doing an excellent job of working on procuring grants" for the organization. "We're lucky to have

► **THE MURAL**, continued on page 2.



WORKS IN PROGRESS

ESTABLISHED IN 1990 BY THE THURSTON COUNTY RAINBOW COALITION

Works In Progress is a free, all volunteer-operated progressive community publication based in Olympia, Washington. Opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of Works In Progress and are solely those of the authors.

Submissions

Please send text as Word attachments. Artwork and photos can be sent electronically or we can scan them for you as camera-ready/black & white.

Works In Progress is committed to stories misrepresented or ignored by the mainstream media. We value local, well-researched news stories, accounts of personal experience and reflections by local authors. Opinion pieces, also valued, are often best supported by facts, examples, and sources, and we encourage writers to include these elements to submissions. We're also looking for graphics, poetry, cartoons, and articles that push the boundaries of conventional journalism.

WIP reserves the right to publish in whole or part all submissions. For editing purposes, please enclose your phone number. Articles may be reprinted. Please cite sources.

If your issue isn't being covered in Works In Progress, it's because you aren't writing about it! (Or haven't found someone else to cover it!)

Send submissions to olywip@gmail.com or mail to Works In Progress, PO Box 295, Olympia, WA 98507-0295.

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WIP will make every effort to work with the contributor of material considered by WIP to be offensive in order to reach a mutually agreed upon resolution, but WIP reserves the right as a last resort to edit or not print submitted material.

Mission Statement

Our aim is to confront injustice and encourage a participatory democracy based on economic, social, and environmental justice. Works In Progress is dedicated to providing a voice for those most affected by the exclusionary and unfair practices that seek to silence the oppressed.

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Back Issues

WIP is archived on microfilm by the University of Washington Library. Some issues are held in the Timberland Library system. The last five years are online at www.olywip.org

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Submission Deadline:

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On the front cover —

Orwell sighting

Graphic Artist: Vince Ryland

► Mural, continued from page 1
her onboard,” says Josh.

This past summer, funds became available to hire a long-needed outreach coordinator for ORSMP. Josh has happily stepped into that role. I asked him to fill me in on the latest happenings with the mural. “We are looking,” he told me, “to encourage folks who are participants in the mural to utilize the space in front of the mural (the leased parking lot), the space online, and the audio space (they are working to bring their technology up-to-date), to better support their organizations and their missions.” In order to see this happen, Josh is diligently contacting each of the leaf organizations, encouraging them to participate even more fully in the mural’s presence, knowing that in doing so their own work will become more visible and be more clearly understood by the community.

As he is communicating with the 50 local Olympia groups, he is “asking organizations and community members to—as they’re thinking globally, be acting locally—by planning events at the mural.” The way Josh sees it, “we could be a launching-point for projects being planned as local outdoor events.” He sees his work as Outreach Coordinator as a time for “re-invigorating connections with our nice network of folks,” and taking the Olympia-Rafah Solidarity Mural to the next level of community participation.

Another aspect of his work as Outreach Coordinator is reaching out to the colleges—The Evergreen State College (TESC), South Puget Sound Community College (SPSCC), St. Martin’s College, and others—for interns. Josh is now developing more formal intern positions that students can plug into, focusing primarily on audio engineering and maintenance for the website and lighting for the mural.

The website (www.olympiarafahmural.org) has been designed to include a very creative experience in which each numbered leaf has its own audio component representing that group’s vision and mission. Improving this technology has been a primary focus of ORSMP for some time, as work is being done to “tie up loose ends of audio and make sure the website is functioning properly, so that when people go to the web-site, or to the mural-site, where they can ‘call the wall’ by cell phone, they can fully take that journey.”

The lighting project is in the developmental phase, with initial plans to place a solar collector on the roof of the building so that the Mural can be lit at night. The building owners are in support of this project. Dealing with a very small budget, Josh is looking for people with expertise in the area of solar lighting who would be willing to donate their time to getting the mural lit-up.

An Internship Fair is planned for Wednesday, January 29, 2014 to be held in the Evergreen Library second floor lobby from 12 Noon to 3 PM. ORSMP hopes this event will attract and lead to new interns who can then receive college credit for their efforts with the mural, and invites all who may be interested to attend. Josh is also involved in creating an organizational packet for the mural which will include its personal history, past events, info and contacts for procuring use of the mural parking lot for events, and important dates such as Arts Walk, International Solidarity with Palestine Day, etc. This will be most valuable, not only for those currently involved in the mural Project, but also for anyone in the community who

recognizes its value in bringing people together and wants to be a part of seeing that happen.

Ultimately, what Josh, and all those working with ORSMP, want is the building of a momentum—community momentum. They are reconnecting with those who already have leaves and are looking for ways that organizations who are not yet represented, but feel

strongly about the mural, can become involved. “We may not be able,” Josh said, “to put more images on the wall, but we can include them in other ways. What we really want to stress is that this is a work in progress. We want it to take shape as a piece of the community that can bring people together, rather than a finite and static piece of art.”

So, if you are a student, or know a student, who is looking for a meaningful and creative internship, belong to an organization created to join in solidarity with others, want to learn more, or are inspired to become personally involved in the Olympia/Rafah Solidarity Mural Project, please contact: Josh Elliott at bunnyface@riseup.net.

And be looking for more on the mural in this on-going series!

Desdra Dawning writes for the Olympia Food Co-op Newsletter and Works In Progress. She has an MA in Creative Writing from Northern Arizona University.

Mark these two dates on your calendar

Marching to Waziristan
Monday, December 9, 7 pm

Judy Mackey will show a presentation “Marching To Waziristan” about her very own travel to Waziristan (Pronounced: Wazir is tan)

Wounds of Waziristan
Thursday, December 12, 7pm

This is a very recent film about drones or UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles); it is highly acclaimed around the world.

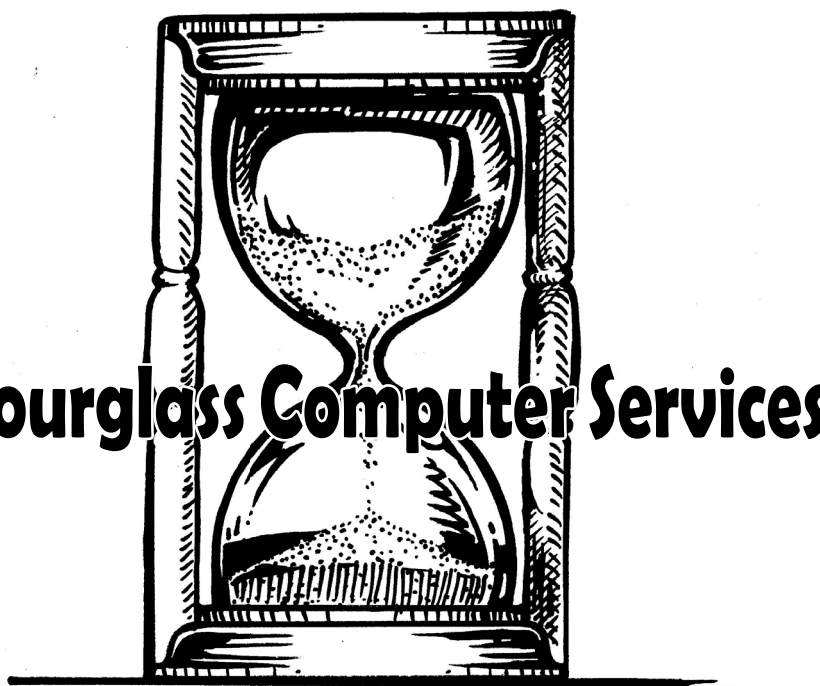
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It's just a scam to push for privatization

Pre-funding mandate masks USPS '13 profit

David Groves

The US Postal Service announced its year-end results for Fiscal Year 2013, citing a loss of \$5 billion. Two major postal unions were the first to point out that the Postal Service actually made a profit on its operations.

“Headlines across the country are shouting that the USPS lost billions of dollars again this year, but that’s a fallacy,” said American Postal Workers Union President Mark Dimondstein. “If it weren’t for the congressional mandate to pre-fund health benefits for future retirees, the USPS would have shown a surplus of \$600 million.”

Fredric Rolando, president of the National Association of Letter Carriers added, “This mandate—a political requirement placed on no other agency or company in the country—cost \$5.6 billion.”

Now it’s time for Congress to set aside bills that focus on cutting service and attacking the pay and benefits of postal workers instead of addressing the real cause of the crisis: the 2006 pre-funding mandate.

The Postal Service is positioned for a strong comeback if lawmakers act sensibly—by addressing the pre-funding fiasco that created an artificial financial crisis, and by freeing the Postal Service to use its universal retail and delivery networks to innovate and grow.

The Postal Service has used its financial crisis to justify service changes, which have affected Washington residents. The closure of mail processing

in Everett, Olympia and Pasco earlier this year have brought reports of delayed mail. The Postal Service plans to shutter mail processing in Tacoma and Wenatchee in February 2014, and officially switch to a slower delivery schedule for first-class mail. Rural post offices throughout the

service cuts for patrons and benefit cuts for employees.

“The USPS is suffering from a manufactured crisis,” Dimondstein said. “But the fallout of the artificial crisis is real.”

Service has declined dramatically—mail takes days longer to arrive, carriers are delivering mail in the dark, lines at post offices are out the door—and good, union postal jobs are disappearing. The solution is clear: Congress must repeal the pre-funding mandate and allow the Postal Service to develop new services that will provide new revenue.

Dimondstein added, “Unfortunately, there are some in Congress who want the Postal Service to fail. They are eager to privatize it.”

David Groves is the editor of The Stand, a publication of the Washington State Labor Council. This article is reprinted with permission.

David Yao contributed to this report.

The USPS is suffering from a manufactured crisis to justify service changes that have affected Washington residents.

state are seeing drastic cuts in lobby hours, and urban patrons have seen postal stations moved from downtown to less convenient areas, as occurred in Redmond, and is planned for Bellevue and Wenatchee.

The official Postal Service release highlighted “revenue growth and record productivity,” but continued the call for

Amahoro House Volunteer Open House

For those interested in being volunteer caregivers for the dying

Tuesday, December 3, 6:30 pm
Amahoro House
1618 East 4th Avenue
(Please enter through the alley)

Amahoro House, a project of Hospice Without Borders, will provide compassionate end-of-life care for the homeless in Olympia. The non-profit organization seeks volunteers physically able and comfortable providing intimate physical care to the dying. Volunteers will be asked to commit to two four-hour shifts a week when Amahoro House has a guest. The House will take

only one guest at a time and will have intervals between guests.

Caregiving volunteers, willing to practice compassion without judgment, will be a part of a community team that includes volunteer doctors, nurses, chaplains, medical social workers and certified nurses’ assistants. Caregiving volunteers will receive about 30 hours of training.

Please come to their Open House and find out about this opportunity to make a difference in our community. For more information, send an email to volunteercoordinator@hospicewithoutborders.com or call (360) 338-0107.

Peter Bohmer and Savvina Chowdhury to lead political economy workshops at Traditions

Political economy faculty members from the Evergreen State College—Savvina Chowdhury and Peter Bohmer—will lead political economy workshops at Traditions Cafe at 5th and Water in downtown Olympia on the dates below. No background in the study of political economy is required. This workshop is aimed especially at those who know

something is seriously wrong with the direction of the United States economy and society, but do not have a defined ideology or politics. We will encourage participation and discussion.

For more information contact: Peter Bohmer, peterbohmer@yahoo.com or Savvina Chowdhury, savvinac@yahoo.com.

Wed	December 4	7-9 pm	Inequality of Income and Wealth
Wed	January 8	7-9 pm	The Economics of a Living Wage
Wed	February 5	7-9 pm	ABC's of Capitalism

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Special Events

Community Brunch w/Gateways for Incarcerated Youth
Friday, December 1, 11 am - 2 pm
Media Island International
816 Adams St. SE, Olympia

The vision of Gateways is to break the cycle of incarceration, recidivism, and violence. Gateways’ mission is to encourage incarcerated youth to achieve self-determination through youth-driven leadership in a collaborative learning environment.

Please join us for a wholesome pancake brunch and learn about the important work happening in the Gateways Program.

JLK & Babysitter, Happy Noose
Sunday, December 1, 10 pm
Le Voyeur
404 4th Ave E, Olympia

\$5 for the touring bands

Olympia Jazz Senators
Monday, December 2, 8 pm-10:30 pm
The Royal Lounge
311 Capitol Way North, Olympia

The Olympia Jazz Senators perform a full range of big band jazz. One minute you might hear an authentic Glen Miller dance tune straight from World War II. Next could be Count Basie, Stan Kenton, Buddy Rich, one of the other current bands, or a cutting-edge new composition by one of the Senators. The Jazz Senators present every tune with a twist you will hear from no other band anywhere.

\$5 Suggested Donation. Sponsored by Olympia Jazz Central

TESC WRC & T-Rex present
Andrea Gibson! Opening
performance by Old Growth
Poetry Collective!
Wednesday, December 4, 7 pm
Longhouse
The Evergreen State College

Cost for this event is \$7.00 for students, and \$15.00 general admission for non-students.

We look forward to seeing you there!

Tulip's 10-Year Anniversary
Party and Annual Meeting!
Thursday, December 5, 5 pm - 7 pm
Hubers Gasthaus
2312 Friendly Grove Road, Olympia

Come join us for our Annual Meeting and 10-year Anniversary. Enjoy food, music, door prizes and great people! We will recognize our successes as well as our partners who have helped us along the way!

Fruition String Band w/ Erev Rav
Saturday, December 7, 8:30pm
The Olympia Ballroom
116 Legion Way SE, Olympia

What a night is in store at the Olympia Ballroom! This will be fantastic original music from start to finish with ‘Americana of the Highest Order’ from Fruition and Olympia’s 2012 winner of Best Band from the Weekly Volcano reader’s poll, Erev Rav.

Danny Barnes & Matt Sircely
w/ the Oly Mountain Boys
Friday, December 20, 8 pm
Pig Bar
619 Legion Way NE, Olympia

December rolls around, it’s time once again to grab the sack of peanut butter sandwiches, climb into the automobile, and venture off to cross the great foggy straits, climb the snowy mountains and visit the gracious towns of the Pacific Northwest. We’ll keep an eye out for oddities such as ornamental open-back banjos and second-hand cassette tapes, and we’ll get to see a lot of good friends along the way.

Darol Anger's Keep-It-In-The-Fam
Holiday Show with the
Cascadia All-Stars
Friday, December 20, 8 pm
The Olympia Ballroom
116 Legion Way SE, Olympia

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Public opinion prevented a war

The need to change violent US foreign policy

Glen Anderson

Use honest words

(September 25) In response to allegations that Syria's president Bashar Assad had used chemical weapons, everybody was clamoring that someone must "do something." In the United States, "do something" was assumed to mean "do something" *violent*! Diplomacy was essentially "off the table."

Likewise, most politicians and news media referred to the United States' possible "use of force," but that is a deceptive euphemism for "military violence" and "killing people." I think of "using force" when I vigorously squeeze and twist the stuck lid on a pickle jar. But military attacks, bombs, and cruise missiles are actual violence and deliberate killing, not merely "force."

So if we want to understand Syria and US foreign policy overall, we must first start to become honest about the ongoing assumption that US violence is acceptable.

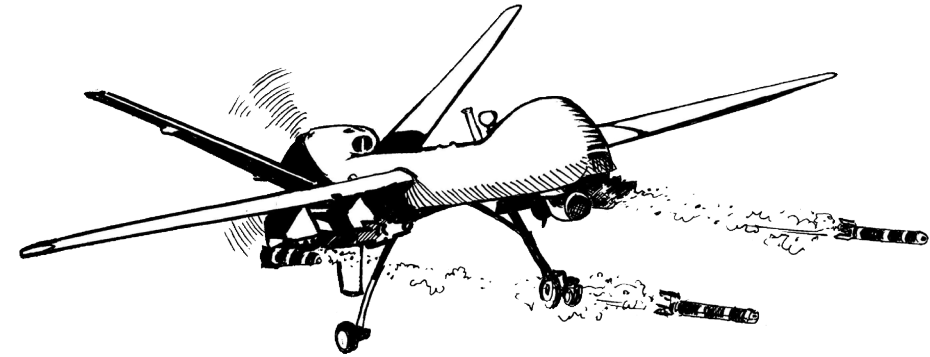
At first, war was the only option—then the "impossible" peace solution became obvious

In 2002-2003, George W. Bush claimed Iraq had "weapons of mass destruction," but did not accept the United Nations' inspectors' reports that the WMD program had ended. In the summer of 2013 this pattern repeated itself with President Obama wanting to attack Syria without waiting for a UN inspectors' report despite evidence that seriously conflicted with Obama's unproven allegations.

In the fall of 2002, George W. Bush was planning to attack Iraq without getting approval from Congress, but the people made him slow down and consult Congress. In the summer of 2013, President Obama wanted to attack Syria without getting approval from Congress, but people slowed him down and made him consult Congress.

On December 20, 2007, when Obama was campaigning for President, he told interviewer Charlie Savage, "The President does not have power under the Constitution to unilaterally authorize a military attack in a situation that does not involve stopping an actual or imminent threat to the nation." But in 2013 he was planning to do that very thing against Syria without Congressional authorization.

Conflicting information about who really used the chemical weapon in Syria refuted the Obama Administration's claimed certainty. Indeed, the Obama Administration actually tried to get the United Nations to call off its investigation into the matter. The August 27 article, "In Rush to Strike Syria, US Tried to Derail UN Probe," the Inter Press Service reported the Administration's reversal "came within hours of the deal reached between Syria and



the UN." But despite Secretary of State John Kerry's direct personal pressure on UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon to stop the UN's investigation, the UN proceeded to investigate.

Obama was planning a violent military attack on Syria and this was becoming absolutely inevitable. Finally, a reporter in London asked Secretary of State John Kerry whether there was anything President Assad could do to stop US strikes and Kerry replied offhandedly, "Sure, he could turn over every single bit of his chemical weapons to the international community in the next week . . . without delay and allow the full and total accounting for that, but he isn't about to do it and it can't be done, obviously." Kerry was saying this in a dismissive way as if this were impossible. But Syria and Russia immediately said, in effect, "Sure, we can do that!"

This episode shows that the Obama Administration had not seriously pursued diplomatic solutions but had immediately jumped onto war as the first resort, not the last resort, contrary to its public statements. During both terms of his administration, Obama has surrounded himself with hawks and has grossly failed to seek information and insights from doves, just like he has filled his positions of economic advisors with people from Wall Street, Goldman-Sachs, and big banks, instead of people who would critique those elites and understand ordinary Americans' economic realities.

Mainstream media likewise were blind-sided by the reality that diplomacy was possible instead of war. It's a good thing the peace movement saved the US from blundering into another boneheaded war that would only have escalated world tensions, antagonized world opinion, and provoked more terrorist "blowback" upon the US and our allies. But you can search the official statements of politicians and mainstream news media without seeing them ever thank the peace movement for saving our nation and the world

from this disaster.

The peace movement and alternative progressive media have recognized the realities. For example, see the September 11 In These Times article titled "How the Anti-War Movement Won the Hearts and Minds of the Public."

The peace movement is larger than people thought, and we won

While the peace movement typically sees itself as small, we are actually much larger than politicians or media

early September. Senator Patty Murray's staff reported receiving 30,000 phone calls and e-mails, with 93% saying NO to war. Senator Maria Cantwell finally said she wanted diplomacy instead of war. Eastern Washington's conservative Republican House member Cathy McMorris Rodgers finally said she did not see how military action would be "in our national interest" nor how it "fits into a larger plan to resolve the conflict and stabilize the situation in the Middle East." None of these were their initial positions. Public pressure forced Congress to choose diplomacy instead of war.

US Representative Jim McDermott from Seattle, who has long been a strong dove, held a Town Hall Meeting in Seattle to slow down the rush to war and to let his constituents speak. Four hundred constituents attended. Todd Boyle videotaped it and you can watch it on YouTube—*McDermott Syria Town Hall Seattle*.

In late August 2013, an NBC poll showed most Americans opposed another war in Syria, and 80% opposed a war without Congressional authorization. Also, in late August, at least 188 members of Congress called for a debate and vote on the war question, and the British Parliament, which is similar to our Congress,

or the movement itself recognizes. President Obama was hell-bent for war and saw no alternative, but a huge number of Americans—and millions of people around the world and their governments—told Obama and the US Congress that we refused to have yet another war. The US attack on Syria, that just a few weeks ago was assumed to be inevitable, suddenly was prevented.

Offices of the US Senate and House were flooded with people opposing war, and we gave an earful to every Congress member who was home in August and

voted against Prime Minister David Cameron's support for Obama's new war. Also pulling the plug were the UN's Security Council, NATO, the Arab League, Jordan, and Egypt. Obama was left with practically no support except for France (which has a lot of baggage regarding Syria) and Israel.

Vladimir Putin actually described the situation accurately

While Russia's president Vladimir Putin is wrong about many things, he

► **FOREIGN POLICY**, continued on page 5.

A reporter in London asked John Kerry whether there was anything Assad could do to stop US strikes and Kerry replied offhandedly, "Sure, he could turn over every single bit of his chemical weapons to the international community in the next week . . . without delay.

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CO-OP

► **Foreign Policy**, cont. from page 4.
has been widely recognized as very accurate in describing the US’s wrong-headed approach to Syria. Russia is an ally of Syria, so it might be natural to take his September 12, 2013, Op-Ed in the *New York Times* “with a grain of salt,” but his article is surprisingly right.

For example, he correctly specifies that, “Under current international law, force is permitted only in self-defense or by the decision of the Security Council,” and that “Anything else is unacceptable under the United Nations Charter and would constitute an act of aggression.” He also criticized the notion of “American exceptionalism,” the mistaken notion that the US is so special that we are entitled to do whatever we want, regardless of the international laws that bind other countries.

He warned that a US military strike would likely kill many innocent victims, spread the conflict “far beyond Syria’s borders,” “unleash a new wave of terrorism,” and “could undermine multilateral efforts to resolve the Iranian nuclear problem and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and further destabilize the Middle East and North Africa. It could throw the entire system of international law and order out of balance.”

Unlike the simplistic assumptions asserted by many US politicians, Putin wrote, “Syria is not witnessing a battle for democracy, but an armed conflict between government and opposition in a multireligious country. There are few champions of democracy in Syria. But there are more than enough Qaeda fighters and extremists of all stripes battling the government.”

He also wrote, “It is alarming that military intervention in internal conflicts in foreign countries has become commonplace for the United States. Is it in America’s long-term interest? I doubt it. Millions around the world increasingly see America not as a model of democracy but as relying solely on brute force, cobbling coalitions together under the slogan ‘you’re either with us or against us.’”

Use diplomacy, not military violence

Some of the “rebels” that the United States are arming in Syria are very closely tied to extreme terrorist groups. The CIA and US military have a terrible track record of funding violent groups that have turned against us, both in the war underway at that time and in new wars that arise in subsequent years. We need to debunk the myth that military violence is the solution and recognize that *militarism is the problem!*

The Obama Administration’s confusion about what its proposed attack would accomplish—and the peace movement’s vigorous opposition—weakened Congress’s support for war. Putin’s surprisingly wise and accurate critique attracted respect from many unexpected persons, including some in high places. The London reporter’s plea for an alternative to war combined with all of these factors to sink the proposal for attacking Syria. The attack would have been a train wreck, but we derailed it before it could do more significant damage.

The limited US military attack on Syria would certainly *not* have caused Syria to get rid of all of its chemical weapons. But diplomacy quickly reached an agreement that military violence would have been powerless to achieve.

On September 10, 2013, Phyllis Bennis (from the Institute for Policy Studies) and the Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr., offered a “Joint Statement on the Syrian Crisis”, which called for diplomacy instead of military violence. They called for diplomacy that would “bring together all sides in Syria’s war, and all those arming and funding them. Russia and the US, along with Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and beyond, must all be at the

table with all their Syrian partners—and we must push, urge, demand an immediate ceasefire and an immediate arms embargo on all sides.”

They urged everyone to strengthen the Convention Against Chemical Weapons and to support efforts by the UN to investigate their use in Syria. They opposed “all chemical weapons in Syria” and urged pushing ahead for a “zone in the Middle East free of all weapons of mass destruction,” which several nations including the US had urged twenty years ago. (Note: This would include Israel, even though the US has continually provided diplomatic cover for Israel’s chemical and nuclear weapons.) Jackson is the Founder and President of the Rainbow PUSH Coalition. Bennis is Director of New Inter-

The limited US military attack on Syria would certainly *not* have caused Syria to get rid of all of its chemical weapons. But diplomacy quickly reached an agreement that military violence would have been powerless to achieve.

nationalism Project at the Institute for Policy Studies (www.ips-dc.org).

How did Obama get himself into this mess?

Perhaps President Obama took a lesson from Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, who had provocatively drawn “a red line” on possible nuclear weapons in Iran. When Obama recklessly drew “a red line” on chemical weapons in Syria, he boxed himself in and made him vulnerable to being tricked by “false flag” operations in which somebody commits the act but attributes it to someone else. In the case of Syria’s civil war, much evidence shows that any of the various rebel groups likely used chemical weapons knowing that Obama would assume that President Assad was responsible, thereby tricking the US into joining the rebels’ civil war against Syria’s government.

Having heard Obama’s “red line” threat—and knowing that UN inspectors were already in Syria—Assad would have nothing to gain and much to lose from using chemical weapons. Indeed, several factions of rebel groups have claimed responsibility, including one Sunni faction that confessed to mishandling chemical weapons they had received from the US’s Sunni ally, Saudi Arabia.

Obama is a chronic deal-maker who thinks he can control domestic politics by cutting and shaving political differences at home. However, this deal-making ends up squeezing him into tight political corners without good options left. Obama also seems to have a naïve belief that drones, missiles, and other airborne weapons can be more precisely targeted than they really can. US air attacks keep causing many, many civilian casualties, but Obama’s military advisors keep telling him that they are precise, so he keeps thinking he can achieve limited, specific results, when all he does is escalate conflicts, kill innocent people, and provoke what the CIA has long called “blowback.”

Is Iran the real target?

On August 30, 2013, Robert Fisk, a very seasoned Middle Eastern reporter, published an article titled, “Iran, Not Syria, Is the West’s Real Target.” He notes that because Iran is an ally of Syria, the US wants to attack Syria as a way of weakening Iran and helping Israel, which—along with the US—has a long-standing animosity toward Iran.

Fisk does criticize Assad’s regime in Syria, but he also reminds us that when Saddam Hussein—a US ally in

1988—gassed the Kurds then at Hallabjah, the CIA promoted the lie that Iran had gassed them. Many more people died in the US-supported gassing in 1988 than in Syria during August. Also, the US’s ally Saddam Hussein used gas against the Iranian army during their war from 1980 to 1988. The US also has remained silent when Israel’s military used chemical weapons several times in recent decades. Clearly, the US’s position about chemical weapons is based on politics rather than on principle.

What about the US’s chemical weapons?

Do you know the old saying about “the pot calling the kettle black”? Why have US politicians and mainstream news media almost entirely refused to point out that the US and Russia have neglected to eliminate their own chemical weapons? Both the US and Russia have signed a legally binding agreement (the Chemical Weapons Convention) with several deadlines over a 15-year stretch to eliminate their own chemical weapons, but we imposed a very short deadline of only about nine months for Syria to get rid of theirs. The US and Russia missed the third and final deadline of 2012. Israel signed the CWC in 1993 but never ratified it.

For more information on this topic read Guy Taylor’s September 23 article “Foot-draggers: US and Russia slow to destroy own chemical weapons amid Syria smackdown” in the *Washington Times*.

Let’s take these real steps toward peace

On September 12, 2013, one thoughtful source urged us to consider how the mass atrocities in Syria could have been prevented, and suggests these things that the world, and specifically the US, should have done:

- **First**, President Obama should announce to the world that the US will sign the Arms Trade Treaty when he addresses the UN General Assembly on September 24th.
 - **Second**, the US should start a discussion with the members of the UN Security Council about the responsibility not to veto actions related to stopping human rights atrocities.
 - **Also**, urge President Obama asking him to sign the Arms Trade Treaty, and urge the Senate to ratify it.
 - **Urge** the permanent members of the UN Security Council to agree that they will not use the veto when dealing with mass atrocities. Many dignitaries such as Madeline Albright, Kofi Annan, and Ban Ki Moon support this supported limiting the veto when it comes to the horrific crimes of genocide and the appalling crimes against humanity and war crimes that we have witnessed in Syria. No leader should ever use helicopter gunships, artillery and chemical weapons on unarmed women and children.
- The feminist peace organization CodePink urges these specific positive steps now :
- Take a strong role in pushing for a ceasefire and a negotiated solution

for Syria during the Geneva II Convention;

- Push for an increase in US aid to the United Nations High Commission on Refugees;
- Adhere to international laws pertaining to the use of cruel weapons, including the US use of killer drones.

When nations are in conflict, a good strategy is to start agreeing on some quick small matters in order to build momentum toward negotiating agreements on larger, more complex matters. These quick small agreements are called “Confidence-Building Measures” (CBMs). The US and Russia quickly reached a diplomatic solution regarding Syria. Let’s build on that quick success with negotiations about further issues.

Iran—an ally of Syria—has a moderate new President who wants to greatly improve relations with the US. If the US were smart, we would start talking with Iran about small quick matters to resolve those, and then use these CBMs to further reduce tensions and solve bigger conflicts involving Iran and the US.

To dampen Syria’s civil war, the outside nations and entities should stop supplying weapons to rival sides. Most of the rest of the world is upset that the US, Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, various oil sheikdoms, and other entities are sending weapons into this extremely violent civil war. The rest of the world would support an international agreement to stop arming all sides, including the Syrian government and various rebels and jihadists.

US military intervention has made daily life much worse—and national politics much more violent—in Libya, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Let’s help the US government learn the lesson that militarism does not solve problems, but only makes them worse.

The world still needs compassionate and thoughtful efforts to heal itself from centuries of colonialism and a half century of Cold War. The world also needs to learn how to respect differences in race, nationality, religion, culture, and so forth.

The US and other nations need to act from humane principles rather than short-sighted geopolitical manipulations based on greed and power. Those have led the US government to support dictators and extremists, including those who have been funding terrorism and other violence. The US’s cynical geopolitical manipulations and militarism keep provoking “blowback” and new threats to US security, along with making the world more dangerous.

We should stop believing the excuses and rationalizations that US military interventions since the 1990s were for “humanitarian” purposes. The hawkish US foreign policy and the US Empire are bi-partisan. US foreign policy includes “neoconservatives” affiliated with the Republican Party and “liberal interventionists” affiliated with the Democratic Party. As long as election campaigns for both political parties are funded by “special interests” (banks, giant corporations that extract natural resources from other nations, weapons manufacturers, etc.), we will continue to make grossly immoral wars that hurt the US along with the rest of the world. If we want peace, we absolutely must change the way we fund election campaigns.

We also need to vigorously regulate big business and promote *fair* trade instead of “free trade.”

Glen Anderson became active in the peace movement during the 1960s and never stopped. He has worked on a wide range of peace issues for the past 45 years. In 1976 he founded the Olympia chapter of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (www.olympiafor.org).

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► **Colombia** cont. from page 1.

should not ratify the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Colombia. At the time of this writing, Mr. Castro—sponsored by “Witness for Peace”—is visiting colleges, workers unions, and progressive groups on the west coast, offering a first-hand account of the detrimental effects of FTA and privatization on his city, Buenaventura.

Privatization, or the process of transferring public wealth to the private sector, has its ideological origin in principles of neo-liberal politics, aggressively forced upon the third world through the IMF and the World Bank. In Colombia these policies were given a judicial frame for implementation with the infamous constitution of 1991, which provides normative guidelines for the privatization of industries and services that previously were collectively owned. Much has been written about the negative effects of privatization and neo-liberalism, the most detrimental being:

1. Cutting of public services (transportation, education, hospitals, roads, water, etc.) so they can be replaced by private enterprises.
2. Deregulation, or the elimination of any legal obstacle to the accumulation of profit by big corporations, no matter the effects on the environment, workers’ rights, and job safety.
3. The cultural elimination of a sense of well-being as a public right along with a sense of communal responsibility, leading to the abandonment of the individual.

Two staff members of WOLA (Washington Office on Latin America) Gimena Sanchez and Kelly Nichols, in an article for NACLA, provide the following social descriptors for Buenaventura, a city of 375,000 residents:

“One-third of the population is unemployed, 80% of whom live in poverty, 65% of Buenaventura households do not have a sewage system, and 45% do not have potable water... Desperate conditions like these greatly facilitate illegal activity and criminality. Many of the city’s youth are drawn to trafficking drugs, arms, and other contraband; illegally extracting natural resources like lumber and gold; and cultivating coca in the river basins of Buenaventura’s municipality, the vast majority of which is rural. Meanwhile in the last decade Buenaventura has become one of Colombia’s most dangerous cities.”

According to Mr. Castro, “*Before the privatization of the Port Authority (1994), Buenaventura used to be a nice city. We were poor but some sort of normal life was possible. Now we are poorer and having to coexist with death and violence on a daily basis. There are a large number of disappearances, and several mass graves have been discovered. It is madness!*”

On the condition of workers, Mr Castro reported:

“Workers used to have labor rights, the right to form and belong to a trade union. The membership now has been reduced from what used to be thousands to a minimum. In our case, dockworkers and longshoremen, we are unable to negotiate direct contracts with the big private foreign companies. Everything is done through an unending chain of contractors and sub-contractors (some times up to seven) hiring workers on individual bases and calling us not workers but “cooperados.” This makes impossible any collective bargaining and reduces salaries, since each sub-contractor makes a profit in the process.”

Ubiquitous presence of cell phones

Throughout this segment of our conversation Mr. Castro has made and received numerous phone calls on his cellular phone. He is kindly apologetic

and tells me that all are very important calls, related to his work with the Port Workers Union. As he talks on the phone my thoughts go to issues of security and the pandemic spying on most citizens’ cell phones and computers. I also think about the harsh material conditions imposed on workers by neo-liberal policies and their impact on language and culture. It seems that—at least in the case of Colombia—the very word *worker* is gradually disappearing from the official institutional legal framework

The latest plans for expanding the port will affect between five and ten thousand people. Now, you have to remember that there is another component to this event—almost 99% of the displaced population are Afro-Colombians, therefore privatization has a racist component at the same time.

and vocabulary. Workers are not considered as such any more; they have become something else, a unit without social context, the word castrated of politics and civic bounds.

Jhon Jairo turns off his phone. This time we talk about the privatization of the areas in neighborhoods next to the port and the consequent displacement of large numbers of people.

“We think that in the last ten years at least sixty thousand people have been displaced, forced out of Buenaventura.

The latest plans for expanding the port will affect between five and ten thousand people. Now, you have to remember that there is another component to this event—almost 99% of the displaced population are Afro-Colombians, therefore privatization has a racist component at the same time.”

Historical optimism / The future again

When asked about the way he sees the future of Colombia, and his opinion about the peace talks between the guerrilla (FARC) and the government, he responded:

“Things are pretty difficult now but at the same time there has been lots of progress. The last month in Colombia has been marked by massive protests of teachers, students, and indigenous people, who have organized strikes and rallies to express their disagreement with the government. Even President Obama himself, as a precondition for signing the Free Trade Agreement (FTA), had to put some pressure on President Santos regarding the need of bringing to justice those guilty of acts of violence against trade unions. Nothing may come out of that, but at least there is the recognition of a problem within Colombian society.

“Our union membership has grown in spite of the difficulties. We have also included as members retired or forced to retire workers. Parallel to this we have

expanded national contacts and closer ties with other national and regional trade unions in Colombia and overseas. International solidarity is very important to us; it offers us a shield against the violence, and at the same time forces issues to be discussed broadly.

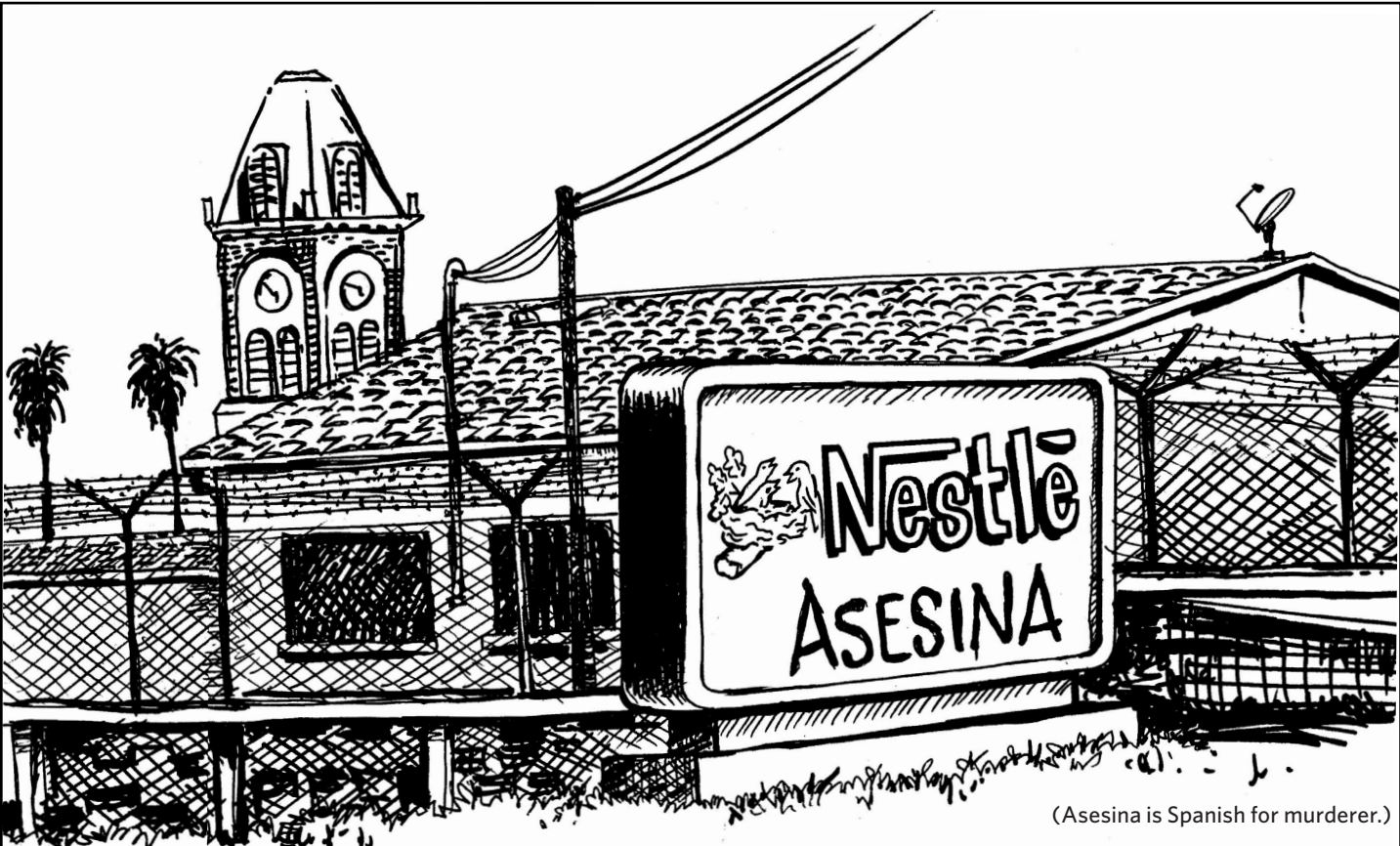
“This is not the first time that a dialog between the government and the guerrillas has taken place in Colombia, and probably won’t be the last. The main thing is that the dialog is occurring behind “closed doors” without popular consultation. Colombians have not been asked what we really want as the outcome of these negotiations. We’ll see what happens.”

Final Words

“Things have to change for the better—look at what is happening in various countries in Latin America. Look at Ecuador and Uruguay; they both act like independent nations. They don’t have their hands tied by a Free Trade Agreement, in which one is free (the US) and the other has to agree (Colombia). We are in this struggle for the future, for our kids.”

At this point, our conversation comes to an end; Jhon Jairo has to do a presentation in the city of Tacoma. We shake hands, wish each other “Buena suerte”, and before leaving he takes the last sip of his “chocolate caliente.”

Enrique Quintero, a political activist in Latin America during the 70’s, taught ESL and Second Language Acquisition in the Anchorage School District, and Spanish at the University of Alaska Anchorage. He currently lives and writes in Olympia.



(Asesina is Spanish for murderer.)

Another Colombian trade unionist killed last month

Saturday, November 9, a man shot and killed Oscar López Triviño in a billiard hall in Bugalagrande, Valle del Cauca Department. Oscar López Triviño worked for Nestlé and was a member of the Bugalagrande branch of the National Union of Food Industry Workers (SINALTRAINAL). On November 8, the paramilitary group Los Urabeños sent a death threat by text message to the phones of José Onofre Esquivel Luna and Álvaro Varela Pérez, who are both leaders of the Bugalagrande branch of SINALTRAINAL and work for Nestlé.

The death threat read: “Guerrilla fighters son-of-a-bitch you continue to mess with Nestlé[,] no more forgiveness[,] we will cut you up[,] death to all communists of SINALTRAINAL Urabeños.”

Members of SINALTRAINAL have been on hunger strike since 5 November in front of the Nestlé

factory in Bugalagrande. They have been demanding that various agreements made with the company are respected. Initially the hunger strike was to start on 10 October but had to be stopped after a few hours due to threats.

Since its creation in 1982, members of SINALTRAINAL have received repeated death threats from paramilitaries and more than 20 members of SINALTRAINAL have been killed. According to the trade union 13 of those killed had worked for Nestlé.

Nestlé has previously denied any link to paramilitary violence; however, Nestlé does have a duty to assist the authorities in undertaking full and impartial investigations into the latest killing and threats and to call on the authorities to undertake such action, as a means to guarantee the safety of the trade union members and ensure that the company does not benefit from paramilitary acts.

—Amnesty International

Murder is a symptom of failed US-Colombia Labor Action Plan

[Oscar López Triviño’s] murder constitutes a climax in the persistent labor conflict between Nestlé and SINALTRAINAL, which escalated after Nestle withdrew from negotiations a few months ago.

According to Swiss human rights group Multiwatch, Nestlé has since then been pressuring workers to join a rival union and trying to delegitimize the work of SINALTRAINAL.

This incident comes only two weeks after a report [by United States Representatives George Miller (D-CA) and Jim McGovern (D-MA)] was published that declared the failure of a bilateral plan which was set up between the US and Colombian governments three years ago to alleviate the serious labor problems in the country.

Human rights group Multiwatch stated that Oscar Lopez’s case was the 15th violent death of Nestlé workers in Colombia, while Nestlé admits the deaths of seven workers and several white-collar employees.

—Facing Finance

Viviendo la vida loca

Luchando contra la privatización en Colombia

Una conversación con el líder sindical Jhon Jairo Castro Balanta

Enrique Quintero

Una decisión existencial peligrosa

Si usted vive en los Estados Unidos y alguien le pregunta cual es en su opinión, el trabajo mas peligroso del mundo, su mente posiblemente piense en cortadores de árboles, pescadores de cangrejos en Alaska, removedores de minas explosivas, reparadores de cables desde helicópteros, y los trabajadores en plantas procesadoras de carne en el Medio Oeste Americano. Esta visión es básicamente correcta y coincide con aquella de la Oficina de Estadísticas laborales del Ministerio del trabajo en los USA. Pero si la misma pregunta fuera hecha en Colombia, primero en la lista de ocupaciones con altos índices de fatalidad y riesgo seria la de Líder Sindical.

De acuerdo a la Confederación Internacional Sindical, cada tres días, por lo menos un sindicalista ha sido asesinado en Colombia en los últimos 23 años. Grupos paramilitares con estrechas vinculaciones a la policía y fuerzas armadas han cometido la gran mayoría de estos crímenes. Últimamente, algunos de estos grupos han sido vinculados a corporaciones norteamericanas interesadas en minimizar la actividad sindical. Esta larga política de terror ha transformado al movimiento sindical Colombiano, de uno de los mas fuertes y organizados de América Latina, a uno de los mas débiles con apenas el 4% de la fuerza laboral sindicalizada.

Jhon Jairo Castro es nativo de Buenaventura, probablemente la ciudad mas violenta del país, y el puerto mas importante de la Costa Pacífica colombiana. El Sr. Castro tiene 40 años y ha sido trabajador portuario y organizador sindical por mas de una década. Actualmente es el Presidente de la Unión Portuaria de Colombia. Hasta el presente ha recibido dos amenazas anónimas indicando que lo tienen localizado a el y su familia y que solo están “esperando ordenes para proceder”

La Historia, John Travolta, la Importancia del Futuro, y una llamada por el Celular.

Cuando WIP (Works In Progress) le preguntó a Jhon Jairo Castro las razones que lo motivaron a tomar una línea de trabajo tan riesgosa, nos dijo lo siguiente: “Primero, todo tiene que ver con mi padre. Yo vengo de una familia muy humilde. Mi padre fue un pequeño minero independiente. El se pasaba largas horas y días en la minería solo para obtener unas pocas escamas de oro. Yo no podía entender a mi padre. Yo le pregunté varias veces porque no trabajaba en las compañías y él respondía que no le gustaba recibir ordenes de nadie.

Yo no estaba de acuerdo con él, y pensaba es imposible el no tener un supervisor. Me tomo años el entender su posición. Su actitud era una respuesta a los abusos en contra de los mineros a manos de las empresas. Él prefería hacer las cosas a su modo.

Mi padre y mi madre me llamaron Jhon debido a Jhon Travolta. A los dos les gustaba mucho la música de “Fiebre del Sábado por la Noche” y querían tener un hijo que fuera tan buen bailaror como él.

Años después, en 1997, se produjo un Paro Civil General en Buenaventura. Se paralizó TODA la ciudad! La gente demandaba un mejoramiento de las condiciones de vida – básicamente un incremento salarial, y un salario mínimo que permitiera a la gente vivir y sobrevivir. Este evento marca el inicio de mi vida como trabajador

sindicalizado y organizador sindical. Me di cuenta que se logran hacer cosas solo cuando se trabaja en grupo.

Para aquel entonces ya tenía una familia y niños. Mi esposa trabajaba como empleada doméstica, pero incluso con dos salarios no nos alcanzaba para vivir. Buenaventura era una ciudad muy bonita, pero ese ya no es el caso actualmente. Tenemos que pensar en el futuro, como hacer las cosas mejores para nuestro hijos, pensar como hacer cambiar las cosas. Este sentido de rebeldía es algo que lleva en la sangre.”

En este punto de nuestra conversación suena su teléfono celular. Yo detengo el grabador y me muevo a una mesa cercanas para que él pueda tener privacidad y la ocasión de tomar unos sorbos de su “Hot Chocolate”; el cual según él “es la tasa mas grande que jamás haya visto, debe ser por lo menos un galón”, añade. “Estamos en los EEUU, aquí todo es desproporionalmente grande!” le digo en tono de explicación semi-seria. Minutos

Los últimos planes para la expansión del puerto afectarán entre cinco y diez mil personas. Pero, además usted tiene que mantener en mente que hay otro componente en este proceso, casi el 99% de la población desplazada es de Afro-Colombiana, por lo tanto la privatización tiene un componente racista al mismo tiempo.

después cuando vuelvo a la mesa, el celular yace en silencio cerca de la tasa que todavía parece contener medio galón de chocolate. Él continúa:

“Hemos notado gente extraña merodeando nuestra casa, gente desconocida en el vecindario. Esto nos pone un poco aprensivos, un poco nerviosos, pero debemos seguir adelante; tiene que ver con el tipo de futuro que queremos.

Privatización y la retro-evolución de Buenaventura/Coexistiendo con la muerte como una necesidad innecesaria

El Sr. Castro fue parte de la delegación de trabajadores auspiciada por la AFL-CIO, para visitar Washington DC y exponer las razones por las que el Congreso Norteamericano no debería ratificar el Tratado de Libre Comercio con (TLC) Colombia. Al momento de este artículo, patrocinado por Witness for Peace” el Sr. Castro se encuentra visitando organizaciones de trabajadores, universidades y grupos progresistas en la costa Oeste, ofreciendo un testimonio de primera mano sobre los efectos negativos del TLC y la Privatización en su ciudad, Buenaventura.

La Privatización, o el proceso de transferir propiedad pública al sector privado, tiene sus orígenes ideológicos en los principios políticos Neo-Liberales, los cuales son agresivamente impuestos a países del tercer mundo a través de organizaciones como el FMI y el Banco Mundial. En Colombia estas políticas tienen un marco judicial de implementación a partir de la infame Constitución de 1991, la cual provee normativas y guías para la privatización de industrias y servicios que previamente eran propiedad del estado y del pueblo. Mucho se ha escrito en torno a los efectos negativos de la Privatización y el Neo-liberalismo, pero los mas importantes son:

- 1. Eliminación de servicios públicos (transporte, educación, hospitales, carreteras, agua, electricidad, etc.) para reemplazarlos con empresas privadas.
- 2. De-regulación, o la eliminación de todo obstáculo en contra de la acumu-

lación de riqueza de las grandes corporaciones, sin importar los efectos en el medio ambiente, derechos laborales, y seguridad en el trabajo para los trabajadores.

- 3. La eliminación cultural del sentido de bienestar social como un derecho ciudadano acompañado de un sentido de responsabilidad colectiva. Todo esto conlleva a un abandono del individuo por parte de la sociedad.

Dos miembros de WOLA (Washington Office on Latin America), Gimena Sánchez and Kelly Nichols, en un artículo para la revista NACLA, proveen los siguientes descriptores sociales para Buenaventura, una ciudad de 375.000 habitantes:

“Un tercio de la población es desempleada, 80% de los cuales viven en pobreza, 65% de los hogares de Buenaventura



no tienen servicio de aguas servidas o residuales, y 45% no tiene agua potable ... Condiciones desesperadas como esta facilitan en gran medida la actividad ilegal y la criminalidad. Muchos de los jóvenes de la ciudad se ven forzados al tráfico de drogas, armas, u otros tipos de contrabando; ilegalmente extrayendo recursos naturales como maderas y oro; y cultivando coca en las márgenes de los ríos

en la municipalidad de Buenaventura, la cual es rural en su mayoría. Mientras tanto, en la última década Buenaventura se ha convertido en una de las ciudades mas peligrosas de Colombia.

De acuerdo con el Sr. Castro, “Antes de la privatización de la Autoridad Portuaria (1994) Buenaventura era una ciudad bonita. Éramos pobres pero era posible algún tipo de vida normal. Ahora somos mas pobres que antes y tenemos que coexistir con muerte y violencia diariamente. Hay numerosos desaparecidos, y muchas tumbas de entierros masivos han sido descubiertas. Es una locura!”

Refiriéndose a las condiciones de los trabajadores:

“Los trabajadores antes teníamos derechos laborales, el derecho a formar y pertenecer a sindicatos. El número de miembros sindicalizados se ha reducido de miles a solo unos pocos. En nuestro caso, el de los trabajadores portuarios, no podemos negociar directamente contratos laborales con las empresas extranjeras. Todo se hace a través de una cadena sin fin de intermediarios subcontratistas (que llegan hasta siete en algunos casos) que contratan trabajadores en términos individuales, y nos llaman no trabajadores sino “cooperados”. Esto hace imposible todo tipo de contratación colectiva y reduce los salarios debido a que cada uno de los intermediarios busca un margen de ganancia en el proceso”

La ubicua presencia de los celulares

Durante este segmento de nuestra conversación el Sr. Castro ha hecho y recibido numerosas llamadas en su celular. Él se disculpa amablemente y me dice que todas son llamadas importantes relacionadas con su trabajo en la Unión Portuaria. Mientras él habla por teléfono mis pensamientos se dirigen a asuntos relacionados con seguridad y el espíar pandémico por parte del gobierno USA en los teléfonos y computadoras de la mayoría de ciudadanos. También pienso en las duras condiciones materiales impuestas por las medidas Neo-Liberales y su impacto en la lengua y la cultura. Parece que—al menos en lo que respecta a Colombia—la misma palabra

OBRERO o TRABAJADOR esta desapareciendo gradualmente del marco institucional oficial legal y su vocabulario. Los trabajadores han perdido su condición de tal, se han convertido en algo distinto, en una unidad sin contenido social, la palabra ha sido castrada de lo político y de sus lazos cívicos.

Jhon Jairo apaga su teléfono. Esta vez hablamos acerca de la privatización en áreas en barrios localizados cerca al puerto y el consecuente desplazamiento de grandes números de habitantes.

“Creemos que en los últimos diez años al menos sesenta mil personas han sido desplazadas forzándolas a abandonar Buenaventura. Los últimos planes para la expansión del puerto afectan entre cinco y diez mil personas. Pero, además usted tiene que mantener en mente que hay otro componente en este proceso, casi el 99% de la población desplazada es de Afro-Colombiana, por lo tanto la privatización tiene un componente racista al mismo tiempo.”

Optimismo histórico / Nuevamente el futuro

Cuando le pregunto como ve el futuro de Colombia y su opinión sobre los diálogos de negociación entre la guerrilla (FARC) y el gobierno, él responde:

“Las cosas son muy difíciles al momento pero al mismo tiempo hay mucho progreso. El mes pasado en Colombia fue marcado por protestas masivas de profesores, estudiantes, y grupos indígenas que organizaron huelgas y manifestaciones para expresar su desacuerdo con el gobierno. Incluso el propio Presidente Obama, como condición para firmar el tratado de libre comercio, puso presión en el presidente Santos sobre la importancia de llevar a juicio a aquellos culpables de actos de violencia en contra de sindicalistas. Puede que nada se haga al respecto, pero al menos hay el reconocimiento de un problema en medio de la sociedad Colombiana.”

“La membresía en nuestro sindicato ha crecido a pesar de las dificultades. También hemos incluido como miembros a trabajadores pensionados o forzados a jubilarse. Paralelamente hemos expandido los contactos y vínculos con otras organizaciones sindicales regionales y nacionales en Colombia y en el exterior. La solidaridad internacional es muy importante para nosotros, nos ofrece un escudo de protección contra la violencia, y al mismo tiempo crea amplitud para la discusión de los asuntos.”

“Esta no es la primera vez que el Gobierno y la guerrilla dialogan, y probablemente no será la última. Lo que importa es que el diálogo tiene lugar “a puerta cerrada”, sin consulta popular. Los colombianos no hemos sido consultados que es lo que esperamos como resultado de estas negociaciones. Veremos que pasa.”

Palabras Finales

“Las cosas tienen que cambiar y mejorar. Mire lo que sucede en varios países latino-americanos. Mire al Ecuador y Uruguay; ambos actúan como naciones independientes. Ellos no tienen sus manos atadas por un Tratado de Libre Comercio, en el cual uno es Libre (los EEUU) y el otro tiene que estar de Acuerdo (Colombia). Estamos en esta lucha por el futuro, por nuestros hijos.”

En este punto concluye nuestra conversación. Jhon Jairo tiene que hacer una presentación en la ciudad de Tacoma, Washington. Nos despedimos con un apretón de manos y nos deseamos el uno al otro “buena suerte”, y antes de partir él toma el último sorbito de su “Hot Chocolate.”

Enrique Quintero fue un activista político en América Latina durante los años 70. Luego trabajó como profesor de ESL y Adquisición de Segunda Lengua en el Distrito Escolar de Anchorage y Profesor de Español en la Universidad de Alaska. Actualmente vive y escribe en Olympia.

Nichols and McChesney at Evergreen

Dollarocracy and the movement to amend the Constitution

Janine Unsoeld

(November 17) Citing the influence money has in politics and the demise of true journalism, authors Robert McChesney and John Nichols fired up the crowd and lit fires under butts talking earlier this week about their new book, *Dollarocracy: How the Money and Media-Election Complex is Destroying America*, at The Evergreen State College.

McChesney, a graduate of The Evergreen State College, was introduced by his former professor, Tom Rainey, who called McChesney a socially-committed student and scholarly hellraiser.

About 100 were in attendance, including 40 students from an Evergreen class called Political Economy of Public Education.

Providing multiple history lessons from the Founding Fathers and the writing of the US Constitution right up to the current City of Seattle city council race between Socialist Kshama Sawant, who recently won the election over incumbent Robert Conlin. Both speakers provided a hard hitting, keen analysis of the influence money has on American media and politics.

McChesney said he and Nichols came up with the idea for their latest book when a 2012 Princeton study of democracy and the federal government revealed the values and concerns of the bottom 90% were not acknowledged. The book's introduction by Senator Bernie Sanders (I-Vermont) says that nothing can pass Congress that is opposed by Wall Street.

McChesney noted that even Jimmy Carter, speaking in Germany in July when he thought he was speaking off-the-record, said 'America today is no longer a functioning democracy.'

"Half the population is now considered to be at poverty level or low-income...we're back to where we were in the 1920's" said McChesney.

Citing a loss of 20,000 journalists since 2009, Nichols, a journalist and correspondent for The Nation, asserted that the ones that remain pretend they're covering the news.

In reference to television ads passing as news, Nichols said, "The standard of news media now is whether the (advertising) check clears...As journalism disappears, it tries to do it on the cheap,

talking about Michelle Obama's work against obesity issues, talking about Ted Cruz....(but) there's a grassroots activism—16 states have petitioned to overturn Citizen United—and yet you aren't told about it. It's real, it's happening, and you need to be a part of it...we're at the tipping point."

Move to Amend is a non-partisan coalition of over 300,000 individuals and organizations whose goal it is to amend the US Constitution to end corporate rule and get big money out of politics by overturning the U.S. Supreme court decision in Citizens United vs. Federal Election Commission.

The proposed amendment would overturn court decisions that granted corporations the status of "personhood" which allows unlimited corporate campaign spending.

Nichols said that Washington state is the number one example of Dollarocracy and that their paperback version of *Dollarocracy* will feature Washington state, the GMO issue, and the Grocery Association's \$23 million dollar contribution toward the demise of I-522.

Washington state is the number one example of *Dollarocracy* and the paperback version of *Dollarocracy* will feature Washington state, the GMO issue, and the Grocery Association's \$23 million dollar contribution toward the demise of I-522.

tribution toward the demise of I-522 - the result of when corporations enter into politics.

"....Their profits were threatened by the reality of labeling. They succeeded in their effort to confuse people so much that people voted against it. That's Dollarocracy in play. That's not how it's supposed to be...."

Nichols asserted that our Founding Fathers did not intend for the Constitution to be a static document. It was amended ten times in the first four years.

"Journalism is so fair and balanced, it treats a lie just like the truth!" exclaimed Nichols, "If we do not acknowledge what's happening today, that will be our future. Amend the Constitution. Let's eliminate the Electoral College.... Can we do it?"

In closing, Nichols told a story: "There's a girl, seven or eight years old, and she's walking up some steps. She's going to work in a mill - she's not going to school. Her fingers are small, tiny, and good at changing bobbins.... sometimes the machines would start up while she was changing the bobbins, and take her finger or hand. And that was okay back then, because if that happened, she could go work in a clothing factory. Jews, Christians, Muslims, all working together. She would go to work on the 10th floor of the factory, and, sometimes, a fire would



John Nichols, at podium, and Robert McChesney visit TESC to discuss their book, *Dollarocracy: How the Money and Media-Election Complex is Destroying America*. Photo: Janine Unsoeld

break out. They'd run to the door, but it was locked shut to prevent workers from sneaking a bathroom break...and they'd either burn alive or jump out the windows....

In the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in New York, they chose to jump. As mothers came to pick their daughters up off the sidewalks, their grief turned to anger. Women were not allowed to vote then....Over a 10 year period, women organized, and reforms took place. They amended the Constitution three times: to vote, to elect the Senate, and enact taxing and regulatory reforms to tell people they can't lock the doors at factories, they can't employ children. Child labor laws were enacted, unions began....

"We are in a similar moment today. Are you the equals of your grandmothers? Your grandfathers?....Five hundred cities have enacted resolutions to amend the Constitution. If you don't engage now, you'll be on the sidelines of democracy...."

The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire of March 25, 1911 killed 123 women and 23 men. The youngest victims were 14 years old.

'Move to Amend' efforts in Washington state

The movement to amend the Constitution is active in the South Sound area. Mike Savoca, of the Olympia Move to Amend group was present at McChesney's and Nichols' presentation.

"We testified last February before the legislature in favor of a bill, HR 4001 and SR 8002, in favor of a 28th Amendment and were successful in the House but the bill was killed in committee by the Senate Governmental Operations chair, Pam Roach," said Savoca later.

The Olympia Move to Amend statement says:

As we work for peace, sustainability and human rights, over and over again, we are opposed by the corruption of our political election system by big money and big, multinational, corporations

A corporation is not a person, it does

not live, breath, bring forth children nor die. The first and primary objective of multinational corporations is profit and the acquisition of shareholder wealth. Nowhere in the US Constitution does the word "corporation" appear!

A corporation is an invented legal entity. Like all inventions, corporations are not necessarily good nor bad. The regulation of our inventions determines if they will be the source of prosperity..... or our demise.

The unlimited power of multinational corporations and big money in our electoral system threatens our very survival as a society, and as people around the planet.

To learn more about local efforts to amend the Constitution, contact Michael Savoca, Olympia Move To Amend, at masavoca@fairpoint.net or go to www.movetoamend.org or www.wa-mend.org.

Janine Unsoeld is a local writer. She blogs at www.janineslittlehollywood.blogspot.com.

Pakistani protests US drones while US anti-drone movement grows

Faisal bin Ali Jaber, who traveled from Yemen to the US last month to get answers about the drone strike that killed his relatives and was featured on the front page of the New York Times, returned home without answers. Despite meetings with members of the National Security Council, US Congress and the State Department, Jaber was offered no apology for death of his relatives (one was an anti-Al Qaeda cleric and the other a policeman), no compensation and no explanation. He did, however, join 400 activists and human rights advocates at a Drone Summit at Georgetown Law School organized by CODEPINK, and got a chance to witness the growing anti-drone movement in the United States that has been protesting at US drone bases, drone manufacturers and US government offices.

Jaber said, "I leave impressed with the American people who are joining with us, in Yemen, to demand an end to the drone strikes."

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It's time to quickly organize to oppose House Bill 1771

Carole Willey, BSW

To all peace and social justice advocates/activists, we need to quickly create a local group to defeat House Bill 1771, which will "establish standards for the use of public unmanned aircraft systems."

Between 1998 – 2007, the legislative work I have accomplished primarily focused on providing an educational and informative format to my listserve working on mental health bills. I personally made a bill die in committee by testifying and providing three documents that countered my opposition.

In this article, I lay out a possible action plan that will allow the tracking of this bill, and others, throughout the Washington state legislative process. This plan follows known and well-tested steps to not allow a bill to pass out of committee with the aim to cause the bill to 'die in committee'. This needs to be achieved as early as possible under the directions of a trained legislative organizer. We can defeat HB 1771 and celebrate a victory.

General 11-Point Strategic Plan

1. Create a facebook page in opposition to HB 1771. This will allow the group to network and provide alerts and immediate postings such as allerts regarding hearings and House or Senate Rules hearings.
2. Create a small group of six to eight local members to meet weekly to perform tasks, accomplish objectives, organize tasks, and establish deadlines.
3. Develope alliances with all organizations in Washington focusing on drone issues.
4. Research and collect documentation on the impact of drone usage and violations of international law.
5. Gather documentation & share with our WA partners/stakeholders/allies
6. All members should use same language/terms/phrases in their presentations.
7. Connect with and encourage organizations in all states with drone bills, especially border states, to work together to share documentation and data. [I have a list of all state legislative websites to study drone legislation.
8. Provide the needed documentation for each hearing, petty cash for printing (or arrange for donated printing).
9. Make available accurate published studies, reports, and other materials to all local and regional meetings on drone issues, and keep a bibliography of useful books and articles available for requests.
10. Immediately begin visiting selective legislative offices.
11. If our goal is not met and House Bill 1771 should make its way through the Washington State Legislature, then we continue the fight—and not just once or twice a year.

Carole Willey is an environmental healthcare and social justice advocate, legislative advocate, and community organizer in Olympia, WA.

Washington state will keep pushing for industrial hemp

Industrial hemp has gained a lot of ground this year, with legislation introduced and moving in several states, and laws being signed in Colorado and Vermont already. In fact, just last week farmers in Colorado harvested the first US hemp crop in decades—and they did it in complete disregard for federal law. Hemp is such a versatile plant—with uses ranging from food to textiles—and is so heavily imported by the US, that it simply makes no sense *not* to grow it.

HB 1888 would allow for the production of industrial hemp in Washington state. The bill has already made it through two public hearings, and is currently being held in the House Appropriations Committee, where it ran into a last minute deadline this spring. The bill’s sponsor, Representative Matt Shea, has spoken repeatedly about the many uses of hemp, and told me in April that *“this is a phenomenal bill, expanding freedom, allowing jobs to be created—a new market here in Washington state—the potential state economic impact is in the tens of millions if not hundreds of millions.”*

This bill identifies industrial hemp as an agricultural product which can be grown, produced, possessed, and commercially traded in the state. Pursuant, of course, to the provisions of the law. The passage of such would not only be a huge boon to Washington state, but act as another domino in the chain of states who are taking back power over what they can grow and produce within their own borders.

What you can do:

- 1) The next legislative session begins on January 13th, and it will be important that we contact the House Appropriations Committee to make sure they are planning on pushing this bill forward. The hearing in April went well, but no vote was taken. Please ask the committee members to send this bill to the floor for a full vote.
- 2) Contact your legislators. Ask them for a positive vote when this bill comes to the floor. As I've stated before, it is not too early to begin dropping emails, snail mail, or even leaving phone messages for our reps. We want the important issues to be front and center from the first hour of the session.
- 3) Share, share, share! Post information on Facebook, tell your friends and

family about the benefits of industrial hemp in our state—get the word out. And again, help equip your friends with bill and legislator info.

—Tenth Amendment Center

Economic paper argues privatization has weakened once public services

Demos released the first in a series of papers for the Gordon Gamm Initiative written by Demos Fellow and co-editor of The American Prospect, Robert Kuttner.

“When Public is Better” makes just that argument by examining a number of case studies where private market incursions have weakened once public functions in areas like law enforcement, pharmaceutical research, and higher education.

An excerpt from the introduction:

Libertarians attribute to governments and their political clients “rent-seeking” behavior, the economists’ term for pursuit of monopoly profits by governments or their political

clients, taking advantage of the fact that government is a kind of monopoly. But libertarians have the emphasis wrong. It is the business sector that typically uses government to pursue monopoly profits by using political influence to rig the rules. In the private sector, even when there is no government contracting, pursuit of monopoly profits is rampant.

The more government fails to regulate, the more such rents are extracted—because of the political and market power of first-mover and incumbent firms, the deception and opacity in many actual markets, and the plain information asymmetries between seller and buyer (an insight for which Joseph Stiglitz shared the Nobel Prize). So inefficiency is often not competed away; on the contrary, incumbent power cumulates. “Corrections” periodically occur, not in smooth, minute-to-minute adjustments of price, quantity and product quality, but in abrupt massive collapses or corruption scandals. Government—taxpayers—then must mop up the damage.

—Demos

Human rights groups condemn Obama's nomination for DHS Secretary, Jeh Johnson

CODEPINK and other human rights groups strongly condemn President Obama’s nomination of Jeh Johnson to be head of the Department of Homeland Security. The organizations are appalled by his legal justification of killer drones, his support of mass surveillance, his anti-whistleblower stance, and the conflict of interest posed by the large financial contributions he has made to President Obama and key members of Congress. A petition to the Chairman Carper of the Senate Homeland Security Committee circulated by CODEPINK calling on him to reject Johnson has already gathered over 4,000 signatures. Activists will deliver the petition to Senator Carper’s office on Tuesday morning at 10:00am.

“As the Pentagon lawyer who provided the legal justification for the US drone program, Jeh Johnson has been complicit in a policy that has fueled anti-American sentiment and jeopardized our national security,” says CODEPINK cofounder Medea Benjamin. “Why would we want someone like that to head the Department of Homeland Security?

Johnson is also an advocate for mass surveillance. This dragnet spying is an invasive breach of privacy that has shocked and outraged people across the globe, including our allies. Johnson has also called for the criminal prosecution of the heroic whistleblower who alerted the American public to government mass spying, Edward Snowden, as well as imprisoned Wikileaks whistleblower Chelsea Manning. “I oppose any person who has called for the criminal prosecution of whistleblowers who have blown the whistle on some of the nation’s biggest scandals, including mass secret surveillance and torture,” says whistleblower attorney Jesselyn Radack. “Appointing an official so opposed to civil liberties is an antithetical move that typifies all that’s wrong with politics today.”

It is also a blatant example of political cronyism, as Jeh Johnson is a major Democratic Party funder. Federal records show he has contributed more than \$100,000 to Democratic candidates and groups, plus over \$30,000 to Obama’s campaign.

—Code Pink

SHOWING AT THE OLYMPIA FILM SOCIETY

Enough Said November 29- December 4

For all of us who’ve been waiting for a smart, funny, snappy romantic comedy—here it is. Nicole Holofcener’s “Enough Said” is a joy, marred only by the poignancy of seeing the late James Gandolfini in one of his final screen appearances, in a persona that fits him uncannily well.

You leave this movie wishing Gandolfini had more chances to show off his twinkling-eyed nice-guy persona, and that Holofcener made movies way more often—and that every romantic comedy was as beguiling.”

—Moir MacDonal, Seattle Times

Inequality for All December 13-19

The former U.S. labour secretary, author and professor is the ideal person to take on the complex challenge of explaining in clear terms why the United States is in danger of failing both economically and democratically.

It may sound like depressingly heavy stuff, but in director Jacob Kornbluth’s able hands, and with the engaging Reich front and centre throughout, Inequality for All is intelligent, persuasive and accessible, a gentle but urgent clarion call to action.... The difference is that unlike Al Gore, Reich has an engaging sense of humor.

—Colin Covert, Toronto Star

Blue is the Warmest Color November 29- December 4

Tunisia’s Abdellatif Kechiche took the 2013 Palme d’Or at Cannes for this coming-of-age lesbian romance. In an unusual honour, French actresses Adèle Exarchopoulos, 19, and Léa Seydoux, 28, shared in the Palme citation for their no-holds-barred acting.

—Peter Howell, Toronto Star

The physical boldness is matched emotionally and psychologically. Whether it’s passion or pain, you’ll feel it too.

—Emma Simmonds, Total Film

The Punk Singer December 13-19

The Riot Grrrl movement may have fallen out of fashion in recent years, but it’s impossible to underestimate the impact this female-fronted punk upsurge had on music worldwide. Bikini Kill singer Kathleen Hanna was the first woman to stand on stage and refuse to perform until the moshpit was completely cleared of aggressive six-foot dudes, allowing the girls to come forward. And, as this hugely entertaining doc shows, she’s still every bit as confrontational today, despite almost a decade out of the limelight...

—Tom Huddleston, Time Out

CAPITOL THEATER ON FIFTH AVENUE IN DOWNTOWN OLYMPIA

Memories of the Olympia to Nicaragua Construction Brigade, 25 years later

Jean Eberhardt

In 1979 the Frente Sandinista para la Liberación Nacional (FSLN) was victorious in their protracted revolution against the US-backed dictator Anastasio Somoza. Under the guise of the red scare, the US funded a counterrevolution (contra war) that cost tens of thousands of Nicaraguan lives and prevented the country from flourishing in its newfound democracy.

During the contra war, an estimated 100,000 people from the US visited Nicaragua. Many of us traveled and volunteered with purpose—delegations of elected officials organized by progressive organizations, ecumenical study tour groups, long-term volunteers with Witness for Peace, caravans with Pastors for Peace, medical teams, coffee and cotton harvest brigades, and journalists. Construction brigades self-organized to build in Nicaragua while our government financed undeclared wars of “low-intensity conflict” across Central America (low on US military deaths, but “high-intensity” with incalculable death and terror on everyone else).

I participated in a construction brigade from Seattle to Nicaragua in 1985-86, which profoundly changed my life. My host family was attacked by *contra* forces one month after our group finished building a two-room grade school in a rural community outside of Santo Tomás, Chontales. Don Gregorio Ruiz Borge was stabbed repeatedly and left for dead, but miraculously survived. The history of that brigade, the war and two families we knew that were attacked, is documented in the film “Vamos a Hacer un País” by Moving Images.

Two years later, with the tremendous support of many people from Thurston County and beyond, we launched a 14-person construction brigade from Olympia to Santo Tomás. We marched in the Lakefair Parade to make clear that we stood with Nicaragua and not with the US position. We raised \$30,000, and carried it in cash to Nicaragua to finance construction of a two-story building for a humble, yet powerful group of women who created a sewing cooperative and sewing school. Thank you if you helped us then and thank you if you’ve supported our on-going projects since! We ask now for your support to replace the roof and make other needed repairs on the 25-year old building.

Georgina Warmoth and I traveled to Nicaragua in January 1988 to prepare for the arrival of the construction brigade in February; it was three months after a contra attack on the town. On the day we landed in Santo Tomás, Georgina and I met the women of the sewing coop in a very small room next to the *Comedor Infantil* (Children’s Free Lunch Program). The space was packed with treadle machines; women’s feet rocked back and forth as their hands pushed fabric through the needles pumping up and down.

After introductions, conversation quickly went to the war and first hand accounts of their terror. Each *costurera* recounted where they were when the attack began and how they scrambled to get their children to safety. They told of brave townspeople, young and old, who fought back the 300 *contra*, street by street, until free of the attackers. The *costureras* named the men who died defending the town; one died right in front of the building site where we would soon be working. Soon enough, we were all crying together, in the

helpless horror of it all.

Later that windy night at the Ruiz home, mangoes rained down on the sheet metal roof over our heads, falling like bombs. Georgina didn’t sleep; she became deeply distressed about being in a war zone and putting her children at risk of losing their mother. It dawned on me, over time, that the two parents on the construction brigade felt the danger in a different way than did the rest of our childless group of *brigadistas*. It was Georgina’s first and last night in Santo Tomás.

Upon arrival, Jeff, Bob, Shoshana, Peter, Kari, Steve, Ted, Carolyn, Donn and I met with the FSLN political secretary of Santo Tomás, who laid out possible risks. He could not guarantee our safety, but promised to notify us if the *contra* came close to town again, in hopes of helping us evacuate should we decide to leave. We were told to stay away from the edge of town at night and certainly never to travel on the highway after dark. “Understood.”

We scattered across town to live with the *costureras* and their families, me to my original host family who had moved to town for its relative safety. We shared meals of thick hand made *tortillas de maíz*, eaten with boiled *frijoles*, with boiled green *bananas* or *yuca* or *quequisque*.

The US-imposed trade embargo as well as Nicaragua’s hyper-inflation and prioritization on defending the country against military aggression manifested in shortages of cooking oil (and soap and car parts and medical exam gloves and syringes and toilet paper and school pencils and many other things

All men between the ages of 15 and 40 in town were organized by the local FSLN Committees for Community Defense. They took shifts to pick-axe down through three feet of rock, creating an extensive system of defense trenches on the periphery of Santo



Santo Tomás: Some of the families of the *costureras*, circa 1990 in front of the Casa de Costura Etelvina Vigil.

Tomás. *Vigilancia* (armed night duty, to listen and look for *contra* movement) was done by the same volunteers, ready to jump into those trenches with their AK47s and wake the town in the event of another attack.

The masons we worked with daily would come to the sewing coop building site without having slept for one or two nights each week. We found an exhausted people, a country full of post-traumatic stress survivors, and saw wasted energy that could have/should have been going into producing a viable economy. We were acutely aware of the US government’s role.

Over the next decade, that war cost an estimated 50,000 people’s lives (1 in 80 people), and destroyed countless schools, clinics, bridges, passenger buses, grain silos, houses, etc. Our mandate, part of a huge movement back home in the states and around the world, was to stop this madness financed by our government and orchestrated by the CIA.

The sewing school and cooperative provided women with the opportunity to learn a trade and support their families. Rosaura Robleto, one of

the hard working *costureras*, lived with her three children in a bamboo walled home. She was proud of her own piece of land (parcels were given by the FSLN Mayor of Santo Tomás to landless people) and looked forward to making improvements on her house as her finances improved. Rosaura had a clay domed, wood-fired oven that she used every weekend to produce traditional Nicaraguan baked goods: *rosquillas*, *empanadas* and *viejitas*. She also attended high school as a non-traditional age student, along with many other adults struggling to get out of poverty. Years later, she would leave for Costa Rica to find steady work.

Kari Bown remembers becoming accustomed to hearing machine gun and mortar fire at unpredictable times of day and night. When George, Jodi and Sheryl arrived several weeks later as the final members of our brigade, Kari remembers them ducking for cover when shots rang out near our job site. The rest of us kept working; we knew from our Nicaraguan co-workers that we were OK because they didn’t miss a beat of what they were doing at the moment. Together we dug the trenches, laid *piedra cantera* (solid rock blocks), cut and tied steel rebar, formed the columns and mixed concrete on the ground to haul by buckets to the right place. Day in and day out, we worked with several of the *costureras* and *albañiles* (masons) to complete the foundation and enclose the first floor walls. There were no such things as concrete delivery trucks 25 years ago, at least not where we were. On days when we ran out of materials, we shifted our labor to the farm project, which produced food for the *comedor infantil* (and still does).

One night the *contra* came in and used plastic explosives to blow up a light post, cutting off power to the town for a long day or two, and making the nights much more tense. No one died from the blast, but someone in their home had been specifically targeted. Our group had an emergency meeting to decide if we would stay or leave. It was obvious the *contra* were too close for anyone’s comfort. I stewed on the choice we’d made to walk into a war zone and wondered if we would leave unscathed. If we were able to get out of this intact, what did it mean that our friends in Santo Tomás did not have that option? We chose to stay.

During our brigade’s six-week stint we were able to get the walls of the 3,000+ square foot building up to chest height. Because of the war and material shortages, it would take the *albañiles* another year and a half to complete the building. Daniel Ortega, the President of Nicaragua, joined the *costureras* for the inauguration of the Casa de Costura Etelvina Vigil, named after a local woman who was killed in the fight against the local military forces of the Somoza family dictatorship.

In these last 25 years, after the
► **MEMORIES**, continued on page 11.

Together we dug the trenches, laid *piedra cantera* (solid rock blocks), cut and tied steel rebar, formed the columns and mixed concrete on the ground to haul by buckets to the right place.

we take for granted). Some *tomasinos* and *tomasinas* complained of having to eat boiled beans, without frying them. Beans, rice, corn, cooking oil, sugar and coffee were rationed and there didn’t seem to be enough to last until the next ration date. The refrain in stores, when searching for goods to buy was “no hay” over and over. “There isn’t any.” I remember seeing used latex gloves washed and hung to dry on laundry lines outside the mini-hospital. There just weren’t any more. *No hay*.

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Thanks to MIXX 96 for its generous support in providing much needed space for Works In Progress production meetings.



Top: Seattle-to-Nicaragua Construction Brigade. Bottom: Gerardo Sanchez (our foreman on the project), Jeff Snyder (brigadista and current Pioneer Elementary School teacher, Santana (assistant mason) 1988

► **Memories**, cont. from page 10.
formation of the Thurston-Santo Tomás Sister County Association, many delegations have come north to visit and volunteer in Olympia and many delegations have traveled south to visit and volunteer in our sister town. Every group that has been to Santo Tomás

visited the *Casa de Costura* and many of us have bought hand-made clothing there. Hundreds of women from near and far have graduated from the year-long sewing program at the *Casa de Costura*. The sewing cooperative still makes school and sports uniforms and does custom sewing for *quinceañeras*

A new roof to keep the women dry!

Grace Cox

Olympia's sister city organization in Santo Tomas, Chontales, Nicaragua has requested our support to raise funds to make critical repairs to the Women's Sewing Co-op building in order to continue to provide this safe space for women. We need to raise \$8,000 to pay for the building repairs. Repairs include electrical, plumbing, windows and casings, and a new roof. We need your enthusiastic financial support to keep this important project going strong.

This building has a long-standing connection with our two communities. For many women, the Sewing Co-op and School was the first place where they could gather, talk and find commonalities in their lives, while learning a marketable skill.

In 2013 our sister organization, the Committee for Community Development, acquired the title to the property and has elected to broaden the scope of services being offered to create a community center for women in addition to the Sewing School. Original members of the Sewing Cooperative are helping to make this transition.

Student Delegate to Santo Tomas Patty Otero spent spring quarter working at the Sewing Co-op. "The Sewing School provides the opportunity to learn a skill that could bring in extra income and a community that supports women and understands the challenges they face."

Safety for the women working in the building is of primary importance. Sewing Co-ops are one way to make the

garment industry fair. Most clothing is made in sweatshops worldwide, and twice this year buildings that house these sweatshops have collapsed or burned, each incident killing hundreds of workers, mostly women and children. Supporting this project is one way to improve the working conditions for a small group of garment makers.

In the decades prior to the Nicaraguan revolution, opportunities for women were virtually non-existent. Lack of opportunities for education or to develop job skills combined with domestic violence drove many women to the streets to support themselves and their families. The Sewing Co-op and School provided the first real gathering place where women shared their stories and learned they were not alone. This support helps women find the strength to take action on behalf of themselves and their children.

Will you help us do right by the women of our sister town in Nicaragua by contributing generously towards repairs on their building? Twenty-five years ago the people of Olympia raised over \$30,000 to support the vision of a place for women to come together and learn skills. Please help us continue the vision by starting with these critical repairs.

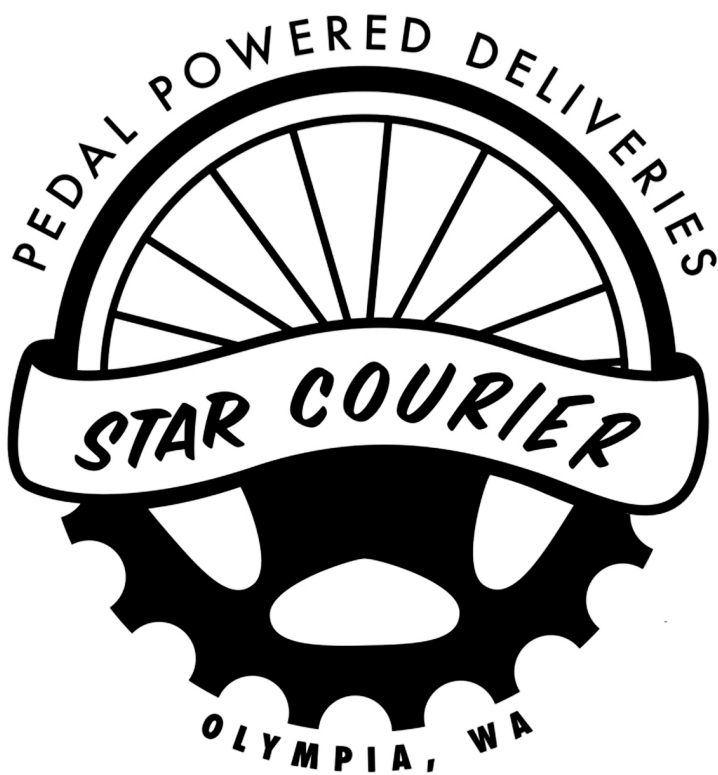
Grace is a member of TSTCA and an early member of Olympia Food Co-op.

Editorial note: Donations may be sent to TSTSCA, PO Box 56, Olympia, WA 98507-0561 or through the online Indiegogo page *Repair the Casa de Costura*.

and weddings. Their vision now is to grow the project to include more support services for women such as capacity-building workshops, hiring a psychologist to be available to any woman seeking support, and possibly a pro-bono legal service too. Let's join with these women working towards their vision of expanding the *Casa de Costura* into the *Casa de La Mujer*, starting with replacing the leaking roof!

Editorial note: "After Jean Eberhardt returned from the Seattle-to-Nicaragua Construction Brigade project, she started organizing an Olympia-to-Nicaragua Construction Brigade. The relationship grew, and in 1988 the Thurston Santo Tomás Sister County Association was created as a non-profit organization." Glen Anderson, "TSTSCA sustains a strong relationship with Nicaragua," WIP, July 2011

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