

LATIN AMERICA & HAITI WEB SITE

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A *QUARTERLY JOURNAL* that describes life in different Latin American countries and Haiti; these include human-interest pieces, political analysis, discussions of US relationships. We will emphasize pieces about indigenous peoples, labor and human rights. We will publish literary pieces. Many of our articles will be reprinted from other sources. WE WILL CONSIDER SUBMITTED MANUSCRIPTS.

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GUATEMALA

Guatemalan Lawyer and Torture Survivor Speaks Out on Behalf of Guatemala's Victims of Violence



“The wife of Human Rights Ombudsman Sergio Morales was kidnapped..”

(Editor’s note: Violence seems to be accelerating again in Guatemala. In 2008 over 6,000 people were violently murdered; 98% of all crimes were unpunished. US economic policy and free trade agreements such as the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) have decimated local economics and food security, granted multi-nationals tax-exempt status and negated indigenous land rights. Over 10,000 Guatemalans have been deported from the US since January 1, 2009. This article was recently published in El Quetzal, issue #3, June 2009 by the Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA).

Gladys Monterroso, lawyer, university professor, Secretary General of a Guatemala political party, and wife of Human Rights Ombudsman Sergio Morales, was kidnapped in Guatemala City on Wednesday March 25 at 1 am and released 13 hours later. Her photo is shown above.

“Who accompanies the victims? The victimizers are portrayed in the movies, interviewed for the front page of the newspaper. But the victims are invisible. I am here to tell the story,” Gladys said, to a crowd of 35 Guatemalan men and women at the Chapina Bakery, in Hyattsville, Maryland on April 8, 2009.

“I had a normal life. I taught classes at the university, worked as Secretary for the Encuentro por Guatemala party and Congresswoman Nineth Montenegro, and returned home to eat dinner with my daughters. On Wednesday March 25, my life was forever changed; marked as before and after that date.”

Three men in yellow hoods abducted Gladys on the street in Guatemala City early on a Wednesday morning. She said: “It is normal for university students to wear colored hoods at this time of year, for the Huelga de Dolores, thus I was not alarmed when the men

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**“Now I
understand
how the
millions of
victims of
violence
live in fear.”**

approached me. They shoved me in a black car, blindfolded me, forced some pills down my throat with a bottle of liquor, and then proceeded to tie my wrists and ankles. They forced a gun against my temple and then shoved it into my mouth. They burned my arms and legs with cigarettes, strangled me, beat me in the face, and raped me. I must wait six months before I can take the tests that will tell me whether or not they gave me a fatal disease”.

“The only thought in my mind was will I ever see my daughters again? Will I accompany them on their wedding day, and see their children? And now my question is, why me? I didn’t do anything wrong,” she said, staring across the Guatemalan Human Rights Commission office of Sister Dianna Ortiz, who suffered similar torture by the Guatemalan military in 1989.

“Now I understand how the millions of victims of violence live in fear, victims of the armed conflict and post-war Guatemala, and I know that I am not alone,” she reflected.

This violent attack occurred just eleven hours after the release of the first report on the contents of the police archives. The archives were discovered in 2005; over 11 million documents were cleaned, scanned, and filed (of over 80 million documents from the 1960-1996 conflict). The report includes information connecting the Guatemalan National Police to atrocities committed during the war. Evidence from the report has already helped in important cases, such as the first arrest in a case of forced disappearance (of the 47,000 disappearances during the conflict.) Four officers linked to death squads have been accused of the 1984 disappearance of Fernando Garcia, student leader and husband of Nineth Montenegro. Two were arrested on March 5, 2009.

“The day that I released the report, we received death threats and a bomb threat,” commented Human Rights Ombudsman Sergio Morales. Luis Romero, investigator for the Ombudsman’s office in charge of the Garcia case, was attacked 12 days before. Gladys and Nineth appeared in a photo on the front page of the newspaper the day of the release, creating a perceived link between Gladys and the Garcia case. “The torture and the fact that no ransom was demanded are indicative of tactics utilized during the armed conflict,” Morales said. Morales spoke of Gladys’ courage and determination to tell her story. He added, “Our daughters decided to stay in Guatemala, despite the ongoing danger. We will return to fight this battle against violence and impunity. We are here to tell the US government, Congress, and the Department of State that violence in Guatemala is forcing people to flee to the US.”

Guatemalan Lawyer

“7000 people are killed each year.”

Gladys spoke of the much-needed support for Guatemalans fleeing violence who migrate north. “Through my testimony, I call upon the state authorities to stop the orgy of blood that the citizens of Guatemala live through every day, that forces respectful citizens to migrate because there are no opportunities or solutions here in the land where we were born and raised.”

Monterroso asked President Obama to express solidarity with his Guatemalan brothers and sisters by providing aid to decrease poverty and violence, and to grant legal status for the 1.5 million Guatemalans living and working in the US to mitigate poverty in Guatemala.

“Violence in Guatemala is indiscriminate; 7,000 people are killed each year, and impunity is so high that the UN had to create a special commission to address it”, Monterroso said . “I speak out in order to break the silence and impunity, to put an end to the uncontrollable violence in Guatemala that forces thousands to migrate to the US”.

The Guatemala Human Rights Commission sent faxes with over 330 signatures, demanding an immediate investigation of the crime in order to identify, process, and sentence the material and intellectual authors. They stated - “We demand that the necessary steps be taken to dismantle the criminal structures that obstruct citizens’ rights, liberties, and guarantees under the Guatemalan Constitution. We also demand protection for Gladys and the PDH staff and their families, and protection for the Police Archives.”



LATIN AMERICAN MIGRANT

(Drawn by Angel Boligan from Mexico City)

CUBA

“Each of them told me how they had made the revolution”

Cuba Yesterday and Today

by Deena Stryker

I was one of the few Westerners to have exceptional access to the Cuban leadership and the Cuba people in the early years of the Revolution, thanks to an irresistible need to know what kind of profession I had joined, and the fact that I enjoyed dual American-French citizenship.

In the summer of 1963, less than a year after the Cuban Missile Crisis that had brought the world to the brink of war, the scariest thing about my trip was the possibility that the Mexican authorities, who obligingly screened travelers to Cuba on behalf of the United States, would find no evidence of my having entered their country the night before, on the French passport which I presented for departure, and which bore my Cuban visa. Cubans in their overwhelming majority turned out to be an irrepressibly humorous people, their optimism tempered by a healthy dose of realism honed by centuries of adversity, first as a colonial outpost, then as a gangsters playground run by well-rewarded dictators. The photograph shows



Cuba Yesterday and Today

**“threats of
U-2s flying
overhead,
provocations by
American
guards at
Guantanamo”**

the author with Fidel Castro (at the left) in 1963. Commander Rene Vallejo, Fidel’s physician is at the right.

It took three weeks patience and finally, intimidation for me to get to sit down with Fidel Castro, from midnight to three am, counting on my fluent Italian to pinch-hit for basic Spanish. When two weeks later we lunched in his apartment and I had the temerity to request a final meeting, with his characteristic jocularly he complained: “And to think I have to repeat everything five times until you understand!”

In my early conversations with him, no great secrets were revealed, but I think I got a fair idea of the man: my original free-lance assignment from the French weekly Paris-Match had been to do a non-political portrait, and that set the tone of all the encounters I had with him and those who had been part of the original “twelve”, from the days of the attack on the Moncada Barracks in 1953, to prison, then Mexico, then the disastrous landing of the fishing boat Granma.

On my return trip, each of “The Twelve” told me, in their own words, how and why they had made the revolution. I spent most of 1964 doing that, and also visiting various parts of the island that previously had been off-limits to Western journalists. I also recorded the various outstanding events of that year, including the trial of a young man who had revealed the hiding place of several revolutionaries to Batista’s police, the return of a fleet of fishing boats that had been held by the U.S. Coast-guard for several months, threats by U-2s flying overhead, provocations by American guards at Guantanamo (which had been in American hands since the turn of the century), and during that year following Kennedy’s assassination, the ebb and flow of the general threat that hung over the island.

Cuba Yesterday and Today

“They were so busy trying to organize a country that had been left to the dogs for centuries.”

The week before Kennedy’s death, he had sent a message to Castro with the French journalist, Jean Daniel, who published the left-leaning weekly *l’Observateur*. It had been rumored that this was the chance of a thaw in U.S./Cuban relations. I flew back to Cuba a week after Kennedy’s death, meeting with Castro on the night of my arrival. We disagreed on how President Johnson would proceed toward Cuba, and Castro’s aide, Dr. René Vallejo, remarked that it was a good thing the Cuban Embassy in Mexico had not granted Oswald a visa on his planned trip to the Soviet Union.

It took months for my meetings with the protagonists to pan out, but that was mainly because they were so busy trying to organize a country that had been left to the dogs for centuries. Che Guevara was the only one who held out as a matter of principle, and the more I heard about him the less eager I was to test my wits against his. When he finally acquiesced, his attitude was one he shared with many celebrities about being misquoted. He answered all my questions, irritated when I referred information from other sources that was incorrect, and revealed remnants of machismo when he taunted my interruptions with a “How long does a woman’s promise last?”

I often wonder what Che would think of the world we’re facing now, when the imperial project he was so fierce about threatens the ability of the world to support human life. I have not been back to Cuba since 1965, but am able to follow its evolution through various internet sites. I know that following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Cubans proved their resilience once again when oil deliveries ceased, and that with the same humoristically defiant attitude I’d witnessed decades earlier they improvised transportation by horse and truck, and created city gardens that grew fruit and vegetables that had perhaps been less well distributed previously - something we may well want to emulate some day soon.

Cuba Yester- day and Today

Year after year, we witness the fact that the Cubans have the response to hurricanes down to a fine art, thanks to a combination of government organization and two generations of citizens brought up to consider solidarity a matter of course.

After fifty frozen years, some are skeptical of the pace at which events between the Obama administration and the Cuban government under Raul Castro could unfold. But to an old Cuba hand and one who knew from the day Obama declared that we would finally have a president who would change the way the United States interacts with the rest of the world, it's inevitable.

LATIN AMERICA

Evo Morales
at
Tiwanaku
receiving a
gold staff
symbolic of
Aymara
peoples'
gratitude.



**LATIN
AMERICA**

“Washington is unable to understand the true nature of this shift in political and economic power.”

Review of “Latin America in Revolt”, a chapter in “How to Rule the World” by Mark Engler, Published by Nation Books, New York, 2007.

By Ronald Coburn

One of the main themes of this journal published on latinamericahaiti.com is the incredible changes that are occurring in Latin America which contains 500 million people and where the chasm between the wealthy and the destitute is among the most extreme in the world. In this chapter Mark Engler emphasizes the progressive independence of Latin America from US dominance. He concludes that Washington was unable to understand the true nature of this shift in political and economic power, that this was not motivated by personal whims of Hugo Chavez as the White House would have it, but is rooted in a rejection of past models of US interventions and economic rule from afar. Economic policies that held sway in the region for over twenty years are now on their way out. Engler does not include evidence of US-, CIA- military support of neoliberal politicians, or removal of democratically-elected presidents so movingly summarized in the Nobel Laureate speech given by Harold Pinter, and republished in the Winter 2009 issue of this journal. Engler points out that those of us who believe that the true national interest of the United States should be helping to expand citizen participation and fight poverty should applaud efforts to make the White House take seriously its own noble rhetoric.

Early sections of this chapter includes summaries of elections of left-leaning Presidents in Bolivia, Argentina, Venezuela, Brazil, Uruguay, Chile, Ecuador and Nicaragua. (This chapter was written prior to the recent election in El Salvador). There is a long section about Eno Morales, his Aymara indigenous roots, his roles in union organization, his landslide victory on December 18, 2005 to become President of Bolivia following massive demonstrations railing against IMF/Worlds Bank-demanded tax hikes and privatization of the country’s national gas resources. Many consider him to be an internationally renowned champion of labor and indigenous rights. “We’re not just anti-neoliberal, we’re anti-imperialist in our blood” - his battle cry. It is difficult to overstate the symbolic significance of Evo Morales’s rise to power.

Latin America in Revolt

“Middle class people who had lost access to their savings rallied angrily outside shuttered banks.”

Nester Kirchner was elected President of Argentina in May 2003. His election followed a public uprising following the collapse of Argentina's economy which started in 1997, a result of effects of IMF/World Bank-demanded structural adjustments. Engler reports that Argentina's economy was dependent on foreign investors and World Bank loans. Middle class people who had lost access to their savings rallied angrily outside shuttered banks demanding accountability. Foreign investors whisked \$140 billion dollars out of the country condemning the rest of the population to live amid the wreckage. Kirchner brought economic stability to Argentina by opposing the demands of the IMF/World Bank, negotiating the huge debt and by opposing privatization.

Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva (Lula), the leader of the Brazilian Workers' Party, was elected President of Brazil in October 2002. Like Evo Morales he was raised in poverty. His background included working as an organizer and leader of a union that played a role in historic strikes that shook Brazil in the late 1970s. Engler points out that Lula's campaign that emphasized “the priority of the social” was a conspicuous departure from politics as usual in this country. However, so far as president he has been unexpectedly conciliatory toward Washington and more centrist than left-leaning



Hugo Chavez, shown at the left with Evo Morales, was elected president of Venezuela in 1998 and has become the most ardent anti-imperialist in the hemisphere. Engler quotes him: “Neoliberalism is the perverse system that has destroyed our democracy, our economy and our society”. Similar to events that occurred in other countries Chavez's

rise followed spontaneous protests of IMF/World Bank required reforms. In 1989 soldiers fired indiscriminately into crowds killing as many as three thousand people. President Chavez's political survival after a CIA-organized attempted coup in 2002 is legend. Popular uproar quickly restored Chavez to power. Engler quotes statements from the

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“There is a decrease in US economic and political control in these countries.”

IMF at that time that they would support the head of the Venezuelan Chamber of Commerce, Pedro Carmona, and that the White House welcomed the coup attempt. Engler relates how the Bush administration was supportive of organizations that produced a sixty-four-day oil strike, in another failed attempt to topple Chavez.

Tabare Vazquez was elected President of Uruguay in 2004. Vazquez opposed the right-wing military dictatorship that ruled Uruguay from 1972 to 1985 and rose to power after leading a successful campaign against the privatization of Uruguay's state-owned oil company. Engler states that although President Vazquez has disappointed many followers, he has shown more concern for inequality than did past presidents, providing \$100 million for food, health, jobs and housing.

Engler describes how in Chile, socialist Michelle-Bachelet was elected president in 2006. In Ecuador voters in November 2006 chose progressive economic professor Rafael Correa to be their president. The previous president had been forced out of office by demonstrators furious that he had reneged on vows to combat the Washington Consensus policies. The election of former Sandinista Commandante Daniel Ortega as President of Nicaragua in November 2006 followed a campaign during which he criticized the “savage capitalism” imposed on Nicaragua since 1990. According to Engler Ortega was elected despite overt suggestions from the White House that the Nicaraguan people would be punished for voting against US preferences. The 2009 election in El Salvador was won by Mauricio Funes, a member of the FMLN.

Mexico, Costa Rica, Peru, Guatemala, Columbia, Honduras, and the Dominican Republic remain at least partially tied to the US government policies and economy. Engler points out that the recent elections in Mexico, Costa Rica and Peru were very close pointing to possibilities of political change after future elections. However, the recent coup in Honduras seems to be a step toward a neoliberal regime.

The significance of these changes as listed by Engler: There is a decrease in US economic and political control in these countries. This resulted in the inability of the US to interest many Latin American countries in the Free Trade Areas of the Americas. The US government no longer can control the Organization of America States. The governments of Venezuela, Argentina, Uruguay and Bolivia cancelled troop training in the US School of the America. The Bush government failed to get many Latin American countries to support their wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Ecuador leaders vowed not to renew leases for a US

Latin America in Revolt

“Human benefits of left-leaning presidents.”

military base in the city of Manta. Engler concludes there has been an almost entire loss of influence of the IMF/World Bank and rejection of their structural adjustment requirements. As recently as 2005, Latin American countries accounted for 80% of IMF/World Bank outstanding loans. By 2008, Latin America accounted for < 1% of these loans. Ecuador went as far as ejecting World Bank representatives from their country. A new bank the “Bank of the South”, supported primarily by Venezuelan capital, is taking up the void. There is beginning to be development of regional blocks. Mercursur (the so called “Southern Common Market”) now includes Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, Bolivia, Chile, Columbia, Ecuador and Peru. The Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), which includes participation of Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua, is another potential regional trade organization. In addition, trade with China and other markets has been encouraged. There has been curtailing of corporate profits; in Bolivia privatization of energy companies was threatened, resulting in an agreement with foreign energy companies that directed 1/2 of their profits to public programs. Similar agreements were effected in Venezuela. Argentina and Uruguay supported repeal of amnesty laws protecting military officers and have helped open a large numbers of legal cases against past US-supported dictators.

In discussing human benefits of elections of left-leaning presidents, Engler emphasizes what has happened in Bolivia and Venezuela. The Bolivarian Revolution has resulted in a 30% decrease in poverty and a 50% decrease in unemployment. Government social spending has tripled. (These data obviously were obtained prior to the current recession and decrease in oil prices). There is now free public education, free public health care, and encouragement of cooperatives where workers can control their workplaces. In Bolivia and Venezuela,

(next page)



Venezuelan indigenous child

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“The collapse of US influence in Latin America has already brought important and tangible positive results.”

there has been some land reform and reclaiming of natural resources for public good. Most exciting, Engler outlines how indigenous rights have been initiated and enforced in Bolivia, Venezuela, and Ecuador and that indigenous voters have become a force in recent elections, the best examples being Bolivia, Venezuela and El Salvador. Engler’s chapter (and book) offers a more detailed discussion of human effects of changes in Latin America, also discussed in the Weisbrot article.

Latin America, The End of an Era – A Brighter Future

by Mark Weisbrot

(Editor’s comment: This is the second part of this article. Part 1 was published in the Summer 2008 issue of this journal. It was written in 2006. We republish with the permission of the Center for Economic and Policy Research, Washington DC. The reader is aware that this article does not include recent information, but contains quantitative data and astute analysis.)

Despite the consternation in Washington, the collapse of U.S. influence in Latin America has already brought important and tangible positive results. In Argentina, almost 8 million people — 18 percent of the population — have been pulled over the poverty line as a result of the rapid economic recovery there — the demise of which has been predicted by most economists and the business press practically every month since it began four years ago. In order to achieve this extraordinary economic success, the government had to implement a number of unorthodox economic policies that were vehemently opposed by the IMF, most of which were presented as reckless and wrong in the international business press. This included not only hard bargaining to clear away about two-thirds of the country’s foreign public debt, but also some macroeconomic policies that were essential to the recovery, including maintaining a stable and competitive exchange rate and lower interest rates. The government also refused to raise utility prices as demanded by the foreign owners and their governments (with the IMF as an advocate). More recently, the Kirchner administration instituted price controls to stem inflation rather than sacrifice employment and income by slowing the economy, as has become the norm in macroeconomic policy. The Argentine recovery is a remarkable achievement, one that both helped clear the path towards regional independence, and then continued to flourish in the new environment. It is easy to see how much weaker it might have been, or even collapsed altogether, had the government simply followed the orthodox advice that had been accepted in the past. At the same time, Kirchner has won high praise among human rights groups for revoking the

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“Venezuela has also had notable successes, most importantly in providing free health care for the first time.”

impunity of military officers who committed atrocities during the brutal 1976-1983 dictatorship.’

Venezuela has also had notable successes, most importantly in providing free health care for the first time to an estimated 54 percent of the population, mostly poor people, as well as subsidized food for more than 40 percent, and increased access to education. It is common to attribute these successes to high oil prices, but oil prices were even higher in the 1970s in real terms, and the country’s GDP per capita actually fell during that decade. Chavez is best known — and reviled — in the international media for his confrontation with the Bush administration, but at home his unshakable popularity derives mainly from delivering on his government’s promise to share the country’s oil wealth with the majority of Venezuelans. And even aside from distribution, it must be recalled that Venezuela suffered one of the worst economic declines in the region (and the world) — a 35 percent drop in per capita income from 1970-1998, prior to Chavez’ election. The current government, which took office in 1999 and is almost certain to be re-elected in December, will probably be most remembered as the one that finally reversed Venezuela’s long-term economic deterioration. The economy has recovered remarkably after stability finally returned to the country, following several opposition attempts to overthrow the government through a military coup and oil strikes. In just the past two years it has grown by more than 28 percent and it is still booming.

Bolivia, too, seems poised to reverse its long economic stagnation and begin to meet the needs of its poor, indigenous majority. It has created a new water ministry with the goal of providing clean drinking water to everyone, as well as water for agriculture. The increased revenue from control over its natural resources should make this, as well as the proposed agrarian reform and other antipoverty programs, feasible.

Of course, all of these governments are still a long way from coming up with a sustainable, long term development strategy. This is not necessarily because they don’t want one, but mainly because — after decades of corrupt rule, as well as the deliberate shrinking of the state’s capacity for economic regulation and decision-making — they simply don’t have the administrative capacity to even make such plans, much less implement them. That is why even in Venezuela, where President Hugo Chavez talks about “21st century socialism,” the private sector is a larger share of the economy today than it was before he took office. The Venezuelan government, contrary to popular perceptions, has embarked on a project of gradualist reform, experimenting with land reform, some production and credit co-operatives, and microcredit programs — but officials are very aware of the limitations of the corrupt and debilitated state that they inherited. In Argentina, which has a more developed economy, there is still little to nothing in the realm of development planning or industrial policy that could lead to the sustained growth and development of the Asian success stories, or perhaps even that of Latin America’s pre-1980 past.

Latin America - the End of an Era

“Ironically, Latin American countries in the age of dictators had more national control over their economic policies.”

Nonetheless the renewal of economic growth, made possible by more sensible macroeconomic policies, is a vitally important beginning. It is a necessary but not sufficient condition for long-term economic and social progress in the region. And it is likely that more changes will follow as the various new experiments achieve success. The increased control over energy and natural resources, and a new commitment to poverty reduction, health care and education — as in Venezuela and Bolivia — are also important first steps, not only in their own right but also for the sake of democracy. Although both the Morales and Chavez governments are accused of authoritarianism by their detractors — which in Venezuela’s case includes almost everyone who has access to large media outlets — from a more objective viewpoint, what we are witnessing is a revival of democracy. This is most obvious in the sense that people are actually getting what they voted for — in terms of social and some economic policy. It is for this reason that Venezuela came in first last year when one of Latin America’s best polling firms, Latinobarometro, asked people in each country how democratic their government was. On the question of how satisfied people were with their country’s democracy, Venezuela came in second, after Uruguay.

Ironically, Latin American countries in the age of dictators had more national control over their economic policies than they have had since formal democratization, and therefore much more successful development and rising living standards under dictatorships. Hence the long term trends, now beginning to reverse, of citizens losing respect for democracy in Latin America — after 25 years of losing ground under democratic governments.

Fortunately, the mass discontent, organization, and revolt at the ballot box has not been aimed at a return to authoritarian government but rather its opposite, demands for an extension of democracy to include social and economic policy, as well as the increased participation of previously marginalized groups — the poor in Venezuela, the indigenous in Bolivia. The recent mass protests in Ecuador against the proposed trade negotiations with the United States should also be seen in that light. So too, the waves of mass organization that brought Evo Morales to power, and are actively encouraging the government to pursue pro-poor and pro-indigenous economic policies.

But it is not only in the countries that have already changed their economic and social policies that the impact of this huge shift in hemispheric relations is relevant. Consider Brazil, which continues to provide a classic example of the failure of “neoliberal” policies in Latin America. Brazil was once a fast-growing developing country: income per person grew by 123 percent from 1960-1980. But over the last 25 years, it has averaged about 0.5 percent annually. The country’s president, Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva of the leftist Workers’ Party, was elected in 2002 on a platform that promised to restore economic growth through lower interest rates, implement

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“Washington is very pleased with the government headed by Lulu.”

industrial and agricultural policies, and return to a national development strategy. The Workers' Party also promised redistributive policies to help the poor, in a country that has perhaps the most unequal distribution of income on the planet.

Since taking office, however, Lula's government has steadfastly maintained the economic policies of his predecessor, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, and achieved the same sluggish growth. Interest rates set by the Central Bank are currently at 15.75 percent (compare this to our own at 5 percent, after the Fed has raised interest rates 16 consecutive times). The country's currency is very much overvalued, which makes imports artificially cheap, and therefore makes it difficult for Brazilian industry to compete in either domestic or international markets. The federal government is paying off debt to the tune of more than 7 percent of GDP annually, leaving little in the way of funds for any anti-poverty initiatives.

But it is important to understand that these policies are the result of Brazil's internal politics, and the United States today has little to do with it. In almost every country there are conflicting interests over economic policy, especially monetary policy, between the financial sector and nearly everyone else. Bondholders, banks, and creditors generally do not have the same interest in economic growth that most people have. For the vast majority of people, more rapid growth means a better chance at employment and higher income. For the financial sector, economic growth is primarily seen as a threat of increased inflation, which lowers the value of bonds. This is a conflict of interest in the United States too, as the Fed sometimes raises interest rates and slows the economy when most people who have a stake in a growing economy would not do so. Brazil has an extreme form of this problem, in that this overwhelming political dominance of the financial sector — which prevails in all of the major political parties — has led to a prolonged period of stagnation and slow growth that the economy cannot seem to improve upon. For the financial sector, the 2.3 percent growth (about 1.2 percent per capita) of last year is considered to be just right, even if it does not create enough jobs to match the new entrants to the labor force.

Washington is very pleased with Lula's government, and has been supportive, including at key points in the corruption scandal that has engulfed the government and led to the resignation of Lula's chief of staff, finance minister, and top party officials. The international press is also very pleased, as have been the international financial markets — in fact the markets were nervous at the prospect of Lula's impeachment because his vice president, the conservative Jose Alencar, has committed himself to lower interest rates.” So there is much international support for the current set of economic policies, but when there is a Brazilian government that decides to go in another direction, there will be little that anyone can do to prevent it. Last December, Brazil paid off its entire debt to the IMF, which was one the largest

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“Latin America’s independence has been spilling over into multilateral institutions as well as Chile and Mexico.”

in the world owed to the Fund, at \$15.6 billion dollars. Furthermore, Lula’s government has not been all that supportive of U.S. foreign commercial policy. Brazil was one of the leaders of the rebellion in Cancun in 2003, when developing countries decided that they were not going to negotiate any more concessions to the rich countries in the World Trade Organization if the latter were not willing to commit to cutting their agricultural subsidies. (The Brazilian delegation was more conciliatory at the latest WTO ministerial in Hong Kong.) Brazil has also, together with Argentina and Venezuela, soundly rejected the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas after ten years of negotiation; the rejection by this bloc has pretty much doomed the agreement.

Latin America’s independence has been spilling over into other multilateral institutions as well. Chile and Mexico, two governments that the Bush administration counts among its favorites, killed the United States’ proposed UN Security Council resolution to confer legality on its invasion of Iraq. Last May, Washington failed for the first time in nearly six decades to get its candidate elected to head the Organization of American States. After Washington’s two failed attempts, the body elected Jose Miguel Insulza, who was supported by Brazil, Argentina, and Venezuela. The Organization of American States met in June that year and promptly rejected a U.S. proposal to amend the Inter-American Democratic Charter that would have empowered the organization to evaluate the functioning of democratic institutions in member countries — a move that was widely understood to be directed against Venezuela.

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HAITI

“He preached liberation of the poor.”

Revolutionary Haitian Priest, Gerard Jean-Juste, Presente!

by Bill Quigley

Though Haitian priest Father Gerard Jean-Juste died May 27, 2009, at age 62, in Miami from a stroke and breathing problems, he remains present to millions. Justice-loving people world-wide mourn his death and celebrate his life. Pere Jean-Juste worked uncompromisingly for justice for Haitians and the poor, both in Haiti and in the U.S.

Pere Jean-Juste was a Jesus-like revolutionary. In jail and out, he preached liberation of the poor, release of prisoners, human rights for all, and a fair distribution of wealth. A big muscular man with a booming voice and a frequent deep laugh, he wore a brightly colored plastic rosary around his neck and carried another in his pocket. The following photo shows him preaching to the poor.



Jean- Juste Presente!

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Jailed for nearly a year in Haiti by the U.S. supported coup government which was trying to silence him, Amnesty International called him a Prisoner of Conscience.

Jean-Juste was a scourge to the unelected coup governments of Haiti, who served at the pleasure, and usually the direction, of the U.S. government. He constantly challenged both the powers of Haiti and the U.S. to stop killing and starving and imprisoning the poor. In the U.S. he fought against government actions which deported black Haitians while welcoming Cubans and Nicaraguans and others. In Haiti he called for democracy and respect and human rights for the poor.

Pere Jean-Juste was sometimes called the most dangerous man in Haiti. That was because he was not afraid to die. His computer screen saver was a big blue picture of Mary, the mother of Jesus. “Every day I am ready to meet her.” He once told me, when death threats came again. “I will not stop working for justice because of their threats. I am looking forward to heaven.”

Jean-Juste was a literally holy terror to the unelected powers of Haiti and the elected but unaccountable powers of the U.S. Every single day, in jail or out, he said Mass, read the psalms and jubilantly prayed the rosary. In Port au Prince he slept on the floor of his church, St. Claire, which provided meals to thousands of starving children and adults every week. In prison, he organized local nuns to bring him hundreds of plastic rosaries which he gave to fellow prisoners and then lead them in daily prayer.

When Pere Jean-Juste began to speak, to preach really, about justice for the poor and the wrongfully imprisoned, restless crowds drew silent. Listening to him preach was like feeling the air change before a thunderstorm sweeps in. He slowly raised his arms. He spread his powerful hands to punctuate his intensifying words. Minutes passed as the Bible and the Declaration of Human Rights and today’s news were interspersed. Justice for the poor. Freedom for those in prison. Comfort for those who mourn. The thunder was rolling now. Crowds were cheering now. Human rights for everyone. Justice for Haiti. Justice for Haiti. Justice for Haiti.

Jean- Juste Presente!

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To the rich, Jean-Juste preached that the man with two coats should give one to the woman with none. But, unlike most preachers, he did not stop there. Because there were many people with no coats, Pere Jean-Juste said, no one could justly claim ownership of a second coat. In fact, those who held onto second coats were actually thieves who stole from those who had no coats. In Haiti and the U.S., where there is such a huge gap between the haves and the have-nots, there was much stealing by the rich from the poor. This was revolutionary preaching.

During the day, people streamed to his church to ask for help. Mothers walked miles from Cite de Soleil to his parish to beg him to help them bury their children. Widows sought help. Families with sons in prison asked for a private word. Small packets of money and food were quietly given away. Visitors from rural Haiti, people seeking jobs, many looking for food, police officers who warned of new threats, political organizers with ideas how to challenge the unelected government, reporters and people seeking special prayers - all came all the time.

Every single night when he was home at his church in Port au Prince Pere Jean-Juste led a half hour public rosary for anyone who showed up. Most of the crowd were children and older women who came in part because the church was the only place in the neighborhood which had electricity. He walked the length of the church booming out the first part of the Hail Mary while children held his hand or trailed him calling out their part of the rosary. The children and the women came night after night to pray in Kreyol with Mon Pere.

Pere Jean-Juste lived the preferential option for the poor of liberation theology. Because he was always in trouble with the management of the church, who he also freely criticized, he was usually not allowed regular church parish work. In Florida, he lay down in his clerical blacks on the road in front of busses stopping them from taking Haitians to be deported from the U.S. For years he lived on the run in Haiti, moving from house to house. When he was arrested on trumped up charges, he refused to allow people with money to bribe his way out of jail. He would stay with the poor and share their treatment.

He dedicated his entire adult life to the revolutionary proposition that

**Jean-
Juste
Presidente!**

every single person is entitled to a life of human dignity. No matter the color of skin. No matter what country they were from. No matter how poor or rich. No matter woman or man.

His last time in court in Haiti, when the judge questioned him about a bogus weapons charge against him, Pere Jean-Juste dug into his pocket, pulled out his plastic prayer beads, thrust them high in the air and bellowed, to the delight of the hundreds in attendance, "My rosary is my only weapon!" The crowd roared and all charges were dropped.

Gerard Jean-Juste lived with and fought for and with widows and orphans and those in jail and those being deported and the hungry and the mourning and the sick and the persecuted. Our world is better for his time among us.

Mon Pere, our brother, your spirit, like those of all who struggle for justice for others, lives on. Presente!



An Aymara tribesman from Bolivia in ceremonial costume.

OUR AUTHORS

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