



Tom Beckwitt with residents of the Embera Cativo community

The Struggle for the Dog-faced Hill or Cerro Careperro

by Tom Bewick

Traveling by dugout canoe up the Jiguamiando River in El Chocó is exhilarating. For several hours we navigated up the narrowing zigzag river dodging tree trunks and avoiding boulders. However nothing was as exciting as the flash storm that turned the river's pristine blue water into a muddy washing machine in minutes. As we approached the Emberá village of Alto Guayabal, the final settlement on the Jiguamiando River, the dense tropical clouds cleared, and my friend Fabio, an accompanier in the region for the *Comision Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz* (Inter-Eclesial Commission for Justice and Peace) since 2005, pointed northward. "There it is," he said grimly, "the infamous *Cerro Careperro* (Dog Faced Hill)." Indeed, the 1500 meter tall mountain looms monolithic over the vast expanse of lowland tropical rainforest of the Jiguamiando Valley. As Fabio continued to gaze up at Dog Faced Hill, I could see

Report on the Cerro Careperro Struggle continued

that for him the mountain itself was emblematic of the conflict and struggle in this remote valley in El Chocó. For five years he had been standing in between mining companies and the Colombian government, who see the mountain as a hideout for reclusive guerilla forces and a source of immense mineral wealth, and the Embera indigenous communities, for whom Dog Faced Hill is the source of all material and spiritual livelihood.

It was an event that had occurred on Dog Faced Hill several months ago that brought me all the way to El Chocó from the confines of the University of Nottingham's law department. In January of 2009 officials from Muriel Mining Corporation, escorted by a large contingent of the Colombian Army's Brigade XV, set up camp on Dog Faced Hill in order to commence drilling activities for copper, gold and molybdenum. When the Emberá inhabitants of Alto Guayabal realized what was happening, the entire community—men, women, children and the elderly—marched through the jungle to confront them. Without food, water or adequate shelter, the Emberá held their ground for days. They demanded to meet with mining officials. They sang songs of solidarity. They prayed. In the end, the mining company and their military escorts pulled out. But it was not a victory. Acres of forest had been destroyed and several children had died of illnesses exacerbated by exposure on the mountain. And, insisted Muriel officials, they had legal rights to mine on Dog Faced Hill and they would be back.

It was in the aftermath of this incident

that I spent a few days in Alto Guayabal asking community members about the Muriel Mine. Despite it's setting amidst magnificent rainforest and crystal clear riverbeds, conditions in Alto Guayabal were difficult. It is tempting for foreign researchers to romanticize life in indigenous villages, but in a few days in Alto Guayabal I came to appreciate the harsh reality of daily life. The tenacious mosquitoes and sweltering heat made simple tasks almost unbearable. Disease and malnutrition were rampant, partially due to centuries of government neglect followed by over a decade of military persecution. When I asked a group of women and children in a shell of a schoolhouse if they had ever received any help from the government, I was told that their only experience with the government was in 2000, when attack helicopters firebombed their village. "We don't believe the government or anyone else who comes in here promising us jobs and meat. For five hundred years they have tried to kill us. We oppose any form of mining here," concluded a female community leader, who like everyone I interviewed, preferred not to be identified out of fear of reprisals.

Government and mining officials in places like Bogotá and London often refer to these hard conditions as justification for industrialized resource extraction. Mining, claim officials in the Ministry of the Interior, will bring desperately needed infrastructure, development and jobs to the people. This view is naïve at best, and arrogant and cynical at worst. Aside from debatable claims that the open pit mine will

not harm water resources critical to the Emberá's survival (similar mines in Colombia have tainted rivers and groundwater supplies for decades), government officials are not taking into account the special relationship that the Emberá hold with their traditional lands. For as I learned from dozens of interviews in Alto Guayabal and surrounding communities, the spontaneous protest by the entire Embera community against the mine was rooted in their fundamental concepts of life and human existence.

The Emberá believe that within their territory exist several sacred sites known as "*Jaikatuma*." The initial area of mining activities of the Muriel Corporation 'La Rica' lies in one of these sites: *Ellausakirandarra*, or Dog Faced Hill. According to the Emberá, a revered shaman, or *Jaibana*, who once lived in the mountain rose up through the side of the mountain in the face of a dog to represent the connection between humans and all creatures that share the earth. The Emberá people believe that within their territory exist several important sacred sites known as "*Jaikatuma*." There,

"...live also the malignant spirits that the *Jaibana* have expelled. Through the work of our traditional wise men, these spirits remain far away from our communities and we avoid people getting hurt or sick. To open the bowels of *Ellausakirandarra* is to free those spirits and endanger the physical and spiritual wellbeing of the indigenous peoples.

continued on the following page

Action On Colombia is the official newsletter of the Colombia Support Network, a national peace and justice network of groups and individuals working to promote respect for human rights in Colombia and a just relationship between the United States and Colombia through grass-roots activism.

CSN supports a nonviolent, negotiated resolution to the conflict in Colombia.

CSN is the only current project of Wisconsin Interfaith Committee on Latin America

Colombia Support Network
P.O. Box 1505
Madison, WI 53701-1505

email csn@igc.org
www.colombiasupport.net

phone 608.257.8753
fax 608.255.6621

In addition, up there live the *animara wandra*, the animal chiefs. They are the guardian spirits of all the different animals and if they disappear, the survival of many other species will also be put in danger.”¹

According to the customs and beliefs of the Emberá communities, only the traditional doctors, the *Jaibana*, are allowed to enter the sacred mountain *Ellausakirandarra*. The doctors alone have the knowledge and training to communicate with the *Jais* (spirits) that are believed to live there. All others are strictly forbidden from entering. If the mining goes ahead, which is planned as an open pit excavation, the community believe that the project will allow the release of the spirits, both good

1 Press Release, Position of the Embera Dobida and Eyabida on the Possible Mining Exploration and Exploitation in Their Territories, Oct. 24, 2005.

and evil that inhabit the land, which will have severe consequences for the communities. “*Ellausakirandarra* is the source of our rivers and the source of our life,” explained a community leader. “If they drill into the mountain, the water will be damaged. Bad water means bad fish. And fishing is all that we know. It has always been our custom.”

While Muriel Mining Corporation and government officials speak of the dispute over Dog Faced Hill as a legal and financial issue, the indigenous inhabitants of Alto Guayabal see it as a threat to their very existence. A female council member summed this up. “Our land is our culture. Without our land we are no longer Emberá.” Another responded by joking “To the city!” After the laughter died down, she looked me directly in the eye and said, “We will live and die Emberá.”

The rights of indigenous people to own their land and exercise control over

their resources is explicitly protected by the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People,² ILO Convention 169³, and jurisprudence of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.⁴ These international bodies, as well as Colombian law, all recognize and protect the connection indigenous and tribal

2 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples [hereinafter UN Declaration] (A/RES/61/295)

3 Convention concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries (ILO No. 169), 72 ILO Official Bull. 59, entered into force Sept. 5, 1991 Art 7(1)

4 See IACtHR, *The Case of The Mayagna (Sumo) Awas Tingi Community v. Nicaragua*, IACtHR, Series C No. 79. Judgement on Merits, Reparations and Costs (Aug. 31, 2001); *Saramaka People v. Surinam*, Inter-Am. Ct. HR, Series C No 172, ¶ 133 (Nov. 27, 2007).

Is Health a Market Product or a Right?

Dr. Sergio Isaza Villa, President of the Colombian Medical Federation, published an article on February 8, 2010 analyzing health reform proposals put forth by the Uribe Administration. His critical evaluation of the measures President Uribe seeks to implement clarifies the discussion of health care policy in Colombia. The following is a summary by CSN volunteer translator John Laun of points raised by Dr. Isaza in his article, which the Colombia Support Network received as a subscriber to the online service of Razon Publica at razonpublica.org.co. CSN regrets any misrepresentations of Dr. Isaza's views which its translator may inadvertently have made.

In Dr. Isaza's view there are two ways of conceiving health: as something to be bought and sold (the mercantile model) or as a fundamental right (the

humanist model). The mercantile model emphasizes treatment of illnesses of persons seeking medical care for existing ailments. The humanist model, on the other hand, is based upon promotion of health and disease prevention, so as to diminish the occurrence of disease and to have sufficient funds to cure persons who fall ill.

Dr. Isaza observes that in the 1980's economic theory applied to health services and medical attention led to formulation of health policies which placed a greater value on market mechanisms, leading to a substitution of competition, pricing, and financial incentives in place of health planning mechanisms, especially in the public sector. Interestingly, Dr. Isaza links this development in Colombia to the end of a bi-polar world (i.e., the emergence of the United States as the

only superpower), resulting in promotion of the market economy as never before. For the health sector this has meant legal reforms minimizing the capacity of the State to intervene and permitting establishment of markets on a large scale.

Dr. Isaza traces the history of this trend in Colombia from the Administrative Decentralization, which began to be discussed in the Administration of President Virgilio Barco and became law under President Belisario Betancur on January 1, 1986. It entered into effect with the Economic Opening of the following Presidential Administration of Cesar Gaviria. Then the 1991 Constitution in Article 365 transformed the interventionist character of the State to a regulatory character. The Constitution does not list health as a fundamental right, but rather considers

Is Health a Market Product or a Right? continued



An Embera grandmother with her family

health only as a right connected to life, when life itself is threatened. Dr. Isaza observes that the fundamental right to health exists in Colombia only for children. He cites Law 100 of 1993 as establishing the right to receive health service and the possibility of competition between state insuring of health (regulating the system) and private for-profit health insurance.

More recently, the Uribe Administration has moved to further privatize the health sector. The government decided to eliminate the Social Security Institute (ISS) and the Cajas de Prevision Social health fund, establishing a General System of Social Security for Health (SGSSS). This sought effectively to end regulation by state entities and deliver the resources and operation of the SGSSS to private operators. Professor Isaza suggests

this has turned out to be very costly for the country, since it eliminated the presumed competition between health agents and, as a consequence, failed to improve efficiency, but rather sent costs skyrocketing. The favored private health care providers (Empresas Prestadores de Salud, EPS) coming into existence under this system have become real political powers, putting the brakes on regulatory attempts.

Dr. Isaza suggests that the SGSSS as it functions under mercantile principles of supply and demand is a prodigious source of establishing of oligopoly businesses through the vertical integration of the EPS through diverse businesses they create to sell medical services. These businesses include the importation, distribution and sale of medications; the founding of schools with health curricula to generate

a large number of professionals and technicians to work in the health sector (for abundant cheap manpower); and in the sports business.

The EPS receive financial capital from the State, which they manage with a private criterion, i.e., profit motive and the increase of capital. Dr. Isaza notes that the private EPS appear annually among the 100 most profitable businesses in the country. During the last 20 years the government's policies have decidedly favored the financial sector, discharging the costs upon the public through taxes, he indicates. The government alleges lack of liquidity in the financial sector which threatens collapse and decrees laws of doubtful constitutionality through which it hopes to collect about 1.6 billion pesos (about 900 million dollars), but, Dr.

Isaza suggests, the government would have funds available were it not for the fact that it is using funds in the health sector to finance the private banking system.

Under the “Social Emergency” declared by Decree 4975 of 2009, President Uribe and his cabinet ministers issued 11 decrees to “confront the crisis in the health sector”. One measure increases the premium for obligatory insurance for traffic accidents, yet this and other measures will not generate sufficient resources to guarantee the financial viability of the health system, at least without structural changes, Dr. Isaza suggests.

One result of the system has been the high cost of medications; some monopoly medications are sold in Colombia at three times their price in Brazil, Ecuador and Peru. The charge made to patients exceeds substantially the sales price of the pharmaceutical laboratories. Yet the Colombian government does not focus upon these differences and seek to control these charges.

Finally, Dr. Isaza points out that one of the new decrees, Decree 128, applies a policy of setting barriers to access to medical services in order to contain costs, which has a negative effect upon what should be the fundamental right of patients to receive medical attention. The decree creates a concept of Exceptional Health Services (*Prestaciones Excepcionales de Salud*), providing that if an illness diagnosed by a doctor requires inputs not contemplated by the new benefit plan, the diagnosis will be evaluated by a Technical Committee, which will authorize treatment on terms it will set. If the diagnosing doctor does not follow the treatment imposed by the Technical Committee, he or she could be fined. Furthermore, the treatment authorized should be paid for by the sick person out of his or her own pocket, drawing upon life savings, retirement funds or bank loans. If the sick person does not have the money to pay for the treatment, the Committee is authorized to investigate his or her own family members to see if they can finance the

needed medical procedure. If not, the Committee will finance the procedure through a special fund created for that purpose, the FONPRES. This system places a bureaucratic committee between the doctor and his or her patient, may delay needed treatment, and opens the door to more business for banks in loans for health care.

The new provisions in the health field established by the Uribe Administration have a chilling resemblance to the worst characteristics the United States health care system embodies. Health services are subjected to the profit motive of private health insurance companies. And interestingly Dr. Isaza’s starting point for the deleterious changes in public health policy in Colombia, when the world became “unipolar” in the 1980’s, parallels exactly the fervid application of market principles enshrining the profit motive as the guiding principle which began in the United States under President Ronald Reagan.

A TRIBUTE TO HOWARD ZINN

February 8, 2010

We at the Colombia Support Network were very saddened by the news a few days ago that Howard Zinn had passed away. He was for many years a member of our advisory council and provided us with good counsel and support. One of our country’s great historians, he focused attention on the common man. His path-breaking book *A People’s History of the United States* directed attention to the importance of common people and social movements, in helpful contrast to the typical history told in terms of the role and influence of the “great man”. While so many historians concentrate on political leaders in explaining historical developments, Howard saw that everyday people and social movements contributed importantly to change.

He also spoke out against war as a means of achieving justice. In a marvelous speech at the 100th Anniversary celebration of the *Progressive Magazine* in Madison on May 3, 2009, a number of us were privileged to hear his compelling statement against war. He observed that “a just cause does not make a just war”. Referring to what he characterized as “Three Holy Wars” in U.S. history—the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, and World War II—he suggested that these wars, in the latter of which he served as a member of the Air Force involved in bombing runs, were “idealized” by those who did not measure the human cost of these conflicts, which when considered could not make them “just”. Since our organization focuses upon community organizations in peaceful resistance to the status quo in rural Colombia, and we and they oppose war as a means to change, we are especially appreciative of his perspective.

A couple of years ago we asked Howard to write a letter of support for our annual fund-raising efforts. He gracefully agreed and the letter he wrote on our behalf produced a tremendous response from our members and others who read it. We are very grateful for his encouragement and support. We will miss him greatly. We send our heartfelt condolences to his family.

ON INFORMANTS AND OTHER DEMONS

... the problem with the informant network is not effectiveness, but democracy.

*Published by Semanario Virtual Caja de Herramientas Edición 00192 on the week of January 29 – Feb 4 By Alfredo Jaramillo, Political Analyst
(Translated by Stephanie DiBello, a CSN volunteer translator)*

A huge controversy has erupted in the country over President Álvaro Uribe Vélez's proposal to have 1,000 young students work with networks of informants in order to combat the growing number of homicides and other crimes that have risen in Medellín in the past two years.

There is debate about whether or not this is an effective way to fight against the criminal organizations that are destroying Medellín, causing an increase in homicides, inter-urban displacement, and the confinement of populations who, because of their location in conflict zones, are victims of the crimes around them.

However, it is necessary to point out that the main reasons for which this proposal is considered a dangerous initiative is not because it will be ineffective or difficult to implement, but because, just like the core principles of the so-called Democratic Security initiative, it is based on principles that prevent the full exercise of human rights.

In 1995 when Álvaro Uribe was governor of Antioquia, a security model was put in place based on privatization and mercenary operations. The main instrument used to implement this model was the creation of Security Cooperatives (Cooperativas de Seguridad—CONVIVIR), which initially brought in civilians to engage in surveillance activities and then gradually



Embera youths enjoy fishing in the river

expanded to include them in the fight against persons who were considered undesirable, as much for their habits and customs as their social and political position: indigents, drug addicts, small time criminals, leftist political activists, NGO workers, human rights defenders, social leaders, etc.

This is how a project initially framed by rhetoric to justify self-defense and community surveillance in practice became a complex model to fight counterinsurgency, in which these illegal armed groups became the origins of the paramilitaries. These groups solidified the strategies of dirty war, population control, seizure of the State, and lastly, the comprehensive counter-reform that has developed in a country ruled by elitist *'narcoterratenientes'* in alliance with the industrial and commercial sectors that saw a threat to their power with the new Constitution in 1991.

This process hit its point of maximum power with the triumph of Uribe in the 2002 elections, and with the national implementation of the Democratic

Security model, which relies on linking civilians to different violent actions and population control, to which the networks of informants are fundamental. The Democratic Security model was put in place August 7, 2002, the day the president took power and has been used to control highways, rural areas and, more and more in recent years, the main cities in Colombia.

Additionally, in Medellín the authorities have recognized these informants as one of the central elements in the strategy against militia groups (“*milicianos*” allegedly linked to the FARC guerrillas) from 2002–2004 that permitted the enthronement of the paramilitaries in wide sectors of the city. Likewise, a large majority of urban inhabitants know the control that CONVIVIR has in the main public places, like parks and plazas, where one can see individuals with two-way radios patrolling public places like parks and plazas and, when necessary,

brandishing guns to intimidate those who defy them. (www.rabodeaji.blogspot.com/2010/01/una-pequena-historia-local.html)

The problem with involving civilians in the war is not about effectiveness, but about an act that clearly goes against international humanitarian law and more specifically violates the principle of distinction, which clearly separates civilians from armed actors. Disregarding the discussion of whether or not Colombia, in particular Medellín, is involved in armed conflict, handing over security responsibilities to civilians by making them into informers in exchange for money is a practice that has generated serious human rights violations. Since 2002 this State policy has generated thousands of illegal detentions, forced disappearances, incidents of torture, extrajudicial executions, and crimes that are neither isolated cases nor small undertakings but structural components of the model of Democratic Security espoused by Uribe and his allies.

These practices reach farther than the fight against violence. They are trying to create a totalitarian society where fear, surveillance and distrust replace solidarity and cooperation as the building blocks of society. These kinds of models of social control, much like those implemented in Nazi Germany, Stalinist Russian and other totalitarian societies, are based on the power of fear as a mechanism to keep the population oppressed, and are often presented as ways of co-responsibility in keeping public order and citizen security.

The Case of the University of Antioquia

In Medellín, there is precedent that illustrates the great danger in involving citizens in intelligence and social control activities. Two well-known brothers, former students of the University of Antioquia and now attending the Medellín campus of the National University, have been following

and harassing student activists at the University of Antioquia since 2003 because they claim that their older brother was killed by the FARC.

These brothers are now working with the Military Intelligence Network (Red de Inteligencia Militar RIME) of the Fourth Brigade in Medellín, and are now able to continue their harassment under the guise of informants. Due to their position, they have beaten, threatened and intimidated students, workers, professors and senior citizens.

Likewise, they have served as witnesses hired to assist the military intelligence division in several unfounded judicial proceedings, similar to the illegal detention of the members of Grupos Musical Pasajeros in 2004, who were accused of being part of the ELN, a guerilla organization, and had to seek asylum because of the threats they received after being declared innocent.

The same thing happened in the trial against student leaders from the University of Antioquia in what was called “Operation Algebra II”, carried out in May 2005. After 14 student leaders from the University of Antioquia were charged with being members of insurgent groups, the trial ended with dismissal of the charges for a lack of evidence. In both proceedings a large portion of the evidence came from these informants.

At the beginning of 2009, an investigation was opened by the Prosecutor 74 (*Fiscalia 74*) before the Fourth Brigade against members of various NGOs, unions, social organizations, and leftist political parties for allegedly belonging to the FARC. In June 2009, human rights defender Winston Gallego Pamplona was arrested as a result of the trial. Some of the evidence provided by the Regional Military Intelligence division was submitted by the same set of brothers. To lend credit to his testimony, one of the brothers pretended to be a demobilized soldier of the Popular Liberation Army

(*Ejército Popular de Liberación EPL*), a guerilla group that mostly demobilized in 1990 and has been completely defunct for several years now.

Cases like these indicate how the networks of informants will be used and how they are more than just a strategy to fight delinquency; they are a mechanism to develop illegal practices of social control that promote distrust, blackmail and intimidation. In the case of educational establishments, these networks are conducting illegal monitoring in a place that’s supposed to encourage alternative thinking in the context of the authoritarian control that the country has suffered from in recent years.

Opposing these informant networks in Medellín is a way to confront the militarization of daily life and the growing implementation of a totalitarian model of society that Uribe and his allies represent.

Medellín, January 29, 2010

The Colombia Support Network

Action on Colombia

Editor

Cecilia Zarate-Laun

Contributors

Tom Beckwitt

Sergio Isaza Villa

Alfredo Jaramillo

Stephanie DiBello

John Laun

Design

Randy Clark



Wisconsin Interfaith Committee on Latin America, Inc.

Colombia Support Network

P.O. Box 1505

Madison, WE 53701-1505

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

NON-PROFIT
US POSTAGE
PAID
Madison WI
Permit No 440

You do make the difference!

Become involved in ending horrible human rights abuses in Colombia.

I would like to become a member of
the Colombia Support Network

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP \$25 REGULAR/\$15 LOW INCOME

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY/STATE/ZIP _____

PHONE/FAX _____

EMAIL _____

Please make checks payable in \$US to WICOLA/Colombia Support Network. Donations are tax deductible

I am interested in volunteering:

STARTING A CSN CHAPTER IN MY LOCALE

GOING ON A DELEGATION TO COLOMBIA

TRANSLATING/INTERPRETING

SETTING UP A TALK AT MY SCHOOL, GROUP, OR CHURCH

PARTICIPATING IN CSN STUDY GROUPS

I am sending a donation of \$25 \$50 \$100 other

Check Mastercard Visa

NAME _____

ACCOUNT _____

EXPIRATION DATE _____

SIGNATURE X _____