

Colombia

Action on

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Patricia with members of the sister community and members of the indigenous guard.

Vetting the Facts from our Past *Facing our Ominous Future*

by Patricia Dahl

One thing was clear when we took our delegation to Cauca last summer. The political landscape that beckoned in ingress before us, and the political landscape that dimmed in egress behind, had undergone radical revision.

The realization was manifold during the days we tried to interpret recent experience. It was manifold in New York City, the city I call home, the city where the "drumbeat for war is barely audible" despite its "outdoor memorial to loss and grief." Yet the Pearl Harbor type event of September 11th provided swift passport for the agenda the authors of Project for a New American Century assured us that we needed.

On the global side, this agenda guaranteed our monopoly on world resources at any cost, a monopoly that guarantees our future domination. This agenda used our tax dollars and surplus social security trust to pay for unending wars against children, against the elderly, against those who lack defenses and the instincts for aggression, against those who do not achieve in any sufficient degree the status sociologist Randall Collins describes as "animals maneuvering for advantage." It allowed for the acceleration by which any natural element that could be drilled, excavated, razed, measured and commodified, could then be appropriated, regulated, marketed, or militarized, including human beings for labor, intellectual property, water for drinking, water for exploring fishing,

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understand the world and my relationship to it. No private habit was too small to cast it, adrift and autonomous, from some larger, determining public force. For Colombia's president Uribe, whom new Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice calls our most important friend in the hemisphere, the word "political" morphs into a pejorative, a larger-than-life animal that maneuvers so aggressively for advantage that he sees it as out to swallow him whole. In September 2004, members of the Nasa indigenous group organized a march from Santander de Quilichao to Cali, protesting human rights abuses, Uribe's re-election, and the trade agreement being negotiated with the United States. It was the largest protest in the entire history of Cauca, with a reported 60,000 to 70,000 Nasas and other indigenous groups, afro-colombians, peasant farmers and trade unionists joined in solidarity. Uribe opposed the march and accused the organizers of expressing political positions. "I see no link between the problems that are being brought up and the march," he needed. "I see that the march has a political objective and it should be clearly presented as such, instead of putting forth lies . . . tell the truth, say you have a political party, and that you want to march and protest, but don't invent stories to tell the country."

Language, and its marriage to thought and the possibilities of thought, degraded even in the realm of what is considered progressive. To address the fact that nearly 4,000 union leaders have been assassinated in Colombia during approximately the last decade and a half, trade negotiators developed a new strategy. "The idea, say labor activists from the AFL-CIO and senior Congressional aides, is to make the issue of violence and impunity as important a component in trade talks as the struggle over agriculture tariffs and intellectual property rights. Its failure to protect union members, the argument goes, gives Colombia an unfair edge over countries that do, like the United States." Under the radical revision of the project for a new century, the argument for the right to life has been eclipsed by the argument for the right to unimpeded trade. In the project for a new century, assassination as a crime, arguably the most serious crime, becomes obsolete. Instead it becomes some-

thing unfair. Assassination offers a status of good, but according to the argument, the problem is that it is imbalanced good.

Evidence of sociopolitical revision was especially manifold on the delegation I took to Colombia, the locus of the more "hidden" war, back in year 2003. I remember entering the dining room of our hotel one morning toward the close of our trip. At one of the tables, Cecilia Zarate Laun engaged in serious conversation with Francisco Ramirez, president of the miners' union Sintraminercol. They motioned for me to join them. As I sat, Francisco turned to Cecilia and asked: "Are you aware how different things are in Colombia now, than from your previous visits? We really are in a crisis."

Judging by all we heard on that delegation, there was no confusion on his question. As

memory either functions or malfunctions, I cannot say for certain whether it was the quantity or the quality of the meetings that were especially intense. This I do know: at the close of each, I looked to my *campaneros* for confirmation that I had not imagined what took place. Speechless, we answered with our eyes.

This crucial delegation of 2003 opened the door to the delegation of 2004, and to our relationship with a sister community. It began on one of our last nights, when our minds, as delegation member Gary Weglarz describes it, were in "return-mode," and ready to implode with the need to process. That night, Cecilia informed us of a final meeting which was to take place in one of our hotel rooms. I, for one,

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Children, displaced after the Alto Naya massacre, sharing their single toy.

because what joins the north and south together is not only our decisions to be sister communities. With the boy of Patio Bonito, we too are vulnerable, bound, and threatened by those who, through their savage maneuvering for advantage, own the means of control. To believe we have more security is a false security. We pay for that security with a price. The evidence of radical revision exists in my own political landscape, which, as my feminist sisters taught, is not to be separated from my personal landscape. The luxuries accorded even a modestly convivial life evaporate by necessity and by choice. Friends and family express concern, but the gain is mine. What I thought would be a gateway to a small community in Colombia, was instead a gateway to the world, because the indigenous are in significant ways leading the resistance to power. They are wresting even language, and all it represents, away from those who steal it as a tool. Maneuvering for advantage does not function in isolation. To maneuver requires a "thing" to maneuver against, to have advantage requires a "someone" with which to have the advantage over.

Like the word "commonwealth," Uribe's word "political" becomes obsolete. Worse, under the revision of the word "patriotic" in both the north and the south, the word and all it represents is criminalized. The indigenous refuse this. They answer Uribe's needling with a public statement: "... our Minga is political with a capital P, because defending indigenous and collective rights is political... Defending indigenous lands and their autonomous government is political... Opposing the free trade agreement is political; rejecting the murders, forced disappearances, forced displacement, violence and war is political... Defending life and dignity is political."

In an article in the New York Times, Republican Governor Haley Barbour of Mississippi is credited with setting the pace for a new generation of Republican governors. The article claims that his actions of fighting trial lawyers over civil liability, taxes, spending, Medicaid cuts, ending job protections for state workers, privatizing services and tying teacher's raises to student performances, have "thrilled business groups and conservatives." His "muscular political style" has made him "unusually

influential" in Washington, and there are rumors of a presidential run in 2008. His statement on the role of public service is: "I didn't run to be a caretaker." In the new revision, the word "commonwealth," the word "political," and now the word "caretaker," is seen as a pejorative. Like the words in the Geneva Convention, it has become obsolete. It offers no recognizable good, not even an imbalanced good, like the word assassination and all that it represents. Again, the indigenous refuse an idea such as Barbour's. In a Nasa communiqué, the action of taking care is the very heartbeat of life.

*"Among indigenous people, two of us come together for a tull [traditional planting],
10 of us come together for the harvest,
1,000 when we need to fix a road,
18,000 if we have to make decisions for the future,
and all of us if we have to come out to defend justice,
happiness, freedom, and autonomy."*

Against all the crimes waged over the world, against all who engineer a system that renders their brothers and sisters the damned and discarded, the superfluous and the unrequited, the shackled, voiceless, downsized, overworked and underfed, the marginalized and disenfranchised, the learning challenged and the diagnosed insane, the cheap fodder and the insignificant collateral damage, looms the single act of Enrique, who defended a society's discard, the boy of Patio Bonito, with his very life. What I thought would be a gateway to a small community in Colombia, was instead a gateway to the world. Against the global minority who maneuver for advantage over the global majority, his act is the antidote on which I stake a moral focus, and on which I affix a line of political action for myriad struggles ahead.

Sources: New York Times, September 2001, cited in 9-11, Noam Chomsky.

Other Sources: David Griffin, The New Pearl Harbor, Constanza Vieira, Inter Press Service, Holly Sklar, ZNet, Joseph Kay, World Socialist Web Site, Michael McClintock, Instruments of Statecraft, James Dao, New York Times, February 8, 2005, NMASS, Bureau of labor statistics, 1999-2000, Michael Moore, Fahrenheit 9-11

Patricia Dahl is the coordinator of the CSN New York City, NY chapter.

THE VOICE OF THE COMMUNITY

By Enrique Guetio

6000 people have been displaced in the border area of the two departments of Cauca and Valle del Cauca, Colombia, (where our community is located) after the tragedy that took place on April 11, 2001. Even today the Indigenous Communities of the area mourn over the crimes committed by the heartless that used every type of weapon imaginable, including chainsaws, to mutilate and decapitate their victims. Women were raped and the bodies of 23 men were found. It has been difficult to find the remains of many more. There are officially 100 missing persons, though this number isn't very precise due to the amount of new and undocumented people who had entered the area looking for work and who fell in the massacre. Initially the camp of internal refugees was home to 387 people with a total of 75 children who were orphaned because of the tragedy. Since then a committee called the Committee of Internal Refugees was created to organize and collect data and statistics on missing persons in the Alto Naya region of Colombia. In the towns of Buenaventura, Suarez, Timba and Cali groups were established to protect themselves. These groups were divided into sub-groups which were in charge of sanitation, health, logistics, and the use of resources for obtaining our basic necessities. Relations with the Government are difficult until land is granted for internal refugee communities. Some initially took refuge at a farm in Timba. From there, they continued organizing farmer groups, indigenous groups and women's groups into divisions of labor with the men and women working the fields, and the children studying and looking over the elderly. The youth have assigned labor amongst themselves in a very dynamic way. They have already installed a town hall with traditional authority. There is also a group of indigenous guards for the community.

Enrique Guetio is a survivor of the Alto Naya massacre and is governor of the cabildo of Cerro Tijeras, Municipality of Suarez, Cauca.

The Ceremonial Stick

(Baston de Mando) of the Nasa Indigenous People

By Carol R. Sundberg

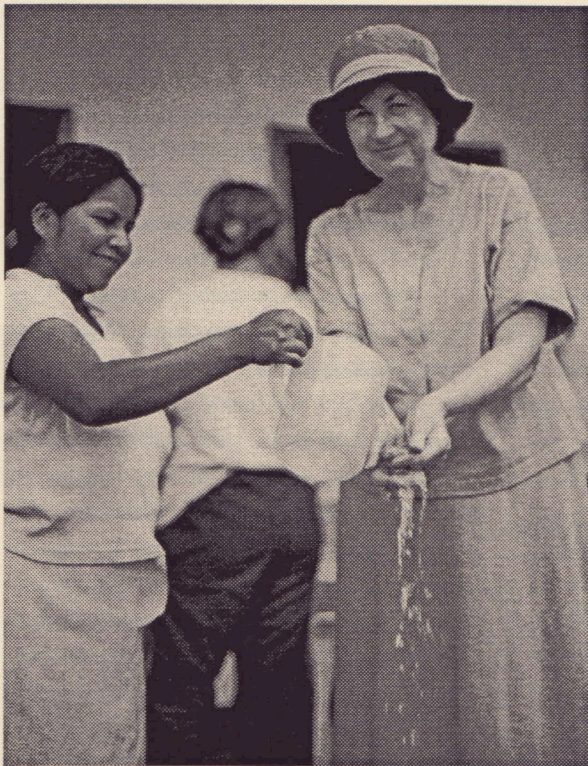
On Sunday morning the entire Cauca delegation met in a circular meeting room on the grounds of Buenaventura University (Saint Bonaventure U.) in a wealthy neighborhood in the south of Cali. Giovanni Guli, a Nasa Indigenous leader of the north of Cauca Department, spoke to us about the ceremonial stick. He had traveled from Cauca that morning to meet with us and accompany the New York City delegation back to Cauca for our 4-day visit. He spoke at length about how the "baston" is a symbol of authority for the bearer and how his people have taken it to meetings with the FARC, and there it is respected as a symbol of non-violent resistance. The stick is made from the native chonta tree and the handle may be made of metal in the shape of the condor, as his was. Several colored ribbons called "chumas" hang from the handle. The bearer wears an identification tag around his neck as well. Cecilia suggested the comparison of the "baston" to Senator

Feingold's letter of introduction that each one of us carried while in Colombia implying that we are backed by an authority apart from ourselves.

In Cauca we were always accompanied by a Nasa leader as well as an appointed guard who carried a "baston". My understanding of the importance of the "baston" increased during the trip to Cauca and has continued since I returned home. On the third day in Cauca we visited the area where the 2001 massacre by the paramilitary occurred in the mountainous Naya region, the ancestral home of the Alto Naya Nasa. The day before we were scheduled to leave for the day trip to the highlands, paramilitaries and FARC were spotted in the area. So 50 Nasa guards were sent into service to accompany us on our ride in the rented "chiva", an open mini-bus of 5 rows across, 6 people per row. We 6 delegation members were placed in the middle of the rows surrounded by guards and Nasa leaders. Quite a few guards rode on the roof and they all held their "baston," spoke very

little and kept their eyes on the surroundings. No one approached us on the bus or when we stopped near a stream to eat our box lunch or when we got out to inspect the controversial dam guarded by a military post.

On August 22, the day we returned to the US from Colombia, 2 members of a delegation of 4 Nasa leaders and their driver from the north of Cauca were kidnapped in neighboring Caqueta Department, where they were meeting with local Nasa leaders. The kidnapped leaders were the mayor and former mayor of the municipality of Toribio, where we had visited a Nasa farm on Tuesday. On September 7 the FARC freed the Nasa leaders. According to the



Carol washing her hands of U.S. foreign policy.

The Profits of Extermination:

How U.S. Corporate Power is Destroying Colombia

by Francisco Ramírez Cuellar

Published to acclaim—and death threats against its author and bombings of his union's offices—in Colombia in 2003, *The Profits of Extermination* uncovers the role of multinational mining and energy companies in Colombia's violence. Through legal maneuvers, corruption, and direct use of paramilitary violence, companies like Occidental Petroleum, Harken Energy, and many others, have taken over Colombia's resources, displacing and murdering those who have tried to challenge them.

This book gives the lie to the claim that the "drug wars" are the main factor behind Colombia's violence, and explains the role that the U.S. and Canadian governments and their corporations have played in the war against Colombia's peasants, indigenous, & Afro-Colombian populations.

Francisco Ramírez Cuellar is president of Sintraminercol, the Union of Colombian Mining Workers.

\$14.95

publication, *Weekly News Update on the Americas*, "A day earlier more than 400 indigenous Nasa guard members armed with ceremonial sticks had marched into the zone and demanded the delegation's release."

The "baston" is also used by the Guard to celebrate victories in the struggle to win indigenous rights. On January 20 the Indigenous Guard of Cauca held a ceremony in Bogotá's Plaza de Bolívar to honor Colombia's Constitutional Court for its rulings favoring indigenous rights. The same news weekly describes the Guard as "a civilian self-defense group armed only with traditional staffs."

Returning to the Sunday morning meeting in Cali, Giovanni said that President Uribe wants the Guard to be under the Colombian military, but they have declined. Uribe wants the civilian population integrated into the armed conflict with "guns for everybody." It looks like Uribe doesn't "get it," or not yet.

Carol R. Sundberg is a former Vice-president of CSN and is currently organizing a CSN chapter.

Talking to Congress

By Carol R. Sundberg

There is a ray of hope for progressives in the dismal Congressional election results of last November. Democrat Brian Higgins defeated hard-line Bush supporter Nancy Naples in a run-off election recount. Higgins has replaced Rep. Jack Quinn, a middle of the road Republican who resigned from his Congressional seat in the 27th District of Western New York.

Higgins was a New York State assembly member, and he made progress in Buffalo's shoreline renewal project for public recreation. Many bills are stymied in the NY State Assembly by the governor and the party leaders whomake most of the decisions. The Assembly has been ranked as one of the most dysfunctional in the country.

I spoke with Higgins at a rally during his Congressional campaign, and I asked him about his position on Colombia. He replied that he didn't know much about Colombia but that I should see him after the election. I was part of a 7-person delegation from the Western New York Peace Center who spoke with the Congressman in his Buffalo office in January.

Three of us spoke about the situation in Colombia. Alice Gerard spoke first, relating to U.S. involvement through the School of the Americas.

Higgins knew something about the SOA, so it was a good starting point.

Alice has crossed the line at Fort Benning for the last 2 November rallies and served a 3-month sentence last spring. She was recently given a 6-month sentence for last November's action. Ned Cuddy, a history professor at Daemon College, followed Alice with more background on our involvement in Plan Colombia and the drug war. I followed with recent political developments—the stalled peace negotiations in the civil war, the new leftist POLO party and its successes in local elections, and the continuing abuses against labor organizers.

Higgins gave us 45 minutes of his time, listening attentively and asking relevant questions. He accepted my offer of a copy of the *Plan Colombia* video, and he granted our request to meet with him personally every 6 months.

This looks like a good start for a new opening in the U.S. Congress.

Interested in becoming an active CSN Member? Contact a CSN Representative in your area!

Chapters in formation not listed here. Please contact the CSN office to learn of Chapters in progress near you!

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If you like Vietnam,
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Video

Plan Colombia Cashing in on the Drug War Failure Ungermann/Audrey Brohy	\$22.00
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Excellent film showing the reality of
the conflict

The Colombia Support Network *Action on Colombia*

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Luis community leader

Eduardo peace activist

Guerra husband

farmer

father

murdered*



*see reverse side

URGENT ACTION DEMANDING JUSTICE FOR SAN JOSE DE APARTADO

The response of President Alvaro Uribe to the horrific massacre of 8 persons , including San Jose Peace Community co-founder and leader *Luis Eduardo Guerra* and 3 children, has been to criticize the Peace Community and its members, as well as those NGO's such as the Colombia Support Network (CSN) which support the Peace Community. His denial of the responsibility of the Colombian Army for the massacre flies in the face of the facts as related by numerous eyewitnesses. The reluctance of witnesses to provide information to the office of the Fiscalía (public prosecutor), which President Uribe has criticized, derives from the fact that the prosecutor's office under Fiscal General Luis Carlos Osorio has failed to investigate Colombian armed forces' collaboration with illegal paramilitaries. This collaboration has been well documented in Uraba, where hundreds of paramilitary killings, assisted by the Armed Forces, have been carried out with impunity. President Uribe has established a policy of paying witnesses for their testimony, promoting the fabrication of false accounts supposedly linking members of the Peace Community of San Jose de Apartado to the FARC guerrilla movement, links which the community and its members have specifically and repeatedly denied.

Please join us in expressing your solidarity with the Peace Community in:

- 1) Rejecting President Uribe's plan to eliminate the Peace Community by having the corrupt military forces of the Seventeenth Brigade and the National Police enter San Jose;
- 2) Confirming our continuing support for the Peace Community and the protective measures ordered for it by the Inter American Court and by the Colombian Constitutional Court, which President Uribe has failed to have enforced; and
- 3) Demanding that the Army units that carried out the massacre and those who ordered it be prosecuted and punished, and that those who witnessed the atrocities be permitted safely to testify in a forum and fashion where their lives will not be at risk because they are testifying.

Please write to the following:

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