1-31-1992

Resist Newsletter, Jan 1992

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Guatemala: Torture of a Nation

SHARI TURITZ

No one is untouched by violence in Guatemala, and, for most, silence is the adopted tool for survival. A visitor to Guatemala is struck by the blank stares and by the difficulty of making contact with many of the people. Within this atmosphere of repression and silence, those individuals who continue to speak out and become involved in popular organizations, such as student groups, widows organizations, trade unions and human rights groups, are remarkable.

But even those who stay silent are not immune to the brutality that plagues Guatemala. On December 16, 1990, twenty-three year old Julio Chalcu Ben was fetching water from a faucet in Sololá, Guatemala. Three men — civilian agents of the military — abducted him. They turned him over to the military police, and he was eventually taken to a military base in Sololá. There, he was kept in a completely dark hut and beaten, kicked and tortured for at least 10 days.

Julio was stabbed several times and left for dead at the side of a highway near Esquintla. When volunteer firemen brought him to the morgue, the doctors realized that he was still alive. Julio spent five months in the hospital before he was able to write his name and recount his story.

Julio's "crime" was being the son of a member of the Council of Ethnic Communities Rujunel Junam (CERJ), a group that works against forced participation in the ostensibly voluntary Guatemalan civilian patrols. The striking aspect of Julio Chalcu Ben's story is that he is alive to tell of it. The vast majority of those tortured in Guatemala are later killed or "disappeared." Julio was chosen, as the innocent often are, as an example and warning to others. Julio's torture left him partially paralyzed and unable to speak. He is now in the United States receiving treatment.

History of Atrocity
Since the CIA-led coup of 1954 that overthrew democratically-elected President Jacobo Arbenz Guzman, over 100,000 Guatemalans have been extrajudicially executed, over 45,000 have "disappeared," and an incalculable number have been physically tortured. It is difficult to accurately calculate those who have been tortured, because the vast majority of victims are subsequently killed.) Government security forces routinely use these methods to maintain the status quo, in a country where over 70% of the population live in absolute poverty and two-thirds of the arable land is held by 2.2% of the landowners.1

In 1986, Vinicio Cerezo Arévalo was elected, and in January, 1991, the country peacefully transferred power to another civilian president, Jorge Serrano Elias. It was the first civilian transfer of power in Guatemala since the Spanish conquest 500 years ago. Throughout the past six years of civilian rule, however, real power has remained in the hands of the military, and the atrocities have continued.

In the first nine months of the Serrano administration, the Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA received documentation reporting 656 extrajudicial executions, 100 forced "disappearances," 80 victims of physical torture (bodies discovered with signs of torture) and 511 death threats. To date there is only one instance in which military personnel have been successfully prosecuted for human rights crimes, and in that case it is yet to be seen whether the guilty parties will serve their entire sentences. continued on page four
Resist grantee victorious

On August 29th, 1991, the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) submitted a permit application to the Army Corps of Engineers to conduct dredging operations in the “Essential Raw Cooling Water Intake” channel at the Sequoyah nuclear power plant. The TVA had intended to dispose of the dredge spoils by pumping them a mile downstream and dispersing them back into the river. The Broadened Horizons Clean Water Project (a Resist grantee) immediately launched a campaign to prevent this action from taking place. The combination of an effective media campaign (press, talk shows and handouts) and persistent education work addressed to their two U.S. Senators resulted in a victory for the downstream residents of the Tennessee River area.

TVA, never responsive to public concerns about safety and health issues, attempted to push its agenda in spite of mounting criticism in the press and on the street. A breakthrough came in this test of wills when a TVA whistle blower leaked a “smoking gun” document to the Clean Water Project. An internal environmental audit revealed that the TVA had been releasing PCBs into the river since the main station transformer at the plant exploded in 1982.

On November 18th, the Clean Water Project went public with the document. Staff at the TVA’s corporate headquarters in Knoxville and its water quality operation in Chattanooga were rocked by the lead story accusing TVA of deliberately polluting the river with a known carcinogen. The blast site is only 13 miles upstream from the drinking water intake for 400,000 people in Chattanooga.

The next day Senator Jim Sasser called for a full disclosure by TVA and the EPA concerning environmental problems at the Sequoyah plant. The Senator also called for a public hearing on the dredge issue. This action stopped TVA from beginning the dredge work in December as planned. The Clean Water Project aims to erode the credibility of the TVA, which it claims is one of the most flagrant abusers of environmental regulations in the region. Watch for more info about the Clean Water Project in an upcoming issue of the Resist newsletter.

$4 a day? No Way!

The American Labor Education Center has a new 19 minute video out on “Mexico, Free Trade, and Runaway Corporations.” According to a flyer we received, the fast-paced video includes scenes from a business association video boasting about moving U.S. jobs to Mexico and paying Mexican workers some of the lowest wage rates in the world; depiction of the deplorable conditions in which Mexican employees of U.S. corporations are forced to live and work; members of the Mexican Ford Workers Democratic Movement talking about being shot at inside their plant by thugs recruited by the government controlled labor federation in an attack that left one worker dead and nine wounded; the chairman of Ford Motor Co. denying, despite obvious evidence to the contrary, that the company had anything to do with the assault; workers from Mexico, Canada and the U.S. taking part in international exchanges and protests.

The video also features Mexican teachers challenging the underfunding and overcrowding of schools while transnational corporations pay low taxes and siphon off the country’s wealth, and includes footage of marches and other protests by Mexican clothing and textile workers, health care employees, airline workers, farmer workers and family farmers, nuclear and oil workers, miners, steelworkers, rubber workers and public employees. There’s also a 16-page text and photo booklet, which explains the Free Trade Agreement, the maquiladora industry and recent solidarity efforts.

To order the new video, “$4 A Day? No Way!”, send $30 for a VHS copy to: American Labor Education Center, 2000 P Street, NW, Room 300, Washington, DC 20036. For more info, call (202) 828-5170. American Labor also has T-shirts available featuring a graphic of the Americas and the slogan “$4 a Day? No Way!” (On the back, “¿4 Dolares Por Jornada? ¡Para Nada!”) in gold, on black or red shirts. So, if you are looking for a way to support Mexico-US-Canada solidarity projects and start conversations about free trade, you might want to order some. For cost and bulk orders, call the number above.
The “Work-a-thon”:
A Grassroots Project to Connect International Solidarity to Local Communities

BILL STOUFFER

Entering the 1990s, activists working in solidarity with the people of El Salvador face two challenges: the shift from a military to a political conflict in El Salvador, and the intensifying domestic crisis in the U.S. Much of the support for the popular movement in El Salvador was built on opposition to an obviously unjust war carried out in support of a government with one of the worst human rights records in the world. Maintaining support for the political process in El Salvador requires a commitment to justice and democratic development. Delegations to El Salvador continue to allow activists to see first hand the on-going struggle to build a society structured around real human needs. Given the degeneration of social services here in the United States, however, it is clear that new and ambitious methods of linking the issues must be created.

In El Salvador, cooperatively run repopulated communities such as San Jose Las Flores offer an alternative model of development for Central America. Such models are seen by the Salvadoran government as threatening acts of resistance. It is just such threats that have fueled the continued flow of U.S. military aid to the Salvadoran government over 11 years of war. Here in the U.S., innovative community projects have been created to confront the AIDS epidemic, make health care accessible, and build affordable housing. These are also alternatives to prevailing governmental attitudes and practices in providing social services. Connecting these strategies of resistance is a flexible organizing project called the “work-a-thon.”

The Austin chapter of the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES) recently attempted a “thon” as a way to extend to our own community the people-to-people bridges we had been building with our international solidarity work. The work-a-thon idea has roots in a type of fundraising that has long been practiced by such mainstream organizations as the March of Dimes. In our adaptation of the model, workers raise pledges for community development projects in El Salvador based on a commitment to spend one day working to repair low income housing in Austin.

Unlike its more familiar ancestors, the walk-a-thon and dance-a-thon, the work-a-thon aims to make fundraising a politicizing experience from start to finish by getting people involved in the process of change in a hands-on way. A primary goal is to make visible the connection between U.S. foreign policy and the accelerating collapse of basic social services and living conditions here at home. At a deeper level, the project aims to bring together communities that have become increasingly divided, even within the left, along race and class lines.

Austin CISPES held its first work-a-thon in November, 1990, in response to concerns that the intensifying domestic crisis was encouraging people to view international solidarity work as a luxury of white middle class activists out of touch with the harsh realities of everyday life on their own doorstep. The growing domestic crises (AIDS, unemployment, homelessness, racism, etc.) are of course the outcome of the same political agenda which supports death squads and fascism from El Salvador to Indonesia. The connections, while real, are too complex to pack into a convenient slogan or sound bite.

We felt that demonstrating a commitment to social change on both the domestic and international level required a willingness to become involved in local communities without losing our focus as a solidarity organization. The work-a-thon was so successful at achieving this goal in its first year that we tried again in 1991 and it was adopted by CISPES chapters across the country based in part on our experience. Austin’s work in both 1990 and 1991 was with low income housing projects. Other chapters renovated community centers or worked with AIDS awareness groups.

Choosing a Partner
Perhaps the most essential step in putting together a work-a-thon is finding an appropriate partner organization. Since we generally don’t do housing-related work, we wanted to find an organization with the experience and community support that would make our one day of work part of something with enduring significance. A partner organization can be expected to identify work sites and projects, furnish some of the tools and other materials necessary for the work, and provide contacts in the community where the work is to be done. As in El Salvador, the most interesting projects, and those with the best potential for long term impact, focus on community self-development.

In 1990 we worked with the Housing Resources Association (HRA), a coalition of organizations which coordinated volunteer efforts to rehabilitate the homes of low-income elderly or disabled people, and families. The HRA emphasized preserving existing housing stock as the most effective way to meet housing needs and respond to homelessness.

That year approximately 50 people worked on three HRA projects during the work-a-thon: painting and weatherizing two houses and doing carpentry repairs on a third. We surveyed the skills of the workers we recruited and concentrated those with carpentry skills at one site. While there was definite improvement at all the sites, the carpentry repairs made the most dramatic difference. The resident, an older African-American man, had been the victim of more than one assault in his own home and the repairs to his door locks were a priority. The project gave us increased confidence in what we could accomplish and significantly influenced our choice of projects for the following year.

In 1991 we had planned to continue working with the HRA, but in the midst of our planning the organization was forced to close due to funding difficulties and related problems. The economic fragility of such organizations came to us as something of a shock because the need for low-income housing rehabilitation is so graphically evident. But what funding is available to these projects from mainstream sources is often limited to work that is “non-political” or “humanitarian.”

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The Phenomenon of Torture

An official definition of torture still eludes international consensus. In 1975 the United Nations put forth its definition of torture in Article 1 of the Declaration Against Torture:

For the purposes of this Declaration, torture means any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted by or at the instigation of a public official on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or confession, punishing him for an act he has committed, or intimidating him or other persons. 2

But the phenomenon of torture in Guatemala goes beyond the United Nations' definition. Dr. Elena Nightingale of the National Association for the Advancement of Sciences more accurately describes the use of torture in Guatemala:

Torture is the deliberate infliction of pain by one person on another... but the main purpose is not really pain and suffering but rather humiliation and breaking of the will. Therefore, there are means of torture that do not involve physical pain and suffering... Torture is a purposeful, systematic activity. 3

In this way Guatemalan security forces torture individuals in order to alter the character of an entire society.

Common evidence of physical torture in Guatemala appears in the form of dead bodies found with eyes and tongues cut out, without nails, with acid burns, evidence of electric shocks to the genitals, and cigarette burns. Evidence is also gathered from the testimonies of those few who survive their torture. The target in these acts is not only the individual who is physically tortured, but members of his or her family or community who may be working for social change. The torture of one individual reverberates in the lives of every person he or she is associated with. The result is a society of torture victims.

Torture has become an acceptable weapon used by the state to control dissent. This concept is vividly illustrated in the words of the former Guatemalan Secretary of Defense, Hector Alejandro Garrmajo, who was quoted by the Pro Justice and Peace Committee of Guatemala while he was discussing "the fundamental reason for the utilization of torture":

The Army's mission is to defend Guat-

DOMLEE. School of Visual Arts, New York.

mala; and in these times, defending Guatemala implies the destruction of democracy's opponents. Therefore, we must do so in two ways: physically destroying them, by elimination, or doing away with their will to struggle. 4

The Torturer is Made, not Born

From the time a recruit first enters the military in Guatemala, he becomes a victim of physical and psychological torture. According to testimony from former members of the Guatemalan military, the indoctrination of military recruits in turn creates more torturers.

The new recruit goes through an initiation process of beatings and systematic humiliation. These tactics are aimed at destroying all of his defenses and reactions to physical and psychological abuse. In military training, there are two processes of transformation acting alternately upon the individual: physical and moral/cultural trauma.

To use torture as a tool against the civilian population, the soldier has first to be dominated himself. And so, during training, any violation of the norms of military life is severely punished. If a new recruit does not understand an order, does not carry it out correctly, gets out of the shower late, fails to shout with enough enthusiasm, or fails to make up his bed properly, he is likely to be punished with various cruel methods of torture.

One torture method often used against

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recruits is the “Cristo Padeciendo” (Suffering Christ), where the recruit is suspended by his arms for hours from the upper frame of a double bunk bed. After undergoing this kind of treatment, little by little, the soldier becomes a walking time bomb ready to strike out at anyone when ordered to do so.

It is equally important to destroy the individual’s civilian identity. This is particularly important in the case of the indigenous soldier, whose identity is strongly tied to his community. Guatemala is over 60% indigenous Mayan Indian, and the majority of lower level soldiers are indigenous.

Thus, racism plays a key role in the transformation of the individual into a soldier capable of atrocities against his own people. Soldiers are coerced into believing that as individuals (particularly as members of native communities) they are nothing. Conscripts are told that indigenous people, in their innate weakness, have allowed “communism” (i.e., any form of opposition or dissent) to penetrate their communities, and the communities therefore deserve to be eliminated.

To differentiate the torturer from ourselves, we often conceive of the torturer as a some kind of bizarre-looking monster. But, in fact, torturers are rational human beings who have been transformed into machines by a process of intense physical and psychological abuse. Through this process a person is destroyed and rebuilt with new feelings of anxiety, frustration, hate and fear; and those feelings enable him to be called upon to torture his own people.

Disappearance as Torture

Physical torture is but one of the repressive tools used by those who hold power in Guatemala in order to maintain the status quo. Beatings, forced exile, death threats and extrajudicial executions are other means used to silence opposition. Among them, the practice of forced disappearance represents the cleanest and most sophisticated form of psychological torture and social control.

The concept of “disappearing” an individual was invented in Guatemala in the late 1960’s, and has since been exported to countries worldwide. There are now over 45,000 “disappeared” in Guatemala, approximately half of all disappearances in Latin America. This excerpt is from the testimony of Adriana Portillo Bartow, a Guatemalan who toured the United States as part of the Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA’s Campaign to END Torture in Guatemala: MAKE IT STOP!:

I am an elementary school teacher, and during the years I attended college and after I graduated (late 1970’s and early 1980’s) I witnessed the systematic, indiscriminate repression [by] the Guatemalan Army and Government against the people. I cannot even count the number of my friends, teachers and co-workers who fell victim to the repression. My father, my brothers, my ex-husband and I were all taking part in the popular movement against such a repressive regime. My brother José was a soldier who later deserted.

Gitanjali Koppikar. School of Visual Arts, New York.

In July 1981 my brother Carlos Alfredo was killed. And on September 11, 1981, my father, stepmother, little stepsister (18 months), my sister-in-law and my daughters Rosaura (10) and Glenda (9) were kidnapped and “disappeared” by the security forces of the Guatemalan government. I have never seen or heard of them since.

After this, Adriana stopped her work in the popular movement in Guatemala. She has never again had a peaceful night’s sleep. Adriana is haunted by thoughts of what could have happened to her family—especially her daughters. Were they raped? physically tortured? shot? These questions will stay with her for the rest of her life. She and the families of the other 45,000 “disappeared” will never have grave to go to, or the peace of mind of knowing their loved ones are dead and will never return. The parents, wives, hus-

bands and children of the disappeared are all victims of torture.

Make it Stop! A Campaign to End Torture in Guatemala

While the structures of repression are deeply imbedded in Guatemalan society, those individuals who, despite threats and fear, continue to work for justice are the hope for the future. These individuals need the help and support of the international community in order to survive. For this reason the Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA initiated the “Campaign to END Torture in Guatemala: MAKE IT STOP!” Our objectives are to educate the international community about the use of torture in Guatemala, and to create an international network that will actively pressure the Guatemalan government to end the practice of torture.

We have created an in-depth packet of information on human rights abuses and the use of torture in Guatemala. The packets are intended as educational tools for direct action, and have been distributed to more than 1000 individuals and organizations in eleven countries. Packet recipients become part of our network and are encouraged to take part in the suggested actions to pressure the Guatemalan government to stop the use of torture.

Over the past year the campaign has included: two speaking tours of Guatemalan survivors of torture; writing guest articles for various publications; providing information to the media on the human rights situation in Guatemala (particularly the use of torture); initiating international letter-writing and petition-signing campaigns; giving talks on torture in Guatemala; and organizing the placement of two full-page paid advertisements in the Guatemalan press, signed by hundreds of U.S. citizens, denouncing the continued use of torture by government security forces.

The campaign will run through the summer of 1992. In addition to ongoing projects continuing from last year, we intend to organize two more paid ads in a Guatemalan newspaper, one signed by labor organizers in the United States, and one signed by members of the international medical and mental health communities. We also plan a third speaking tour and a human rights delegation to Guatemala.

As members of the international community, we cannot stand idly by in the face of such suffering and injustice. As mem-

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bers of the human race, it is our obligation to denounce human rights abuses wherever they take place. We urge Resist readers and supporters to join the MAKE IT STOP! Campaign and help put an end to torture in Guatemala, so that more Guatemalan voices can be raised in pursuit of peaceful alternatives to the violence and injustice which has plagued that beautiful country for centuries.

ENDNOTES


Shari Turitz is the Coordinator of the Campaign to END Torture in Guatemala: MAKE IT STOP! for the Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA (GHRC/USA). Shari has toured the United States as a representative of GHRC/USA, with Guatemalan survivors of torture, and recently returned from a trip to Southern Mexico and Guatemala. In both the refugee camps in Chiapas, Mexico and Guatemala, Shari met with survivors of human rights abuses and members of the popular movement. Shari will be on tour again as part of the MAKE IT STOP! campaign in the spring of 1992.

For information, call or write the Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA at 1359 Monroe Street NE, Washington D.C., 20017, telephone: (202)-529-6599 fax: (202) 526-4611.

Photos donated to the Make it Stop! Campaign by the New York School of Visual Arts MFA program.

JOIN OUR LIST
HELP END THIS ONE

... Maria Pereira (18 months), beaten and shot to death August 17, tongue cut out...
Jose Morales, disappeared August 19... Ovidio Garcia, mutilated body found August 19 floating in river... Nery Boteo, slashed to death with machete August 29... Francisco Garcia, Ezequiel Hernandez and Carlos Chavez, tortured by police August 31...

BE PART OF THE SOLUTION. SUBSCRIBE TO:
• *Information Bulletin*, quarterly news and analysis on Guatemala ($10/year)
• biweekly *Human Rights Update* of current human rights violations and related information ($30/year)

Ask about GHRC/USA’s Campaign to End Torture in Guatemala: MAKE IT STOP!

Send check to: GUATEMALA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION/USA
1359 Monroe Street NE • Washington D.C. • 20017 • (202) 529-6599

Tax-deductible contributions are also welcomed.
Such aid by-passes grassroots neighborhood organizations like the HRA that relate to people as part of an organic community rather than as isolated individuals.

Just as preparations for the 1991 work-a-thon had gotten underway, the city announced plans to annex large tracts of land in the Blackshear neighborhood and evict the current occupants. One of our new partners, the Blackshear Neighborhood Project (BNP), was faced with the prospect of having its work literally cut out from under it, while we were faced with the fact that we might not be able to guarantee work for the work-a-thon. Having the labor and the commitment but lacking the community infrastructure to implement the work underlined the paradox of the housing crisis in a dramatic way. Luckily the annexation plans were delayed and the BNP was able to continue to operate, at least for the time being.

We ended up working with three different partner groups, including the BNP, whose motto is “an organized community is a strong community.” Blackshear is predominantly African-American and Latino; a significant proportion of its residents are elderly women who live alone. BNP organizers had become intimately involved in the neighborhood through visiting each household and getting to know many of the people on a first name basis. In many ways it was an ideal partner organization since community empowerment was its explicit goal. While facilitating housing repair, the group also emphasizes skill building and awareness of existing rights and resources.

Recruitment and Organization of Work

In both 1990 and 1991 workers for the “thon” were recruited through direct mail and a follow-up phone bank targeting members of local progressive groups. Volunteers were sent pledge sheets and asked to solicit donations from friends, neighbors and acquaintances. The average amount of pledges raised per worker was $60, about what we had predicted. In addition, we received substantial contributions from people who were supportive of the project but unable to work.

The project we collaborated on with the BNP was the installation of door locks and deadbolts, which the community saw as a priority because of the high level of crime and drug use in the neighborhood, and the vulnerability of the residents. The number of work sites expanded from three

the preceding year to thirty, ranging over a 28 block area of East Austin. Although this complicated the logistics of the work considerably, it also increased the potential impact the work could have on the community.

After a preliminary training at a neighborhood church on how to install the locks, the group was divided into teams of three and assigned a set of houses. We hoped to use the installations as a training opportunity for the people in the community. Although those residents who did show up at the church were very enthusiastic about the project, apparently word had not gotten out widely enough to meet our expectations. Still, workers were able to make contact with a wide range of people in the neighborhood both at the training site and while installing the locks. Many workers were sufficiently motivated by their experience to make arrangements to work for the Blackshear community on some of its future projects. A member of CISPES volunteered to act as an organizing liaison.

A work-a-thon takes work!

Although in many ways a more satisfying project, a work-a-thon clearly involves more organizational commitment and resources than a walk- or a dance-athon. This becomes most evident on the day of the event. The logistics of coordinating activities at a number of different work sites, allocation of tools and labor, problem solving, etc., can become extraordinarily complex, especially since, with a one-day event, there is little chance to practice in advance or start over again the next day.

On the other hand, the feeling of accomplishment in pulling it off successfully can build a sense of community among the workers and organizers that would be hard to achieve with more traditional versions of the “thon.” Enthusiasm before, during and after the project was very high among those directly involved. Workers, in particular, seemed highly motivated by the opportunity to do something constructive that made a visible difference in people’s lives.

This response put to rest earlier concerns that the word “work” might have become too closely identified with alienated labor to effectively capture the imagination. Still, it is important to keep in mind that the work-a-thon really does demand more commitment from workers than a walk-a-thon. Not only is the amount of time greater — a day as opposed to a couple of hours — but there are also anxieties about skills and cultural sensitivity that need to be overcome.

The issue of cultural sensitivity was discussed during the organization of the project. Given that predominantly white middle class volunteers would be working in an African-American and Latino community, the primary concern was racial

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and class bias. This was expected to be more problematic at some work sites where basic living conditions would be very poor compared to anything many of the volunteers had experienced. However, relations between residents and workers were very friendly throughout the day, and at least on the surface, cultural and racial tension seemed minimal.

Gender based ideas about home repair skills, however, did creep all but unnoticed into the organization of the work. Although work teams were divided up in advance with the aim of maintaining some ethnic and gender balance, at the actual work sites men tended to dominate the aspects of the work that involved tools or carpentry. Mostly this involved a failure to rotate tasks and appeared to be a relatively unconscious assumption of gender-typed roles and deferral to already acquired skills. Both men and women organizers involved in the "thon" felt that by not immediately challenging these assumptions we wasted an opportunity for political growth.

In terms of accomplishing other political goals, the situation was also more complex than we first anticipated. Initial response to the concept of the work-a-thon was overwhelmingly positive; organizations as diverse as the Palestine Solidarity Committee and local religious networks expressed interest in the project and are exploring the possibility of adopting similar fundraising projects of their own for next year. However, despite general enthusiasm, the complex political message the project presents proved vulnerable to misunderstandings and even malicious distortion to an extent we did not anticipate.

In dealing with the mainstream media there was difficulty in communicating our perspective. They liked the project by and large but represented it as a kind of seasonal charity event, obscuring the connections we were trying to make between continued funding of the war in El Salvador and the neglect of domestic needs. The community newspaper, The Villager, was much more accurate and sympathetic in its coverage. It ran a front page article on the work-a-thon which did discuss in detail the links we were making with events in El Salvador.

Another problem arose at the University of Texas where we had hoped to raise a substantial portion of the seed money necessary to organize the 1991 work-a-thon. Our project came under attack by a coalition of rightist Salvadoran students and the Young Conservatives of Texas. In essence, they claimed that the work we were doing was a PR show for easily duped well meaning souls which artificially tied together a noble "apolitical" cause with a partisan and thus morally questionable one.

To some extent this claim was rendered implausible by the shilliness of the accompanying rhetoric which, despite the end of the cold war, included claims that CISPES was really run out of Moscow and Havana. Other distortions were of a similar McCarthyite bent including the description of a publicity flyer, which we had just used for a 2,500 piece mailout, as a secret internal memo.

The fear that the work-a-thon might be a gimmick designed to exploit the sympathy of the middle class and the suffering of the poor was not easy to dispel. A funding proposal presented to the Students' Association was defeated in large measure because of the atmosphere of suspicion that these groups were able to generate. In part this was due to naive but ingrained notions that real development aid is above politics. On a positive note, the attacks led to a significant consolidation of support among people who had a better understanding of the issue or who were just disturbed by the way we had come under attack.

Our initial evaluation of the 1991 work-a-thon makes clear the need for improvement in a number of areas. Now that we are more aware of the nature of the problem, it should be possible to counter gender stereotypes in the division of the work. More consistent involvement with community groups such as the BNP should make advance publicity more effective in the community in which we plan to work. We are also looking for creative ways to make the connections to US foreign policy clear to the mainstream media. Overall though, everyone involved thought the project was a great success, especially in terms of expanding the community building work we had begun in 1990.

Bill Stouffer co-coordinated the 1991 work-a-thon and has worked with CISPES since 1989. He lives in Austin where he writes for the Polemician. For more information about how to organize a work-a-thon contact the CISPES National Office at 202-265-0890.

Looking for Funding?

Resist has often been a resource center for groups looking for funding. This year we published a small booklet entitled, "Finding Funding: A beginner's guide to foundation research." The booklet gives people an idea of how to get started, and includes a bibliography of important foundation and fundraising books, a list of Foundation Center Network Libraries, a sampling of large U.S. foundations and what they fund, and a list of the Funding Exchange Network of foundations. We were surprised that no simple guide like this existed, and happy that we had the time, energy, and financial resources to put one together. For a copy, send $1 to Resist, One Summer Street, Somerville, MA 02143.

Too Many Fundraising Appeals?

Some people love getting mail, and enjoy getting information from groups doing organizing all around the country. Others just want to receive mailings from the groups they already support, and not keep getting approached by new groups. If you want to know how to cut down on your direct mail, keep reading.

Many groups, Resist included, do mailings to other lists in order to attract new donors. We have to do this in order to keep growing, and continue the work we do. (We have a special fund we use only for these mailings.) When you let us rent or trade your name, it helps us get other names at little or no cost. But some of you have already decided you're not going to give to any new groups, and you're sick of all the mail you get.

If you don't want any of the groups you support to trade or sell your name to other organizations, you should do two things. First, whenever you send in a contribution (or subscribe to a publication), write a note "don't trade or sell my name." Second, you can write to the Mail Preference Service of the Direct Marketing Association, Box 3861, 11 West 42nd Street, NY, NY 10163-3861, and ask them to remove your name from all lists that are rented or traded. It might take 4-6 months for this to take effect, but it should cut down on your direct mail.
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with sentence-by-sentence, or “sense” translation.

Since its purchase, the translation equipment has been used at a national network of educator activists conference in Toledo, several smaller meetings in Detroit, and other events. It will be used for the Women Workers global strategy school which LERP is organizing with Mujer a Mujer in February, 1992. This event will bring together 70 women labor and community activists from Canada, Mexico and the Mexico-U.S. border area - focusing primarily on those most affected by the free trade agreement. The meeting will take place in Oaxtepec, Mexico. For more information, contact Mary McGinn at Labor Notes, (313) 842-6262.

U.A.W. New Directions Local 422, P.O. Box 889, Milford, MA 01757.

The New Directions Movement (NDM) Local 422, initially called the STAND-UP coalition, had its beginnings in early 1986. A core of activists came together to elect a progressive delegate to the 1986 UAW Constitutional Convention. This group formed following years of attempts to participate in local union affairs, attempts thwarted by lack of democracy. When GM’s Framingham, MA plant closing was announced and the local leadership did nothing, the STAND-UP coalition researched the situation and found that the closing was illegal. The group mobilized the rank and file to force the leadership to file the necessary grievances, but to no avail. The group is soon to publish a document, “The Illegal Shut down of Framingham,” exposing all the violations involved.

By 1989 the group had become part of the national New Directions Movement and continues to grow. It sponsors educational meetings in the region and has taken primary responsibility to bring new members to the movement in New England. Basically, the NDM seeks to restore to the UAW the values of democracy, solidarity and accountability, and to recreate social unionism. A principal reason the formation of the NDM within the UAW has been the union’s “jointness” policy of cooperation with management which has led to massive concessions from union members.

NDM believes that to be effective the union must join with others, both inside the trade union movement and outside, to work for social and economic justice, ecological sanity, and multi-racial unity. The group stands for affirmative action within the workplace and within society in general. It stresses democratic representation to achieve a balance among people of different colors, ethnic backgrounds, genders, and job categories.

NDM Local 422 is an open collective of interested UAW members (including those who are retired or laid off), which meets twice a month. This chapter is unique within the national organization in that it has survived and grown despite the plant closing. The group has worked with the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists in Connecticut to sponsor a forum on Internationalizing the Trade Union Movement, and is actively involved with the Canada, U.S., Mexico Labor Solidarity Network. The group joined with others in the network at a planning conference in Mexico this past fall. Internally, the group is involved in reading about, and discussing, current problems facing the labor movement.

This summer the NDM established a program for the UAW covering several major areas including: a bargaining program for the 1993 contracts covering all UAW members; an internal strategy for resisting company programs; a plan for internal UAW reform, concentrating on democratizing the union; a plan for organizing unrepresented autoworkers in the U.S.; and plans for mobilizing the membership in broad-based struggles for social and economic justice. This program is a clear alternative to the labor-management cooperation the UAW leadership has followed for the past decade.

Resist’s recent grant enabled the Local to buy a FAX machine so that it could act as the clearinghouse and coordinator for the entire New England region. Having a FAX allows the members to respond immediately in developing critical resolutions that can be presented at the UAW’s Constitutional Conventions.

Of course, to do all this we need lots of help, support, words of advice, or whatever else folks have to offer. We are particularly interested in knowing how current and former Resist board members, staff, and grant recipients would like to help out. Do you think you’d be interested in organizing some kind of 25th anniversary event in your area? Do you have suggestions for the best ways we could celebrate? For Boston-area folks: Are you interested in working on the 25th Anniversary Committee? The committee will probably be involved in some of the press work we do and will definitely be involved in the Boston event. Please write or call the office if you’re interested or have ideas. THANKS!!
In each issue of the newsletter we highlight a few recent grants made to groups around the country. In this issue we feature projects focused on labor. We also highlight Austin CISPES, whose "work-a-thon" project is described in the accompanying article. The information in these brief reports is provided to us by the groups themselves. For more details, please write to them at the addresses included here.

Austin Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES), P.O. Box 7406, Austin, TX 78713.

Austin CISPES began its solidarity work in 1989 with a march in commemoration of the Chicanos Moratorium (organized with Chicanos against Military Intervention in Latin America — CAMILA, another Resist grantee). Building on the tradition of CISPES solidarity work throughout the U.S., the Austin chapter responded to emergency needs of Salvadoran grassroots organizations in November, 1989, when the Cristiani government in El Salvador intensified repression and bombing of the civilian population in response to the FMLN offensive. CISPES organized demonstrations including the disruption of a fundraiser for Senator Lloyd Bentsen, a supporter of continued aid to El Salvador. In 1990 the chapter coordinated the efforts of 60 community groups in the commemoration of Archbishop Romero, and raised nearly $6,000 with the work-a-thon.

Like other CISPES chapters, the goal of the Austin chapter is to work for the elimination of all U.S. aid to the government of El Salvador, while providing political and material support to popular movement organizations in that country. The domestic impact of U.S. repression abroad figures importantly in all of CISPES’s protests, fundraising and educational work, choosing priorities each year based on the political leadership of local groups working on AIDS education, combatting police violence, addressing homelessness, etc.

In addition to the work-a-thons, CISPES sponsors (usually in coalition with other groups) educational forums in the Austin community and at the University of Texas. For example, a forum on racism in domestic and foreign policy was sponsored with Movimiento Estudiantil Chicanos de Aztlán. When George Bush attended graduation at the university, CISPES organized a domestic links/foreign policy protest. When El Salvador’s Treasury Police fired upon workers during a strike, Austin CISPES mobilized a “phone-jam” which clogged a state representative’s phone lines and forced his office to call the U.S. Embassy in San Salvador to protest the shootings.

Austin CISPES has joined ACT-UP in Austin at a state-wide demonstration calling for AIDS funding and denouncing U.S. support for death squads in El Salvador. The group also works in support of reproductive rights in coalition with local activists.

The chapter holds six-month planning meetings twice a year for all its volunteers and members. Day to day work is conducted by a coordinating committee and sub-committees.

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Join the Resist Pledge Program

We'd like you to consider becoming a Resist Pledge. Pledges account for over 25% of our income. By becoming a pledge, you help guarantee Resist a fixed and dependable source of income on which we can build our grant making program. In return, we will send you a monthly pledge letter and reminder, along with your newsletter. We will keep you up-to-date on the groups we have funded, and the other work being done at Resist. So take the plunge and become a Resist Pledge! We count on you, and the groups we fund count on us.

Resist's grant was used to organize for the 1991 work-a-thon.

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Labor Education and Research Project/Labor Notes, 7435 Michigan Ave., Detroit, MI 48210.

The Labor Education and Research Project (LERP) was founded in 1978 to aid and educate labor activists fighting for a more democratic and socially progressive labor movement. In 1979, LERP began publishing Labor Notes, now a well-known and influential publication for labor activists. LERP has held six national/international labor conferences. Its 1991 conference was entitled "Organizing for the 1990's." It emphasized practical organizing tactics and strategies.

LERP has worked closely with union reform movements including UAW New Directions, Teamsters for a Democratic Union, Hell on Wheels (NY-Transit) and others. The group cooperates in a range of labor and community-based efforts including supporting strikes at Eastern, Watsonville, Hormel, International Paper and Greyhound. LERP's long-term goal is the transformation of the U.S. labor movement into a growing, dynamic force for social change. Shorter term goals involve helping people to organize and gain power in their workplaces and in their unions.

Specific LERP projects include a minority outreach campaign to increase minority participation and power in unions as well as within the organization; grassroots international solidarity work facilitating rank and file participation in solidarity activities and catalyzing a network of U.S. labor activists to engage in concrete solidarity with workers in other countries; workplace strategies education via publications and weekend and four-day schools developing creative ways to resist contemporary corporate strategies; and local education and support work in Detroit.

An ongoing project concerns U.S.-Mexican-Canadian labor solidarity in the face of economic integration. As part of that work, LERP has brought five Mexican trade unionists to the U.S. for its April conference. Resist supported the purchase of simultaneous translation equipment for the conference and the tour which followed it. LERP reports that simultaneous translation allows non-English-speakers to fully participate in events and at meetings at a more natural pace than is possible.

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