

WASHINGTON PLANS TO "WIN" THE VIETNAM WAR IN COLOMBIA

1.6 BILLION FROM THE U.S. WILL SERVE TO INCREASE FLOW OF DRUGS

Because of its dependence on power in lieu of truth, empire is unable to learn anything from history. Colombia has a population of 39,309,422 people. This is more people than all of Central America put together. The Colombian people in a plebiscite have declared their choice for a negotiated solution in their long civil war. The children of Colombia in an unprecedented plebiscite have demanded a negotiated solution. The United Nations Office in Bogota has expressed its willingness to act as mediator. But the dogs of war keep barking from the Pentagon. General Charles Wilhelm, the head of the U.S. Southern Command is arguing for negotiations from the "battlefield" in Colombia. His reference to battlefield seems to be a flashback to the Civil War in the United States. There is no battlefield in Colombia, just as there was no battlefield in Vietnam. The entire country is in conflict. The United States is encouraging Colombia's Air Force to adopt a policy of shooting down "suspected" drug smuggling aircraft. Such was the fate of some 2,000,000 "suspected guerrillas" in Vietnam.

Perhaps the greatest charade of this entire plan for war is the idea that eliminating the rebels of Colombia will eliminate the drug business. Quite simply, if every rebel in Colombia were dead today the drug business would still be flourishing. Is there anyone who does not know that the drug business is connected to the Colombian government, the Colombian military and paramilitary as well as to the U.S. Embassy in Colombia?

The time has come to protest Washington's plans for war in Colombia. The ignorance and malice, the disrespect for the people of Colombia and the people

Since our last general membership mailing of FOCUS, October, 1999, Blase was diagnosed with colon cancer. He has since had surgery and has begun a program of chemotherapy. He is presently back at work and doing well. We are grateful for your thoughts and prayers for a complete recovery.

Office of the Americas Board of Directors

of the United States is literally unforgivable. Why will 1.6 billion dollars increase the flow of drugs? Because the planned aid will provide funds to the Colombian military which has collaborated with illegal paramilitary forces by forcing 1,000,000

people from their homes. The U.S. aid package will simply enhance the Colombian military's capacity for carrying out "dirty work" against Colombian citizens, including human rights workers, school teachers, union leaders, journalists, university professors and anyone else who tries to criticize Colombia's facade of democracy and its long history of impunity for those who commit or facilitate the committing of atrocities.

Hundreds of millions of dollars already wasted by the United States on the Colombian military to fight the hare brained "war on drugs" have neither slowed the entry of drugs from the Colombia to the United States nor curbed human rights abuses by the Colombian military. We can expect the 1.6 billion package to result in more innocent Colombians killed, more military abuses of human rights and greater paramilitary involvement in massacres and displacement of the population. Since the security forces are reliably reported to be engaged in drug trafficking, we can expect the net impact of this "aid" to increase the flow of drugs from Colombia to the United States.

Role of the United Nations

The illegal NATO bombing and destruction of Serbia which the Russians are currently imitating in Chechnya, included ignoring the international mission of the United Nations.

The mediation of the United Nations in El Salvador and in Guatemala was received enthusiastically by both countries. Is it too much to ask of the United States that it conform to international law and foster a United Nations mediation in Colombia?

Our opinions on Colombia were confirmed by our personal presence in the war zones of Uraba in northern Colombia and our interviews with government, military and opposition leaders.

See: www.igc.apc.org/csn/ The Colombia Support Network.

[The article above was reproduced and sent to 32,000 members of ZNet Commentary.]

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FASTING FOR JUSTICE

**Lori Berenson (Office of the Americas
Honoree)**

In the wake of a dozen Vigils throughout the United States on January 11, 2000, Lori Berenson began a hunger fast. This news has been confirmed by the Peruvian prison authorities and the U.S. Embassy in Peru. This date represents the fourth anniversary of Lori's unjust conviction at gun point by a hooded military "judge." Her sentence, life imprisonment. Lori is also protesting the lack of help from her own government as well of the intransigence of the Peruvian government.

Please continue your calls and letters to President Clinton. He has an obligation as stated in Act of Congress (22 U.S.C., Section 1732) to come to the aid of any U.S. citizen wrongfully held in a foreign country. Ask the President to demand her immediate release. Four years is too long. Her health is failing.

As members of the Steering Committee of the Committee to Free Lori Berenson, the Office of the Americas will continue to foster actions nationally for Lori's freedom.

Visit OOA's Website: www.officeoftheamericas.org

**KATHY KELLY (Office of the Americas
Honoree)**

Voices in the Wilderness leader, Kathy Kelly began a month long fast in Washington, D.C. on January 15, the birthday of Martin Luther King and the ninth anniversary of the beginning of the Gulf War. Crimes are committed every day in our name against the Iraqi people. Thousands of Iraqi children die every month because of our embargo. In 1991 a firestorm of bombs and weaponry shattered Iraq to its core. The civilian infrastructure was targeted including electrical grids and water sanitation plants. Weapons made with depleted uranium have left a toxic nuclear legacy for our troops as well as for the Iraqi people. U.S. planes have bombed Iraq for over nine years making this the longest bombing campaign since the Vietnam War. Kathy together with Voices in the Wilderness fasters asks you to contact your congressional representative, to notify your local media and, if possible to come to Washington, D.C. to visit and lobby lawmakers to end the crimes against the people of Iraq.

Leave the legacy of your commitment to your heirs: When drafting your will, please consider making a bequest to THE OFFICE OF THE AMERICAS. We are a 501-c-3 non-profit educational corporation. All contributions are tax deductible.

THE MEANING OF "THE BATTLE OF SEATTLE"

By Leone Hankey

The massive peaceful protests in Seattle last November 29-December 5 against the WTO and corporate globalization were a very unusual event for the United States. Many activists hope that they mark a new stage here in building a serious movement for social change. These protests may represent the strongest opposition in the US around international issues to emerge since the Vietnam War, and also the strongest unity yet between organized labor and other activists both here and abroad, such as environmentalists, human rights activists, and youth who are disenfranchised with our consumer culture that says buy everything, value nothing.

Why did so many people protest in Seattle?

The meeting of the World Trade Organization became a logical focal point for many movements here and around the world that are seeing a massive transfer of power and wealth from the poor and from ordinary people to the wealthiest corporations and individuals. Decisions by the WTO, as well as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund are made far from any democratic process. Not only do some of these decisions, like those undermining public health, education, environmental and labor standards, lower the quality of life, they literally result in the deaths of millions to malnutrition and other preventable causes. For example, under the pressure of the WTO system, the Guatemalan government rescinded a law designed to protect infant health, that would have prevented Gerber from marketing infant formula in ways that undermine breast feeding. For example, Canada is suing France in the WTO for banning asbestos. We believe the purpose of this suit is to mainly to prevent workers of third world countries from grasping just how dangerous asbestos is. Under WTO protection of pharmaceutical companies' patents, it is very difficult for African governments to provide their people with lifesaving drugs to combat the AIDS epidemic. Under the agricultural arrangements of NAFTA and in negotiation at the WTO, literally millions of subsistence farmers in Latin America, Asia and elsewhere are being dispossessed of their living by agribusiness, resulting in massive dislocations and hunger. These are only a few examples! I could give dozens more, involving species like sea turtles and dolphins, clean air and water, and human rights abuses from Burma to maquilas in Central America, Mexico, and Asia where U.S. based multinational corporations profit from forced and child labor.

Needed: Computer volunteers to do word processing and data base entries.

What next after Seattle?

So many people are asking, what next after Seattle? Right now, plans are forming to carry forward the movement against globalization at the international and national level around a series of coordinated

events over the next six months. First of all, a variety of organizations are already planning a series of actions in Washington, DC, beginning with the Jubilee 2000 mobilization on April 9 to abolish 3rd world debt, and culminating in a massive mobilization on April 16 (shut down the International Monetary Fund meeting!) and April 17 (shut down the World Bank meeting!) Following these actions focused on the institutions of globalization, People's Global Action has called for an international day of action against capitalism on May 1.

Republican and Democratic National Conventions

Since this year is an election year, exposing the way that none of the major candidates for President represent the interests of the people, but rather the profit interests of corporations, is another focus of the movement against globalization after Seattle. We hope that this summer there will be massive protests outside the Republican National Convention in Philadelphia and the Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles against the policies of the government and the corporations that are attacking working people, human rights and the environment all over the world.

Distributive Justice

Here in the U.S., (and even more so in other countries) the drive to maximize profits is seen not only in trade policy, but in the obscene gap between rich and poor, and the destruction of the social safety net and public services through privatization. The state is becoming more and more exclusively an instrument to coerce and punish all who do not fall in line with the desires and needs of corporations and the wealthy; bombs for countries, jails and police brutality for people. But of course, this repression is breeding resistance. We have returned from Seattle to continue the daily fight against sweatshops globally and locally, the defense of indigenous rights and forests, the support of human rights against military, police, and corporate abuse from Burma, East Timor, the Philippines and Colombia to Los Angeles, opposition to free trade bills, and of course educational work around the WTO, World Bank, IMF and other instruments of global exploitation shrouded in secrecy by the corporate media. The combination of daily struggles with big coordinated actions will help build a profound social movement of international solidarity that challenges the powers which are keeping billions of the world's people hungry and oppressed.

What you can do

In addition to getting involved in local activities of the Southern California Fair Trade Network and other organizations opposed to corporate globalization, please call all your elected representatives and the major presidential candidates, and tell them to take the stand: No to Free Trade, NAFTA and the WTO! This is very important!

Upcoming Events:

- Feb 5th, 1pm Demonstration against Sweatshops at the GAP, Santa Monica Promenade.

- Feb. 7th, Fair Trade Network meeting, 7:00 PM, Lafayette Park Community Center. To reach the Southern California Fair Trade Network, call 323-931-3669, or email LSandraH@aol.com.

Leone Hankey is the coordinator of the Southern California Fair Trade Network.

Editor's note: Leone Hankey will be honored by the National Lawyers Guild for her dynamic leadership in the Southern California Fair Trade Network. Sunday, February 13, 2000. Call 323/653-4510 for information.

Open Letter to Judge Bonner

By Blase Bonpane, Jr.

[Our son, Blase Bonpane, Jr. was arrested in Seattle while walking down a public street. He asked the officers if he was being arrested because of the anti-WTO button he was wearing and they said, "Yes". He was held for five and a half days.]

To: Judge Bonner
Municipal Court of Seattle
600 3rd Ave
Seattle, WA 98104

From: Blase Bonpane, Jr.
King County Jail
500 5th Ave.
Seattle, WA 98104

Dear Judge:

Under oath in your own courtroom today, you insulted me, America, the civil rights movement and all activists of all time by referring to protesting in no more sophisticated a term than "stupid". You may have realized by now how prejudicial an impression you have made, and we are anxious to receive your apologies. I appeared before you as a citizen illegally jailed and sentenced for suggesting alternatives to the unaccountable and undemocratic dominance of the World Trade Organization (W.T.O.).

The W.T.O. needs to be protested because the W.T.O. is responsible for lowering standards of pay and working conditions for wage earners, lowering standards of environmental protection, and for causing the overturn of democratic decisions now affecting people all over the world including you and me. Two often included examples, among a myriad of others, include the functional overturn of decisions made by the people of the European Union and of the United States, despite the disproportionate influence of these countries over this and other powerful international organizations. This overturning of people's decisions is done by threatening sanctions or loss of WTO membership if these countries are to implement environmental or labor-rights protection laws determined as necessary by their people. The WTO calls laws like these "trade barriers" because they may increase the overhead expenses of billionaire corporations like Nike and Exxon.

Not understanding the danger of such patterns is certainly cause for distress and re-evaluation, but insulting those who are knowledgeable can only lead to serious problems.

Are you an Office of the Americas Member? If we have not heard from you in the past year, please renew your membership. See the form at the bottom of this page.

Your Honor, when I told you that I am a high school teacher in California, you said to the court, "If he is a high school teacher, he shouldn't be acting stupid [by protesting]." Your Honor, by this comment, you put me in an unfortunate position to inform you that if it were not for people speaking their minds through protesting or demonstrating you would be nowhere near the position at the bench from which you currently preside. For one thing, America would still be a colony of the Kingdom of England. Furthermore because you are an African American, and I am a European American, you and I would not enjoy the long awaited basic rights of equality that were won by the organizing prowess and inspiring sacrificial endurance of our country's civil rights movement.

Your Honor, it seems tragically clear that you would benefit significantly by attending my world history class mentioned today in court. Doing so may help you to avoid the contagious embarrassment stemming from your apparently thorough lack of knowledge regarding the crucial role of social and political

activists throughout recorded history. You, and needless to say, the city government of Seat-

tle, owe all activists ever, a deep and comprehensive apology. You might specify in your apology activists such as Thomas Paine, Sojourner Truth, Eugene Debs, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Dolores Huerta, Dr. Noam Chomsky and, of course, us, the new international coalition of concerned people who are halting the globalization of corporate colonialism while building toward the globalization of increasingly participatory labor governance and environmental sustainability.

Judge Bonner, I hope to hear from you again in circumstances which lend themselves more easily to friendship; either in my class (I gave you the phone number in court) or through a response letter in the Seattle Times.

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