



# Chaski

The Latin America Solidarity Centre Newsletter

Issue 3  
November 2008

This issue of Chaski finds LASC staff and committee concentrating their efforts on planning for the next three years. It is an exciting period: a time to think creatively, to come up with new ideas, to cast a critical eye on our work up to now. From April 2009 LASC will be working on **Food Sovereignty**. We felt it was relevant in light of the current global food crisis and the related mobilisations in Latin America and other regions around the world. According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, the world has the ability to adequately feed up to 12 billion people – almost double the current world population. But while the world's food production is increasing, so is the price of food, meaning many do not have access to proper nutrition. The reasons are manifold, among them the control of a high percentage of the production of food, seeds, fertilizers and pesticides by a few multinationals; the use of arable land for production of non-food crops such as agro-fuels; food speculation in the international markets; big transnationals' control of public goods such as land, water and biodiversity. While the people of Haiti eat mud cakes to obtain some nutrients, and displaced small Paraguayan farmers strive to survive in the shantytowns of Asunción, a small few reap the benefits of an utterly unfair and morally unacceptable global food system. During the coming years, LASC will be looking for your support as members to challenge this situation.

LASC

## campaign update **free but not fair**

José Antonio Gutiérrez D.  
LASC Research and Development Officer

The current situation in relation to the EU-CAN Association Agreement remains in limbo: the dates for a new round of negotiations and the format that it will take are as yet unknown. The impasse has been caused by the failure of CAN members (Perú, Ecuador, Colombia and Bolivia) to agree on the central issue: free trade. In the original proposal, bi-lateral negotiations were to be opened between individual CAN countries and the EU, but on October 14<sup>th</sup> CAN member countries demanded that bi-regional negotiations be implemented first with consensus on such contentious issues. Disagreement between CAN countries quickly emerged, with Colombia charging ahead with its bi-lateral negotiation of a Free Trade Agreement with the EU.

So, what next? It's a waiting game, but we need to keep the pressure on the EU: to resist a Free Trade Agreement, and instead support a trade agreement that takes the asymmetry between the negotiating partners into account and which is not tied to aid or conditionality. Meanwhile, a Free Trade Agreement between the EU and Colombia is complicated, given its government's human rights record and the huge public opposition to such agreements in the country. Protests against a Free Trade Agreement with the US left five dead in clashes with police recently.

Any bilateral negotiation must include acceptable human rights standards and ensure full and proper consultation with civil society organisations. The Colombia-US Fair Trade Agreement was cancelled because of the high number of trade unionist assassinations and the lack of safeguard guarantees for their members. Could the EU be less concerned with human rights than the US?



**Sign of the times:** A sign towering over the Ecuadorian coastal city of Montecristi – where the Constituent Assembly was completing the writing of a new constitution – proclaims “In 4 days the past is over” (Photo by Chris O’Connell). See Feature on Page 3.

**\*What is a 'Chaski'? Or rather, who were they? They were the messengers of the Incas, trained runners that brought news to the far corners of the empire.**

## event update

LASC has been very active over the past 3 months, organising a variety of events for members and the general public. Blue October is a month of action in which social movements around the world speak out to reclaim the right to water. This year LASC hosted two Thursday Night Talks dealing with this issue. Valeria Llano Arias – a Colombian activist (see Voices of Latin America) – outlined the national campaign to force a referendum on making water a fundamental human right.

Valeria described the organisation of the campaign that brings together diverse social actors, and the challenges it faces in collecting the required 1.5 million signatures. Chris O'Connell delivered a talk on water rights and Ecuador's new constitution (see Feature Article), while Nessa N'Chasaide of Debt and Development Coalition reported back from Ecuador on the country's unprecedented audit of its external debt.

LASC was also very proud to sponsor talks in Dublin and Gort, Co. Galway by the highly respected journalist and author Hugh O'Shaughnessy, who presented an optimistic view of Latin American democracy and future prospects. A bleaker tone was set by LASC's own Pepe Gutierrez, who talked about the conflict in Colombia, and the state-sponsored repression that is becoming increasingly apparent. Victoria Garcia Diaz presented a documentary on Nicaragua (see LASC Recommends). Finally, Astrid Perez Pinan from Puerto Rico discussed the political situation in her home country. Look out for future events on our website, or feel free to propose a talk of your own.

Louise van Bruggen (centre), LASC Membership Development & Volunteer Officer, with volunteers Elena Hermosa (left) and Carolina Smeriglio (right) in the LASC offices.



## staff update

I am Louise van Bruggen, your Membership Development and Volunteer Officer and part of the editorial committee of this newsletter. I have been working at LASC through a CE scheme for 3 years now. It is a busy job where you need to be versatile, and that is what makes it so interesting. I work closely with my colleagues, especially the Events and Information Officers. I would not be your Membership Officer without asking all Chaski readers to make an effort to contribute to LASC by introducing a new member. And remember that the office is there for you too! The staff is always very happy to welcome you.

## Member Feedback:

### Thomas McDonagh

The article gave an overview of the internal and external causes of the 'Left Swing' in Latin American politics. What I liked about the article was that the author gives a balanced summary of the dynamics at play in the continent, leaving the reader with some answers but, just as importantly, many questions and resources for further reading on the issues.



Colombian activist Valeria Llano Arias delivers a Thursday Night Talk as part of Blue October entitled "Without Water There's No Life," at the Irish Aid Centre (Photo by Miren Maialen).

## workshops update

LASC was present for a third time at the Festival of World Cultures in Dun Laoghaire in August, bringing a flavour of Latin American culture to the general public. The workshop explored Latin America through its songs – unveiling Iberian, African and American roots – and was delivered by singer, performer and former LASC staff member Rachel Dempsey.

This autumn LASC provided a Latin American development issues workshop to youth workers from around the country. Participants explored the issue of water in Latin America (particularly in Colombia), and examined different projects carried out by youth groups in Latin America. The workshop was part of the Global Justice and Youth Work FETAC course offered by the National Youth Council.

## education update

### Volunteers Exchange Programme

LASC is involved in an exchange programme with Latin America as part of the European Volunteer Service. Steve O'Dwyer, a LASC volunteer, is in Colombia volunteering with Ecofondo for 8 months, while Valeria Llanos of Ecofondo is at LASC for 6 months. The exchange will give LASC a better understanding of the work of local organisations in Latin America, and will strengthen links between us. Specifically, the exchange will help the Development Education work of LASC, particularly its work with youth.

So far Valeria has found the experience "extraordinary and enriching." Coming to the "old continent" was always a dream, and "what better way of doing it than through this exchange, leaving an imprint with my energy and knowledge, and taking with me so many stories, methodologies and experiences that will help us on the other side of the ocean," she says. But the challenging part is yet to come, when she gets home and puts into practice what she has learnt. "I will look for ways to bring these lessons back, because our own land is always what motivates us."

### Development Education Courses at LASC

The school year has started again, and with it LASC's courses. The Latin American Development Issues course continues to prove a success, with 21 participants enrolled for 2008/2009. Charla Latina will this term welcome Valeria as guest facilitator, and continues to explore different aspects of Latin America through Spanish.

# The Two Faces of Rafael Correa: Populism and Ecuador's New Constitution

by Chris O'Connell

In Latin America, it's like the 1970s all over again: there's a global economic crisis, oil prices are fluctuating wildly, and the political scene is utterly polarised. Loaded words are bandied about in the media and on the streets: "socialist," "populist," "revolution," and, stronger still, "dictator." But what do these words mean in a globalised economic system? The new generation of left-wing leaders in Latin America has been the subject of much debate and controversy. According to some (often themselves) they are saviours, come to redress historical injustices; for others they are demagogues, interested only in power and their egos. Where does the truth lie?

Rafael Correa, Ecuador's dynamic president, is one such conundrum. Elected in 2006 as a "socialist," Correa has done as much to infuriate as placate the left. Castaneda calls him "populist" and "bad left,"<sup>1</sup> lumping him with close collaborator Hugo Chavez, Evo Morales and the Kirchners. But the term "populism" is notoriously slippery, and has become synonymous with a clientelistic style now ever-present in Latin American politics. Others call these leaders "authoritarian," even though they have been democratically elected (often repeatedly). Canovan's theory of the "two faces of democracy" throws light on this paradox: it describes "pragmatic" and "redemptive" faces, and argues populism thrives on the tension between the two.<sup>2</sup>

This tension can be traced through the history of Ecuador, a country long run by and for the economic elites: first the *latifundistas* of the Sierra, latterly neoliberal business interests based in the coastal city of Guayaquil. Periodically, however, the under-represented majority gain a voice and concessions, usually by backing a "populist" champion like 5-time president Velasco Ibarra. In the 1990s, when neoliberal ideology was most dominant and political parties abandoned voters, it was the indigenous movement (CONAIE) that renewed public faith in democracy. Still there were increasing signs of a crisis of legitimacy in the political order and a search for alternatives – like the election of outsider Abdala "El Loco" Bucaram, ousted after just 6 months. Following a financial meltdown in 1999/2000, CONAIE's pact with Colonel Lucio Gutierrez got him elected. But he abandoned the social movement in favour of the economic elite, and was driven out in 2005. By then CONAIE was damaged, Ecuador had ousted 3 presidents in 8 years, inequality was rising, and belief in democracy reached new lows.<sup>3</sup>

Cometh the hour, cometh the candidate: economist Rafael Correa, a political outsider who vowed to end "the long dark night of neoliberalism," rewrite the constitution, and run off the corrupt party regime. A jaded electorate opted to gamble on the charismatic newcomer. Since then he has transformed the Ecuadorian political landscape, and enjoys unprecedented levels of public approval. Yet doubts remain on both the left and right, as Correa alternates between his "pragmatic" and "redemptive" faces. Correa may have done what no other

Ecuadorian president has – keep his promises – but he clearly has his own vision for the country and plays hard to get his way.

Elected with no political party, Correa engineered the dissolution of Congress and convened a Constituent Assembly to write a new constitution. He increased the poverty bond, queried debt repayments, and refused to allow a US military base. He has adopted proposals by social movements, and recently seized assets of corrupt bankers. But Correa has another side. The dissolution of Congress was illegal, and when his Alianza Pais movement gained a majority in the Assembly, it proceeded to pass numerous decrees. Correa's economic plans involve exploiting oil, mining and hydroelectricity, so environmental groups are as likely to feel the lash of his tongue as the elite "mafiosos."<sup>4</sup> Correa has allied himself neither with business groups nor social movements, and anxiety abounds at the concentration of power in the presidency.

The new constitution approved by the electorate on September 27<sup>th</sup> is a perfect example of this schizophrenia. Elements of the document are progressive, even ground-breaking: rights to water, food, clean environment, health and education are guaranteed – it even recognises "nature" as having rights. But the constitution also increases presidential power over all areas of the economy, including natural resources, and allows for two presidential terms. In an uncanny echo, Ecuador's premier political magazine highlighted these "Two Faces of the Constitution"<sup>5</sup> in a recent article. Bear in mind also that the 1998 Constitution guaranteed potable water even while TNC Bechtel were allowing children in Guayaquil suffer Hepatitis A due to contaminated water.<sup>6</sup> You cannot drink a right.

Correa has destroyed the corrupt, elitist party system and restored belief in democracy, and for this he is hugely popular among the country's poor majority. And the rights in the new constitution are to be welcomed. But as with other "populist" leaders, Correa is as much realist as revolutionary, and only time will tell which face he will show when hard choices are required between respecting rights and economic progress. What is clear, however, is that it will be his decision.

<sup>1</sup> Castaneda, Jorge G., and Marco A. Morales, 2007. 'The Left Turn Continues,' *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 13(2): 201-210.

<sup>2</sup> Canovan, Margaret, 1999. 'Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy,' *Political Studies*, 47: 2-16.

<sup>3</sup> *Latinobarometro* Summary Report 2005.

<sup>4</sup> LASC partner Acción Ecologica has come in for harsh criticism from Correa.

<sup>5</sup> Arroyo, Maria Belen (2008), 'Las Dos Caras de la Constitución,' *Revista Vistazo*, 1 August. [www.vistazo.com](http://www.vistazo.com).

<sup>6</sup> Joiner, Emily (2007), *Murky Waters/Aguita Amarilla*. Guayaquil: UUSC.

**Colombia**

President Uribe is under pressure following revelations of extra-judicial killings of innocent civilians by the armed forces. An investigation into the deaths of 11 youths from Bogota revealed that the military are luring jobless men into remote areas with the promise of work, only to execute them and present their bodies as paramilitaries. This is to cover up drug-running by army officers, in league with right-wing paramilitaries. Some 2,300 members of the Colombian army are currently under investigation.

Source: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7701556.stm>

**Guatemala**

The Americas Social Forum (part of the World Social Forum that began in Brazilian city Porto Alegre in 2001) took place in Guatemala City from October 7<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup>, providing an important space for social movements and the construction of alternatives to neo-liberalism, under the slogan "Another World is Possible." Over 7,000 delegates from the Americas engaged in discussions covering issues like rights to land and water, food sovereignty, free trade agreements, and mining, which affect rural and indigenous communities.

Source: <http://upsidedownworld.org/main/content/view/1524/1/>

**Uruguay**

The model of agriculture in Uruguay has seen a decline in small and medium farming, the concentration of land in the hands of big enterprises, and a food crisis. On October 16<sup>th</sup> (International Food Day) organisations of peasant farmers, small producers and environmental groups outlined the negative effect of monoculture forestation, and called on the Uruguayan authorities to take action to protect family-based agriculture, and to reintroduce local crops to promote food sovereignty.

Source: <http://webs.chasque.net/~rapaluy/>

**attention all members!**

LASC will hold its Annual General Meeting on Saturday, 29<sup>th</sup> November beginning 10:45am at the Teachers' Club, 36 Parnell Square West. Along with the election of a new committee, this year's AGM will include the presentation of LASC's Strategic Plan for 2009-2012. **All members are cordially invited.**

**LASC recommends...****book****Silent Revolution**

by Duncan Green

For anyone seeking a primer on Latin America in the last century, but baffled by the economic-babble now dominating our airwaves, Duncan Green's excellent second edition (first published 1995) is just the ticket. Simple while never simplistic, Green uses case studies, statistics and clear prose to build a compelling case against the 'silent revolution' of neoliberal market economics. What's more, he goes on to outline alternatives to the current hegemony: take note, Messrs. Cowen, Brown, Sarkozy...

Available from the LASC Library.

**music****Mestizo Music;****Rebelión en América Latina**

This album of explosive anti-globalisation anthems successfully fuses contemporary Latin American styles – Latin Ska, Cumbia, Reggae, Hip Hop, Salsamuffin and Mangubeat – with dynamic rhythm and flair whilst delivering a clear political message. With contributions from well-knowns such as Sergeant Garcia, and less well-knowns, such as a rare recording of the uplifting 'Hymn of the Landless Movement,' this album is the soundtrack to Latin America's social justice movement.

Available online (Trikont 2005).

**film****Nuestra America**

This film depicts developments in Nicaragua over the past 25 years. Filmmaker Kristina Konrad – who lived and worked in Nicaragua during the 1980s – returns to find things much changed since the Sandinista revolution, including the imposition of a neoliberal regime. The documentary focuses on two women who were actively engaged during the revolution and fought against the Contras, and this personal viewpoint gives the story added power.

The film was presented by Victoria Diaz Garcia as a LASC Thursday Night Talk, and is available from the LASC Library.

**voices of latin america: Corporacion Ecológica y Cultural Penca de Sabila**

Penca de Sabila is a cultural and ecological organisation located in Medellín, Colombia. It is part of the umbrella organisation ECOFONDO. In 1988 the organisation began to work in environmental education with teachers; urban, rural and popular sectors; women and youth organisations; and indigenous people and black communities. All participants share the desire to construct alternative national and global policies to those that have caused a planetary crisis.

Penca de Sabila works on education projects and the promotion of alternative environmental management from a holistic and interdisciplinary perspective. The organisation contributes to the improvement of quality of life of the communities, and also helps to guarantee the biological and cultural diversity of Colombia. It promotes the construction of environmental management alternatives, integrating participative democracy, sustainable economy, and the use of appropriate technologies.

Currently, Penca de Sabila is working in four main areas: (1) food sovereignty and economic sustainability; (2) social and environmental management of the territory; (3) environmental culture and politics; (4) education. The organisation participates in campaigns such as the Women's Pacific Route, food sovereignty, and the referendum for the defence of the human right to water in Colombia, thereby strengthening its social and political ethos.

ColyFlor, a fair trade store, arose from the group's work with farmers in a rural area of Medellín. In ColyFlor farmers sell their agro-ecological products at a fair price, and Penca de Sabila provides advice and workshops about appropriate technologies. The Agro-ecological School in San Cristobal, a rural area of Medellín, offers alternative education to local people, highlighting the possibilities for sustainable lifestyles.

For more information, go to: [www.corpenca.org](http://www.corpenca.org) and [www.ecofondo.org](http://www.ecofondo.org)

Valeria Llano Arias of Penca de Sabila is working as Information Officer at LASC as part of the project "Water for life, learning from youth."

**contact us!**

We want your views and opinions: on the contents of this Newsletter (in particular the Feature Article), and any other news from Latin America. The best comments will be included in the next issue of Chaski.

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