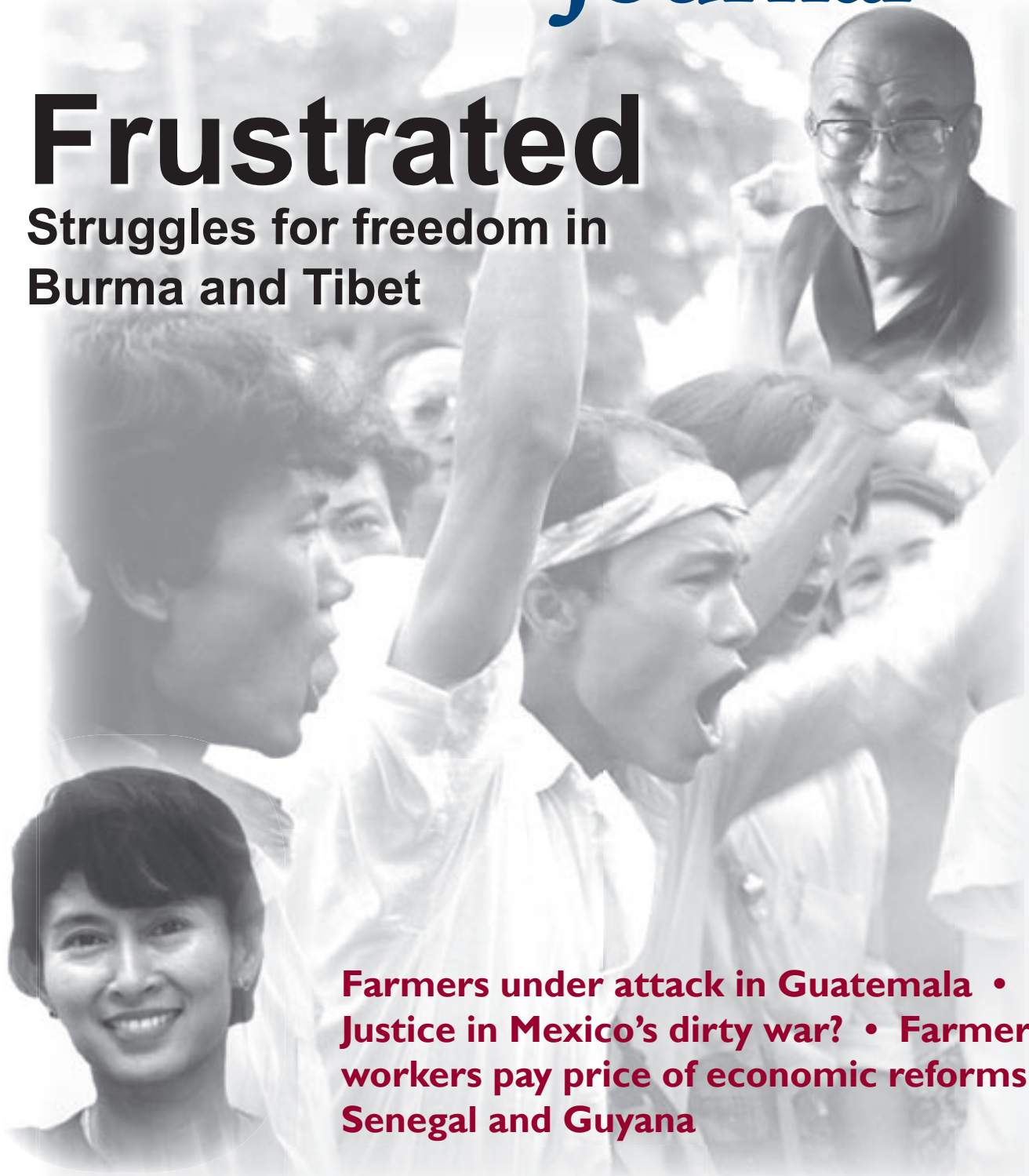


The Upstream Journal

Frustrated

Struggles for freedom in
Burma and Tibet



**Farmers under attack in Guatemala •
Justice in Mexico's dirty war? • Farmers,
workers pay price of economic reforms in
Senegal and Guyana**

A new *Upstream Journal*

New content, new look, new focus...

The *Upstream Journal* is moving in a new direction. This issue is the first step, and we plan to make the journal better with every issue to come. Here is what we're changing:

The content. Shorter, more focused articles will better reflect our perspective of Third World poverty as a human rights issue. We have a new contract with InterPress wire service, a tremendous source of news on human rights and development issues with stories from correspondents around the world.

Design. We have shifted to completely different graphic and layout software. We're learning to use Adobe's cutting-edge InDesign, Photoshop and Illustrator, to aim for better images and clearer type. The layout is getting a makeover, starting with a revamped front page.

Production. The same size and 16 pages, but we've added just a touch of colour and use a better quality newsprint.

Now more than ever, the *Upstream Journal* is a journal of social, economic and cultural rights.

We're sorry it's meant delays, but we think the rough parts of the changeover are behind us. Please let us know what you think as the *Upstream Journal* evolves.

The *Upstream Journal* is published by the Social Justice Committee, Montreal. Reflecting the SJC perspective of Third World poverty as a human rights issue, the *Upstream Journal* focuses on economic, social and cultural rights.

Views expressed in the *Upstream Journal* are the writers' own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Social Justice Committee. We welcome the submission of illustrations and articles on aspects of international development and human rights. Editor Derek MacCuish - upstream@s-j-c.net or 1-514-933-6797

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Social Justice Committee
Annual General Meeting

18 May 6:30pm

St. Patrick's Church
(Congress Hall)

454 René Lévesque blvd. ouest

Guest speaker

Rev. Pierre Goldberger
Recently returned from five
years in Guatemala working with
indigenous people.

Election of the Board of Directors -
nominations now open. Any 5 members of
the SJC can nominate a member for election
to the Board. Nominations should be sent in
writing, with the nominee's letter of assent, to
the SJC office by May 11.

Trying to save Tibet's culture

A first-hand perspective on why Tibetan cultural survival is the priority for the Dalai Lama

by Hanna McLane

On a dirt road in Tibet five children ran around me, their faces smudged and sunburned a healthy red. Their giggles were contagious as they took turns giving me handfuls of bright yellow flowers. It was dusk, and it looked as if they had been playing all afternoon. We smiled at each other, making hand gestures in an effort to communicate.

Then, I was surprised to hear words that I understood. One of the children said "Zuo ba" to another, which means 'sit down' in Mandarin. I wondered if they could speak Mandarin, which I had studied for a year, so I tried it out.

"Nimen hui shuo hanyu ma?"

They couldn't believe it! They all began jumping around and excitedly sang, "Ta hui shuo hanyu!" ("She speaks Chinese!")

That changed everything. Now I could ask them about themselves - their names, where they lived, what their school was like. We sat down on the grass together to talk, and I learned that they often use Mandarin, not Tibetan, when conversing with each. Mandarin is the language of instruction in schools.

One little girl, about eight years old, insisted that I accept her schoolbook as a gift. It was the only thing she had to give me.

China's 'saving' of Tibet

The schoolbook story was of the Chinese arrival and their 'saving' Tibet. There were images of Mao Zedung (the Chinese Communist leader in 1949) shaking hands with Tibetans, with Chinese

flags waving behind him.

This is what they are teaching Tibetan children almost fifty years after the illegal occupation of Tibet. Do Chinese government officials actually think they can erase the horrors of the Chinese invasion from the memories of the next generation of Tibetans?

"But Hannah, you know we are not free, right?"

Later that evening a Tibetan woman invited me in for tea. She introduced me to her family, and served me warm butter tea. They were also excited to converse with a Westerner through Mandarin. We had a wonderful conversation, the entire family sitting in the room with me.

I hinted that I was interested in the political situation, but was fully aware of the Chinese guards on the streets of this remote town of about three hundred people. The woman's husband explained to me that they are happy, because they have their family and their health.

Then he looked me in the eyes, lowered his voice, and whispered in a tone that I will never forget, "But Hannah, you know we are not free, right? You know that."

I tell him I know.

Tibetans can be imprisoned for possessing a Tibetan flag. The Dalai Lama, beloved as a spiritual and political leader, was forced to leave his people. It is actually illegal to possess even a photograph of him. I met multiple travelers who smuggled postcards of the Dalai Lama into Tibet. Many Tibetans would fall to their knees in tears just to receive one of these photographs.

I was in Lhasa (the Capital of Tibet) on



Tibetans sell souvenirs in front of the Potola Palace, former home of the Dalai Lama, now a tourist attraction run by the Chinese government.

the Dalai Lama's birthday. He was not there, of course, but even so the Chinese government would not allow foreigners to leave their hotels that day. In an effort to curb any sort of protest, tanks were rolled into the square in front of the main Buddhist Temple.

There was no protest. It all seemed so ridiculous - tanks in front of the temple?

If Tibetan culture is to remain intact, it is imperative to achieve some sort of cultural independence from China. Forced cultural integration has been the norm since the Chinese invaded Tibet in 1949. More than 6,000 monasteries were destroyed and more than a million Tibetans were killed. Mandarin Chinese is the language of instruction in schools, and the government of China has encouraged large-scale migration of Han Chinese into Tibet to make Tibetans a minority in their own land.

The Tibetan struggle has remained

peaceful for more than half a century. The non-violent reaction to the occupation is largely due to the pervasiveness of Buddhism in Tibet. In a time of terrorism and violence around the world, it would seem that a commitment to peace in the face of adversity and cultural suppression would be highly respected. Sadly, this does not seem to be the case.

Young generation militancy and violence?

Tired of the international community ignoring their struggle, some of the younger generation of Tibetans are calling for militancy and violence. Resorting to violence would be sad proof that it seems the only way to be heard in the world.

For more than fifty years the international community has been reluctant to actively assist Tibet. The Dalai Lama desperately appealed for international help in 1949, but to no avail. A Nobel Peace Prize winner, he is an internationally recognized spiritual teacher, but Prime Minister Paul Martin has not yet agreed to meet with him when he comes

to Ottawa on April 21st. The last time he came to Canada was 1993. Sadly, the most likely explanation of Paul Martin's hesitating to meet the Dalai Lama would be an effort to please China and retain Canada's privileged trade status.

Cultural survival is now the most pressing issue in the Tibetan struggle. As head of the Tibetan government-in-exile, the Dalai Lama has put political independence aside and is imploring the Chinese to grant Tibet cultural autonomy. If granted, Tibet would remain a province of China, but each person would be free to practice his or her religion of choice. Cultural traditions would not be restricted, and Tibetans would have the power to decide what is taught in their schools.

Hanna McLane is an intern with the Social Justice Committee.



Report links growth in Tibet sex trade to unequal economic development

by Sanjay Suri

LONDON, Jan 13 (IPS)

Disproportionate development is leading to increased prostitution in Tibet, an independent investigation report says.

"An increasing number of Tibetan women from rural areas, particularly in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), are working as prostitutes," says a report by Tibetan Information Network (TIN), a London-based non-governmental organisation that gathers and disseminates information from Tibet.

"This study was based on about six months of investigation," TIN director Thierry Dodin told IPS. Five persons were involved in the investigation, he said.

The report links the growth in the sex trade to development models focused on urban areas.

"Whereas economists express serious doubts about the sustainability of the economic growth in Tibet, which is artificially fuelled by heavy subsidy from Beijing, there is little doubt that it has generated higher levels of disposable income in a few urban centres while leaving the vast majority of Tibetans who live in rural areas in a state of stagnating poverty," the report says.

"At the same time, the aggressive consumerism propagated in rural areas by the increasing penetration of the state controlled media has raised expectations impossible to fulfil locally," it says.

The report says rural Tibetans are not only poorer, their extremely low level of education makes their chances of getting a steady and lucrative job in the cities as good as nonexistent.

The Canada Tibet Committee Campaign

The Canada Tibet Committee (CTC) is asking the Canadian government to act as a neutral third party in a genuine dialogue between Tibet and China. This is a viable way for a third party (and trusted friend of the Chinese) to help with negotiations without offending China.

The campaign goal is to have least 150 Members of Parliament sign a letter supporting a Canadian role in Tibet-China negotiations. More than 135 MPs have signed so far. The CTC hopes to get all these signatures before the Dalai Lama arrives here on April 21st. Hopefully the Prime Minister Paul Martin and the Dalai Lama can then discuss Canada's role in the China-Tibet dialogue.

To help in the current campaign, please go to the CTC website and see if your MP has signed the letter yet. If not, please write your representative and say that you would be proud to have Canada act as a neutral third party in the China-Tibet dialogue. You can also help by sending a letter to Prime Minister Paul Martin and urge him to meet the Dalai Lama this April.

The CTC is a non-profit organization fighting for Tibetan cultural autonomy through political pressure. For more information, please visit the website: www.tibet.ca

The movement for democracy in Burma: Canadian connections

Young people active in the Burma freedom movement come to Canada to build their lives and gain support for the struggle

by Luingamla Kashungnao

In 1989 I was studying in India at Ghana Priya Women's College, unaware that student leaders of Burma's democratic movement were languishing in Imphal Central Jail a few blocks away. They were released a year and a half later, through the hard work of a human rights lawyer, but little did I know that I would eventually marry one of them and move to Canada.

Meeting my husband was an eye opener for me, and I have not once regretted supporting him and the people of Burma in their struggle for democracy.

We lived together in New Delhi for five years before we came to Canada. Food was hard to come by, and four or five people had to live together in a one room apartment.

Every evening, after a hard day's

work, we would gather at the small office of the All Burma Students League to discuss ways to restore democracy in Burma. On weekends more of us would gather to plan actions and campaigns, and develop what are still the guiding principles for many Burmese people working for democracy.

I took part in many demonstrations, rallies, meetings and events although I could barely understand the Burmese language. Just the sight of people coming from all parts of New Delhi and different states of India in support was more than enough for me to understand their desire for democracy.

In time, many of us decided to move to other parts of the world to raise awareness about the Burmese democratic movement and strengthen its international recognition. In 1998 my husband and I moved to Canada, where we are in a different ball game completely. Now the greatest fear in my life here is the thought that I might become complacent about the democratic movement of Burma, but we are working constantly with Canadian people, NGOs and government agencies and with Burmese people throughout

the world.

The fallout of the forty-two years of brutal military dictatorship in Burma is enormous in terms of human, political, social and economic security and stability. The junta stays in power through its use of torture, political and religious persecution, intimidation, rape, forced labour and relocation, imprisonment, deprivation of basic needs, and the closing of educational institutions. Once the "Rice Bowl of Asia," Burma is now



The author, front left, at a protest in Ottawa. Life in Burma would mean imprisonment.

Nov. 7, 2003 Le Château, a major Montreal based clothing retailer has agreed to discontinue the sale of products from Burma. In a statement issued today, Le Château President, Emilia Di Raddo stated that the company will terminate the sale of all product from Burma and no longer deal with third parties who may sell goods from Burma. The company mentioned the US import ban and the reasons for such a ban as also having influenced their decision to stop business with Burma.

- Source: Canadian Friends of Burma

one of the Least Developed Countries with a grave human rights record and a militarized economy.

There are more than one and half million Burmese refugees living in Thailand, India and Asian countries. Many have also taken refuge in Canada, United States, Australia and Europe. It is difficult to know the number of internally displaced people, which could be in the millions.

For many years the people of Burma, including political leaders, NGOs and individuals, have lobbied agencies like the United Nations to help restore democracy and human rights in the country and to stop doing business with the military junta. Reports on Burma come out and resolutions are passed, but how useful are they when no concrete action is being taken? The inaction of the



international community is dismayed.

Turning a blind eye

It is also more difficult when government policies have double standards. On one hand, the Canadian government has passed measures such as not giving bilateral and multilateral aid. It does not issue visas to military junta officials, does not send diplomatic representatives, and bans military sales. On the other, it turns a blind eye to the behaviour of Canadian corporations.

Passing legislation is one thing, but ensuring that it is implemented is another. Denouncing the junta's repressive actions, asking for the release of political prisoners, and supporting political dialogue have become symbolic token gestures with no teeth. International communities and governments bestow Aung San Suu Kyi with accolades, but how meaningful are they when she is under house arrest and democracy is denied to the people of Burma?

Companies like Ivanhoe Mines, Canadian Helicopters International, International Bio-Recovery, Nortel Networks and Walmart-Canada share huge dividends with the military government. Ivanhoe

Mines, based in British Columbia, is accused of developing its infrastructure in Burma by using forced labour and forced relocation with no compensation. Unocal Corporation, an oil and gas company based in California, has a \$1.2 billion investment in oil pipeline construction in Burma. It has been engaged in court battles charged with responsibility for the rape, beating, torture and killing of construction workers.

The Salween River mega-dam project, an infamous joint venture with Thailand funded by the Asian Development Bank, is another example of international complicity. Apart from the high human cost, the environmental damages caused by these corporations are impossible to reverse.

The junta's allies

India has joined China as the closest allies of the junta, building cross-border highways to boost its bilateral trade with Burma, including the supply of small and medium arms and ammunition.

I often wonder what it would take to make the international community wake from its deep slumber of indifference. The world started talking about Burma after the ambush of Aung San Suu Kyi's convoy

"We call on the international community, and particularly Burma's ASEAN neighbours, to use their influence to encourage national reconciliation and a return to democracy in Burma. We also urge the Canadian business community to refrain from entering into further investment agreements or commercial ventures in Burma until improvements are evident."

- August 7, 1997 Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Lloyd Axworthy announcing "further actions on Burma, including selective economic measures and humanitarian assistance."*

**Withdrawing Burma's General Preferential Tariff eligibility and placing Burma on the Area Control List, which requires all exports from Canada to Burma to have an export permit.*

"Sanctions have been described as a form of war. The very idea is absurd, any impartial observer would agree, when there is the viable alternative of peaceful and progressive improvement of an area within a country through appropriate investment. Ivanhoe Mines would prefer to contribute to improvement within Myanmar than to become a casualty of external political confrontation which has no certain outcome."

- Excerpt from Ivanhoe Mines background information on the Monywa copper project in Burma www.ivanhoe-mines.com

in May 2003. Isn't it ironic that eleven people have to be killed and more than 220 members of the National League for Democracy have to be arrested to get the attention of the world? Do the lives of thousands of people who have sacrificed their lives for democracy mean nothing at all? The struggle has been sidelined in the international arena despite the pleas for international interventions. It seems that there are always more important burning issues.

Although we Canadians are physically far away from Burma, our actions can have an impact on the struggle for democracy. We can work to make the restoration of democracy in Burma a major foreign policy of our government, and push for a long term genuine commitment to supporting the democratic movement. Let us help in rebuilding Burma into a democratic nation where all citizens can fully exercise their rights and freedoms without fear from persecution and violence.

Luingamla Kashungnao is a Board Member of the Canadian Friends of Burma. You can contact the author by email: luingamla@sympatico.ca.

Find out more visit the web site of the Canadian Friends of Burma - www.cfob.org. For information about the All Burma Students League visit <http://absl.myip.org>

Burma refugees' return won't be easy

by Marwaan Macan-Markar
BANGKOK, Mar 17 (IPS)

When the U.N. refugee agency takes its first tentative steps into military-ruled Burma this year, the workshops and seminars it holds there will form the foundation of plans to prepare for the return - if and when this happens - of thousands of refugees. In other words, U.N. refugee officials say, permission by Rangoon for the U. N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to visit the country does not mean that refugees are going to be back into the country any time soon.

The U.N. agency will be holding workshops and seminars in three areas of Burma - the Karen and Mon states and the Tenasserim Division, all of which are along Burma's south-eastern border near Thailand -- to get an idea of conditions there.

"The workshops will help us assess the ground situation," Hasim Utkan, head of the UNHCR regional office in Bangkok, told IPS. "There are some minimum conditions that need to be fulfilled before people are offered the opportunity to go home."

However, he said that UNHCR - which on Mar. 11 said it had finally been given permission to visit Burma's border area - will not be assigning a "full-fledged team" from its staff for this initial operation in

the three areas. The workshop themes during the Geneva-based humanitarian agency's preliminary efforts in Burma will cover health, education, community services, infrastructure development and landmine clearance.

UNHCR hopes that these efforts will pave the way for these basic services and safety to be restored in villages and communities ahead of the day when refugees return.

"What is significant is that the SPDC has recognised that UNHCR should be there as a first step towards people returning," Utkan said in reference to the State Peace and Development Council

News brief

Nepal: Maoist Conflict Sends Country Adrift

By Suman Pradhan

KATHMANDU, Mar 11 (IPS) - More

than 1,500 people dead, over 250 disappeared, and thousands more rendered homeless in trying to flee ravaged villages. These are not the final casualty figures in the wake of a natural disaster, but the toll of the Maoist conflict in Nepal since the collapse of the last ceasefire in August 2003.

These numbers show that the conflict in this poor Himalayan kingdom has turned into just about the deadliest conflict in Asia. The overall death toll in the conflict, which first began in February 1996, has reached more than 9,130.

"This is by far the most violent conflict in South Asia," said Deepak Thapa, an author and expert on the Maoist conflict. "The rate of daily killings has doubled since the resumption of hostilities."

The violent turn in the conflict came about in late August last year, when a seven-month truce between the government and the Maoists, who are fighting for a republican state, collapsed in the face of mutual intransigence.

Powell suggests US will keep ban on Burma imports

U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell suggested on 10 March the U.S. market would remain closed to imports from Burma, whose military rulers have detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi for months.

Mr. Powell told US lawmakers that he has seen no improvement in the situation and that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi remains unable to participate in public, political life in Burma.

He added that the US will continue to apply pressure and that he will be looking at the sanctions issue very, very carefully with the same attitude he looked at it last year.

President George W. Bush on July 28 signed into law the Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act barring imports from Burma. Under the legislation, the import ban must be renewed each year and expires after three years.

The law requires the secretary of state to report to Congress about the efficacy of the sanctions 90 days before their renewal date in late July.

- Source: *Democratic Voice of Burma* www.dvb.org

Coffee crisis worsened by agricultural subsidies in rich countries

(SPDC), as Rangoon's junta is officially known.

There are close to 120,000 refugees in nine camps along the Thai-Burma border. More than 90,000 of them are from the Karen ethnic community, while over 20,000 are Karennis. In Karen state some 200,000 displaced persons are reported to be living in the jungle.

The steps being taken by UNHCR to help these refugees return are no different from the measures it pursued earlier when helping refugees from Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, who left in the 1960s and '70s, return home from Thailand.

Since 1975, more than 1.3 million people from neighbouring countries have sought refuge in Thailand from wars and conflicts. The 1980s witnessed the highest presence of refugees in this South-east Asian nation - over 300,000 being assisted in UNHCR camps.

But while the U.N. agency considers the moment opportune for it to finally enter Burma -- after a decade of appealing to the military regime for access to the areas where the refugee population come from - there are some who question this move.

Some Burmese exiles in Thailand argue that UNHCR's efforts will be undermined if the junta refuses to proceed with its plans to push ahead this year with its much-banded political reform process.

"I was not surprised by the SPDC's decision to let UNHCR in, but I think the decision to start work is premature," said Soe Aung, external affairs director of the Network for Democracy and Development, a group made up of Burmese exiles in Thailand.

"It is better if UNHCR waits till the political dialogue begins before going into Burma," he added during an interview.

by Emad Mekay

WASHINGTON, Mar 11 (IPS)

The World Bank is blaming over-supply from coffee producing countries and protectionism in rich nations for complicating a worldwide coffee crisis that has dealt a blow to some 20 million farmers globally.

Agricultural subsidies paid by northern governments to their own farmers means that coffee-growers are unable to leave the depressed sector to grow other more lucrative crops because they cannot effectively compete, adds a new report from the Bank.

Watchdog groups say the problem's roots can also be found within international coffee companies that do not pay enough to poor producers.

According to the report some 20 million coffee growers and millions more people who depend on coffee for their livelihoods have seen their incomes and lives buffeted as coffee prices slumped to their lowest levels in a century. More than 50 nations, almost all of them in the developing world, produce and export coffee, which is grown mainly by smallholders using just a few hectares of land.

Slumping prices worldwide have increased poverty in many countries,

cutting valuable export revenues. The estimated economic loss to small producers is 4.5 billion dollars a year, says the Bank.

Because of their dependency on coffee exports, Central America and Africa have been the hardest hit region, seeing small farmers drop into poverty and workers displaced.

"The effect of the coffee business in poor countries is quite striking," says the report. In Nicaragua, it adds, between 1998 and 2001 overall poverty rates dropped 15 percent, except among people in the coffee sector, where poverty rose 2.4 percent.

The situation has been even more dramatic in other coffee-producing countries. Farmers in India's southern state of Karnataka, hit by low coffee prices and a loss of markets, have reportedly started taking their own lives.

"It goes without saying that with a crop of such significance for some countries, the destabilising effect of the price crisis sparks concern precipitating bank failures, public protests and dramatic falls in export revenues," the report concludes.

The document argues that oversupply in world market is the main reason for the crisis, but also blames "structural shifts in the markets" and protectionism in rich nations.

"Trade protectionism in industrial country markets, particularly continued high levels of subsidy in industrial countries for their own farmers, pose additional obstacles to diversification into other activities or into higher value or processed products, and thereby leave producers with limited access to these markets."



Guatemalan police evict farmers

Government failure to implement reforms promised in Peace Accords means heightened tension and violence in rural communities

by Ernie Schibli

Agents of Guatemala's Special Police Force surrounded the Chipar farm in Coban, Alta Verapaz, in the early morning of February 18, and evicted the forty-five Maya-Q'ujiché families living there.

Setting up roadblocks on the main road from Coban to San Juan Chamelco, they checked identification papers and conducted body searches in a manner reminiscent of Guatemala's civil war period.

This is the fourth farm eviction since Oscar Berger assumed the presidency of Guatemala in January. About three hundred families have been evicted from farms, according to the Agrarian Platform (*Plataforma Agraria*) coalition of Guatemalan organizations for land reform.

The farms were occupied by men and women, with their children, trying to pressure landowners to fulfil their labour obligations and to insist that the state guarantee the rights of food, life, housing and work.

The evictions took place despite President Berger's election campaign promise to find a solution to the land problem.

Land reform is one of the more important issues facing the new Guatemalan government. Early in the country's colonial history wealthy land barons appropriated most of the country's good land where they grow a variety of export crops or graze cattle. The vast majority of the people, mostly indigenous, are relegated to farming infertile land high in the mountains or in the jungle. This land is too poor to support them, so many farmers work on

the rich plantations during harvest time as cheap labourers. Some live full time on small plots of land on the *fincas* (large farms) where they serve as a permanent labour force. In either case salaries are very low and conditions difficult.

With the collapse of the international coffee market and poor sales of several other commodities, the land barons now have less need for workers. In quite a few cases, they evict those living on the *fincas*. Some are refusing to leave, contesting the evictions in the courts where they occasionally win. Others, with no place to go, squat on inactive *fincas*. Land barons respond by forcing them off the land and sometimes destroying their homes, crops and belongings. The police are usually the agents of these evictions.

When the civil war ended in 1996, the government committed to land reform when it signed the Accord on Socio-economic Issues and the Agrarian Situation. The government agreed to facilitate the access of peasant farmers to land and

productive resources, and to promote the resolution of conflicts. Although the two previous governments have done very little to abide by this accord, there had been some hope that President Berger would live up to his promise to solve the problem.

The Canadian connection

Canada played a very strong role in promoting the Peace Accords. Now that there is a new government, there might be a temptation on Canada's part to give it time, especially since the government has shown a greater interest in free trade agreements than the others. Canada is currently negotiating a free trade agreement with Guatemala and three other Central American countries and is an enthusiastic supporter of the proposed Free Trade Agreement of the Americas.

Nevertheless we must remember that the new Guatemalan government's base is largely made up of the land barons and the big business community, the very people who have promoted and benefited from the current socio-economic system. Moreover, there are increased hunger and disease throughout the country. The indigenous people of Guatemala need to be treated justly now, not some time in the distant future.

You can respond

The Social Justice Committee has sent letters of protest to Guatemalan and Canadian government authorities about the increasing land expulsions in Guatemala, the most recent being the one in Alta Verapaz. You too can let your opinion be heard by writing to Guatemalan or Canadian government officials.



* Ask them to immediately stop the evictions at Chipar, in San Juan Chamelco, Coban, Alta Verapaz and elsewhere in the country;

* Urge them to address the structural land problem in Guatemala as a way to avoid the starvation of children and elderly and to prevent further violence.

* Remind them that under the 1996 Accord on Socio-economic Issues and the Agrarian Situation, part of the Peace Accords, the government is to develop an integrated strategy in rural areas that will facilitate the access of peasant farmers to the land and other productive resources, and promote the resolution of conflicts;

* Ask Canadian government officials to encourage Guatemalan authorities to stop the evictions and to abide by the Peace Accords, especially those dealing with agrarian reform.

And please continue to buy Fair Trade coffee, which helps Guatemalan and other farmers to survive.

His Excellency Ambassador Carlos Humberto Jimenez Licona
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Hon. Bill Graham
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House of Commons
Ottawa ON K1A 0A6



Guatemala: Protest against dam construction

Two men shot as hundreds of local people block highways

Chiapas Independent Media Center

More than 500 habitants of the region of Peten, Guatemala blocked highways at different points of the main route which runs from the oil region in the north, to the capital of the country. Protesters are opposed to the proposed construction of dams in this biologically diverse and culturally rich area.

Two protesters were shot by unidentified people in a white pick-up truck. The victims, Carlos Tiul Caal and Ricardo are in stable condition.

Protesters are concerned that the dam construction would mean the forcible displacement of 15,000 people – the majority of indigenous Qeqchi origin. These communities, recently returned from refuge in Mexico, could

lose their homes and land to flooding of more than 300 square kilometers.

The protest was organized by the Frente Petenero Contra Las Represas (Peten Front Against the Dams) and La Alianza Por La Vida y La Paz de Peten, composed of more than fifty community organizations from the watersheds of the Usumacinta, Pasion and Salinas rivers on the Mexican border.

Environmental groups and national and international intellectuals have joined in support of the communities demonstrating in favor of the protection of Sierra Lacandon National Park. The park is known for its rich biodiversity and for important Mayan archeological sites, such as Yaxchilan and Piedras Negras. Over 300 of these sites are at risk of being flooded by the dams.

Burma: Death sentences for contacting the ILO

Brussels (ICFTU OnLine)

The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) strongly condemned the Burmese authorities for the prosecution and subsequent sentencing to death of nine Burmese workers on charges of high treason.

Charges were brought against some individuals on the grounds of making contact with the United Nations' International Labour Organisation (ILO).

One defendant received the death sentence having been found in possession of the report of the ILO Commission of Inquiry on Forced Labour in Burma, and 'other sheets of paper', including the business card of an ILO official currently serving in Rangoon.

In a letter to the Burmese authorities, the Brussels-based ICFTU underlined that the prosecution of individuals for making contact with the ILO is a viola-

tion of fundamental human rights. The ICFTU highlighted the blatant hypocrisy of the Burmese authorities' pledges to work with the ILO to stamp out forced labour whilst prosecuting those individuals on grounds of treason for making contact with the UN agency.

As the world's largest trade union body, the ICFTU committed its support to the ILO Governing Body which is currently examining these disturbing cases. In its letter, the ICFTU wrote:

"The Burmese authorities must drop the charges of high treason against the defendants and ensure that they are released from prison. Anything short of this would show a flagrant disregard for fundamental human rights. The ICFTU will press the international community to use all tools available to ensure that the Burmese government ends the ongoing abuse of Burmese workers' rights."

SJC study identifies problems of exclusion and manipulation in World Bank/IMF programs

World Bank program was in trouble from the beginning, says new report from the Social Justice Committee

by Wendy Phillips

When I lived in Senegal, I asked my driver-friend of two years about life in the culturally rich African nation. He said it is hard, and getting harder, to get by and support a family. When I asked if he thought he could effect change in his country, he said no.

These answers are not marks of apathy or hopelessness. They reflect the reality of living in a country where government policy is disproportionately influenced by international financial institutions (IFIs) such as the World Bank and IMF.

My friend, like so many others in Senegal, would like a better life for himself. He would like the power to make choices that enable a sustainable future, socially, economically and politically.

Senegal qualifies for debt relief through the program overseen by the World Bank and IMF. This program requires that the government, with the participation of its people, draft its own strategy for poverty reduction, which would be outlined in a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). According to the rhetoric of the IFIs, the PRSP would put the government and its people in the "driver's seat" of their own development.

This is not what happened. After initially taking an arms length approach, the IFIs used their position as lenders to "suggest" changes, not only to the framework of the PRSP but also to the country's broader economic agenda.

In its recent study, "Driving Under the Influence: Senegal's PRSP Process," the Social Justice Committee looks in depth at the power dynamics underlying efforts

to reduce poverty in Senegal. Among other conclusions, the study suggests that empowering national strategies requires reinforcing the capacity of both elected officials and citizen groups.

The study identified several problems with the PRSP process.

The IFIs insisted on revisions to what the government considered its "final" version of the PRSP, citing shortcomings in the government's economic strategy.

The institutions also renegotiated the terms of another loan to include policies that would affect poverty reduction efforts. These were agreed without including the Senegalese people or keeping in mind the direction of the PRSP.

In drafting the PRSP, the government was supposed to engage its citizens in the process and formulate strategies that responding to the needs identified by the people. Ultimately, however, the government was more concerned with pleasing the IFIs than its citizens.

The government lacked the capacity to organize a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy process. It spent six months trying to find a department to run the PRSP process, compromising the time and scope for local citizen participation.

Despite opportunities for revisions, gaps between economic and social goals outlined in the PRSP were not addressed. As a result, there is the risk that social goals in areas like health and education become unrealistic under the economic framework.

Governments in countries like Senegal must no longer look to the IFIs for

guidance, but rather take control of their economic destiny. They must look instead to their people for strategies to reduce poverty and increase their standard of living.

The international financial institutions insist that they are sincere in their desire for countries to control their own development. If so, they must cease putting compliance with their preconceived notions of economic development before the full participation and ownership of processes like the PRSP by poor countries and their people.

Wendy Phillips was a World Vision Canada policy analyst for two years, living much of that time in Senegal, and is now assisting SJC policy research.

This study
and other
publications
by the Social
Justice
Committee are
available on
our web site:

www.s-j-c.net

Guatemala: Police raid home of respected rights leader

More than fifty agents from the Public Prosecutor's office and the National Civil Police raided the home of Amílcar Méndez in Santa Cruz de Quiché on Friday, March 12, 2004. He is the founder of the indigenous rights organization the Council of Ethnic Communities Ranujel Junam (CERJ).

The home was unoccupied and the time of the raid which was carried out under the pretext of searching for drugs, firearms, large amounts of cash, and various electronics allegedly stored there.

Neither Méndez nor CERJ have a criminal record. Members of CERJ believe they are being targeted for remaining on the forefront of fighting for human rights for the past eighteen years.

Sebastian Macario, veteran human rights director at CERJ, was killed after being shot four times on September 27, 2003.

A few days later Amílcar Méndez received threats suggesting the same would happen to him. His movements are occasionally monitored by unmarked vehicles stationed outside his home. The Inter-American Human Rights Commission has since taken measures to protect his safety.

On March 4th, 2004, Méndez testified at the Human Rights Commission of the Organization of American States regarding the Diego Velasquez case. Diego Velasquez, a CERJ member, was executed in May 1993 at a paramilitary Civilian Self-Defense Patrol (PAC) base in Quiché.

Méndez expressed concern and disappointment for being targeted as an alleged narco-trafficker or potential terrorist. In his view, this is a repeat of the intimidation in the 1970s and 1980s, when he and other CERJ members were targeted as communists.

Guyana miners comment on their situation as they lose the few jobs left in their struggling community

(see story opposite)

"The union and the company agreed that they would give no more than a hundred and four weeks pay, right? That means, even if you got fifty years service, you were only paid for a hundred and four weeks. All the rest, down the line. You couldn't tell me that's good enough for you. Would you like to know that you worked for forty years, and at the end of the day you get nothing but a hundred and four weeks of your money? Would that serve you well? That would be good for you? And this is what they're calling good."

"I was working for twelve years as an electrician, and finished up electrical joining at a rate of two hundred and six dollars an hour. The mines were closing up, and you could opt for voluntary redundancy, but at the end of the day everybody would be out."

"I'm not employed presently. And I have to live, I'm a young man. If they offer me a job, I will have no options to take it. It's better to work than to steal, it's better to be honest. But I'm not seeing anything."

"When you got nothing and you get something, you're dying to grasp it. You're so anxious to get it, to do what you don't ordinarily get to do."

So you have to be totally focused when you get that money because the economic condition in Guyana is so hard. You can't give a man nothing less than a million dollars who has been suffering for all the years, give him the work money, and expect him to be so focused and to spend it wisely.

You have to be focused. If you are not focused you are as good as dead tomorrow. I have seen instances where people have gotten their money and they spend it out. They are broken. They are on the road today, looking for another dollar."

"So far, they have only hired about a tenth of us, if that much. All the rest are from Omai. And the Linmine workers were suffering for so long, for some twenty-five, thirty years service. Sometimes, you know, when you look at these things, a man being a worker for thirty years, you know? And he has been made redundant on a six hundred thousand dollars pension plan, you know? Nowhere to turn to. It's a very hard situation."

Trade unions slam IMF attack on labour rights

Brussels, 3rd February: The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, jointly with other organisations, has criticized an IMF report, "Unemployment and labour market institutions: why reforms pay off," for its ideological bias, selective reading of evidence, and scant attention to the reality of European labour markets. The report argues that European countries could greatly reduce unemployment simply by adopting US-style labour market and competition rules, with much weaker legal and social protection of workers. High-level IMF spokespersons have publicly called on European governments to adopt policies based on this report.

John Monks, General Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation, said "It is hugely disappointing but not surprising that the IMF has swallowed wholesale the conservative view that the European Social Model is out of date. The American way is certainly not the only way and certainly not the best way of running economies. Europe has much to teach the USA about equality and civilised cities. It does not have to apologise."

World Bank/IMF programs take toll on workers

Hundreds lose jobs, thousands more may, under economic reforms required for debt relief, foreign assistance. SJC study examines flawed process.

by Derek MacCuish

Guyana is a country with political and social crises. Heavily indebted, the government has been trying to comply with the economic reforms demanded by the World Bank and IMF as preconditions for debt relief and development assistance loans.

Sweeping changes in the main economic sectors means that workers are losing their jobs. Rice farmers are in despair, unable to recover their costs as world prices continue the free fall subsidized by agricultural subsidies in wealthy countries.

Hundreds of miners at the country's main bauxite mine lost their jobs when the company came under the management of Cambior (Montreal). The management deal is a first step in the privatization required by the World Bank. Cambior will complete the deal if the government of Guyana can get a US\$20 million loan from the World Bank to cover the cost, and political risk insurance from Export Development Canada.

Sugar is the biggest industry in Guyana. The World Bank wants unproductive sectors closed. This would eliminate 8,000 jobs, in a Third World country with a total population a bit less than that of Ottawa. So far, the company has resisted efforts to shut these sectors, preferring to cross-subsidize from profitable areas, but the World Bank continues to press for the restructuring.

The whole story of economic change in Guyana in an in-depth study by the Social Justice Committee. The

study is the result of extensive research, and interviews with key people in Guyana and in the IMF and World Bank, from government ministers and IMF managers to laid off miners and rice farmers facing severe poverty and a bleak future.

The study takes a look at the main actors in the economic planning of the country: the international financial institutions, the donors (wealthy country development agencies), the government, and civil society. It describes a decision making process where confident, well-trained technocrats in Washington decide what is best for a country they have indeed come to like. Donor agencies are in a similar role, especially the British Department for International Development, which is deeply involved in public services like water and electricity, financing the management of these sectors by British firms.

The study explores the frustrations of

a government trying to maintain control in a difficult social situation, but one that bases its power on racial division and remains suspicious of civil society organizations. It also recognizes the weakness of civil society organizations, largely isolated from the decision making process.

This case study of economic reform, along with the study of reform in Senegal, provide several recommendations of what needs to change in the decision making processes, especially at the World Bank and IMF.

This study will be available in April on the web site www.s-j-c.net. Produced in partnership with the Halifax Initiative Coalition, which provided funding support.



Drag-line equipment the size of city buildings stand idle, rusting after years of neglect. The bauxite mine, now run by a Canadian company, is being restructured. All employees lost their jobs.

A Blow to Impunity Surrounding Dirty War

by Diego Cevallos

MEXICO CITY, Feb 19 (IPS)

Although everything seems to indicate that the 532 victims of forced disappearance from Mexico's "dirty war" against dissidents between the 1960s and the early 1980s were killed, their families believe they might still be alive - a hope that was fed by the arrest of a former intelligence chief.

The arrested police chief should "speak, and say where our children are, and they should be returned alive, just as they were when they were taken away," Rosario Ibarra, the head of the human rights group Eureka, which represents the families of people who were arrested and never heard from again, told IPS Thursday.

Miguel Nazar, former director of the now-defunct Federal Security Agency in

the 1970s and 1980s, was arrested late Wednesday. He was the first former security chief in Mexican history to be arrested in connection with past atrocities committed against dissidents.

Nazar, who was imprisoned in a penitentiary in the southern state of Nuevo León Thursday, is charged with kidnapping Ibarra's son, Jesús Piedra Ibarra, who was arrested in 1975, at the age of 21, for his alleged links to leftist insurgent groups.

"I don't hate him, but I do hope that he gives us information on where my son Jesús is, and that he pays for all of his crimes in prison, for the immense abuses he committed against my son and hundreds of other young people," said Ibarra.

Nazar's arrest "is a small piece of a large perverse puzzle in which many people, from presidents to low-ranking police officers, took part," added the 76-year-

old Ibarra, whose activism has led her to be nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize and as a presidential candidate for leftist parties, and who has twice held a seat in Congress.

From the 1960s to the early 1980s, 532 opponents of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) governments that ruled Mexico from 1929 to 2000 were taken away by the security forces and never seen alive again.

The forced disappearances were the other face of governments that claimed to hold up the ideals of Mexico's 1910-1920 revolution, supported Fidel Castro's socialist revolution in Cuba, and gave asylum to thousands of political refugees fleeing the military dictatorships ruling many countries of South America at the time.

Nazar, 79, who received training from the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) in the 1970s, claims to have known

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nothing about the dirty war, and says all of the accusations against him are false.

But according to witnesses and investigations by human rights groups, Nazar headed a police and military unit that infiltrated leftist insurgent groups and abducted and "disappeared" activists. Many of the victims were held in military prisons before they were killed and dumped into the sea from helicopters, according to a number of testimonies.

Ibarra says she found out that her son was held in a clandestine military prison until 1987, although she has no information on what might have happened to him after that.

"All of us mothers want our children back, and our idea is that they are still alive," she said.

Before December 2000, when President Vicente Fox of the conservative National Action Party became Mexico's first non-PRI president in seven decades, it seemed impossible that the events of the dirty war would ever be clarified. But in his campaign, Fox promised to bring to justice those responsible for past human rights abuses, and once in office he set up a "special prosecutor's office for social and political movements of the past" within the justice department, to investigate human rights abuses from that period.

In April 2003, the special prosecutor's office requested Nazar's arrest in connection with the kidnapping of Ibarra's son, but a judge ruled that the statute of limitations had run out on the case.

However, the prosecutors appealed to the Supreme Court, which ruled in November that the statute of limitations did not apply to cases of kidnapping and disappearance. In December, a lower court ordered Nazar's arrest, but the former police chief remained at large until Wednesday night, when he was arrested driving his luxury car in the Mexican capital, accompanied by a bodyguard.

Sources with the special prosecutor's office say they are also preparing arrest warrants for more than 300 former members of the police and military, including high-ranking officials, in connection with the dirty war abuses.

Film

When a Flooded Town Is a Laughing Matter

by Mario Osava

RIO DE JANEIRO, Feb 28 (IPS)

The fictional town of Javé is to be flooded by a dam that Brazil's authorities claim will generate electricity "and progress". The uprooting of its residents would be a sad tale, but it is told in a new film with such humour and human warmth that filmmakers have no choice but to laugh.

And this "tragicomedy" continues to rack up awards. Earlier this month "Narradores de Javé" (Storytellers of Javé) won best film at the Punta del Este International Film Festival, an annual event at the Uruguayan beach resort.

"Narradores de Javé" portrays many aspects of little-known rural Brazil: populations expelled from their homes by megaproject hydroelectric dams, the oral histories maintained by storytellers, rampant illiteracy and the naive malice of rural culture.

It is a profoundly Brazilian film in that much of the dialogue is not translatable, which is why its popularity in Uruguay and at the Rotterdam Film Festival last year in the Netherlands came as a bit of a surprise.

Director Eliane Caffé herself uses the term "tragicomedy" to refer to the story of the Javé residents, told in a rich way that combines a true-to-life reality with situational mix-ups and characters that are very funny -- at times hilarious.

Javé is a small town in impoverished rural northeast Brazil and is slated to be flooded by the dam that will "bring progress." All of the houses will be wiped out "in benefit of the majority, but we never find out who that majority is," comments one villager.

A local leader, Zaqueu, the town's link to the rest of the world, comes up with the idea that a book about the Javé's glorious past could lead to its designation as a historic site and there-

fore save the town from inundation.

To achieve this it would be enough to write down the stories that the town's older people are known for telling, replete with colourful details.

But for a writer, the only choice is Antonio Biá, the only person considered capable of recording the stories because all of the rest of the villagers are illiterate.

Biá is persona non grata in the village because, to justify his job at the post office -- useless in a town of illiterate people -- he wrote and sent letters to residents of other towns, reporting the idiosyncrasies and poor habits of the residents of Javé.

They ultimately have to reinstate the "writer", who was exiled to the town's periphery and who describes himself as an "intellectual", and entrust him with recording the oral memory of the community.

The mission proves to be impossible, with neighbours' contradictory versions about the same event, recalling for film aficionados "Rashomon", by Japanese director Akira Kurosawa. Each one tells the story about the founding of the town that is in his or her best interest.

Indalecio, the town's founding father, is remembered by an alleged descendant as European and as a model of courage, while others say he was of African origin and a leader of Brazilian blacks. Or, his role was secondary, says one woman who claims that a female relative of hers was the town's founder.

The clashing histories exhaust any motivation that Biá had to complete the project. He is more interested in benefiting personally from the situation or inventing his own "more literary" version of the stories.

This is Caffé's second feature film. It confirms her talent and is emblematic of the growing presence of women among the new generation of Brazilian filmmakers.

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