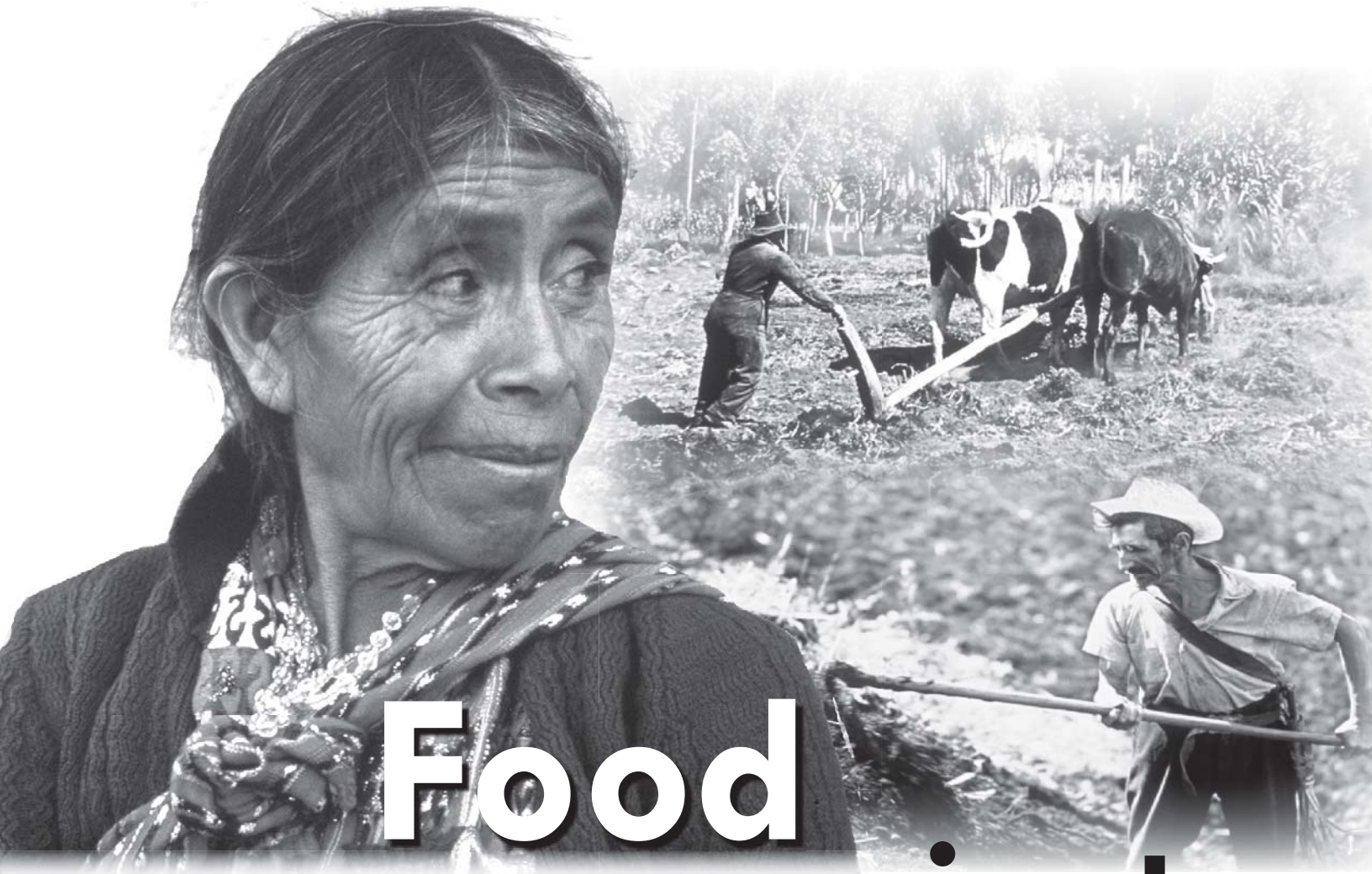


The

Sept/Oct 2004 Vol. 20 No. 1

Upstream Journal



Food sovereignty

- Fighting dams in India • Canadian company takes heat in US
- Zambians struggle to overcome poverty, disease
- World Bank lending and poor country debt going up - what about poor country voice in decision making?

Published by the
Social Justice Committee

Dear Readers,

The director of the world's main debt relief program says that the problem wasn't that poor countries have too much debt, but rather than they don't have enough economic growth.

If he were a doctor, he might as easily say that the problem wasn't that the patient died, but rather that he hadn't lived long enough.

A case of different perspectives, but actually the same result.

The difference in perspectives between people seeking food security and those seeking food sovereignty brings a different result when we look at the goal of ensuring that people everywhere get enough to eat. The concept of food sovereignty takes more of a rights perspective, and thus looks as closely at the process as it does at the outcome, especially in terms of power relations.

Do people have a right to feed themselves? Do food producers have a right to farm in ways they deem appropriate, and can they survive if they don't adopt methods of mass production?

In this issue, the *Upstream Journal* explores the concept of food sovereignty with three people involved in the movement in Quebec, Saskatchewan and Chile. This is part of our efforts as a whole in the current program year, with the Social Justice Committee framing much of its work by the food sovereignty perspective.

SJC person in Washington

This Upstream brings new perspective on World Bank and IMF operations, with the first articles by the SJC's new representative in Washington. One of the most experienced campaigners on these institutions, Karen Joyner has worked with several European and US organizations, and is well known and respected within the institutions as well.

Now based in the Washington area, she gives her insight into the latest developments at the World Bank and IMF in a new feature, "Eye on the World Bank and IMF."

Karen also has a new paper on how to strengthen the voice of small and poor countries and their people at the World Bank and IMF, available on the web (www.s-j-c.net) She finds out what happens in the boardrooms and in the corridors of the institutions, and spells out some practical ways to strengthen the hand of the marginalized.

Upping the quality

Once again we have tried to take the quality of the Upstream Journal up a notch, shifting from newsprint to a higher quality paper. This should give us photos with more detail and text that is crisper, so that you the reader can settle in with the paper in more comfort. It will also allow us more freedom in the design of the paper, and of course we'll be trying to improve the quality of the content at the same time.

Please let me know what you think of the changes and the direction we are headed in style and content.

Derek MacCuish
Editor

The Upstream Journal is a free publication of the Social Justice Committee. It is one of several educational materials we offer on human rights and development.

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Guatemala network launches web site designed and maintained by the Social Justice Committee

The Alianza por la Vida y la Paz is a network of community organizations in the Peten in northern Guatemala. They asked the SJC for help putting up a web site for their information. The site is now up and running. Please visit: www.vidaypaz.org

Our world is not for sale

The new way of global power, and the neocolonization of agriculture: three people, three places, one fight in the name of food sovereignty:

Terry Boehm, Vice-president of the National Farmers Union of Canada, in Saskatchewan,

Benoit Girouard, General Secretary of the Union Paysanne, in Quebec, and

Francisca Rodriguez, Director of the National Association of Rural Women and Indigenous People (Anamuri Asociacion Nacional de Mujeres Rurales e Indigenas) and founding member of Via Campesina, in Santiago, Chile.

Katrin Schwarz

Food sovereignty as a global concept is larger than that of food security. In the end, it concerns all of us, not just the malnourished and the hungry.

Concretely, it is a concept used in the fight against the globalization of agriculture

Lack of food sovereignty is reflected in a host of issues:

- large-scale monoculture and genetically modified crops,
- free trade liberalization without protection for local farmers,
- privatized control of productive resources (land, water, fishing grounds),
- large producers dumping below production costs,
- cheap imports destroying local markets, water crises, and
- land concentration in the hands

of a few big landowners and multinational trusts.

For Benoit Girouard of Québec's Union Paysanne network, changes in agriculture are aspects of globalization.

"We need to know what we produce and what we are doing, here in our province and in our country, to be better prepared to answer the needs of our people. This includes cultural needs, the need for knowledge, the need for work, and above all for agriculture and nutrition. Food sovereignty fundamentally includes the capacity to respect the environment and agriculture."

Francisca Rodriguez of Chile is a central figure in the Via Campesina movement. She says that talking about food sovereignty means talking about rights, and is part of the sovereignty of the people and of each individual.

"For me, as a person, I am not sovereign if my community is not sovereign. It will be very difficult for us to obtain food sovereignty as a country. We want to keep on producing food that is nutritious and healthy according to our food culture."

Because of their lack of food sovereignty, Latin-American countries are becoming more dependent on imports because of government focus on export production. They are losing their genetic heritage and

their campesino agriculture.

"When a country loses its agriculture, it loses its sovereignty entirely," she says.

Here in Canada, the reality is a different one but the issues are similar.

While acknowledging that the concept is still quite novel here, Terry Boehm says, "Food sovereignty is essential to thriving communities, healthy culturally appropriate food production and to the economic well-being of people who produce food."

Basically, food sovereignty means the right of people, communities and countries to define their own food and agriculture. It includes protecting and regulating domestic agricultural production in order to achieve sustainable development objectives. In general, food sovereignty does not negate trade, but it gives the priority to domestic markets. It demands adequate trade policies that serve the people rather than multinational trade organizations and trusts.

The problems and fears of farmers in Canada, Quebec and Chile vary, but the effects and causes are similar. Food sovereignty is not guaranteed anywhere.

In Canada, as in many places worldwide, pressure on food producers is increasing. The pressure of economic incentives means that farmers are buying seeds from suppliers and not saving them from their own harvest.

Farmers are losing their right to control their farming, to save seeds and to plant varieties of their choosing. They are becoming controlled by corporate suppliers, and worrying about cut-backs in public funds and loss of biodiversity, says Terry Boehm, Vice president of the National Farmers Union of Canada, active member of the Via campesina movement, and practicing farmer for twenty years.

"They fear that this system will destroy any facility that allows farmers to practice

"Farmers are under extreme economic pressure to produce in a way that many feel isn't appropriate."

any sort of food sovereignty, especially since the engagement in food production contracts became a common practice.”

The National Farmers Union represents family farmers, and promotes family farms as the most appropriate and efficient way of agricultural production. Its goal is agricultural policies that provide security of farmer incomes and sustainable development.

In western Canada, farmers have a negative net farm income, because of the focus on export agriculture and on new technology. They are abandoning traditional practices, including seed saving.

“We have to sit back and ask who is benefiting while our rural communities are disappearing, resulting in all kinds of family dislocation. Farmers are under extreme economic pressure to produce in a way that many feel isn’t appropriate,” Boehm says.

Canada does have examples of a type

of food sovereignty that has been in place for a long time. Its supply-management system, which is under attack by the WTO and other institutions, allows and protects production for the local market or within a province.

Recently, there was even a successful campaign to stop genetically modified wheat from being registered and commercialized in Canada.

In Quebec, the biggest concern of the farmers in the context of food sovereignty comes from the WTO. “In a completely deregulated market, where the WTO allows the strongest to take the greatest profit, Quebec would not be able to compete,” Benoit Girouard says.

There are some positive aspects of farming in Quebec. The size of the farms in the province is still relative small. “In California, there are farms of two thousand milk cows. In Quebec it’s rare that a farm count more than 120 cows. And there is a demand for local food, although the industry takes a long time to adapt to this consumer demand.”

He points to the Cuban example to show how locally-based agriculture is possible. Because of the US embargo, Cuba developed a system of local agriculture that is more ecological than North American production. Cuba is now a leading organic producer.

“Cuba shows us that it’s all is a question of willingness. From the moment a country chooses to take control of agriculture in a meaningful way it is able to, despite industrial interests, in favour of the people.”

In Chile, ANAMURI is fighting for women worker’s rights to social security and to health, and against the work in areas contaminated by insecticide and herbicide. Members are especially

concerned with the dramatic increase in the number of children born with congenital malformation in recent years.

The government does not support the use of small plots of land by families, but is focused on large-scale export-oriented monoculture. Chile now imports cereals that were once produced in family plots, and campesina agriculture itself is threatened.

Jobs are changing. In the past there were a lot of small producers. Today people are working seasonal jobs for transnational corporations or big landowners, with low salaries and hard working conditions. These changes are contributing to poverty in the countryside and the destruction of family unions.

“The situation for rural workers is very bad,” Francisca Rodriguez says. “They become more and more indebted trying to produce under these aggressive circumstances.”

“Chile is a country with one of the biggest growing economies in Latin America, but this growth is accompanied by a huge inequality and the danger of extinction of campesina agriculture. We’re rebelling against this phenomenon, this is our biggest challenge.”

Local initiatives and projects are responding to the difficult situations for farmers worldwide and the dominant model based on agro-exports, neoliberal economic policies and free trade.

One of the ANAMURI projects is the rescue of campesino and indigenous groups’ seed varieties that people thought had been lost.

“When we’re talking about rescuing our seeds we’re talking about rescuing our culture,” Rodriguez says. “In our work, we’re getting back to the area of healthy food. We’re campaigning for life!”



**Benoit
Girouard,**
General
secretary
of the

Union Paysanne, an organization open to farmers and citizens, and President of the Union Biologique Paysanne.

The Union Paysanne promotes alternatives to industrial agriculture, and works to revitalise the countryside.

“I think of myself as a young utopian, since I am less than thirty years old, but I am realistic. It takes struggle to achieve change in the world. Why haven’t nations agreed on this essential thing, their need to be sovereign in food? It’s not protectionism, but simply a question of common sense.”

- Benoit Girouard

Links between farmers and peasants in the North and South

The exchange of people in the North and in the South is one of the objectives of Via Campesina, the international farmers' network regrouping national farmers' organizations and movements worldwide. Because of Via Campesina, the struggle for an alternative model is now internationally organized.

"Farmers from the North and South can speak and act with a united voice," says Terry Boehm. "We can speak with more authority at the WTO about the situation and the effects of its policies."

For him, it is important to show the connections to the people in the south, and demonstrate that the corporate model doesn't work in reality for ordinary farmers in the North and in Europe.

"There's no economic benefit except for those that trade the products," Francisca Rodriguez says. "The scale of problems is different, perhaps, but in fact the problems in North and South are quite the same. This allows us to work in the sense of brother and sisterhood, and that's what we're doing in Via Campesina."

ANAMURI has programs to send women from remote parts of Chile to the North, to meet other farmers and to learn from them, and to give them hope. "In the North there is a lack of hope, but here we still have hope," Francisca Rodriguez says, adding "Despite the hardships, I believe that we're in a wonderful stage of widening the horizon and the relationship in the rural world."

"We look at the future with optimism. We are planting seeds and are sure that there will be a harvest. A lot of women are working in the same direction. There is a lot of strength in women despite of hard work they do. They have a power in themselves to love, and to fight to keep on living." - Francisca Rodriguez

Francisca Rodriguez, International representative of the National Association of Rural and Indigenous Women (ANAMURI) and active member of the Via Campesina movement. ANAMURI members are rural and indigenous women from peoples like the Mapuche, Kollas and Quechuas. The network fights for the integral development of rural women, constructing relationships of equality in gender, class and ethnicity, and a balance between humans and nature.

Earth in the hands of women Campesina farmers in Chile

In many southern countries, people's right to feed themselves and the right of the rural population to define their own food and agriculture are at risk. Women and girls in particular do not enjoy equal access to land sharing, ownership and production opportunities.

In Chile, ANAMURI is rebelling against the male-dominated system because women suffer the most from problems caused by corporate production and export agriculture.

Characteristic of the inequality, when ANAMURI was founded there was only one woman in Chile at a leadership level in a farmer's associations.

The economic reality in Chile represents a heavy burden for women. One issue is the intense overwork caused by the modern mass production system, and the change of lifestyle and loss of tradition.

Agrarian reform and economic changes mean that many men are leaving farming, and so women take on a more visible economic role. They not only have to cope with their personal problems, they deal with problems caused by the changes of traditional roles in the families, such as depression in men.



Food sovereignty

Francisca Rodriguez describes the situation in this way: "Women work up to eighteen hours a day, and there are cases where women work even twenty-four hours straight. Because of this intense work, people have a short life span, workers are becoming disposable. We're in a time of modern slavery."

Despite being faced with these conditions, Chilean women farmers were shocked during a visit to Europe. It seemed to them that European women had an even harder life in agriculture, often remaining deeply in debt until they died. Back in Chile, one delegation organized a praying meeting for "the sisters in the North to get back their souls and learn to live again."

"Women of our beloved countryside, women of the generous land that gives us seeds and life, the origin of the people, rural women, campesina women and indigenous women, receive from ANAMURI a greeting of unity and hope, a greeting that tells you who we are - women born from the struggle, from the heart, from strength and commitment." - ANAMURI message

"Women were the first farmers. For centuries, we looked after our plants, propagating and growing them. Now all these scientific advances in the service of profit are trying to finish our seeds." - Francisca Rodriguez

"I love being a farmer.

I've been farming for twenty years and have been an activist from the very beginning. I believe that ultimately, although perhaps not in my life time, people will come to a different reality of how to organize society and resources.

We are under huge pressure environmentally now, and we need ultimately to respond in a more appropriate manner."

- Terry Boehm

Food Sovereignty is the right of peoples, communities, and countries to define their own agricultural, labour, fishing, food and land policies in ways that are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances. It includes the right to food and to produce food, which means that all people have the right to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food and to food-producing resources and the ability to sustain themselves and their societies. Political Statement of the NGO/CSO Forum for Food Sovereignty

Food Sovereignty requires:

- Placing priority on food production for domestic and local markets, based on peasant and family farmer diversified and agro-ecologically based production systems
- Ensuring fair prices for farmers, which means the power to protect internal markets from low-priced, dumped imports
- Access to land, water, forests, fishing areas and other productive resources through genuine redistribution, not by market forces and World Bank sponsored "market-assisted land reforms."
- Recognition and promotion of women's role in food production and equitable access and control over productive resources
- Community control over productive resources, as opposed to corporate ownership of land, water, and genetic and other resources
- Protecting seeds, the basis of food and life itself, for the free exchange and use of farmers, which means no patents on life and a moratorium on the genetically modified crops which lead to the genetic pollution of essential genetic diversity of plants and animals.
- Public investment in support for the productive activities of families, and communities, geared toward empowerment, local control and production of food for people and local markets.

Food Sovereignty means the primacy of people's and community's rights to food and food production over trade concerns. This entails the support and promotion of local markets and producers over production for export and food imports.

Excerpt from "Food Sovereignty: A Right for All," the Political Statement of the NGO/CSO Forum for Food Sovereignty, Rome Italy, June 14 2002



Villagers in India fight dam projects

An environmental activist visits communities to hear the concerns of people in areas affected by the building of large dams

Ann Kathrin Schneider

This year's monsoon hit northeast India hard. Reports arrived daily of the embankments of the Brahmaputra River breaking and washing away hundreds of villages and fields.

As I flew over the region from Delhi, I could only see a brown flood from my airplane window. Everything was covered with water. Trees stuck out, and the roads appearing above the water seemed unclear where they were coming from, and where they were going.

I was there to see whether a new development plan by the Indian government and the World Bank will help the population in this flood prone region. The plan is to build more than 150 dams to generate hydro-power. The question

is whether the dams and the generated electricity will benefit the local people.

More than 70% of the people in this area do not have access to electricity, and almost everyone in the region suffers from the floods. The government claims that the dams will mitigate the floods and relieve the people of the worst effects of the floods.

It is unclear, however, how the local people can benefit from the generated power. No plans exist on how they would get access to the electricity produced.

People working with the flood victims are skeptical about whether the new plans will actually help improve the situation of the poor people in rural areas. Girin Chetia, a quiet man respected for his hard work and commitment, distributes relief packages to uprooted people in the region. He is worried that more dams will increase the annual hardship of the local population during the monsoon season.

"This year 400,000 families lost everything because their houses and villages were flooded within hours," he said.

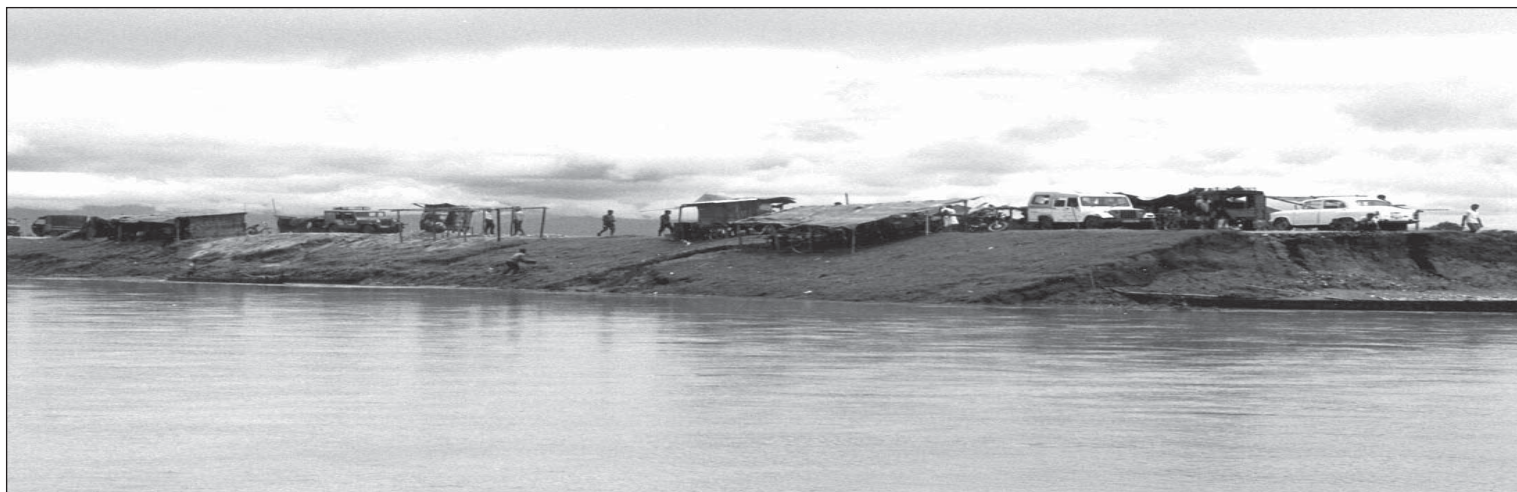
People suffered more than in the years

before, due to the heavy rains because dams further north had to release water quickly to prevent them from bursting, sending tons of water downstream in a matter of hours.

Although people can normally predict when their villages will be flooded, they had no idea that the water was coming. When they left their houses in a hurry to rescue themselves, they had to leave all their belongings behind. "The government tells the people that the dams will reduce the floods, but in reality they will increase the floods and make it more difficult," Girin said.

The dams will not only increase the insecurity of the people downstream of the dam, but also reduce their capacity to provide food for themselves and their families. Many depend on the river and fishing cultivation for a living. Both activities will be endangered by the dam builders. With more dams, the rivers will carry less water and less fish. The water that remains will be too little to irrigate the rice fields.

Some people, trying to forget about the likely negative impacts of the dam



People on embankment survey this year's flood. They are concerned that proposed dams will not help with flooding, but will make things worse. Photo: AK Schneider

and the reduced water level of the river, hoped that the construction of the dam would offer employment opportunities.

Binoy Jamul Phukan is an outgoing student who joined other young people in the struggle against the dam. "We were told that local people would benefit from the dam because they would be employed as construction workers. It is true that the construction company employs us, but they pay us less than a dollar a day for very hard labor. We cannot feed our families with so little money."

He lives in Gogamukh, where the Indian government has already begun the construction of the large Lower Subansiri dam.

The experience with this year's floods, the labor practices of the dam construction company, and the likely negative impacts of a reduced river flow for communities dependent on the river do not speak well for the dam development plan.

"What the people really need is help with the preparation for the floods," Girin Chetia said. "They need access to electricity. The new dams will not do

anything against the floods, and they will not improve the people's access to power. The dams generate electricity for big cities like Mumbai and Calcutta. The people here will bear only the costs. They will not reap any benefits."

Ann Kathrin Schneider works with the South Asia campaign of the International Rivers Network based in Berkeley, California. For more information, please visit www.irn.org/programs/india or contact the author by email: akschneider@irn.org.



Latin American Agenda 2005

The Social Justice Committee is pleased to present the English edition of the 2005 Latin America Agenda.

As in past years, the agenda serves not only as a handy date-book but also contains articles by well-known writers in Latin America and other parts of the world.

At a time when people working for peace and justice in the Americas are frequently under attack, the agenda also serves as a symbol of our solidarity with them. All the profits go either directly to Latin America or to solidarity groups.

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Canadian firm accused of ignoring safety concerns in US plants

Quebecor World is the target of complaints by workers in Mississippi and Kentucky

Sandra Smele

We work seven days a week, twelve hours a day, and whatever they say you got to do. It's like being treated like slaves.

Dorothy Bills, a worker at a Canadian-owned printing plant in Mississippi, described her concerns about safety at Quebecor World plants in the southern US to Montreal church and human rights representatives in September.

"Their safety program is handing out a pamphlet," said Dean Compher, a press-operator at the Quebecor plant in Versailles, Kentucky. He was one of the three worker representatives visiting Montreal.

"The company only fixes problems after someone gets hurt," added Richard Woods of the Versailles plant. "We don't get safety guards on machines until someone gets cut or loses a finger."

Their complaints echo other concerns about safety in the Quebecor World plants. The recent death of an employee at the Versailles plant is under investigation. Carolyn Cox Campbell, 62, a plant employee for 15 years, was crushed between a forklift and metal racks on October 15.

The Graphic Communications International Union (GCIU) claims that during a recent fire in Memphis, Tennessee the company's fire suppression equipment failed to activate. Two workers were hospitalized, one with severe burns on one-third of his body.

News reports include a story of a work-



Workers' delegation in Montreal. From left: Joni Jenkins (Rep. Kentucky state legislature), Fred Azcarate (Jobs With Justice), and Alan Tate (GCIU organizer), Don Butler, Dorothy Bills and Lloyd Hayes.

er losing two fingers in a press that didn't meet Occupational Safety and Health Administration standards (Herald-Leader, 2 July 2004).

Workers claim that injuries are due to a lack of management interest in safety:

"My operator was ordered a year ago to run a press when they knew there were no safety guards on the thing," Dean Compher said, contending that managers knew about the safety hazard because he and others pointed it out, but they wanted it running anyway. "Two days later he was pulled into the back of the press."

The man's injuries kept him out of work for months after the incident, Compher said, but that didn't stop the company from operating machines without guards. (Erie Times News, 7 July 2004)

Long hours without days off is another complaint of the workers.

"We went from the 5th of July to Thanksgiving in November without a

day off. I once worked twelve hours a day for six weeks straight," said Lloyd Hayes, a worker in the Olive Branch, Mississippi printing plant for twenty-two years.

A story in the Erie Times News (7 July 2004) reported the claim that the company recently ended double-time pay on Sundays, and working that day is now mandatory instead of voluntary.

The plants are the target of a unionizing effort by the GCIU. The union charges that the company engaged in unlawful surveillance to intimidate workers who support forming a union. The GCIU claims that in Tennessee Quebecor World managers fired, intimidated, threatened, and spied on workers because of their union activities. (Source: Justice@Quebecor GCIU info sheet Aug. 2004)

The GCIU claims that management in Covington fired worker Carl Rogers for refusing to spy on and coerce coworkers to stop the union organizing drive.

"I feel like I'm being watched at work, like I'm being suppressed. I take pride in what I do. I used to like my job and going to work, but the way things are now, I can't say that. I want to make it better," Dean Compher said, according to a GCIU info sheet.

Quebecor's response

Interviewed in October, Quebecor World Director of Corporate Communications Tony Ross said that the issue is not one of safety but of union organizing tactics:

"Our plants have a very good safety record. They are big machines and there are dangers and there accidents but we have an excellent safety record.

The AFLCIO and the GCIU have made a number of complaints and those complaints have been unfounded. Occupational Safety and Health Administration inspectors investigated the complaints that were made by the Union, and found that they were untrue, that we adhere to all safety requirements.

These complaints are a tactic that is used by large labour federations like the AFLCIO as part of a corporate campaign which they are waging against Quebecor. In December of 2003, the GCIU supported by the AFLCIO, announced that it was having a campaign against Quebecor World to get us to agree to a card-check neutrality.

The avalanche [of safety complaints] started when the corporate campaign started, because the idea is let's make this as difficult, let's say all kinds of things, let's put out news releases, let's make complaints, let's create a lot of problems for the company basically to blackmail the company into agreeing to give up its workers democratic rights and we're not about to do it.

The GCIU and the AFLCIO want us to basically sign away the workers rights to a secret ballot election and agree to a card-check agreement. It's a long established tactic that is used by the AFLCIO to increase membership, whereby if 50 percent-plus-one of workers simply

signed a Union Card then a union would be formed. There would be no secret ballot election and we're not prepared to do that."

The GCIU argues that its unionizing campaign, launched in December 2003, is an "unprecedented effort by Quebecor workers and their unions throughout the world to win basic human rights on the job at Quebecor World's facilities worldwide. These rights, which are covered in the conventions and declarations of the International Labour Organization,

include the right to organize a union free from management interference, the right to engage in collective bargaining, and the right to a safe and healthy workplace." (August 2004 statement on the GCIU web site)

Quebecor World Inc. is one of the largest commercial printers in the world. Quebecor World Inc. has approximately 37,000 employees working in more than 160 printing and related facilities around the world.

Zambians face day-to-day struggle

Nancy Montgomery, SJC President of the Board of Directors, traveled with a group of fifteen women from across Canada to Zambia this past summer. This journey was a United Church initiative to gain an understanding of the impact of HIV/AIDS within the country and the various issues affecting the response to this pandemic.

"I expected to see material poverty; I did not expect to see such an intense richness in their emotional and spiritual lives. I expected to see, or hear of, suffering; I was not prepared for their joy or the profundity of their hope. I expected dirt and poor food and ragged clothing; I did not expect the beauty of the faces, of the smiles. I expected suspicion and fear; I received open welcome and genuine love."

- Kathryn Anderson in "Weaving Relationships"

Nancy Montgomery

The outstanding image of Zambia that I carry with me is of the people and how they cope. Their faith and the support they give each other seem to be the elements that hold the society together.

One of the highlights of my trip was

spending several days in traditional rural villages with people working with an NGO called Women for Change (WFC).

The mission of WFC is "to work with and empower remote rural communities, especially women, through gender analysis, popular education methodologies and advocacy to contribute towards the eradication of all forms of poverty."

Our focus in the villages of Kalundu and Mbanvutu was on food sustainability projects developed in a gender-balanced manner. Various farming projects, in areas like animal husbandry and fishing, aim to increase food production for local needs and as cash crops. Serious drought in some areas of the country has created particular problems, and irrigation is always an issue.

WFC involvement in a community is built through a sensitization program on gender equality and concepts of empowerment. The goal is to reach an agreement on a development program that respects the villagers' autonomy and decision making power, through a process involving collaboration between men and women. Teams of women and men

...cont'd on p.14



- New **debt relief** framework, same old flaws
- Strengthening the “**voice**” of poor countries and their people in IFI policy
- New guidelines for **World Bank lending** to poor countries - why more isn't better

A new debt framework, while the old one flounders on

Karen Joyner

Earlier this year, the World Bank and IMF shifted their discussion about debt relief for impoverished countries in a way that was a promising development. They are considering a new framework that identifies more dimensions of potential debt stress, and recognizes the need to accommodate enhanced government spending to reach development goals.

Unfortunately, this discussion is transpiring with the understanding that the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Debt Relief Initiative is achieving its goals, which is certainly not the case. Developing a framework to maintain debt sustainability beyond the HIPC Initiative without acknowledging the failures of the HIPC Initiative does not bode well for indebted poor countries.

The two versions of the HIPC Initiative since 1996 deliver too little debt relief, to too few countries, too slowly, and on condition that poor governments cut spending and implement economic adjustment reforms not tailored to country circumstances.

It should take less than three years to run the HIPC gambit, but no country has got through without serious delays. The World Bank and IMF put the blame for stalled debt relief on debt-burdened

governments, but the situation really points to the faulty design of the HIPC Initiative.

Requiring poor, indebted countries to implement ambitious and often inappropriate economic reform programs is unreasonable. Invariably, it is the lack of an operating IMF program that caused delays getting into the Initiative, and it is “slippage” in program implementation that most often delays exit.

The countries that do complete the HIPC Initiative exit with unsustainable debt thresholds, even by the optimistic standards of the program itself. In three cases so far - Burkina Faso, Ethiopia and Niger - the institutions have had to “top-up” their debt relief. The need to do this points to an obvious failure in the way the Initiative functions. And while it is encouraging that top-ups were approved for these three countries, many more – if

not all – are owed them.

Even these top-ups were delivered grudgingly. To keep the cost of additional relief to the World Bank down, they counted additional debt relief given by countries like Canada and Britain toward their targets. This relief from countries was granted in the spirit of going beyond HIPC debt relief. Thanks to the HIPC crafters’ method of calculating top-ups, countries that could have had a more robust exit from HIPC are losing out.

Debt campaigners have long insisted that the HIPC Initiative is open to too few countries, and in September 2004 the IFI Boards of Directors decided it would remain so. The door was shut on countries like Bangladesh, Eritrea, Haiti, and Tajikistan.

Officials consider HIPC to be a well-functioning debt relief mechanism. Indeed, the World Bank and IMF have moved on to consider debt sustainability issues beyond HIPC. It makes sense to renew thinking about debt relief and management, but not because HIPC is doing its job. Quite the opposite.

It is time to think beyond HIPC because it is failing. New thinking on debt sustainability should not be built on top of a failing mechanism, but based on what elements are truly at the root of debt crises and how best to manage and avoid them.

“It is time to think beyond HIPC because it is failing.”

Rich governments plump up the World Bank for more lending

World Bank debt is so prominent in the debt burdens of the poorest countries that there is growing concern about the extent of World Bank lending on the heels of debt relief.

The World Bank lends to poor countries through its International Development Association (IDA) arm. IDA loans have low interest rates, but they still need to be repaid, on time, in hard currency. The World Bank, like the IMF, has preferred creditor status, meaning it gets paid, in full, ahead of other creditors.

IDA seeks replenishment of its resources from the Bank's wealthy members every three years. Discussions for the 14th replenishment of IDA began earlier this year. In these IDA replenishment discussions, rich governments find yet another occasion to engage in their quiet ritual of discussing important policy and resource issues for the poorest countries.

During the IDA replenishment dialogue, rich countries will take important decisions regarding the amount of IDA resources available for poor countries, and under what terms. While final decisions are some way off, IDA 14 is heading in some clear directions.

The World Bank will allocate IDA resources according to its institutional rating scheme – known as the Country Policy and Institutional Assessment (CPIA). The CPIA is an analytical tool through which Bank staffs rank borrowing countries in four areas: economic management, structural policies, social inclusion and equity policies, and public sector management and institutions. While many are critical of the CPIA for being a secretive process that relies too much on staff judgment, the use of the CPIA to determine access to IDA resources it is not new.

What is new is the prominence of debt in the IDA 14 discussions and the proposed link between the CPIA and debt threshold targets. The acknowledgment that every country can sustain a different amount of external debt has been central in this dialogue. Consistent with the new debt sustainability framework for poor countries, the CPIA will be used to assess a country's ability to repay debt. Countries with higher CPIA rankings will have their sustainable debt thresholds set higher.

Through this system, some poor countries will have their thresholds set at three times their annual exports, while the poorest performing countries will have their threshold set at an amount equal to one year's exports. Conveniently, this means that IDA will be able to lend much more to good performers – as articulated through CPIA ratings – than poor performers.

Debt campaigners are concerned with the high thresholds proposed in this scheme. Poor countries need access to concessional loans to fund their development programs, but these proposed thresholds are up to twice as high as targets set in the HIPC Initiative. Of

course, had the HIPC Initiative delivered a more robust exit from debt burdens, these thresholds could be set lower and still leave ample room for development borrowing.

Under this scheme, Tanzania would be able to borrow three times its annual exports, even though in 1999 donor countries questioned the World Bank's big lending program on the heels of HIPC debt relief. If IDA 14 terms as designed now are agreed, the Bank will be able to sidestep such criticism with ease.

Had creditor governments and the IFIs thought more about tailoring debt levels to specific country needs and circumstances in the mid-1990s, debt campaigners would have a lot less to complain about today. Back then, this type of thinking might have led to some truly productive crafting of a debt relief mechanism that measured the need for debt relief against a country's need for development spending.

Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, this potential positive train of thought is instead being used to justify World Bank lending that will, in some cases, double debt sustainability thresholds targeted in the HIPC Initiative.

Canada debt action

The Social Justice Committee congratulates the Canadian government and Minister of Finance Ralph Goodale for cancelling all debts owed to Canada by Ethiopia, Ghana, and Senegal.

We agree with Minister Goodale, who said, "Excessive debt is one of the heaviest burdens to economic growth for African nations. The relief provided today will enable these countries to spend more on priorities such as health and education."

We now hope that Minister Goodale will call for the unconditional cancellation of all debt owed by the poorest countries to the World Bank, the main creditor to impoverished countries.

Canadians can congratulate Minister of Finance Ralph Goodale for Canada's recent debt cancellation, and request that he seek the same of the World Bank: Hon Ralph Goodale, House of Commons, Ottawa ON, K1A 0A6 (no postage stamp required).

Strengthening the voice of poor countries

In March 2002, world leaders called on the World Bank and IMF to improve the participation of developing and transition countries in decision making at these institutions. Meeting at the UN summit on Financing for Development Summit, they acknowledged that rich countries have an overwhelming influence at the international financial institutions (IFIs), and called for improved voice for poorer countries, with the goal of improving the quality of policies promoted by these institutions.

The ensuing voice dialogue has primarily focused on power dynamics within the IFI Boards of Directors, and the weight of the voting power of the G7 and Europe compared to that of poorer countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Correcting this imbalance will take substantial structural and political change at the IFIs.

The IFIs have identified a number of ways to address voice deficits and have taken some small steps. The Executive Directors' (EDs') offices represent member countries at the IFIs and conduct the day to day business of the Boards. Extra staffs have been allocated to the two offices representing sub-Saharan Africa, and a trust fund was established to fund alternative analytical work for these offices. The use of secondments of poor country civil servants to the IFIs is being promoted to facilitate better more understanding of, and exposure to, the workings of the IFIs. There is even some talk of adding an additional African ED.

While encouraging, none of these measures address the core issues compromising the voice of poor countries at the IFIs. Much more could easily be done, but there is a lack in creative thinking beyond the above measures, in part due to the impasse faced on voting issues.

Within this debate, very little atten-

tion has been given to the issue of the voice of citizens in IFI decision making. For groups like the Social Justice Committee, this is the critical issue when contemplating the significance of voice at the IFIs. The citizens of countries where the World Bank and IMF are active need to be more involved in designing the policies promoted by these powerful institutions and implemented by their governments. The voice of citizens can most immediately be increased through enhanced transparency and inclusion in IFI policy dialogue with borrowers.

Over the past nine months the SJC has held some fifty meetings with staffs of EDs' offices at the World Bank and IMF to discuss the issue of voice. In a

resulting paper, we raise the core issues of citizen voice and improved programming at the IFIs, but we also spend substantial time looking at what small steps could be taken at the EDs' offices themselves to improve the voice of the less enfranchised. We will hold follow-up meetings over the coming months with our representatives at the IFIs to discuss how we might work together to pursue some of the recommendations we make.

The full text of the new SJC paper "A Different Take on Enhancing Voice at the International Financial Institutions" is available on our web site, www.s-j-c.net

IMF refuses to accredit *Upstream Journal* because of advocacy stance

Continuing its practice of refusing access to independent media, the IMF Press Office refused to accredit the editor of the *Upstream Journal* as a journalist to the 2004 annual meetings of the World Bank and IMF in Washington in October.

William Murray of the IMF press office wrote that the office considers the Social Justice Committee to be a civil society organization engaged in advocacy, and refused the accreditation on that basis.

"You are an advocate for a CSO group(s), and not a journalist."

There are no guidelines by which the IMF grants accreditation, although in 2000 Mr. Murray wrote, "The IMF and World Bank do not accredit as journalists the representatives of public access television, student newspapers, publications of private consulting firms, or academic journals. This policy exists because of the difficulty in establishing their credentials as professional journalists."

The editor of the *Upstream Journal*, Derek MacCuish, is a member of the Canadian Association of Journalists and thus accredited as a professional journalist in Canada.

As for advocacy, the *Upstream Journal* provides information on rights issues, and on poverty as a rights issue, and thus advocates for democratic structures that promote positive social change. The readership is international, and is not restricted in any way (it is not a newsletter for members, for example).

The *Upstream Journal* will ask that the operations of the Press Office be reviewed, to ensure that the office functions in a transparent and professional manner that recognizes the greatest possible freedom of the press, and accepts that dissent is a component of free and democratic systems.

from the village form the basic unit for a project. Each team has a woman as coordinator, a woman as treasurer and a man as secretary.

One day we joined a group of women, men and children sitting in a circle in a clearing under a large tree. A tall, powerful looking woman, Maureen Linka, stood in the center leading a gender workshop. With sophisticated animation skills and humour, she involved the group in a lively dialogue about their respective roles. As they compared their daily tasks it was abundantly clear who carried the greater burden.

Talking with Maureen later, I learned that she lived in a near by village with her husband and four children and had been trained as a volunteer by WFC. She explained that she left school after completing the elementary level due to problems with her eyes, and so did not get to be one of the 25% of children who attend high school.

The next morning when I awoke and looked out the shuttered window of the thatched roof hut where we slept, I saw Maureen in front of a fire peeling vegetables for our meals after sleeping outside on a mat. Later, at a celebration for International Women's Day, she gave a strong, political speech about the needs of the rural communities, and again spoke with dignity, confidence and conviction.

"We will not wait for the government to feed us!"

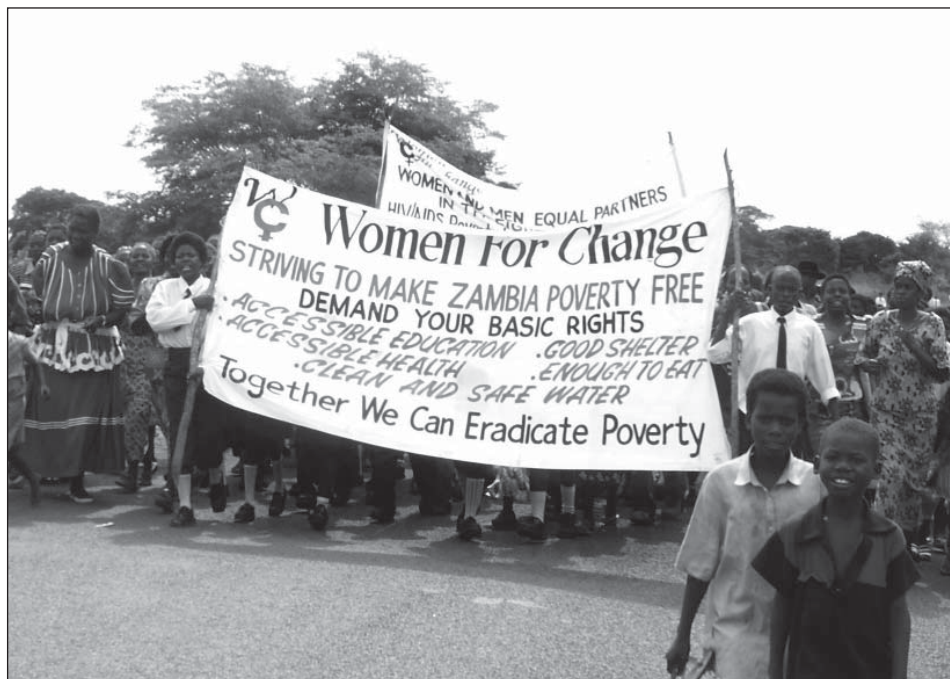
Then when the music started she began to dance, and the crowd erupted with whistling, shouting and singing.

Maureen was only one of the many amazing women we met who embodied courageous determination, capacity and vision, evoking humbling admiration.

In Zambia, AIDS is a hard reality, particularly for women and children. 20% of the population is infected, and every family is caring for orphans and sick relatives.

"If you're not infected you're affected," is the way Suzanne Matala of the Council of Churches of Zambia put it.

Major interventions on education, pre-



Zambians march for the right to education, health, food water and shelter

vention, support and advocacy are being implemented despite limited resources and unstable funding. Medical services are minimal with approximately seven doctors per one hundred thousand people. Facilities are poorly funded by the government, so 40% of them are operated by the church.

A major factor in the reduced health care is the pressure on the government by the World Bank and IMF to place priority on payments of foreign debt, despite the high health and education needs. Serious difficulties arise in distributing the scarce drugs that are slowly trickling into Zambia. At the time of my visit last March only three thousand were receiving anti retroviral drugs with the goal of increasing treatment to two hundred thousand people in 2005.

WFC works in three districts out of nine in Zambia and the need for extending their work is apparent, but as with all the organizations we met the shortage of

funds was the overwhelming obstacle.

Since my experiences in Zambia I have reflected a lot on the concepts of partnership and solidarity. How can we achieve genuine supportive relationships in the context of continuous exploitation and domination of African countries by the Western world? An extraordinary imbalance of power and wealth exists, alongside distorted perceptions of Africans often portrayed as helpless, hopeless victims. How can we overcome these inequalities in the process of trying to establish open trusting mutually respectful relations?

Questions must always be raised, assumptions challenged, and motives examined in the course of sharing resources and working with countries needing foreign aid.

Zambians are not defeated people. They know how to solve their problems, they know what they need and have enormous capacity to do it.

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www.upstreamjournal.org



Three little children, five or six years old, held hands and faced the camera in a typical Guatemala scene for a young woman from a St. Edward's Church delegation to capture. The slide sat in a box for years, until recently when it was flashed on the screen before a gathering of that original delegation and others of us in the church community.

The slide lied.

The children were not five or six years old. They only looked it. More likely they were nine or ten. The tufts of reddish and blond hair streaking through the little boy's head pointed to the truth. They were clear evidence of malnutrition.

Many Guatemalan children in 1979 were older than they appeared, and the three in the photo were not healthy children. Like so many others they were stunted, susceptible to disease, and destined to a life of hardship.

Almost twenty-five terrible years later, after hundreds of massacres and thousands upon thousands of deaths, life has not changed very much for millions of Guatemalans.

For them, hunger and disease are never far away. Day in and day out Guatemalans die before their time because they lack the clean water and the nourishing food necessary to sustain themselves and their children.

It's apparent that in a country with great inequality of wealth, the fault lies primarily with the ruling class.

Despite the peace accords that call for radical reform, there is little political will on the part of the elites to share the country's resources more equitably. Few *campesinos* received entitlement to land since the end of the war, and the rest are becoming desperate.

As I write this, the news arrives that the police and military are forcibly evicting squatters off some land. Nine people, including three policemen, were killed in the latest in a series of increasingly violent evictions.

One cannot ignore the role of the international community.

From the Spanish colonization in the 16th century to the American economic and military support of Guatemala's elites in the 20th, foreigners have contributed to the suffering of the

indigenous majority. Even today, when the United States and Canada are in a position to pressure the Guatemalan government to work to implement the peace accords, they are more interested in promoting "free trade." Trade agreements have at least as much to do with granting North American corporations the right to exploit Central America as to foster more open trade.

If we go by what the NAFTA has done to Mexican *campesinos*, Guatemalan *campesinos* have little to look forward to. It doesn't stop there. Foreign business enterprises have long cozied up to Guatemala's ruling class. Remember United Fruit Corporation and its role in helping bring down the Arbenz government in 1954? Recent changes in Guatemala's mining laws are bringing renewed interest in the country's gold, silver and nickel. The Canadian nickel giant, INCO, is back on the scene after an absence of many years, much to the dismay of many local inhabitants. Vancouver-based Glamis Corporation is opening up a gold and silver mine in the San Marcos region, despite opposition from church, environmental and indigenous groups. Will these companies put food on the tables of Guatemala's poor?

I wish I could stop there, but I can't. I have to mention the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank.

The first is funding Glamis mining; the second is a strong supporter of Plan Puebla Panama, that massive neo-liberal development plan that covers the whole of Mesoamerica with Guatemala right in the middle.

It might seem that I've come a long way from that old picture of three little children. Are they still alive? Possibly, and they may even have children of their own, but I'm willing to bet that those children, if they exist, are no better off.

They have too many enemies - governments, corporations, financial institutions and individuals - who simply do not care whether they live or die. After all, there's money to be made.

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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.

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The Social Justice Committee of Montreal has been working to raise awareness of the root causes of hunger, poverty and repression in the world through our education programs since 1975. We work in solidarity with organizations in a number of Third World countries in the search for a more just and sustainable global socio-economic system.

The Social Justice Committee depends on financial support from its members and the general public. It is a registered charitable organization; donations are tax deductible.

We invite you to donate today, and become a member by supporting the mission of the Social Justice Committee to:

- Analyze the underlying structural and global causes of poverty, human rights violations and other social injustices
- Contribute to informed popular participation in eliminating these injustices
- Work in solidarity to transform our world into a just society

The Social Justice Committee believes that social and economic change is essential for the creation of a sustainable world, and that each person has the right and the responsibility to participate in the process.

The Social Justice Committee thanks the Québec Ministry of International Relations for its support of our mission of education on behalf of international solidarity. Le Comité pour la justice sociale remercie le ministère des Relations internationales de son appui à sa mission d'éducation à la solidarité internationale.

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