

A Letter from El Salvador

BY WENDY WALLAS

Tuesday, January 16, 2001 (9th anniversary of the signing of the Peace Accords).

Did I say that this quake wasn't as bad as the one in '86? Well, I was wrong. Today I spoke with the 86-year old founder of the Salvadoran Red Cross who rattled off all the earthquakes that have hit El Salvador in the past century and he said that this one was the worst of all. We went by helicopter today to San Agustin in Usulután. The town of 6,000 people is totally destroyed, some parts just look like strewn about matchsticks and others have the front wall standing or leaning but with nothing behind it.

The sun is shining brightly, life in the city moves along at its breakneck pace, shopping malls filled, cell phones attached to ears, businesses self-congratulate themselves for their big hearts and the charity they sell, many mayors across the country refuse to accept the band-aid assistance offered by the central government and discounts are announced on building materials, lower interest rates on loans. In the countryside the sun is shining, birds aflight, dust billows under truck and bus tires, cooking tortillas tantalize on clay comals, maquilishuats and madre de cacao flower pink feast our senses

and challenge us to seguir adelante.

I remember the ever popular Salvadoran phrase: "Estamos jodidos pero contentos, pero no contentos de estar jodidos" (we're screwed but happy, but not happy to be screwed), that people here often use as a kind of greeting. Not that people are happy. But most of them have been screwed for so long they have a historically-developed sense of humor, a kind of armor to withstand, aguantar.

The word that most crosses my mind these days is "vulnerable". So much fragility. The environment, so many people. The beautiful old towns in the hills that have crumbled. The cracks and splits in walls, beams, posts, roads, fields, dikes, bridges, hillsides that create a gnawing insecurity. The earth continues to shake. Here's a relatively new housing development that is a high risk zone. Some of the houses were destroyed and people still owe on them. How can they move and pay on another house. If their house was destroyed, maybe they can get insurance for part of their loss but they lose all the payments they have been making for years.

It's possible some towns may not be re-

built and then if they are, what will they look like? Sheet metal shacks with sheet metal roofs, hot and ugly as sin where once rested cool thick adobe houses with wide sleepy verandahs.

With the bigger and even more horrific India earthquake, hopes for generous foreign aid and support has understandably gone down. There is great spirit and determination to "do it ourselves", but the President came out with another brilliant statement saying that his goal for the rest of his term (just over 3 years) is to get El Salvador back to where it was before January 13th. But things were not so great here on January 12th. Over 50% of the population lived in poverty.

El Salvador is truly not the same as it was. Main roads have been cut off and alternatives have to be built, lots of good coffee land has fallen down into ravines and coffee processing plants flattened like a pancake. Disaster management, relief and prevention have become the new civil society focus and lingo. And what will all these people do? Will they emigrate to the cities, youth flight to the north, crowd in with extended families?

Fortunately most of the crops were in before the earthquake but the rainy season, just a few months off, is the next big threat since if all the splits and cracks fill up with water and all the loose earth turns to mud more "desgracias" can follow. CP

Contreras' work for the Agency.

At the same time, the CIA was amassing the names and addresses of Chilean dissidents who would later be hunted down and murdered by Pinochet's band of killers. There is the case of Frank Teruggi, a leftist American journalist, who, only days after the coup in 1973, was dragged out of his home in Santiago, tortured and killed by the military. Teruggi's name and address showed up in CIA files from a year prior to the coup, leading Peter Kornbluh, director of the National Security Archives, to suggest that the CIA may have fingered Teruggi to Pinochet's men.

For all this, Pinochet has picked up some unlikely allies. Cronies of the general have set up the Pinochet Foundation, a trust fund set up to finance his ultimately successful legal and pr fight against extradition to Spain from England. One of the foundation's fundraising schemes involved the release of a CD featuring Chilean military tunes, which apparently sold well throughout South

America and in London.

Most Chileans see the writing on the wall. In a recent poll by the Santiago-based Fundacion Futuro, only 8 percent said that they thought Pinochet was innocent of the charges from the Caravan of Death massacres. But even so 60 percent of polled said they didn't think the General would ever spend a night in jail even if convicted.

Footnote: The Reebok Human Rights Award may be the most hypocritical of those kinds of honors. If so, then the Chilean Human Rights Award can't be far behind. Well, the rock star Sting has now gotten both. In January, Sting, known for hob-nobbing with Kayapo chieftains in an attempt to profit from the cachet of the Amazon, jetted to Santiago to receive a human rights award from the Chilean government. A few days later, Sting announced his belief that if Pinochet would merely make some public statement of contrition perhaps the charges against him should be dropped. CP

SUBSCRIPTION INFO

Enter/Renew Subscription here:

One year individual, \$40
(\$35 email only / \$45 email/print)
One year institution/supporters \$100
One year student/low income, \$30
T-shirts, \$17
Please send back issue(s)
_____ (\$5/issue)

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Payment must accompany order, or just dial 1-800-840-3683 and renew by credit card. Add \$17.50 for foreign subscriptions. If you want CounterPunch emailed to you please supply your email address. Make checks payable to: **CounterPunch.**
Business Office
PO Box 228, Petrolia, CA 95558

larger problem, global corporations forcing genetically engineered or processed foods down the throats of unwilling farmers and consumers. "The WTO and the corporations are telling us what to eat," Bove said. "In France, no one agrees with this."

Almost overnight Bove became a French hero, praised even by French president Lionel Jospin, and touted in *Le Monde* as the new Vercingetorix, who had repelled the alien invaders. In the US, the *Wall Street Journal*, roused by this attack on one of the nation's leading exports, lashed out at Bove as "a food terrorist".

After knocking down the McDonald's

US tariffs on French Roquefort by smuggling in rounds of the cheese, dispensing chunks to cops and demonstrators alike in front on a Downtown outlet of McDonalds. This last month he was with an international coalition of peasant farmers called Via Campesina, demonstrating at an anti-globalization forum in Brazil, timed to coincide with the annual moot of the rich and powerful in Davos, Switzerland.

While in Brazil Bove and Christison were asked by the Landless Workers Movement to accompany them in an attack on a test facility belonging to Monsanto, where 1,300 farmers duly destroyed a thousand acres of genetically

said Christison. "This means domestic policies that support international deals that are in the interests of corporate agribusiness. These policies are created in board rooms of companies motivated by profit and not the economic health of the farmer, the health of the consumer or the vitality of the rural community. Globalization means policies in the US that force our prices as low as possible by removing an effective commodity loan rate or reserve. These policies force the world price to levels that are unsustainable for farmers around the globe."

After coming back to France from Brazil (where he is now banned from return-

After knocking down the McDonald's outlet Bove was arrested and refused to pay his bail, which was then raised by American midwesterners in the National Family Farm Coalition.

outlet Bove was arrested and refused to pay his bail, which was then raised by American midwesterners in the National Family Farm Coalition. The Coalition's president, Bill Christison, flew to Millau to stand in solidarity with Bove and two others on trial. Quoting Lincoln, Christison told the French court that "We testify on behalf of our fellow farmers as they seek economic and social justice. Corporate globalization, flawed agriculture and trade policy are the real problems. These farmers made an effort to abide by the law when looking for a solution but found there was no other recourse."

There is a question of how much cheese Bove has time to make. For the past two years he's been on the road, in Seattle for the WTO protests where he protested

engineered corn and soybeans. The peasants had earlier forced the local governor to declare the province of Rio Grande do Sul a biotech free zone but Monsanto secured an exemption. If Monsanto returns, the peasants say, they'll put the company's directors on a plane and send them back to the United States.

The United States is home turf to the world's mightiest corporate agribusiness, as family farmers know all too well, having seen their average income decline by 62 per cent since 1978, and have seen themselves become little more than sharecroppers for the four or five companies that now dominate US agriculture. Hence the support of Bove by the National Family Farm Coalition.

"Our fight is against globalization,"

ing), Bove went right back to work — his political work, that is. He traveled to Lille, in northern France, where he and four colleagues broke into the local headquarters of the ruling party to protest lack of support for small farmers. With them they brought a sow and 10 piglets, which they left behind in the party head's office along with 20 bales of hay.

In the Montpellier courtroom Bove wound up his speech from the dock thus: "Yes, the action was illegal; but I lay claim to it because it was legitimate. I don't demand clemency, but justice. Either we have acted in everyone's interests and you will acquit us, or we have shaken the establishment and in that case you will punish us. There is no other issue." CP

CounterPunch

3220 N Street, NW, PMB 346

Washington, DC 20007-2829

Attention Subscribers: the number that appears above your name on the mailing label refers to the ISSUE NUMBER of CounterPunch after which your subscription expires, NOT the month. Don't worry, this confuses everyone.

The Real Reason Al Hates Bill