

Trouble on the Home Front

Vicente Fox's popularity is soaring—in the United States

By Martin Espinoza

For months, Mexican President Vicente Fox has managed to stay one step ahead of the growing reality that little has changed in Mexico since his election last year, which toppled the autocratic regime that had controlled Mexican politics for 71 years. His critics charge that, after nine months in office, Fox has failed to make good on his pre-election promise to spur economic growth, end government corruption and negotiate a peaceful solution to armed uprisings in Mexico's poorest regions.

On July 2, the anniversary of his democratic triumph, Fox stole headlines from his detractors by marrying his spokeswoman and ending his controversial status as Mexico's most eligible bachelor. More recently, in early September—only days after the Mexican public coldly received his first state of the union address—Fox traveled to Washington for a high-profile state dinner at the White House and a speech before a joint session of Congress, in which he spoke boldly in defense of millions of Mexican immigrants. By focusing on the plight of immigrants in the United States, Fox shrewdly tapped into Mexican nationalism and the bitter resentment of a country that for centuries has been a doormat for the United States.

Not only was Fox able to regain his hero's status, but his visit helps President Bush make further inroads into a growing constituency. Media analyst and pollster Sergio Bendixen told *La Jornada*, a left-leaning Mexican daily, that Bush is trying to "exorcise" anti-

immigrant dogma from the Republican Party, and "Vicente Fox is the exorcist."

Hispanics represent a powerful voting bloc that Bush and other Republicans can no longer ignore. The number of registered Hispanic voters grew last year to more than 8 million, up from 5 million in 1994. The Hispanic vote was 7 percent last year and is expected to be 10 percent in the next presidential election. What's more, Hispanics are centered in the most important electoral states: California, New York, Texas, Illinois and Florida. In the 2000 election, most Hispanics remained loyal Democrats, though pre-election polls showed that many maintained a favorable opinion of Bush. Bendixen said that in recent months



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Bush's popularity among Hispanics shot up from 42 percent to 70 percent.

While Bush is seeking votes, Fox is seeking dollars. Fox has made no secret of Mexico's growing dependence on immigrant dollars—Mexicans in the United States sent some \$7 billion back to their families last year. Fox has encouraged Mexicans abroad to help fund public works projects in Mexico. He has said he would match the amount of money immigrants send back dollar for dollar.

There's a degree of desperation in Fox's asking America's worst paid residents for help—as if there were little he could do to improve Mexico's ailing economy. But that may indeed be the case. Since the economic crisis of 1994, most Mexicans have been struggling to

get back on their feet. The current economic slowdown has had a devastating effect on Mexico, which sells 85 percent of its exports to the United States. The low-wage *maquiladoras* that now dominate Mexico's industrial landscape offer no incentive for Mexicans to stay in their country. NAFTA has done little in the past seven years to reduce the country's poverty rates; up to 60 percent of Mexico's population lives in some degree of poverty.

During Fox's visit, Bush told reporters that only by strengthening its middle class can Mexico control its borders. That's easier said than done. Significantly raising salaries and thus Mexico's standard of living is unlikely, given the country's role as a low-wage haven for multinationals in the new global economy. Instead, as a way of generating much needed revenue, Fox has been pushing a fiscal reform package that includes a 15 percent tax on food and medicine. The revenue proposal, soundly rejected by the Mexican Congress and the public, represents Fox's biggest political failure yet. Add to that his inability to create new jobs, reduce crime or negotiate peace with armed rebels in poor states such as Chiapas, Guerrero and Oaxaca.

In the face of so many defeats at home, Fox has turned to foreign policy in the way one might expect a lame duck American president to do. The problem is, Fox has more than five years to go. Fox has said that he is president of 118 million people, 18 million of whom are living in the United States. Being a bold leader for these people may help get Bush votes and even encourage Mexican immigrants to wire home more money, but it won't solve the problems the other 100 million are suffering. ■

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The Daughter's Generals

Bush's cronies are eager to
renew ties with the
Indonesian military

By Frida Berrigan

Things seemed to be looking up for Indonesia in July, when President Abdurrahman Wahid, widely viewed as corrupt and incompetent, finally was voted out of office—and Vice President Megawati Sukarnoputri assumed leadership. Megawati, the daughter of Indonesia's founding father, Sukarno, is seen by many as a clean break from the legacy of General Suharto, who ruled the vast archipelago with an iron fist for more than 30 years.

But to write a new chapter of Indonesian history, Megawati must first subordinate the powerful military to civilian control and resolve the conflicts in Aceh and Irian Jaya, where separatist movements have battled with Indonesian forces for decades. Claiming to assist this worthy task, the Pentagon, White House and a consortium of corporations want to renew weapons sales and military training.

Washington applauded Megawati's choice of a stable of advisers with close ties to international lending institutions and U.S. corporations. Finance Minister Boediono is the former director of the World Bank's Indonesia office and worked for Bank of America in Jakarta. Laksamana Sukardi, the new minister of state-owned enterprises, is a former Citibank executive. These choices demonstrate Megawati's commitment to creating a favorable climate for investment.

Throughout Indonesia, U.S. corporations doing business there benefit from a cowed and cheap work force, nonexistent labor and environmental

protections and generous tax breaks. But as she flings open the door to businesses, Megawati slams the door on negotiated solutions to the bloody conflicts in Aceh and Irian Jaya.

While Defense Minister Matori Abdul Djalil is a civilian, other military advisers include Lt. Gen. Agum Gumelar, whose ties to the notorious Kopassus counter-insurgency units are well known, and Lt. Gen. Hari Sabarno, who adamantly opposes autonomy in Aceh and Irian Jaya.

These two provinces are the sites of massive operations by oil giant ExxonMobil and mining company Freeport-McMoRan, respectively. ExxonMobil pays the Indonesian military millions of dollars to protect its oil fields and operations in Aceh, an arrangement that led to a recent



Megawati greets East Timor independence leader Xanana Gusmão.

lawsuit by Acehnese villagers, who charge that soldiers on the company's payroll were responsible for rape, torture and murder.

Historically, the United States has consistently armed Indonesia's military with everything from F-16 fighter planes to M-16 combat rifles. Since Indonesia's invasion of East Timor in 1975, in which 200,000 people were killed, the United States has transferred more than \$1 billion in weaponry to Jakarta.

Congress stanchd the flow of weapons following the 1991 Santa Cruz massacre in East Timor, where soldiers wielding M-16s mowed down 270 unarmed people. Congress strengthened

the ban in response to military and paramilitary violence after East Timor's vote for independence in 1999. Central to this legislation are criteria for the resumption of military ties, including the return of East Timorese refugees and prosecution of soldiers involved in human rights violations.

Two years after the violence, a newly independent East Timor is still struggling to recover, and Indonesia has failed to meet the congressional criteria. Violence in Aceh and Irian Jaya continues to escalate. Despite these grim realities, officials in Washington are bending over backward to re-engage with the military. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld recently said he is "anxious to re-establish the military-to-military relationship with Indonesia."

While Bush himself is not well briefed on the region—his one remark on the conflict in East Timor during his campaign was an awkward reference to the "East Timorians"—his backers in the oil, gas and other industries are urging that the ban be lifted. The U.S.-ASEAN Business Council, a private body made up of the heads of corporations with interests in Southeast Asia—including ExxonMobil, Freeport-McMoRan, Boeing and Coca-Cola—released a report in February urging the new administration to "lift the embargo on military equipment and training

while re-establishing direct military-to-military contacts."

The Council on Foreign Relations also argues in a July report that the ban on military sales and training is "heavy-handed" and "short-sighted." Their report concludes that "the United States must cease hectoring Jakarta and re-engage Indonesia's army." Nearly one-third of the report's 27-member panel is made up of corporate representatives, including ExxonMobil and baked-goods giant Sara Lee, both of which have extensive investments in Indonesia.

Given the report's pro-weapons-sales position, it is not surprising that

Dov Zakheim, a former Reagan official who just signed on as the comptroller in Bush's Pentagon, drafted the report. Between working for Reagan and Bush II, Zakheim was a lobbyist for weapons manufacturers like McDonnell Douglas (now part of Boeing), promoting arms sales to Saudi Arabia, Israel and elsewhere.

Despite the push coming from the Pentagon, White House and big business, many in Congress oppose re-establishing military ties. Most prominent among them is Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa). He visited a church in East Timor just days before the 1999 vote, where hundreds sought refuge from the military violence. Everyone he met was later killed. In memory of that horror and because no one has been prosecuted for that crime, he pledges opposition to the resumption of military aid: "I'll do everything I can to stop it."

Frida Berrigan is a research associate with the Arms Trade Resource Center.

Klamath Water Babies

Anti-government farmers wouldn't have prospered without federal handouts

By Jeffrey St. Clair

KLAMATH, OREGON—Not since Shay's Rebellion has a popular uprising against the government enjoyed such jaunty press coverage. When a militant band of irrigators in the Klamath River basin of southern Oregon thumbed their noses at the Bureau of Reclamation and illegally diverted water into their fields of alfalfa, politicians such as Oregon Sen. Gordon Smith rushed to their side, calling them heroes.

Press accounts portrayed the irrigators as hard-scrabble farmers, versed in the values of Jefferson's agrarian democracy, defending their livelihood against an out-of-control federal government. Even Willie Nelson and his FarmAid organiza-

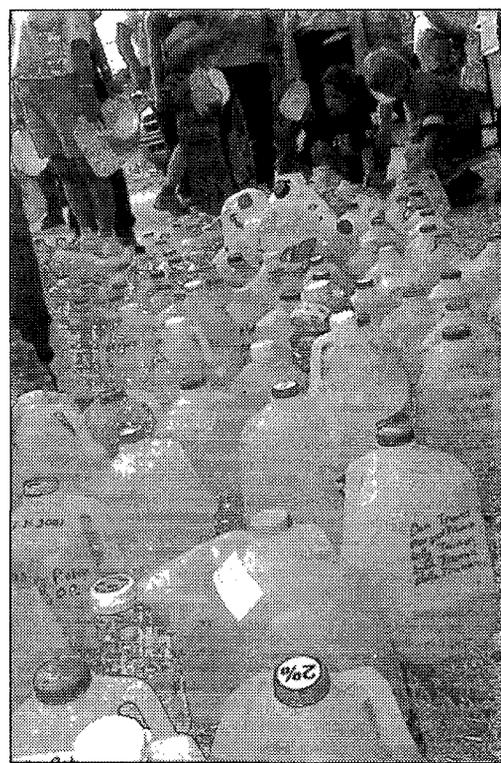
tion forwarded messages of solidarity. To top it off, there was near unanimous agreement that the proximate blame for the farmers' dire straits resided with the unfortunately named suckerfish.

The battle of the Klamath rests on a number of myths, perhaps none so frail as the supposed plight of the farmers themselves. It has been widely reported that the feds' decision to shut off irrigation water to the farmers put 1,400 farms in jeopardy. It should be remembered, however, that the irrigation district was heavily subsidized by the federal government, which not only footed most of the bills, but turned the Klamath National Wildlife Refuge into croplands for the farmers.

As much as the Klamath farmers decry the federal government, their farms exist almost solely because of generous federal handouts. Indeed, the dams, irrigation canals and headgates were all constructed with federal money, which they partially paid back by growing crops on federal land. "The debt the Klamath water users owed the United States came to about \$70 million for project construction with no interest," says Phil Doe, a former environmental compliance officer for the Bureau of Reclamation.

The Klamath refuge's once-extensive marshlands provide one of the most important bird habitats in the world. More than 2 million birds stop here to feed and rest during spring and fall migrations. Plus, more than 1,000 eagles, one of the densest populations in North America, roost here every year. Drained of water and parched by drought, those marshlands have now been transformed into a fissured bed of caked mud, with dust devils rising off land that should be the hunting ground of herons and osprey.

While the suckerfish, once a staple in the diet of the Klamath tribes, gets all the attention, the Klamath River also once boasted the most robust salmon fishery south of the Columbia River. No more. Dams, withdrawals for irrigation and toxic runoff from chemical agriculture have destroyed the fishery. The water in the once crystalline streams is now murky,



Supporters from across the country sent bottles of water to the Klamath farmers.

algae-clotted and emits a putrid odor.

The Klamath coho salmon has landed on the Endangered Species List, and the commercial salmon fishery has been put out of business largely by the upstream irrigators. "Those farmers are water robbers," says Tom Stockley, a former commercial salmon fisherman from Eureka, California. "Commercial fishermen have given up, given up, given up. I think it's time for someone else to give up something."

The salmon fishermen aren't the only locals who are unimpressed by the beligerence of the farmers. Bonanza, Oregon—a small town inside the basin itself—was once known for the purity of its water, which gushed forth from dozens of springs near town. Now the town's water supply is contaminated with toxins, algae and coliform bacteria. Residents must boil their drinking water and add bleach to their bathwater. The culprit: the Klamath farmers, whose toxic runoff has contaminated the town's wells and natural springs.

At the end of August, the town decided to sue the Klamath Basin Irrigation District. It wasn't an easy decision to make. Each time the problem was debat-

ed at City Council meetings, the Klamath farmers would show up en masse. "Whenever we have meetings, we get shouted down, overpowered," Former Bonanza City Councilman Bob Hoylman told the *Portland Oregonian*. Hoylman said that he finally resigned his position because of the rising tensions and death threats: "These people, they're out for blood."

Doe recalls urging his bosses at the Bureau of Reclamation to close the Klamath refuge to farmers more than a decade ago. "But no one wanted to do it," he says. "The payments for the leasing of wildlife refuge land were used to pay down the debt on the construction of the Klamath basin irrigation infrastructure—the same system that is destroying the refuge. Does it get any better than that? But now look at the ugly situation you've got: you're losing salmon, suckerfish, eagles, and you've poisoned the water quality in the entire basin. To those who argue that we need to help the Klamath irrigators out in their hour of need, maybe even buy them replacement land, I say, save it for those who really need it and deserve it." ■

Never Let Them See You Sweat

UNITE takes on the Wal-Marts of the world

By David Moberg

In an unprecedented international campaign to organize garment workers, unions in the United States, Asia and Central America are joining with student and religious groups to target the real powers in the global apparel business: big brand-name merchandisers like Eddie Bauer, Ann Taylor, Gap, J. Crew, Abercrombie & Fitch and the major retail chains.

The clothing industry has changed dramatically in the past few decades: Roughly 30 major retailers now dominate the business, subcontracting work to thousands of workplaces employing 2 million people in 150 countries, whether in massive factories in China or Indonesia, highly mobile small workshops in Central America, or even

individual homework in the United States. "Retailers led by the Wal-Marts of the world determine the price, and the contractors have no choice," says new UNITE President Bruce Raynor, who is spearheading the global organizing drive. "It's their decision whether a product will be made in a sweatshop."

UNITE estimates that 80 percent of the workers producing clothing for U.S. retailers "are working under conditions that systematically violate local and international law." "Retailers know if a seam is one-eighth inch off, but they say they don't know it's made with child labor," Raynor says. "Bullshit. They know exactly what's going on, and we'll hold them accountable."

Beyond fashion and style, retailers increasingly are selling their brand image, and none of them wants its hipness compromised by association with child labor, prison labor, unsafe working conditions or sexual exploitation. The new retailer campaign, building on the anti-sweatshop efforts focused on individual companies like Nike, aims to tackle the entire industry.

Economist Robert Pollin estimates that only about \$55 of the \$1,831 spent



Appall-o-Meter

By Dave Mulcahey

Thin Blue Line 7.2

Two sheriff's deputies from rural Maryland are breaking new ground in the field of frivolous litigation. They're suing an innocent motorist they beat the hell out of three years ago.

Frederick T. Moore IV was driving erratically, Geov Parrish reports on Workingforchange.com, when a Frederick County patrol car picked up his trail. Moore failed at first to pull over. Then, when he did stop at a roadblock police had set for him, he failed to respond to their commands.

In short order, deputies Eric J. Winer and Jeffrey A. Norris had pepper-sprayed Moore, wailed on him with nightsticks and unleashed a dog into the cab of his pickup. Only then did they notice a sign dangling from Moore's rearview mirror identifying him as a diabetic. Moore, it turns out, had been on the verge of a diabetic coma.

No criminal charges were filed in connection with the case, but, after a four-day stay in the hospital, Moore filed a \$10 million lawsuit in federal court. Now Winer and Norris are a little hurt, frankly, by the way

Moore has been squalling to the press. After all, the lawmen claim in a suit filed in U.S. District Court, they saved him from "serious harm, injury and/or death." They're seeking \$68,000 in damages.

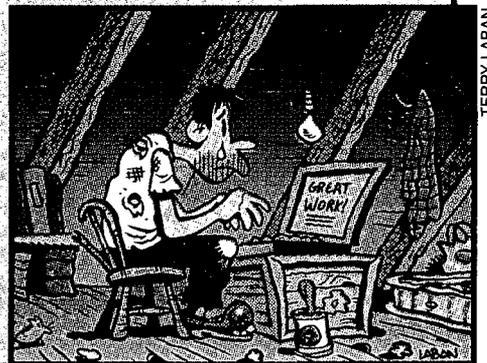
Grub Street Blues 4.9

Pity the poor scribblers. According to a report published by the National Writers Union, pay rates for freelance writers have declined by more than half since the '60s—and by as much as 80 percent at the top magazines. (Over the same period, by contrast, the average hourly wage in America has fallen a mere 20 percent in real terms.)

According to the report (which can be found at www.nwu.org), a freelancer can expect to churn out between 3,000 and 4,000 published words a month, the equivalent of two feature articles. Even a prolific writer, if paid 30 cents a word—the low end of the *New York Times* freelance scale, according to the NWU—could expect to make only \$14,400 a

year (even less if you take expenses into account). Of course, writers favored with the *Times*' high-end buck-a-word rate won't qualify for food stamps. They will, however, still fall short of the median income of full-time, college-educated workers in the United States.

So how do writers manage to cough up content, especially for alternative weeklies and, ahem, lefty magazines that offer a fraction of the aforementioned rates? Because rent's not so bad here in Bangladesh, actually, and because we love you.



TERRY LABAN