

Meetings: Mondays at 5:00
G-27 Anabel Taylor Hall
(607)256-7293

CUSLAR NEWSLETTER

A Project of CRESP

CRISIS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PUERTO RICO

The strike by students at the University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras Campus, in the latter half of 1981, focused the island's attention on public education. The strike was called to protest a 500% increase in tuition, which was arbitrarily declared by university authorities over the summer. The students charged that the magnitude of the raise seriously threatened the ability of many low-income students to attend the university. The students also contended that the university's need for funds could be partly solved by a more efficient administration and a more organized and rational use of existing resources. This last allegation was supported by a report by a commission of the Middle States Schools Association, which visited the university during June. They found that one of the main problems confronting the state university and threatening the school's certification was poor administration as a result of political meddling by the government.

The students showed unprecedented unity in opposition to the tuition raise and the decision making process used by the administration. In spite of this and the support for the strike shown by many sectors of Puerto Rican society, the government responded with intransigence and unwillingness to discuss the issue. In September the Rio Piedras campus was occupied by the police, an action that led to repeated confrontations with the students. At the end of that month University Police fired shots at a peaceful demonstration of students; fortunately there were no injuries. The situation took a turn for the worse when the government utilized the Fuerza de Choque (the police's special forces) to break up a student demonstration on the the 22nd of October. A month later 7000 to 10,000 students were meeting to decide whether or not to continue the strike, when the Fuerza de Choque entered, armed with M-16s, smoke grenades, and batons. With shocking brutality, they broke up the assembly, injuring more than a dozen students

and many bystanders from the Rio Piedras community. The swiftness and violence with which the police acted suggested a plan drawn at high levels in government to break student unity and silence the strike leaders, whom the government had accused of being members of the "revolutionary left" and agents of Cuban communism.

The five-month strike ended when university authorities offered to negotiate, accepting preconditions set by the students. These were that the police leave the university grounds, that expelled students be taken back, and that the university administration guarantee financial aid to those needing it. By February, the students saw that the university administration had not seriously begun the re-evaluation necessary to deal with the crisis. They staged protest demonstrations, which were broken up by the police. This incident led many to fear further confrontations at the university.

At the heart of the university conflict is the grave institutional crisis which runs through all levels of administration. The lack of student participation and input, an overgrown bureaucracy, the absence of an educational philosophy to give university programs vigor and dynamism, the isolation of the university from the needs of the Puerto Rican population, and the mediocrity of government-appointed administrators are all endemic to the university and the higher education system in Puerto Rico. The attitude of the government, however, which has vowed not to let the university fall into the hands of radicals, casts a shadow on the prospects for an intelligent and just solution to the crisis.

Meanwhile, the population looks on, feeling powerless and wondering when the university, inert and stagnant, will reintegrate itself into society so that it can help solve the great problems that confront Puerto Rico today.



Women and Work in a Mexican Village

by Donna Goldstein

It was Doña Teresa's turn to use the new electric grinder. She was feeling a bit nervous that her new job would cause problems with Don Chido, so she awoke at 3:00 a.m. to make him his usual breakfast of fried beans and tortillas before he took off for the sugar cane fields to cut cane and before she took off to the meeting hall to complete her work shift at the new electric grinder.

The government had recently awarded the new grinder to the women's collective of the "Parcela AgroIndustrial de La Mujer" (Women's Agroindustrial parcel) of Poblado C-34. The women's collective received the new grinder because of the enthusiasm and initiative that the women had taken in the other collective endeavors. Each day a new group of three out of the 30-45 women of the collective was in charge of grinding corn and coco for tortillas and pozol (a native Tabascoan drink) to be sold in the poblado. The grinder would hopefully serve as a small, steady income for the women in the collective and also save all of the women in the poblado from the arduous task of hand grinding corn and coco each day. The arrival of the new electric grinder changed the lives of the people in the village, especially the women, but its success was somewhat limited.

Poblado (or village) C-34 is the name of one of the 22 poblados that were formed in the early 1970's in Tabasco, Mexico as part of a development project, "Plan Chontalpa," aimed at the poor subsistence farmers of this tropical lowland region. The development project basically changed the entire structure of agriculture of the region, replacing crops grown for export such as sugar cane and cacao (coco). More dramatically, the raising of cattle for meat production and export was also greatly expanded in the region.

Along with such structural changes, many other dimensions of development were considered in the planning of the project. The Women's Agroindustrial Parcel or women's collective was essentially created as the women's component of the development project. The "women" as a collective entity in each of the 22 newly created poblados were guaranteed 15 hectares of land to plant and harvest and reap the economic returns. All women were eligible to become members of the women's collective and thereby gain access to the 15 hectares. The grinder was the newest addition to the women's collective; it not only became a new way for women to enter the cash economy and receive wages for labor, but it also helped to change people's conceptions about the role of women and work.

In the days before the development project, cash was not as important in the economy as it is today. With the arrival of the project, cash replaced the trading and bartering of many goods as well as traditional exchanges of labor. Cash became power.

Men worked for daily wages in the Chontalpa. Women worked hard, as mothers, cooks, and farmers, but they were not paid in cash for this work. Only by working in the women's collective were women able to participate in the wage labor cash economy. In this way the grinder became the access to power for women.

In the beginning, profits from the grinder enterprise were quite low. For example, one of the earliest split of the profits payed only 40 pesos (\$2) to each woman for three completed shifts. Daily wages for the women of the poblado did rise a bit, once the initial costs were calculated and prices were adjusted. Never, however, did the women's daily wages equal that of men in the poblado or of workers outside of the poblado. Despite this fact, the women continues to work in the collective. There was a high turnover rate, but most women felt proud to be earning their own cash, even if their wages were not equal to the men's. The important point of comparison for these women was that most other poblados of the development project and rural villages

did not have an electric grinder nor did the women themselves have a source of cash income.


Working outside of the home simply is not feasible for many women because of the huge amount of chores that women must perform daily. In addition to general housecleaning, cooking, and child-care responsibilities, women in the Chontalpa are cultivators; they often care for the family parcel of two hectares and the garden which contains vital fruits and crops grown for use at home.

But most women in the C-34 parcela were in their forties, and could "afford" to work in the parcela because they had older daughters who could help them with their household chores and with the younger children.

After the grinder had been in the poblado for a few months, I asked many women whether they "worked" or not. Those who were not employed in shifts at the grinder quickly responded "no." It seems that "work" became defined as that paid in cash; since traditional women's work is not paid in cash, it seems that women's own conception of work, i.e. that at the grinder, may have undermined their own feelings of self-importance.

When interviewed, many women stated that they were not working in the women's collective, and thus with the grinder, because their husbands were against it. Many men in the village feel that "working" outside of



A vertical illustration on the left side of the page shows a woman in a headscarf and a young child. The woman is looking towards the right, and the child is looking towards the viewer.

the home for money was not an acceptable "role" for women to be in. The grinder was an interesting experiment for testing men's attitudes. Men generally disliked the idea of women working if it meant that they would have to leave the village unaccompanied. The new grinder offered a middle ground; women who worked shifts at the grinder never had to leave the village to work. The grinder was centrally placed in the meeting hall of the poblado. Providing this opportunity for women in the poblado to accustom men to seeing women work for wages. It helped adjust them to the changing role of women.

Doña Teresa uses the money she earns from her shifts at the grinder to help subsidize the schooling of one of her sons. She also enjoys being able to spend her money on a new dress for herself when a travelling merchant passes through without having to ask her husband for money.

To Doña Inez, a widow, the money she earns from the grinder and as a seamstress are extremely important. Her son works in the sugar factory and earns over 2000 pesos/month, but spends most of his money on gambling or alcohol or prostitutes. Thus, Inez must spend the meager wages she earns on feeding her seven children and three grandchildren. Inez cares for her grandchildren while her daughter works as a maid for a family in the city.

Doña Fidelia had to quit working at the grinder because her husband did not approve of her working. She enjoyed making her own money and hopes to convince her husband to let her resume working again.

Doña Marta enjoyed working at the grinder, but could not continue working. She has three small children and no older daughters to help her care for them and cook and clean at home.

Doña Erma decided to quit working at the grinder and devote more time to serious seamstress work since it paid better.

Doña Ana sleeps barely six hours a day. With her chores at home and her responsibilities at the grinder, she is quite overworked. However, she won't quit her work at the grinder because she needs the money and wants to "contribute" to her family with cash.

Doña Juana, of poblado G-33, wishes that her poblado had a grinder so that she could have some way of earning cash and "contributing" to her family.

The gains attributable to the arrival of the grinder in poblado C-34 are not so clearcut. The grinder has important implications for the changing role of women in the poblado; it helps integrate women into the cash economy. This is important in challenging traditional conceptions of the role of women and work and is important to the self-esteem of

the women. It also allows for some small measure of economic independence. On the other hand, the grinder could not point out to men and women themselves that the daily unpaid labor of women is important by itself. It seems that any program which hopes to change concepts of the role of women must incorporate some ideological component that recognizes the importance of traditional forms of women's labor.

Some people view the Plan Chontalpa as an experiment in socialism simply because it collectivized agriculture in one region of Mexico; this is not true.

Development was imposed on the campesinos by an inefficient, patriarchal bureaucracy. Unlike the Cuban revolution where women gained many political, economic and social rights through the family code, women in the Plan Chontalpa gained very little. Women were not integrated into the production process the way that men were; this would have meant evolving entirely new institutions, such as child care facilities. The example of the Plan Chontalpa points out the problem of imposing development projects in societies that maintain the existing socio-economic framework.

Puerto Rico: Paradise Invaded

Coming next in the CUSLAR film series, shown with "Courage of the People".

Although Puerto Rico was not exactly a paradise under Spanish colonial rule, it was certainly invaded by the U.S. in 1898—and still remains a colony. Under such a title, the movie describes the shortcomings and dissatisfactions of the largest colonial "experiment" by the United States. Narrated by a politically conscious worker, the movie

shows the repression that the opposition to Puerto Rico's domination by the U.S. has faced.

The movie is a collage of images of Puerto Rican political history in this century. It shows documentary footage of the 1898 invasion by the U.S. marines; incidents of nationalist resistance throughout this century; scenes of Puerto Rican exile life in New York; and of course, the beautiful scenery of Puerto Rico.



Stop the U.S. War in El Salvador

Mass Protest in Washington D.C.
Saturday, March 27, 12 Noon

- Fund Jobs and Human Needs—Not Massacres in El Salvador!
- Self Determination for the People of Central America and all Oppressed Nations—No More Vietnam Wars!
- Unite against the Reagan Policy of Oppression at Home and Intervention in the Third World!
No to the Draft! No to Racism! No to Sexism!

Tickets
available now
for buses
leaving from
Ithaca

#23 bus
ticket
available
at
Borealis~
Smedleys~
CUSLAR
Grain Store

MARCH 27 COALITION: Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador; American Indian Movement; Black Veterans for Social Justice; Clergy and Lay Concerned; International Indian Treaty Council; Mobilization for Survival; National Black Independent Political Party; National Black United Front; National Committee Against Regime and the Draft; (Executive Committee); National Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala; National Network in Solidarity with the People of Nicaragua; People's Anti-War Mobilization; Progressive Student Network; Puerto Rico Solidarity Committee; Religious Task Force on El Salvador; Women's Pentagon Action.

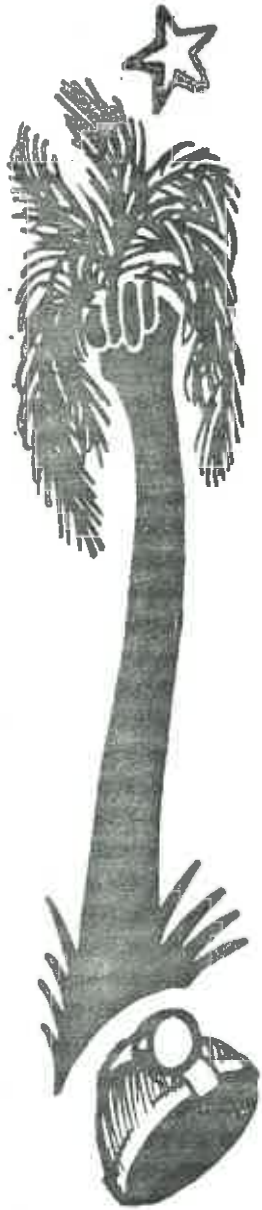
FOR INFORMATION, call (202) 622-4712
SEND CONTRIBUTIONS TO: P.O. Box 51391, Terra
High Station, Washington, D.C. 20009.

FOR LOCAL CONTACT:

CUSLAR G27 Ave
256-7293 Teylo

MARCH 1982

Calendar of Events



March 22 8 PM Anabel Taylor Aud.
Lecture: Women in the Euro-
pean Disarmament Movement
by Toni Liversage. Sponsored
by Women Against Militarism

March 23 8 PM Uris Aud. \$2
CHAC A film of Mayan myth-
ology, made in Mexico.
Sponsored by CRESP.

March 24 4:30 PM Anabel Taylor
Chapel. An interfaith ser-
vice in commemoration of the
2nd anniversary of the assa-
sination of Salvadorean Arch-
bishop Oscar Romero. Watch
for announcement of an eve-
ning event downtown.

7 PM Moot Courtroom, Cornell
Law School. Courts, Cops
and the Klan: Dimensions of
Racist Violence. A film and
speakers.

March 25 8 PM Uris Aud. Free
CUSLAR film series presents
Courage of the People and
Puerto Rico: Paradise Inva-
ded (see review in newsletter)

March 27 Demonstrate in Washington
against US intervention in
El Salvador (see ad in news-
letter).

