

## THE SCHOOL OF THE ASSASSINS

The Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation [WHINSEC], formerly named the School of the Americas [SOA], is known to its critics as the School of the Assassins, because of the murderous actions of a great many of its graduates.

Guatemala. In 1954 the U.S. CIA orchestrated a coup d'état to overthrow the democratically elected government of Guatemala. This was at the behest of a U.S.-based transnational corporation (now known as Chiquita) in order to reverse a land reform program, which would have given the peasants better options than to work for starvation wages on Chiquita's plantations. The brutality of the resulting military dictatorship, gave rise to a revolutionary insurgency. Since 1963, SOA, now located at Fort Benning near Columbus, Georgia, has trained tens of thousands of military and police officers from Latin America to put down such insurgencies and other threats to the property and profits of local and international capitalists. SOA graduates constituted half or more of the 8 to 10 military officers in the cabinets of each of the three military dictators who ruled Guatemala from 1978 to 1986. SOA counterinsurgency methods in Guatemala caused the deaths of more than 200,000 people, mostly non-combatants. No SOA graduate has ever been held accountable for these crimes against the people in Guatemala.

Venezuela. After Hugo Chavez was freely elected as Venezuelan President in 1998, he offended the Venezuelan rich by establishing social programs for the working class and poor. He also offended transnational corporations by nationalizing some foreign holdings and by restructuring contracts to give Venezuela a larger share of ownership and profits. Military officers, who had been trained at SOA, were prominent in the failed coup d'état, which temporarily overthrew President Chavez in 2002. Although overt U.S. complicity has yet to come to light, that coup attempt clearly received immediate U.S. government approval. Now leading politicians in both major U.S. political parties have demonstrated the hypocrisy of their liberal democratic pretensions by branding the popular democratically elected Chavez government as a "rogue regime".

Colombia. The U.S. government has spent over 5 billion dollars since 2000 supporting the Colombian government in its civil war against revolutionary insurgent forces and every other group seeking social justice for the common people. Right-wing paramilitary death-squads have run free carrying out, massacres, assassinations, death threats, torture, and other terrorist acts, often in collaboration with regular government forces. In the 1980s, when the FARC guerrillas experimented with peaceful participation in the electoral process, many pro-FARC candidates were assassinated with no action taken against the assassins. The government itself jails and represses trade unionists and other peaceful reformist political activists. Government forces also carry out extrajudicial killings, sometimes against captured guerrilla suspects, but also against labor leaders and other non-combatant dissidents. In the past 12 years, more than 1200 labor activists have been murdered, while many others were threatened, detained, tortured, or otherwise terrorized. Membership in trade unions has declined by more than half from 9.3% in 1984 to 4.6% in 2005. Since the current President, Alvaro Uribe, came to power in 2002, the

terror has continued with more labor activists murdered in Colombia than in the entire rest of the world. Colombian death squads murdered another 41 labor activists in just the first eight months of 2008. Rarely have the immediate perpetrators been apprehended or punished; and government action against the business representatives, who order these crimes, is virtually unheard of. Transnational business corporations, which operate in Colombia, include: Dole, Del Monte, Chiquita, Coca Cola, Nestle, Occidental Petroleum, Drummond Coal, Caterpillar, Hanes, Wal-Mart, Citigroup, and many others. Dole, DelMonte, and Chiquita were recently identified by a former death squad commander as having provided financing to his paramilitary. Colombia sends far more police and military officers for training at the SOA than any other country. Thus SOA graduates are plentiful in both the government forces and in the right-wing paramilitaries.

SOA graduates were also prominent: in the campaign of disappearances and murders of 30,000 dissidents in Argentina [1976 to 1983], in the murderous terror [from 1973] of Pinochet's Chile, and in the brutal repressions of other right-wing Latin American dictatorships.

Human rights and social justice activists demand that the School of the Assassins be closed and its counterinsurgency training programs be discontinued. School of the Americas Watch [SOAW] has brought activists to protest against SOA at the gates of Fort Benning annually since 1990. In recent years these protests have been over 15,000 and (most recently) 20,000 strong. A House bill in Congress to cut funding for SOA lost by only 6 votes this year. If the funding cut-off passes in the next Congress, we must not assume problem solved. Unless stopped, transnational capitalists will find other ways and venues, through which the U.S. government can conduct the counterinsurgency training and operations, which serve to preserve the repressive regimes, which serve capitalist property and profiteering interests in the third world.

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