

CHEMICAL DEPENDENCY IN THE CAMPO

Corn. To the Salvadoran *campesino* corn means life. Each day it is cooked and ground and made into tortillas, providing the energy necessary for survival.

The community Ciudad Romero is currently in its second corn-planting season since repatriating from Panama, where it spent 11 years in exile. Having endured a drought and subsequent loss of crops during its first planting season, the community is this year celebrating adequate rainfall and the promise of a bountiful harvest.

Along with the rainfall, however, has come an unexpected problem--that of a pest, which, if not controlled, destroys all of the corn. Therefore, to combat this pest, each farmer goes to the local store requesting a pesticide. The store owner, being a good businessman, persuades the farmer to buy the strongest (and most expensive) brand available. The farmer buys, and without safety equipment, or education, proceeds to spray, by hand, his corn field. This may result in feeling sick for the next few days with mild symptoms of pesticide poisoning, but he sees this as something that must be endured if his family is to eat in the coming months.

In the past two months alone, at least 15 people in Ciudad Romero have reported symptoms of mild to moderate pesticide poisoning, with several requiring hospitalization and treatment. Some have been poisoned more than once. One of the victims was Julia, a three-year-old girl who, while taking lunch to her father, walked through a field which was being sprayed. A few hours later she was vomiting, and was then hospitalized for two days.

Although Julia and the others seem to have fully recovered, what will the long-term effects be on their health? Since the laws that do exist in El Salvador regarding pesticides are not enforced, who is responsible for the abuse of pesticides? The farmer? The local store? The manufacturer? The government?

Meanwhile, corn is cooked, ground and made into tortillas, providing life to the campesino.

pan out for the Salvadoran people in the long run. The war may be over, but in many ways the battles have just begun. As one Salvadoran pastor put it, "War is the final expression of frustration and tension within the society. Now with the war over, we can begin to resolve the problems that caused it in the first place."

One of the most difficult problems that must be faced is that of land tenancy. The Peace Accords formally commit the government to carrying out land reform measures created (but not fully implemented) in the early 1980's. Yet the process is a long and complicated one, and there is still a great deal of scepticism over whether the government will actually act on this issue.

At the present time, one of the most controversial and well-known cases is that of El Espino. Often referred to as the "Lung of San Salvador," El Espino is a very large stretch of fertile land to the North West of the capital city. During the Agrarian Reform attempts, El Espino was expropriated from its multi-millionaire owners, the Dueñas family. The family was offered a generous sum of money in return, more than its declared worth. The campesinos who were awarded the land by promisory note formed a cooperative which has worked the land throughout the war years in spite of the difficulties and risks to themselves. They carefully cultivated and cared for the coffee trees, producing good harvests from the hard work they put in.

After the takeover of the government by the right-wing ARENA party in 1989, El Espino's former owners began to petition to get the land back. Though they had previously declared the land to be rural in order to minimize tax payments, they now claim that it was actually semi-urban land and therefore exempt from the Agrarian Reform.

The case is tied up in a legal mess involving corruption at the Supreme Court level, government officials who propose re-purchasing the land from the Dueñas family, leaving a prize portion to the family to be developed into a lucrative shopping mall for the rich Escalon district, ecology activists who denounce the possible destruction of this forested area in a country already deeply suffering the effects of deforestation, and the 5,000 campesinos who have worked the land cooperatively the last 12 years. The outcome of this case will be a true test of the government's commitment to, and ability to carry out, land reform.

virtually come to a halt, freedom of speech is at a notable all-time high, dialogue between the government of El Salvador and the F.M.L.N. continues, despite the numerous difficulties that must be overcome as both sides renegotiate details regarding the fulfillment of the Peace Accords, and work continues on the development of the National Civilian Police, El Salvador's first police force under civilian, rather than military, control.

El Salvador is definitely living in a "new moment." The presence of the United Nations Office, the absence of military patrols and checkpoints, the reduction of anxiety and stress in people's lives, all are indications of the great changes that have taken place since the signing of the Peace Accords on January 16 of this year. Just how this will translate into long-lasting concrete reform remains to be seen.

What is clear is that the society must work for reconciliation in order to heal the many wounds brought about by the war and repression. The churches of El Salvador are faced with this great challenge: to seriously take up the role of Peacemaker, recognizing that true peace will only come with societal justice and equality for all. Churches in the United States are also faced with a challenge, that of continuing to press for just foreign policies not only for El Salvador, but for the many other nations in which the U.S. is involved as well. El Salvador suffered deeply as a result of U.S. foreign policy over the last 12 years. We must work to end U.S. policies which cause suffering to Salvadorans as well as to other peoples in the world, including those in the U.S..

HOSPITAL FOOD VERSUS VILLAGE FOOD

A Christian medical mission admitted a malnourished child to a hospital. The child stayed in the hospital for several weeks, and gained enough weight to return to his family in the village. The health educators gave the mother a ration of food, and instructed her to feed it to the child.

The health educators did not expect to see the child again. However, a few months later, the child and his mother returned to the hospital. The child had lost all the weight that he had gained during his previous stay in the hospital.

The child was treated a second time. The health educators gave the mother another supply of food, and instructed her again to feed the child. Several months later, the mother brought the malnourished child back to the hospital.

The health educators confronted the child's mother, and asked her why she was not able to maintain the child's health. The mother said she was very concerned about the child's health, but said she could not feed the child the hospital food in the village because the ancestors insisted that the child could eat only village food.

The health educators challenged this answer by asking the mother why the ancestors would let the child eat hospital food in the hospital, but not in the village. The mother said, "The child can eat food in the hospital because the ancestors do not go near it. They are afraid of the people who wear white coats, and they do not like the hospital smell."

How should the health educators respond to the mother's concern? What is an effective Christian witness to her?

Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi

**Lord, make me an channel of Thy peace,
that where there is hatred I may bring love;
that where there is wrong, I may bring the
spirit of forgiveness;
that where there is disorder, I may bring
harmony;
that where there is error, I may bring truth;
that where there is doubt, I may bring faith;
that where there is despair, I may bring hope;
that where there are shadows, I may bring
light;
that where there is sadness, I may bring joy.**

**Lord, grant that I may seek to comfort than to be
comforted;
to understand than to be understood;
to love than to be loved.**

**For it is by forgiving that one is forgiven;
it is by forgetting self that one finds it;
it is by dying that one awakens to eternal life.**