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Adios, Guatemala: Refugees in Chiapas

As the rainy season winds to a close in the jungles of the state of Chiapas in southern Mexico, refugees slowly die of starvation while new ones continue to arrive in varying numbers.

There are over 140,000 people from Guatemala encamped as refugees in Mexico. They have been driven there because to stay in their country would have meant certain death due to the Guatemalan government's policy of irradiating villages in the Northern mountains which are supposedly Communist guerrilla strongholds. The wide-spread atrocities which have resulted numb one's sensibilities. The recent coup and change of government there do not bode well because the man who seized power participated in and executed these policies as Minister of Defense.

The situation there has largely escaped the attention of the U.S. news media, but several large and well-organized relief efforts are now in operation in southern Mexico. Eugene's GRACIAS committee has been raising funds locally and sending them to one of the organizations working there, namely CARGUA (Comite de Ayuda a Refugiados Guatemaltecos).

The local people of Chiapas help in what small way they can. A small number of the refugees have been taken in on farms and what food can be spared is given to the camps, CARGUA in the last year provided over 250,000 pounds of corn to the camps as

well as comparable amounts of other staples. Yet this has not been enough; malnutrition and the host of diseases which result are still the most immediate problem. It is not known at this point what will happen to these people or where they will go, but keeping as many of them alive as possible is a basis for any other solutions which may be found.

With the purpose of raising funds, GRACIAS is presenting a 1983-made film entitled *Adios, Guatemala* on Wednesday, Oct. 12 at 7:30 p.m. at the Wesley Center at 1236 Kincaid. *Adios, Guatemala* deals with the refugees and with the oppression in Guatemala which made people in an ages-old, stable culture into refugees. The evening will also feature a slide show of Guatemala in 1975 as well as an exhibit of textiles from that country. While admission is free, donations are requested. Donations are tax deductible and will go directly to buy food, medicine and clothing for the refugees.

The last reliable news we have from the region came in August when it was reported that new refugees keep arriving. New camps are formed in the jungle and the efforts in these centers is on basic survival. In the older camps, workers are trying to implement production projects

which will provide at least some autonomy from external aid.

The Mexican government is making life more difficult for those who are working to help the refugees. Foreigners are no longer allowed into the area of the camps and the refugees themselves are not allowed to leave. A woman who was working in the camps was abducted for over 24 hours by three men with guns who interrogated her continually about relief organizations and individuals in those groups. As she was released they told her, "we don't want anyone helping the refugees."

The plague of violence, inhumanity and general misery which has a grip on Central America seems to be spreading into once-peaceful southern Mexico. A woman who is deeply involved in refugee work there reports this conversation with her five-year-old child:

"If somebody comes and wants to bury me alive, then I will call God, who will come with his [sic] gun and . . ." I interrupted him and explained that God doesn't have a gun and that God doesn't like for people to kill each other with guns. He looked at me and didn't answer for quite a while. Finally, he said, "Well, God better go quickly and ask somebody to lend him a gun."

—Dan Fuehring



There will be a Special Benefit Showing of *Alsino and the Condor* on Saturday, October 8, at 4 p.m., at Cinema 7. All proceeds will go to the Eugene Council for Human Rights in Latin America for emergency medical relief for Central American refugees. Admission \$2.

Alsino and the Condor

Directed by Miguel Littin (Nicaragua, 1982)

Alsino and the Condor is an important film. It helps bridge the gap between the world we are exposed to by mass media and the real world, full of terror, violence and misunderstanding. The world in which *Alsino*, a twelve-year-old village child in Nicaragua, lives is one from which he longs to escape. *Alsino* wants to be free from the everyday horrors of this world: he wants to fly like a bird.

Chilean director Miguel Littin was asked by the Institute of Cine in Nicaragua to make that country's first feature film. The film was made as a Mexican-Cuban-Costa Rican-Nicaraguan co-production for approximately \$60,000. Littin said about the production, "With more money the picture might have been easier to make, but it would have been less passionate. Every day was a struggle and many times I thought we would never end the movie. But when it finished, I was sorry."

Littin recruited a diverse group of professional actors and actual villagers from the area in which he was filming. He also used Sandinista soldiers to portray the oppressive forces representative of the likes of the

former Samozan National Guard. For the role of the American adviser to the Nicaraguan government, a man dedicated to flushing out rebellion and subversion with bombs and bullets, Littin cast Dean Stockwell, American actor and ex-child star. Stockwell's character tries to befriend *Alsino* by taking him for a ride in his helicopter. *Alsino* knows that this condor-painted machine does not possess the kind of wings that he desires.

Alsino's experiences in this world seem to offer more truth about Nicaragua, and about Latin America in general, than the nightly newscasts which we condition ourselves to ignore. While Littin does not consider the film to be anti-American, he clearly believes in the force of liberation and of freedom. Nominated for Best Foreign Language Film, *Alsino and the Condor* is far from being a perfect film. It is, however, a brave and forceful look at the truth about the fight for liberty and democracy in Latin America.

—Cathy Sarkowsky

(Film reviews by Cathy Sarkowsky can also be heard on KLCC 89.7 FM.)

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