



ETTY YANIV

# YANKEE STAY HOME

BY LOIS MORFORD

I have been asked to write about what I think the role of the United States should be in Central America in the 1990's and into the 21st Century. My first reaction was to decline — I am no expert, I have not researched all the countries or all the issues. I was asked to write from the heart, from my personal experience. So please accept the limitations of my observations. They are my own little piece of the truth as I see it.

I see such a similarity between the aspirations of the people of Eastern Europe and the people of Central America. I wish they could get together in solidarity. Both peoples are fighting for the same goals: removal and punishment of corrupt government officials; freedom of choice, specifically free elections with many parties participating; an end to the persecution of labor, religious, and student leaders; more availability of food and consumer goods to the people; an end to repression and torture and the release of political prisoners; and an end to the interference and control of their countries by the superpower nations.

It is amazing to me, and tragic for the people of Central America, that our government and our media interpret these aspirations in Eastern Europe as being a rejection of Communism, while in Central America the very same aspirations are viewed as Communist inspired.

The reality, which I believe we must always keep in mind, is that in Central America a tiny percent of the population (2%) owns and controls almost all the land and resources (60% or more). These 2% are fabulously wealthy, with more wealth than any of us on the Oregon coast have seen. They live behind high walls with broken glass on top, with vicious dogs and

security guards all around. The wealth of the country and much of our U.S. aid is sent to their foreign bank accounts. They own the land, which they rent to the peasants at such high rates the farmers must try to live at below subsistence levels. In some areas where I have worked, half of the peasant children die before the age of five. The situation is getting more desperate. These 2% hire death squads to exterminate anyone who tries to organize or protest the status quo.

So what should the role of the U.S. be in Central America? In my opinion, we should get out! I truly believe that without U.S. interference, the people of Central America, like the people of Eastern Europe, would be able to resolve their own problems. I do not even support "humanitarian" or "economic development" aid. In my experience and observation, this well-intentioned aid ends up benefitting the big plantation owners and landholders, and never trickles down to the poor people. Instead it increases their debt to U.S. banks. So I join with rightwing conservatives in calling for an end to government foreign aid to Central America! Our aid does more harm than good. I would be so pleased and proud if our government could follow the lead of Gorbachev and willingly give up our control of our Central American satellites.

There is one more point I would like to make, and if you have agreed with me so far, this may be a bit more difficult for you. I believe we must all realize that the reason we here in the United States have so much in material wealth is because we exploit Central America and other third world nations. We are standing on the backs of our Latin brothers and sisters. They are not poor countries in terms of natural resources. The problem is that their best lands are owned by the tiny elite who use them to raise cotton, coffee, beef and bananas to export to us. The majority of the population cannot subsist on the poor land that is left. If they object, they are killed as Communists with weapons supplied by our government.

I was in a Unitarian Church in December where educated, caring people were discussing this issue. Three people expressed the view that the basic problem in third world countries was too many children. As long as they don't control their population they can't expect to overcome their poverty. I disagree with that opinion. In addition to the infant mortality figures, consider this: The United States, with 6% of the world's population, consumes 60% of the world's resources. What this means is that

each privileged child born here in the U.S. consumes as much of the world's resources as 10 third world children, and consequently pollutes the world 10 times as much as any third world child. The well-planned family of two children in the U.S. has as much impact environmentally as 20 (or more) third world children. I myself have four children and so far three grandchildren, whom I adore. But in terms of impact on the earth, I realize this is the equivalent of 40 children and 30 grandchildren. The overpopulation of the earth is not due to third world countries, but to us.

So what can we do about all this? Be aware. Oppose U.S. intervention in Central America, certainly in military aid, but also in "economic" aid. Simplify your life. Protect the ecology of our planet. Use non-renewable energy sparingly. Recycle all you can. Take an active role in politics. Educate yourself in public interest matters. Help out in your community. Keep in touch with other activists. Be caring and loving. Be good to one another.

Lois Morford lives in Astoria. She is a teacher and has spent considerable time in Central America. She was a United Nations observer at a refugee camp in Honduras in 1983. The camp was filled with refugees from El Salvador and Guatemala who had fled repression and death squads in their countries. In 1985 she was a member of a delegation from Oregon that spent a month in Nicaragua as part of the Witness for Peace program, sponsored by Clergy and Laity Concerned. Her group was endangered by a Contra attack in a neighboring village while they were visiting a coffee cooperative. In recent years she has returned to Honduras and Guatemala. She has written several articles about Central America for the NCTE.



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