

Tales from the White Dog Cafe

A Quarterly Newsletter 3420 Sansom St. Philadelphia Summer, 1998

Trading for Change

When I sip my morning coffee at the White Dog Cafe, I often think of the indigenous farmers in the highlands of Chiapas, Mexico, where our coffee is grown. Through our trade in coffee and the crafts we sell in The Black Cat, I feel a connection with the Mayans of Mexico and their struggle for human rights. Since the 1994 Zapatista uprising, I've traveled to Chiapas several times as part of our international sister restaurant project. Last December our Mexican sister restaurant alerted us to the increased violence in the region which had driven thousands of Indians into the jungle without food and shelter.

In response to the massacre at Acteal when 45 of those refugees, mostly women and children, were murdered by paramilitary forces, I contacted other companies who purchase organic coffee or crafts from southern Mexico and formed Businesses for Equitable Trade & Human Rights in Chiapas. Representing fifteen companies from across the US, a delegation of five, including Philadelphia's New Harmony Coffee and Frontier Herbs and Coffee in Iowa, traveled to Chiapas to investigate the effects of the violence on our indigenous trading partners.

During our visit to a coffee cooperative we were told that paramilitary soldiers had forced the growers off their land, burning houses and stealing their coffee harvest, leaving the producers without income or homes, and putting in jeopardy years of hard work on the part of the coffee cooperative and their trading partners in the US and Europe. Unable to work since the massacre, the women in a weaving cooperative tearfully spoke of their grief over the gruesome slaying of their friends and fear of the soldiers who had threatened that they be next.

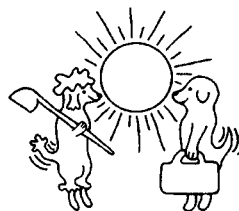
Through all our interviews we heard the same story: while Zapatista supporters uphold the peace accords and enforce non-violence since the cease-fire four years ago, well armed and supplied paramilitary forces loyal to Mexico's ruling party have conducted a reign of terror and systematic attack on the indigenous economy resulting in the loss of the region's coffee harvest. Our own country is complicit by continuing military aid and training. Mexican Army leaders in Chiapas, who grant the paramilitary forces immunity if not direct support, are graduates of the US Army School of Americas, known for producing officers implicated in massacres, torture and other human rights violations throughout Latin America. The School now trains more military personnel for Mexico than any other country.

Our group traveled to Chiapas in support of the indigenous people with whom we trade, but we also went to defend an economic system we believe in. Through people-to-people, win-win

business relationships based on equitable prices and support of sustainable agriculture and development, we offer an alternative economic model to a global economy dominated by multinational corporations which often lack respect for the environment and the lives of workers and suppliers. Through conscious purchasing, all citizens can participate in building a world economy based on healthy local economies, both in our own communities and communities abroad.

Launched on the day NAFTA took effect, the struggle of the indigenous people in the highlands of Chiapas for self-determination and self-sufficiency is our fight, too. It's the struggle to make a living wage when you work hard for it, and it's the fight to save family farms and neighborhood businesses. In essence, it's a global struggle between those who are working to build a world economy built on business relationships which benefit all people & the traditional forces of globalization based on environmental and human exploitation. Change is possible; as traders, consumers and voters, the choice is ours.

Judy Wicks



New Visions for Business

A quarterly forum on making work meaningful

Monday, July 13, 6pm

"Shared Capitalism" with Jeff Gates,
author of *The Ownership Solution*,

described by Mikhail Gorbachev as a guide to "transcend the simplistic dilemma of capitalism versus socialism and create a new, sustainable civilization." Former counsel to the Senate Finance Committee, Jeff worked with Louisiana's Senator Russell Long (Huey's son) crafting the federal law encouraging employee stock ownership plans (ESOPs), since implemented in over 10,000 companies. An advisor to more than 2 dozen foreign governments, Jeff addresses issues of wealth inequality and our system's failure to create more capitalists. His ideas receive support from an unlikely mix of prominent politicians from Bill Bradley to Jack Kemp.

6pm Three course diner followed by discussion.
\$30, including tax & gratuity. Reservations 386-9224.