

# Architects of the new slaveocracy

BY MARY MACDONALD

During a public debate on February 20th at the Dalhousie Law School, the merits of the Helms-Burton (Libertad) Bill were addressed by Ms. Gina Hathaway, an employee of the U.S. State Department, and Peter Milliken, Member of Parliament for Kingston. Ms. Hathaway, an exponent of Helms-Burton, raised multiple themes during her discussion of U.S.-Cuban relations, three of which are briefly examined here.

### 1. Slaves.

According to Ms. Hathaway, ordinary Cuban workers are being exploited by their government as a source of "slave labour." This assertion was apparently viewed with scepticism by the audience. A closer analysis, however, would reveal that it is entirely plausible for the Helms camp to raise the spectre of slavery in the Cuban context. Whereas North Carolina was an historical bastion of the planter caste, it is quite understandable that a challenge to the property claims of the landed aristocracy would arouse the indignation of the arch-conservative Senator. With respect to property claims in Latin America, Senator Helms has indeed emerged as the champion and standard bearer of the slaveocracy which once flourished on his home turf.

A cursory glance at the regime of the Southern states in the 19th century illustrates how "democratic forms" had been success-

fully combined with outright slavery. In the 1980s, the "democratic transition" imposed on Chile by the Pinochet regime was enthusiastically applauded by Jesse Helms. Within the auspices of the Libertad Bill, the southern Senator now prescribes a similar formula for Cuba — under the pretext of emancipating the "slaves" of that Caribbean island. Such "transitions to democracy" conform to authoritarian regimes (i.e. reconfigured slaveocracies) and are inherently undemocratic in substance.

### 2. Torture.

Ms. Hathaway correctly states that survivors of political torture — a fundamental human rights abuse — may now pursue legal recourse against the perpetrators of those activities, who, as is frequently the case, reside in another country. Many victims of torture escaped from their countries of origin in Latin America and subsequently sought refuge in the U.S., Canada and elsewhere. The widespread practice of torture in Argentina and Chile during the military dictatorships of the 1970s and 80s is a well-documented phenomenon.

As a consequence of concerted pro-activism on behalf of torture victims, these survivors have recently acquired the right to prosecute the perpetrators of those acts. In most cases, the torturers have evaded responsibility for these crimes because the "transition to democracy" administrators in their

respective countries have essentially absolved the military of responsibility for those atrocities.

What relationship exists between the legal rights of torture victims and U.S. foreign policy vis-a-vis Helms-Burton? Ms. Hathaway reasons that the recently established rights of torture survivors to sue extraterritorially should in turn be extended to property owners. According to the architects of Helms-Burton, no moral or legal distinction should exist between the grievances of property owners and those of torture victims. Landowners who have been adversely affected by expropriation are demanding the same mechanisms of legal recourse granted to junta victims as recommended by human rights tribunals.

Whether Ms. Hathaway's claims are founded upon valid legal and ethical principles is a matter for further in-depth deliberation. By utilizing a torture victim/property claimant analogy, however, her argument betrays a glaring omission from the outset. She neglected to inform her Dalhousie audience that torture, as historically practiced in Latin America, is inflicted by the agents of the reactionary landowners whose interests Senator Helms so zealously guards.

### 3. Salvadore Allende.

The former Chilean president was perhaps the most cynical pawn in the vast arsenal of propaganda wielded by Senator Helms'

State Department speechwriter. Ms. Hathaway knows very well that Senator Helms was an arch enemy of the Allende Popular Unity government. In fact, the North Carolina politician was and still remains a staunch ally of General Augusto Pinochet. Helms personally visited Chile in 1986 at the special invitation of the Sociedad Nacional de Agricultura, a conservative organization of local landowners.

During his visit did Senator Helms express concern about the repressive nature of the Pinochet dictatorship? Did he object to the systematic crushing of labour unions, collective organizations and the exile and torture of Pinochet's political opponents? Not at all. Helms has no qualms whatsoever concerning the regi-

mentation of "slave labour" as practiced in post-Pinochet Chile.

Ms. Hathaway's presentation in support of the Helms-Burton Bill was supposedly about "democratization" in Cuba. The themes incorporated and briefly reviewed here — slavery, torture, and Salvadore Allende — suggest a much wider agenda.

Cuba and Chile are two integral components of the neoliberal blueprint for Latin America — a fact that Ms. Hathaway failed to acknowledge during her "debate". Ms. Hathaway, Senator Helms and other twentieth century architects of the new slaveocracy are well advised to take note that an important distinction exists with respect to Cuba's slaves — they are armed.

Last Monday the Gazette held elections for those section editors who will be filling their positions in September. These people will be helping to carry the Gazette through its 130th year of publication in 1997/98.

- Arts Editor **Greg McFarlane**
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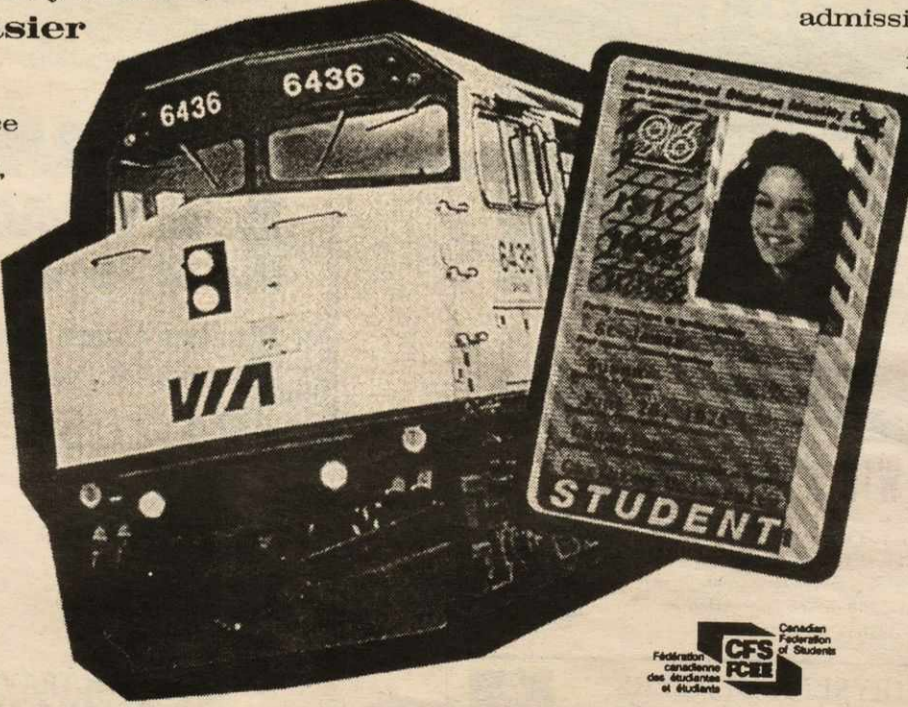
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