

STOP *Killer Cola* FUND-RAISER

By John Martinez

On April 17th, a rally to Stop Killer Coke was held, sponsored by UAW Region 1, Region 1A, UAW Local 22, SEMCOSH and the Detroit branch of the IWW.

The featured speakers at the rally, held at UAW Local 22's union hall, were SINALTRAINAL member Luis Adolfo Cardona, UAW Vice President Bob King and Campaign to Stop Killer Coke Director Ray Rogers. Entertaining at the rally were DJ Master Blaster George McGregor and the G.N.S. Band. The Wobblies Kitchen Crew representing Detroit's I.W.W. branch prepared a spaghetti dinner.

After Father Leo Reilly of St. Ann's Parrish led a prayer, President Craig Nothnagel kicked the rally off by affirming Local 22's continued commitment to help our brothers and sisters in Colombia win this important struggle. President Nothnagel introduced Ray Rogers, who spoke of growing support for the Campaign to Stop Killer Coke, especially the successful efforts of unionists and students around the world. Already six colleges and universities have terminated major vending and pouring contracts with Coca-Cola.

Numerous unions within and outside the UAW have followed Local 22's example by removing Coke machines from their unions

and banning the sale and distribution of Coca-Cola products from union functions. UAW Local 909 President Al Benchich, who was present at the rally, informed us that his local told the Coca-Cola Co. that they would no longer be stocking Coca-Cola products in their vending machine. UAW Regions 1 and 1A and Local 174 had earlier terminated their relationship with Coke.

Rogers went on to emphasize that no union, school or other institution should be lending their good name and prestige to any company guilty of such anti-social, immoral and criminal conduct by serving as a marketplace for its products.

At Coke's annual meeting on April 21 in Wilmington, Delaware, Rogers challenged Coke's CEO Daft and the Board of Directors to stop its campaign of terror against the workers in Colombia and other criminal abuses worldwide. Before he finished his statement, he was assaulted from behind and attacked by six security guards, wrestled to the floor and evicted from the meeting. (You can hear coverage of what took place at the annual meeting at <http://www.killercoke.org/news.htm>.)

Luis Adolfo Cardona was introduced by Ray Rogers as "one of the most courageous unionists I have ever met." Mr. Cardona told the gathering, through interpreter Jorge L. Chinaea (Director for Chicano-Boricua Studies at Wayne State University) that he witnessed the assassination of union officer Isidro Gil by paramilitary gunmen at a Coca-Cola bottling plant where he worked. The paramilitaries returned to the plant the next day, called the workers together and told them that if they didn't quit the union

by 4 p.m., they would also be killed. Resignation forms were prepared in advance by the Coca-Cola plant manager, who had a long history of socializing with the paramilitaries and had earlier given them an order to carry out the destruction of the union. Fearing for their lives, the workers resigned en masse. The union was crushed and pay in the plant dropped from \$380 a month to \$130.

Cardona also spoke of how he narrowly escaped death while in the hands of the same paramilitary gunmen and how he fled to the United States and was granted political asylum. To this day, no charges have ever been brought against Gil's killers or those who murdered seven other Coca-Cola workers.

In January 2004, Hiram Monserrate, a member of the New York City Council and a former police officer, led a delegation on a 10-day, fact-finding mission to Colombia. The delegation's final report, released in April, said in part: "Coca-Cola is complicit in human rights abuses of its workers in Colombia" and "bears responsibility for the campaign of terror leveled at its workers." (The report can be found at www.killercoke.org.) G.E.S. Investment Services, a Swedish investment company, arrived at a similar conclusion when it recently placed Coca-Cola on its list of bad corporate citizens.

UAW International Vice-President Bob King talked about the importance of supporting SINALTRAINAL's struggle and linked it to the movement to shut down the "School of the Americas," renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, but still known throughout Latin

America as the "School of Assassins."

Three days after the rally, we received news from SINALTRAINAL that armed men with machine guns entered the home of Coca-Cola union leader Efrain Guerrero's brother-in-law and fired indiscriminately, killing him, his wife and one of their children. Efrain was a leader in the recent hunger strike protesting Coke's plan to close production lines and fire workers.

In the June 7 issue of *Fortune*, an unflattering front-cover story about Coke was published entitled "Coke, The Real Story: How One of the World's Great Companies Lost Its Way." The story pointed out, "Coke's decision not to investigate possible union-related murders at its bottlers in Colombia has become a public relations nightmare."

The article also highlighted a key reason that General Counsel and Secretary Deval Patrick resigned from the company. Coke's CEO Doug Daft "abruptly reversed a four-month-old decision to let General Counsel Patrick investigate Coke's problems in Colombia. Patrick had announced at an awards dinner last fall in Washington, that he would look into the labor violence at Coke's Colombian bottlers, and with a green light from Daft had begun the process." (At the Equal Justice Works conference in October, a dozen protesters distributed hundreds of Campaign brochures and leaflets protesting the organization's honoring Patrick. Inside the meeting, Patrick was questioned about the issue and he felt pressured to announce that Coke would mount an independent investigation and that investigation would include members of Equal Justice Works.)

This story was first broken by *Washington Post* reporter Margaret Pressler on April 22 in an article entitled, "Human Rights



Charges still Gnaw at Coca-Cola."

Leading up to the Saturday rally, Luis Cardona addressed many gatherings on his Detroit-area tour sponsored by Local 22.

Many thanks go out to Cranbrook Institute Professor David Watson for his wise comments and his financial support and, most of all, the students who asked many questions and wrote a story on Luis' visit in their school newspaper.

Thanks to Julio C. Guerrero for inviting Luis Cardona to the Latino Conference in Ypsilanti, MI. The conference members passed the hat and demonstrated their support by passing a resolution that will be sent to the President of the UAW, Ron Gettlefinger.

Many thanks go out to Professor Mike Whitty, Stacie Trescott and all the activists at the Green House for making Luis' tour a success. <http://www.greenhouseonline.org/>

I like to give special thanks to Jorge L. Chinaea, Ph.D. Associate Professor of History and Director of the Center for Chicano-Boricua Studies at Wayne State University. Dr. Chinaea made this organizing event easier for me and did a fantastic

job translating for Luis at the Local.

Thanks go out to Region 1A Director Jimmy Settles for his co-sponsoring along with SEMCOSH and the Wobblies Kitchen Crew representing Detroit's I.W.W. branch that prepared the spaghetti dinner- who everyone I

spoke to said was delicious! We thank Bob King, Frank White, Cindy Estrada, and Sandra Engle from the UAW Organizing Department for all they did. Again we give special thanks to Director Ray Rogers, and his staff from Stop Killer Coke Campaign, who traveled from New York City and is relentless in his efforts to stop these injustices.

Luis and his family would like to thank the President of Local 22 Craig A. Nothnagel, Vice President (Master Blaster) George McGregor and all the Local 22 volunteers that made this tour a success.

And finally, this tour would not been possible without the support of Region 1 Director Ken Terry and his assistant Joe Peters who always support our ideas here at Local 22. (Muchas Gracias) Many Thanks.



Local 909 President Al Benchich



Frank White



Ray Rogers



Luis Cordona



Bob King and son



The Kitchen Crew