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## ***Building a Just and Sustainable World***

# DISCUSSION GUIDE | ISSUE 42 | LATIN AMERICA RISING

YES! Discussion Guides are designed to help you explore your own experiences, opinions, and commitments as they relate to material found in YES! magazine. Use them in group discussions, classrooms, or study circles. We believe that when people discuss with mutual respect and caring the critical issues of our time, they create a powerful avenue for constructive social change.

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**By Catherine Bailey and Zach Kyle**

Historically, the fortunes of Latin America have been closely tied to policy set by the United States. Though many citizens of both North and South America consider the United States' treatment of Latin America to be exploitative and unfair, the United States has always claimed to be acting in the best interest of the South. In recent years, globalization and neoliberal policies have taken an additional toll on Latin American development. But now, all over Latin America, people are standing up for their rights and refusing to play by the rules of economically stronger nations.

Latin America's movement toward self-determination can no longer be ignored by the United States. After decades of answering to U.S. policy, Latin America is looking for answers internally, and finding them. Not only are the people reclaiming their own power and pride, they

are discovering effective ways to build compassionate, cooperative societies. A look at Latin America may gently remind the United States that the function of a democracy is, after all, to care for people. What can we learn from Latin America's progress? What, if anything, can we apply to our own society? This issue of YES! seeks to find out.

## **Democracy Rising by Nadia Martinez**

Martinez discusses the historic and cultural symbolism woven into the increasingly powerful people's movements of Latin America. From the reclamation of indigenous Bolivian pride, to the rise of a metalworker turned president in Brazil; from the self-proclaimed Bolivarian

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Revolution of Venezuela's Chávez to the creation of the alternative trade agreement "ALBA," Latin America's democratic movements are proving to be rich in passion and in promise. Leaders are responding to the demands of the people rather than the commands of the influential, and democracy is rising from the bottom up.

- Latin Americans are not only overcoming economic and political barriers, but also the expectation that they will obey the commands of the United States. Which of the Latin American people's movements do you find the most impressive? Which do you find the most surprising? Could you see these movements working in the United States? Why or why not?

- Most of the U.S. media vilifies Hugo Chávez. However, he has used Venezuela's oil revenue to attack domestic problems such as illiteracy and poverty, and to foster regional cooperation. Does the information about Chávez in this article surprise you? Does it change your opinion of Chávez?

### **Bolivia's Indigenous Uprising** **by Jubenal Quispe**

Evo Morales has become an icon of indigenous pride in Bolivia. From his humble beginnings in the countryside, Morales rose to power through the unions of the coca fields in which he worked. Now, as the first president of indigenous heritage, Morales restores the people's dignity by inspiring them to move toward sovereignty. The president's tangible first steps include redistribution of the revenue gained through renegotiating oil and gas contracts.

- Morales has been criticized by the U.S. government for trying to restore the coca leaf—an ingredient of cocaine, but not the drug—as a symbol of indigenous sovereignty. The leaf is illegal in the United States, but in Bolivia, it is used for medicinal purposes and is part of everyday life. What do you think of the claim that there is no connection between indigenous coca use and cocaine traffic? What are your thoughts on the United States' intervention in the growing of this crop?

- Bolivia has its first indigenous leader in Evo Morales, and Brazil's president, Luiz Inacio da Silva, was a metalworker. What cultural differences do you see that allowed the election of these men? What obstacles prevent a blue-collar person from becoming president of the United States?

- The one piece of advice Oscar Olivera has for the citizens of the U.S. is to let go of their fear. What do you think he means by this? What do you think he hopes to see in the United States? What lessons of courage can we learn from Cochabamba?

### **Health Care for All...Love, Cuba** **by Sarah van Gelder**

YES! Executive editor Sarah van Gelder included the Cuban health care system in the many people's movements she investigated during her three months in Latin America. She discovered that Cuba has developed an innovative network of doctors and nurses who live in the neighborhoods where they work, and are readily available to all. Doctors are familiar with the environmental hazards, stress factors, and other aspects of the neighborhood, so they are able to concentrate more on prevention than on cure. Now, Cuba has turned its medical miracle into an asset to share with the world, by "exporting" doctors to other nations, and training young people to practice medicine in poor communities worldwide.

- "You can introduce the notion of a right to health care and wipe out the diseases of poverty," says Dr. Paul Farmer. Many in the United States oppose the idea of government-funded health care, while in Cuba it is viewed as a fundamental human right for which the state takes responsibility. Where do you think this difference comes from? Which position do you take? What are your reasons?

- Cuba has sent doctors to treat immediate problems, as well as the means to establish medical facilities, to scores of nations around the globe. It is also providing free medical education to hundreds of young people from impoverished regions. Would you favor a similar program funded by the United States? Why or why not?

### **In Venezuela, a Cooperative Mood** **by Michael Fox**

A new model of business is transforming Venezuelan economics. Government-funded cooperatives, in which collective ownership takes the place of hierarchical structure, are proving that the people can manage themselves better than a corporate boss can. Decisions are made as a group. Cutting out the middle man allows co-op members

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to sell their products cheaper while earning more money, so this form of “endogenous development” (development from within) benefits all.

- More and more Venezuelans are employed in cooperatives. Employees enjoy the democratic decision-making process despite the long meetings necessary to involve everyone. How would you feel about working in a non-hierarchical workplace? How would this differ from the policies of your workplace? Would it be good, or bad?

- Look at the chart on page 45. Do you think Venezuela is a democracy or a dictatorship? Which of these factors do you think are most important in a democracy? How do you think Chávez measures up? How does Venezuela compare to the U.S.?

### U.S. Role Turned Upside Down by Sarah Anderson, Jeremy Orhan Simer, and Eva Golinger

U.S. President Monroe swore to defend Latin America from European imperialism. While his intentions may

have been pure, the Monroe Doctrine has been used to justify U.S. interference in Latin American politics, economics, and society, frequently taking countries in directions they do not want to go. This article presents five ways in which the people of Latin America are casting off their Northern “protector” and showing they can stand on their own.

- What will happen to U.S.–Latin American power relations now that Latin America has paid off such an enormous part of its debt to the IMF? How do you think this will affect the nature of capitalism in Latin America?

- Rafael Correa, the president of Ecuador, said, “We can negotiate with the U.S. about a base in Manta, and if they let us put a military base in Miami, if there is no problem, we’ll accept.” Is Correa’s proposal fair? Ridiculous? Plausible?

- Golinger reports on the U.S. channeling of funds to anti-Chávez groups in Venezuela. How do you feel about this intervention? Do you think the U.S. should be able to fund political activities in other countries when it’s illegal for other countries to fund political activities in the U.S.?

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