

NESTLÉ, the Military and Colombia

Freedom is the right to tell people what they do not want to hear.

George Orwell

Not everything that is faced, can be changed, but nothing can be changed, until it is faced.

James Baldwin

Last June the Global Policy Forum, Bread for the World and MISEREOR published a very important working paper: "Corporate Influence on the Business and Human Rights Agenda of the United Nations" (1). This document pay special attention to Nestlé: „Nestlé for example hired public relations (PR) practitioners to develop strategies of `issues management` to undermine efforts of international regulation. (...) One telling example is the case of Rafael Pagan Jr., PR executive and President of the Nestlé Center for Nutrition in the early 1980s. Pagan developed a comprehensive PR strategy for TNCs to fight for corporate `survival` and to deal `constructively and effectively` with the international regulatory mood“. Rafael Pagan, however, was no ordinary PR executive but actually an Army Intelligence Officer at the US Department of Defence. Pagan advised US Presidents Kennedy and Johnson on the Soviet bloc's economic and military capabilities and Presidents Nixon, Reagan and Bush on Third World Policies. Nixon was the US President who supported Pinochet's putsch against the Chilean elected President Salvador Allende in 1973, throwing Chile in a murderous military dictatorship for years. Rafael Pagan received a Life Achievement Award from President Reagan, the US President waging war against the Nicaraguan Sandinista Government, killing and terrorizing thousands of people in Central America. I do not think that Rafael Pagan advised either Nixon or Reagan against what they were doing. Rafael Pagan also received a Silver Anvil Award for resolving an international boycott against Nestlé – the "Nestlé kills babies " campaign that at the time was a powerful movement bringing much damage to Nestlé's image.

As part of the " Pagan strategy" the document mentions:

- „separating" the "fanatic" activist leaders from those who are "decent concerned" people, and „stripping the activists from the moral authority they receive from their alliance with religious organisations“.

In Switzerland the Pagan strategy is very successfully applied, including among the Church institutions. An example of the Pagan strategy working in Switzerland is Alliance Sud's (AS) reactions to the Nestlé Colombian Case involving the trade union Sinaltrainal and the Nestlé spying case involving ATTAC. Four out of the six development agencies that form AS are linked to the Churches. Concerning the Colombian case, AS went on a „dialogue“ with Nestlé in Colombia and as correctly pointed by an article in the Tages Anzeiger (2) helped to improve Nestlé's image by showing the company as “tolerant” and “open to criticisms” while at the same time portraying Sinaltrainal as “fanatic”. There was no public discussion or support from AS concerning the spying case. The „fanatic“ activists – ATTAC, myself – were separated from the „decent concerned“ institutions – and being „decent“ is to remain silent about embarrassing issues. For AS the Colombian case would be closed and forgotten if it were not for the European Center for Constitutional and Humans Rights – ECCHR – coming to Switzerland with the support of MISEREOR to file a law court case against Nestlé regarding the murder of the Colombian trade unionist Luciano Romero in 2005. According to another article in the Tages Anzeiger (3), AS was not very enthusiastic about ECCHR's initiative. An important documentary from the Swiss French TV RTS from 2013 – Contre Nestlé jusqu' à la mort – revealed that exactly at the same time that SECURITAS was spying on behalf of Nestlé, the Colombian Secret Service DAS was also spying on Swiss citizens in Switzerland who were helping Sinaltrainal. The documentary leaves open the question of whether there was any exchange of information between DAS and SECURITAS since ATTAC was supporting Sinaltrainal or if DAS was also spying on behalf of Nestlé. The information made public by RTS is disturbing enough in any case and needed further investigation, but again there was none.

Rafael Pagan was not the only military advisor whom Nestlé hired when confronting civil society criticisms. John Hedley was Corporate Security Coordinator of Nestlé SA from 2003 to 2008 and one of the four high ranking Nestlé employees linked to the spying operation. According to the ATTAC lawyers, John Hedley met several times the spy who infiltrated the ATTAC group and in an article from L' HEBDO from 17th July 2008 the spying is mentioned as just part of a vast system of operations and information control established by John Hedley, an ex-agent of MI6– the British Military Intelligence.

From one of Nestlé's websites in the US (4) we are informed that:

„Nestlé is proud to offer numerous opportunities to veterans of the U.S. military, helping them

use their unique training and skills within our organization's various operating companies.“

We already know how Nestlé put to use the skills of both Rafael Pagan and John Hedley. But Nestlé is looking for more. From another website of Nestlé also in the US (5) we are informed that:

„Military men and women around the globe have enjoyed Nestlé Professional Beverages. Our juices, isotonic drinks, teas, smoothie mixes and other specialty drinks can be found on Navy ships, Army bases, Air Force training centers and in other military operations.“

Nestlé's Creating Shared Value Forum in 2011 was organized in partnership with The Atlantic Council – a business group around NATO. The US Department of Defence, US Department of the Army and the US Department of the Air Force are among the sponsors of The Atlantic Council. Some people could argue that the military for Nestlé are just a market like any other and that the Atlantic Council is just a business association. But with such business partnerships come deeper contacts, information exchange and a closeness that may be always useful for both partners in many different ways. A business association built around a military institution like NATO clearly indicates that at least part of the business sector considers it important to engage in such an alliance, but for what purposes? Above all, such closeness with the US Military may have serious implications for Latin America with its tragic history of US military interventions and US supported military dictatorships.

Nestlé's many layered relationships with the military are not mentioned by AS or any other Swiss NGO as far as I know – thanks again to the success of the Pagan strategy, „decent concerned“ people do not raise such embarrassing topics for public discussion.

Colombia is a major recipient of US Military Aid and the only country in Latin America still much under influence of the US. It is not surprising that the 2013 Nestlé Creating Shared Value Global Forum took place in Cartagena, Colombia. The aim is clear: promote Colombia as the „business friendly“ country in Latin America, in opposition to Venezuela and the ALBA countries. Colombia is the „model“ to be followed. The Government of Switzerland seems to be joining Nestlé in this effort. In March 2014 Swiss Development and Cooperation (SDC) magazine „Eine Welt“ published an article praising Colombia. In 2013 Switzerland organized a ministerial event at the margin of the 68th Session of the General Assembly of the UN in

New York about water with several institutional partners but in cooperation with only two other countries – Netherlands and Colombia. In Latin America the country that has done more internationally for water issues, the one responsible for bringing the human rights perspective to water to be voted at the UN General Assembly is Bolivia, an ALBA country. Ecuador, another ALBA country, is also very much engaged in water issues, as is Uruguay. Cooperation between Switzerland and those countries on water issues would make more sense than with Colombia. But SDC is a partner and sponsor of the Water Resources Group (WRG) – an initiative from Nestlé, Coca-Cola and Pepsi to “transform the water sector”, meaning privatizing it. What Bolivia, Ecuador and Uruguay have in common in their engagement for water issues is their commitment to keep water as a public good under democratic control and therefore in opposition to Nestlé’s and WRG policy.

The Bolivarian process in Venezuela and in the other ALBA countries has been built by an active, informed and participant civil society to the despair of those who always profited from the political isolation, ignorance and vulnerability of such people. And for the first time in its history, Latin America is asserting itself and taking its destiny into its own hands. For Nestlé and its friends Rafael Pagan, John Hedley, The Atlantic Council and the US Military, the enemy is an organized and politically active civil society, therefore they are fighting it, in Switzerland and in Latin America. Our task is to expose them.

Franklin Frederick

- (1) http://www.misereor.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Corporate_Influence_on_the_Business_and_Human_Rights_Agenda.pdf
- (2) Nestlé arbeitet an Imagekorrektur – Tages Anzeiger 05-03-2013
- (3) Hilfswerk-Allianz unterstützt Anzeige gegen Nestlé nur halbherzig – Tages Anzeiger 15-03-2012
- (4) <https://recruitmilitary.com/Nestle>
- (5) https://www.nestleprofessional.com/united-states/en/BeverageExpertise/Beverage_Expertise/Pages/BeverageSystems.aspx