

The FMLN's Presidential Campaign Caravan



Schafik Hándal, FMLN presidential candidate, and wife Tania greet enthusiastic crowds.

An inside look from Usulután...

By Alex Modotti

(CISPES volunteer in San Salvador)

Each weekend during January and February the FMLN's presidential and vice presidential candidates are touring around El Salvador on a "megajornada", a caravan that will take them through most every municipality in the country. In mid-January I was able to accompany the FMLN's presidential candidate, Schafik Hándal, on his campaign tour through the department of Usulután. Starting in the mountainous coffee community of Berlin and making our way down into the valley, the enthusiasm with which people received

Schafik defied all the polls that show a lack of support in rural areas. In every town we visited, hundreds upon hundreds of people swarmed to see the man who they see as the hope for their country's future.

The tour started early, at 8:30 Thursday morning in Berlin, Usulután. For a gringa witnessing this campaign, the FMLN turns politics-as-usual on its head. As the curious crowd began gathering, the event kicked off with a puppet show that featured a rural woman-puppet explaining why she was excited to see Schafik to two other campesino-puppets. The events of the day would go on to also include music, dance, and poetry by local community members; speeches by local priests; a visit by "Miss Jucuapan"; merengue and salsa campaign music; comedy acts; and of course, campaign speeches. As we waited for Schafik to arrive, pickups drove into town bursting with red T-shirts and flags, old men and women, young children, campesinos, and youth from surrounding communities. I stood to the back of the crowd, next to two elderly men, and listened to the speeches.

The first speaker of the morning in Berlin was a representative from the Alliance for Change, a broad cross-section of social sectors, including transportation,



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2004: The Year to Stop CAFTA!

Congressional Vote Vital for Halting Bush's "Free" Trade Agenda

Momentum has been building in the campaign to stop the US-Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), a precursor to the FTAA that would be devastating for the five Central American countries involved (Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Costa Rica and Nicaragua.) Negotiations for CAFTA concluded on December 17, 2003 and the vote on CAFTA in Congress will come in June or early July - unless the Bush administration decides to hold back the agreement until after the November elections.

Labor unions and social movement groups across Central America are coordinating mass actions in the coming months with the hope of building enough opposition that their own country's legislatures will vote against CAFTA. But despite tremendous popular opposition to the agreement in Central America, the best chance for stopping CAFTA is in the US Congress. Given the resources and spin of the corporate lobbying, our victory must lie in a

coordinated grassroots pressure campaign that touts the concrete reasons that CAFTA is bad for the majority of people in Central America and the US. US corporations recently came together to form a pro-CAFTA lobby group that is deceptively promoting the "benefits" of CAFTA; but even though governments and private industry will put millions of dollars towards propaganda, we can still beat CAFTA!

Congressional representatives will be in their home districts from April 5-16, May 24-31, and June 28-July 5. These periods are our best chance to lobby those that are on the fence, shore up support with those who are on our side, and take action against those who blindly support "free" trade. You can also get involved by doing educational outreach and media work related to CAFTA.

(Taken from STOP-CAFTA Coalition Alert)

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EL SALVADOR
Watch

Why Women Fight CAFTA

And Why We Should All Work To Stop It

(from "The Gender Impact of CAFTA" by Farah Nageer,
International Gender and Trade Network)



Agriculture:

Agriculture liberalization under CAFTA will have far-reaching impacts on the region's women, who are the primary care-givers responsible for ensuring proper nutrition and health for their families and those responsible for household food security. As people are forced to move from rural to urban areas in order to find employment, more women in Central America will be left with no option but to seek work in maquilas – export oriented factories notorious for poor working conditions and exploitative working environments.

Investment :

The U.S. is pushing Central American governments to further liberalize their investment rules and increase investor rights under CAFTA, in order to attract more foreign direct investment (FDI). This will undermine Central American governments' ability to regulate FDI for sustainable development and the protection of the human rights of all its citizens. As such, governments will be challenged to provide protection and benefits to the countless women workers who are employed by foreign companies and who are often paid less than the legal minimum wage, and who face physical, verbal, and sexual abuse, age discrimination, and have little job security.

Services:

Victories to prevent the privatization of essential services are threatened by CAFTA, under which service sectors may be opened to foreign investment and privatization. Public services as well as other essential low-cost services may no longer be accessible or affordable to those who need them the most. Poor women, many of whom are single heads of household, will be especially hard hit. Privatization will also threaten the job security of service workers, many of whom are women. For many women, public service jobs are among the most secure and offer the most benefits, including healthcare. These government jobs could be subject to privatization and foreign competition, and therefore made less secure.

Intellectual Property Rights:

CAFTA's intellectual property (IP) rules would make it difficult for the region's governments to obtain cheaper drugs to meet the public health needs of their citizens. Corporations would make legal claims on and profit from plants, medicines and traditional knowledge that indigenous people of the area have used for centuries. As the primary providers of healthcare within families and communities, women will bear increased burdens under CAFTA's IP laws, as access to cheap drugs and medicines becomes less available.

Towards a More Gender Sensitive Trade Agreement:

* Any trade agreement with the countries of Central America must respect and ensure their sovereign right to determine their own national development and economic growth paths, and allow governments to fulfill their responsibility to protect the social welfare of their peoples and communities.

* Women from across the region must be able to participate in a transparent negotiation processes, be educated about what is at stake, and contribute to the creation of pro-poor, gender sensitive strategies for development that take into consideration their knowledge, expertise and needs.

* Foreign investment in the region should be socially responsible, and should be applied towards development goals of poverty eradication in a gender sensitive manner.

* Essential public services must remain affordable and accessible to women and men in the region.

TAKE ACTION TO STOP CAFTA!

1. Download the CAFTA Activist Organizing Kit and CAFTA Grassroots Lobby Kit at:

www.stopcafta.org

2. Begin planning for the larger, nationally coordinated action in April. Bring together a coalition of labor, religious sector, immigrant rights, and solidarity groups in your community to organize an action in April. Check out www.stopcafta.org for ideas and resources.

3. Contact your representative and tell them to vote NO on CAFTA and to speak out publicly against the agreement. Call the US Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and give them your zip code; they'll connect you to your representative.

4. Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper. See the CAFTA organizing kit for sample letters.



Boston CISPES visits Sen. John Kerry's house to pressure him to vote NO on CAFTA.

FMLN Caravan continued...

small and mid-sized business, military, and agriculture, have come together to support the FMLN's campaign. The former military officer began. "We tried to capture him 20 years ago during the war," he said, referring to the time when Schafik was a leader of the FMLN guerilla movement. "But today we realize that we didn't understand who the real enemy was. The enemy is those who create poverty, not the people who defend the poor. We are now fighting together with the FMLN against the real enemy – against ARENA."

The crowd, now numbering around 700 people, cheered for the impassioned officer. The Alliance for Change's agricultural representative took the microphone. He began by thanking people for coming out on a Thursday morning, a day of work in the fields. "Work," he qualified, "for those of you who still have work." The local small farmer talked about the ever falling cost of coffee prices, the hardship faced by all small farmers in the country who have received no support during the past 15 years of ARENA's rule. He spoke about the difficulty for rural people to make the pennies stretch to buy school supplies and pay back high-interest government loans. The men standing beside me turned to me every few minutes, nodding and affirming to me that what he was saying is true.

By the time Schafik took the microphone, the park was filled and spirits were high. Schafik, a political leader who has dedicated over 50 years of his life to organizing El Salvador's social movement, was prepared to address the crisis coffee farmers are facing. He said that while ARENA claims there is nothing to be done, they are just avoiding dealing with the problem. Schafik proposed working with allies like Brazil to increase exports to China. He presented the FMLN's plan for the agricultural sector, a plan that includes the establishment of a national development bank with low interest loans to farmers and the elimination of sales tax on food, medicine, and agricultural products like seed and fertilizer. The crowd cheered and my neighbors nodded approval.

Through the rest of the day in five
3* Winter 2004

CISPES SENDS 60 DELEGATES TO OBSERVE SALVADORAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS



This March, as the Salvadoran people take to the polls to elect a new president, surveys show a very close race between the right-wing ARENA party and the left FMLN party. The Salvadoran right, as well as the Bush administration, are showing visible signs of fear as the FMLN climbs ahead in the polls, approaching a real chance to win the presidency this year. On a trip to El Salvador in February 2004, Roger Noriega (top State Department official for Latin America) criticized the FMLN and called on Salvadorans to vote for someone who "shares [U.S.] vision and values." This type of comment is not new, and the U.S. State Department is fully aware of the weight the threat carries in a country so economically dependent on its relationship with the U.S.

The Salvadoran electoral process carries a history of fraud and increased violence. The Salvadoran people are calling upon international observers to accompany them in combating this climate of intensified violence and fear with revolutionary hope as they head to the polls this March to elect a new president. CISPES has participated in every election since the signing of the Peace Accords in 1992 as accredited international observers, and will be there again this year to accompany the Salvadoran people in their struggle for peace with social justice! We are bringing a group of 60 international observers representing 10 states across the U.S., as well as Canada and the UK.

Check our website www.cispes.org for Action Alerts to stop US intervention in the Salvadoran elections, for updates on the situation in El Salvador, and for reports from our elections observing delegation.

other small towns, the campaign music, theater, and speeches were enthusiastically received by seas of red T-shirts and flags. While it makes sense from the outside that this enthusiasm would be the case – at times it can seem obvious that the FMLN is the best option for El Salvador's poor and middle class – the ebullience is not a given. First, the pollsters have worked hard to massage numbers and never give the FMLN any clear lead, so someone depending on the media for information might believe that the FMLN's support is tenuous. Second, this is a country with a recent history of a bloody war and a country in severe economic crisis, and the right is taking full advantage of both the history and the current suffering to create fear. They have been telling people that the "communists" are liars, thieves, and murderers. They have been circulating rumors that if the FMLN wins the economy will crash and the U.S. will cut off El Salvador's number one source of income by deporting all Salvadoran immigrants. In Nueva Granada, a

man walked up to me in home-made leather sandals, with his machete hanging at his side, and asked me if my country would really deport all Salvadorans if the FMLN wins. He explained that he and his neighbors can't make any money off their crops anymore, so they increasingly depend on the money their families can send from the U.S. Deportations would be devastating, he said.

The day's tour for Schafik was scheduled to end in Jucuapan, but at the last minute the organizers decided that he would have time to catch up to Mata, his running mate [see photo],

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CISPES meets FMLN vice-presidential candidate Guillermo Mata on his trip to New York.

**CISPES Chapter Highlight... CBLOC/PCASC:
Portland Central America Solidarity Committee/ Cross Border
Labor Organizing Coalition**



PCASC helped organize a huge anti-WTO solidarity protest in September 2003

In an effort to create awareness of the interrelated aspects of globalization and labor issues, CBLOC/PCASC hosts events and plans actions that educate the community of Portland while directly establishing relationships with communities of Mexico and Central America.

In October 2003, Juan Carlos Galvis spoke of his experience as a Colombian Coca-Cola worker to an audience from diverse communities. CBLOC also accompanied him to meetings with important unions to establish stronger international support for the Coca-Cola boycott. Sara Quintanilla, the general secretary of the Electrical Workers Union stopped in Portland in November to tell her story while on a national tour. She was fired for attempting to organize electrical workers and urged her audience to stop CAFTA.

While making visits to unions, universities, and public forums, CBLOC uses informative tools to illustrate the negative impact of NAFTA and the potential hazards of other free trade agreements on the table. We continue to teach the problems of privatization and other results of free trade agreements through outreach and educational events.

Union and community support of the fight against privatization and globalization in El Salvador has helped raise funds for important causes. Money was sent to support the 10-month health care strike last year. In March 2004, money has been raised to send a delegation to observe the elections to help ensure fair elections. This is significant because El Salvador stands as a model of the evolution of alternatives that can be successfully implemented.

Other techniques that CBLOC employs to raise awareness and educate the people of Portland include rallies and demonstrations. In September 2003, we collaborated with Portland Jobs with Justice and a number of other community organizations to plan an anti-WTO march in solidarity with those who were protesting the WTO ministerial meetings in Cancun. Fifteen hundred people assembled in the streets to listen to speakers and marched in protest of the WTO. The day before the last round of CAFTA meetings began in DC, we staged an anti-CAFTA rally that included popular education methods of outreach, such as puppet shows, to educate people about the detrimental effects of such trade agreements.

Demonstrations have been a particularly effective means of networking with groups and individuals with similar interests and intentions. Protests of the FTAA allowed us to network with other local groups to support more than 60 Portlanders who traveled to Miami. These relationships continue to deepen as we build a more permanent statewide global justice coalition to challenge globalization, and are now meeting on a regular basis to formulate ideas and to substantiate the resistance against current free trade agreements.

**FMLN Caravan
continued...**

in Estanzuelas. The event had attracted 400 people in the small town, despite the young ARENA members in their red, white, and blue shirts, sitting around the park with their chests puffed out like roosters waiting for a challenge. I stood near a few community members who were leaning against a rickety fence. As we waited for Schafik to arrive, the caravan organizers went through their whole bag of tricks to keep people entertained while they waited. Music, comedy, more speeches. It was 6:00, 6:30, and getting dark. The small group next to me explained that people had been there since 3:00. "The people are bored," they said, "but they are going to stay to see Schafik." And stay they did. We waited, we sat, we stood, we watched the entrance to the center of town. And when people saw headlights, the crowd exploded. For what seemed like forever, as the whole caravan parked, got out, and made way for Schafik, people screamed and chanted and waved their flags. And as Schafik climbed onto stage, the men at my side nodded and smiled. "That's our man," they said. "That's our man."

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