

EL SALVADOR

Watch



Produced by the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES)

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Fifteenth Anniversary for Peace Accords: Moment for Reflection More Than Celebration

On January 16, El Salvador celebrated the 15th anniversary of the signing of the Peace Accords between the government and the FMLN, which ended the country's 12 year civil war. Officially, the main achievements of the Peace Accords were the end of the armed conflict, the recognition of the FMLN as a political party, and the dismantling of the military structures utilized to repress the people of El Salvador.



"There is no peace without social justice". Rally in San Salvador January 16, 2007 (photo FMLN)

the armed conflict. Furthermore, right wing political forces have refused to allow the truth to come out about the grave human rights violations that occurred during the war. At the same time, the nature and functioning of the current National Civilian Police is increasingly militaristic, the old structures of repression are being reactivated, and the right wing has created the tools to legally repress organization and mobilization in the country.

However, many people are asking whether or not this anniversary truly warrants a celebration, given that the Salvadoran government has refused to fulfill many of the agreements, and, more importantly, that violence, crime, impunity, and repression are all on the rise. These factors have created a social and political climate reminiscent of the decades leading up to

Current Context: Violence and Difficult Living Conditions

Salvadorans today are suffering through the very social, economic and political conditions that the Peace Accords were meant to alleviate. There *continued on pg 3*

Building Resistance: Salvadoran Youth in the Global Struggle Interview with Oswaldo Nataren

Oswaldo Nataren is a visual arts student at the University of El Salvador and a founding member of the Roque Dalton University Front (FURD). FURD has organized recently around increased bus fares and tuition hikes, and has worked in coalition with unions and the Popular Social Bloc (BPS) against the privatization of water and the implementation of the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). Oswaldo offers a brave and honest critique of the social movement in the United States and some profound recommendations of how to work together as one world movement towards justice. This interview was conducted during his 2006 Fall Tour by CISPES National Organizer Jacoby Ballard.

How does your organizing in El Salvador relate to the organizing here in the United States, from what you've seen on your tour and what you have read? How can we work together more effectively?

It's imperative that people are organizing in the United States, because you're on the inside and you can

raise the conscience of this population. I've said to the people here, as I've been on tour, that you are fighting and we are resisting, and this is the struggle. This is how we build a stronger movement, from the inside and from the outside.

From the United States, you can try to change the structure that your government is perpetuating, forcing on the world. But, there are fewer motivations to do this when you're in the wolf's mouth. A movement of strong social strength has the capacity to transform the world when we fight together for the benefit of everyone. It's not just for Latin America, it's all over the world, and here too. The government here is intervening in the politics over much of the world, creating a political war in much of the world.

What have your impressions been of the solidarity movement in the U.S.?

I've seen an important segment of the U.S. population that is working hard to confront imperialism from within this country, and this is something that is incredibly important. This is critical not only because of the change it can generate here, but because it also gives us hope and strength in

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Latin America Goes Left – What Does it Mean?

A broad political shift is afoot in Latin America, and though the mainstream media in the US is loath to admit it, the latter part of 2006 cemented the leftist trend. Overwhelming victories by leftist economist Rafael Correa in Ecuador (November) and Hugo Chavez in Venezuela (early December) proved that anti-Bush and anti-free market forces continued on the rise. Negotiations for a CAFTA-style free trade agreement between the U.S. and Ecuador have been canceled, and though agreements with Peru and Colombia are pending, the political shift has all but ended Bush's hopes for a hemisphere-wide Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA).

Meanwhile, the victory of Daniel Ortega in November's Nicaraguan presidential election demonstrated the failure of the US State Department to consistently influence Latin American election results. Ortega's Sandinista party won despite tactics of U.S. intervention reminiscent of those employed during the 2004 Salvadoran presidential campaign. However, the fear campaign that led to the victory of ARENA in El Salvador in 2004 was successfully echoed in the still-disputed victory of Mexican conservative Felipe Calderon in July's presidential election, and to a lesser extent by the squeaker victory of centrist candidate Oscar Arias in Costa Rica over his anti-CAFTA counterpart, Otton Solis, last spring. As these examples illustrate, U.S. support of pro-business, right-wing candidates has not gone away, nor has its influence in the region totally dissipated.

Thus, despite some electoral outcomes favorable to Washington in 2006, the region-wide trend appears to have turned toward the left. The victories of Correa in Ecuador and Chavez in Venezuela are especially significant, as the majority of South American countries are now governed by Left or center-left governments, including Bolivia, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Chile and the aforementioned Ecuador and Venezuela. Such steps forward give social movements throughout the region and leftist political parties like the FMLN hope for future victories.

Giving the resources back to the people

So what are these leftist governments actually doing to empower people within their countries? Bolivia and Venezuela have held constituent assemblies in recent years – and Ecuador promises to follow – meaning that citizens have the opportunity to elect representatives from political parties, grassroots organizations, and indigenous groups to re-write their nations' constitutions. The new



Venezuelan President, Hugo Chávez, accompanied by FMLN leaders Violeta Menjivar and Nidia Diaz at the *Palacio de Miraflores* in Venezuela in March of 2006 (from Venezuelan Embassy homepage)

constitutions in these countries, once written, represent the concerns and needs of a vast majority of the population, making them contemporary, living documents reflecting the needs of the people. Another change being made by the governments on the left in Latin America is the nationalization or partial-nationalization of natural resources such as oil in Venezuela and natural gas in Bolivia. For the people of Latin America, this means that the revenues generated from these industries will go back to the people.

In late November, President Evo Morales' MAS (Movement Toward Socialism) government in Bolivia passed a National Agrarian Reform Service Law (IRNA) which focuses on distribution of unused land to landless farmers. The landless peasants' movement (MST) in Bolivia – modeled after the MST in Brazil – has been demanding such changes for years but had been met with tear gas, riot police and little sympathy from corrupt government officials of previous administrations. However, in November of this year the Morales government supported a march of farmers, *campesinos*, and worker organizations that arrived in the Bolivian capitol of La Paz to demand these changes.

The land distribution law was passed by the Bolivian Senate even though opposition party members boycotted the session. IRNA makes land that "is not serving a social or economic purpose" subject to redistribution, and includes environmental preserves as serving a valid land use. Land grants are prohibited from being granted to the officials making the reforms, and small properties, *campesino* farms, and indigenous communities are all exempt from property taxes and protected from expropriation.

The land reform will benefit thousands of poor Bolivian families and attempts to address and quell the tension around the distribution of land. It also symbolizes political accountability, as Morales had promised to redistribute 23 million hectares during his presidential campaign. To pass this law, the MAS worked to mobilize social organizations around the country. This is the support that Morales and other left-leaning governments in Latin America will need in confronting the right-wing backlash to their progressive policies, not to mention future U.S. intervention.

Hope for the future

In January, CISPES joined the FMLN and other leftist parties and leaders from throughout the hemisphere at the Foro de Sao Paulo in San Salvador. Riding a wave of change, these groups plan to build a strategy based on successes in Venezuela and Bolivia as well as address a new model of trade and regional integration that would reduce dependence on the U.S. Chavez, Morales, Cuba's Fidel Castro, and now Nicaragua's Daniel Ortega have signed the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), a direct challenge to the free market intransigence of the FTAA. Regional meetings like the Foro have provided space to continue building this alternative model.

Finally, the FMLN is already beginning its run towards victory in the presidential, legislative and municipal elections of 2009, with renewed expectations to join the parade of change. ■

have been few advances in the process of democratization, as political and economic power are still in the hands of the same small group. In order to maintain its power, this oligarchy has control of the mainstream media, the police, the military and the justice system.

Economically, the neoliberal policies of the oligarchy have forced more than 2.5 million Salvadorans out of the country, mainly to the United States. More people have left El Salvador during the period of "peace" since 1992 than during the entire armed conflict. Remittances continually increase, totaling more than 2.7 million dollars annually. That money sent home not only sustains a large percentage of Salvadoran families that depend on it to survive, but it has also created a highly lucrative system for the same financial oligarchy that controls the government.

Furthermore, Salvadorans are facing increasing violence, measured by everything from the national homicide rate to domestic violence. There are, on average, 13 murders every day in El Salvador, concentrated mainly in the 20 municipalities with the highest population. The government of President Antonio Saca has deliberately failed to create or implement solutions to the increasing crisis of violence, instead making superficial changes to the cabinet and periodic publicity stunts that aim to create the false perception that the ARENA party is addressing the crisis.

In addition, ARENA leaders have continued their campaign to criminalize and thwart organization and mobilization of the Salvadoran left. The recently-approved Law against Acts of Terrorism penalizes the simulation, preparation, financing and organizing of any mobilizations and other acts of protest. In the last plenary of the year in the Legislative Assembly, the right wing factions approved the Anti-Organized Crime Law, which was highly criticized and voted against by the FMLN deputies for its repressive and arbitrary nature. ARENA also continues to attack the FMLN in the media, worried already about a victory for the left in the 2009 presidential elections.

Regressions in the Peace Process

Repression and impunity continue to reign in El Salvador. Leaders and members of the social movement have been captured and disappeared in the style of civil war era death squads, and these cases are causing alarm in the Salvadoran left. At many protests, the presence of riot police surpasses that of protesters, which is not only unconstitutional but also a return to the repression that forced the organized population to armed struggle. The repression against the student movement, especially since a violent confrontation on July 5, 2006, has been serious. Furthermore, ARENA used the violence to justify the passing of its Anti-Terrorist Law.

According to evaluations of the Peace Accords by progressive Salvadoran think tanks like FESPAD (Foundation for the Study and Application of Law), there are many resolutions within the Peace Accords that have not been fulfilled by the government. One important agreement is about the nature and function of the National Civilian Police (PNC). The PNC today is mainly comprised of former military and police personnel who were tied to the military governments of the 1980s, despite the intention of the accords to de-politicize the police.

In addition to the military nature of the PNC, the Armed Forces are regaining their presence in both the rural and urban sectors of the country, justified by the under-funding of the police and the increase of violence. Almost seven years ago, the government of El Salvador approved and ratified a cooperation agreement with the government of the United States related to the military use of Salvadoran airport installations, supposedly as part of the drug war. The agreement allows for U.S. military personnel to function there, even though the Peace Accords stipulate that all security is the exclusive responsibility of the PNC. This military base not only marks U.S. military and political intervention in El Salvador, but also works in conjunction with the International Law Enforcement

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CISPES Solidarity Delegation to El Salvador

April 27 – May 6, 2007

Join CISPES as we accompany labor unions, student and women's groups, and other community organizations in preparation for the massive, annual May Day march!

Over the course of these 10 days you will:

~meet with Salvadoran social movement groups that are directly confronting the neoliberal model of free trade and resisting the implementation of CAFTA

~hear directly from those targeted by governmental politics of harassment and intimidation about their courageous organizing work

~accompany the movement in their massive International Workers' Day march to demand No to Water Privatization and an end to U.S. military intervention

~strategize with leftist FMLN party and other social movement leaders about the role for international solidarity in supporting their struggle

For more information on how to join the delegation contact your local CISPES committee or Krista Lee Hanson at the CISPES National Office: (212) 465-8115 x204 or krista@cispes.org



Annual May Day March 2006 in San Salvador!

INTERVIEW cont. from Pg. 1 our struggles in Latin America, knowing that there are people here who are committed to working together for social change. Knowing that there are people here willing to struggle with us, hand in hand, to try to bring well-being to our countries as we collaborate and work together like brothers and sisters.

You have traveled to many U.S. cities and have met many organizers, activists, and students. What have been your most striking encounters so far?

The meetings with teenagers have been especially exciting—students 15, 16, 17 years old, seeing their interest and enthusiasm about what is going on. But the surprising thing has been the lack of knowledge of how U.S. policies affect El Salvador and the rest of the world. It has been exciting for me to be part of a tour that is educating people, but it has been surprising even what questions people are asking and that they don't know how to get involved or what is going on in the United States.

Also the participation of the older generation has been really great. Not everyone from this generation has physical capacity to be doing everything, but they are giving how they can. Every event that I've done so far has had the participation of the older generation who has been to El Salvador. They are asking tough questions and remembering their experiences, wanting more information and reminding us of the importance of solidarity.

This year there has been a great rise in organizing and mobilizing for immigrant rights, and on your tour with CISPEs, you have been meeting groups that are immigrant-based or work around issues of immigrant justice. How do you see the recent protests in the United States as connected to the economic situation that you have spoken about in your country?

We are entering a crisis—socially, economically, politically. The economic situation in my country is bad. There aren't any opportunities in El Salvador. This is the situation, so the people continue to migrate to the U.S., fleeing economic crisis. The only money in my country is in fighting, in security, in the military. Many people have their parents or their children here in the United States. The other thing is that in my country, there's so much repression against the social movement, especially in recent months. Members of people's family are being kidnapped, being killed, and all of these people are Salvadoran, so they want to stay, but how can they if this kind of repression exists? Many students migrate out of El Salvador because of the lack of opportunity and the intense repression. Jobs don't exist in El Salvador; there are jobs here, so they have to emigrate. So many young people are migrating to the U.S., and when they get here, they're faced with intimidation, racism and inaccessible education.

On the weekend of November 17, the annual protest at the School of the Americas was held outside the school's gates

in Columbus, Georgia. What was it like being at the SOA?

It was great being there, because I was able to understand what people here in the U.S. think about Latin America. The fact that 20,000 people gathered at Fort Benning [which houses the School of the Americas] says a lot about what people in the U.S. think of the crimes that were committed – that continue to be carried out – in our countries. So you can feel the intensity of so many people who have gathered to close an institution that has caused so much death in El Salvador and other parts of the world.

The U.S. has worked hard to create instability in our countries, and for that reason now we need to increase the pressure and organizing from within the U.S. to help us break the chains that have tied us down for so much time now.

In the workshops leading up to the vigil and protest, you generated a lot of interest about the ILEA, the International Law Enforcement Academy. Many people

haven't heard of the ILEA- what can you tell the people of the United States about it?

The ILEA isn't the School of the Americas, but it is training police in how to "fight crime", and it has the same motivations as the SOA. They say that crime is on the rise in El Salvador, and they are saying that they need more power to combat this crime. The ILEA is financed by the United States but it's in El Salvador. We need to secure other finances that aren't police training, that aren't this kind of school. In El Salvador, we know that this school is nothing more than an institution to enforce the neoliberal economic system.

The U.S. has an agenda and pretends that they're helping countries in Latin America. ILEA represents another repressive element. The people in El Salvador know that this school is nothing more than to benefit the United States, just like CAFTA, NAFTA, the trade agreements being negotiated with Colombia and Peru. It is to enforce their economic system and squelch the resistance. It is possible, with the new Congress, that these things will change, that they will close the ILEA and SOA, but we'll see if that happens.

Can you offer some suggestions for the social movement here in the United States?

Organizations and movements in the U.S. all have different visions and purposes. There is no collective vision of what the problem is. It could start at the level of regions or cities—even within cities. People aren't unified around issues within cities. You need to create space to work together.

It is possible to give a name to all of the oppression that we struggle against, which is neoliberalism. This is the root of homophobia, poverty, racism, the oppression of immigrants. If you could agree on a common cause it would help you unify in your struggles, because it causes all the social problems. Everyone who has a vision, an organization or individual, who believes in real democracy, should come

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FURD march in the San Salvador May Day March, 2006

REPRESSION cont. from pg. 1

Academy (ILEA). Resistance to the ILEA in El Salvador has been strong from the social movement and the FMLN, which maintain that the academy is a violation of national sovereignty and a corresponding institution to the infamous School of the Americas.

In its final report, the U.N. Truth Commission, established as part of the peace process, verified the existence of a clandestine system of repression organized by military leaders and wealthy civilians during the war. The repressive system worked to disappear and murder political opposition activists through death squads. Despite the Peace Accords, the death squads were never investigated or dismantled, and their members were not brought to justice, mainly because of the political power of their financiers and leaders, amongst them the founder of the ARENA party, Roberto D'Aubuisson. As a result, impunity has allowed for these practices to resurface.

Unresolved Political Murders Lead to More Impunity

Currently, there are unresolved cases of political assassinations – such as that of union leader Gilberto Soto in October 2004 – that have revived fear amongst the left of the persistence of political murders in El Salvador. Beatrice de Carrillo, the nation's Human Rights Ombudswoman, presented an extensive report on the Soto case, in which she concluded that death squads continue operating in El Salvador. To this day, the presidency and the judicial system have prevented any true investigation of the case.

More recently, the political assassinations of Francisco Antonio Manzanares and Juana Monjaras de

Manzanares, parents of former Radio Venceremos host Marina Manzanares- also known as "Mariposa"- have again presented evidence of the existence of death squads. In her international campaign to bring light to the case, Mariposa has explained that prior to their murder, in March and April 2006, her parents received various death threats by telephone and in person. However, the judicial system and the PNC remain silent and have not moved forward with the investigation of the case. Mariposa believes that their refusal to investigate serves to protect members of the ARENA party or representatives of the State Intelligence Office. Mariposa also points out that the political assassination of her brother, Paco Cutumay, occurred in 1993 when the PNC was under the direction of Rodrigo Avila, while the murder of her parents took place with Avila again at the helm of the PNC.

Considering the economic, social and political crisis El Salvador is suffering at the moment, the 15th anniversary of the Peace Accords serves as an opportunity for the Salvadoran left to demand that the Peace Accords be respected. In order for there to be real peace, the assassins who continue to govern the country will need to be brought to trial and sentenced. In a country where on average 13 people are murdered daily, where the costs of living require six or seven minimum wage salaries per household to live in dignified conditions, where impunity remains the most efficient means for the right to maintain its neoliberal model and repress any group that demands a change, we cannot celebrate this anniversary without the implementation of a real agenda for comprehensive peace! ■

INTERVIEW cont. from page 4

together around neo-liberalism.

What are some of the differences in organizing strategies and tactics that the FURD uses and that which you have seen or heard about from U.S. citizens?

It's important to think about strategy, and there are certainly differences in my country. A big difference is the issue of unity and connections within the movement. Every organization here has their own mission statement, many saying that they're making connections, which doesn't necessarily mean that they are. In El Salvador, though we have our internal problems, we look for places of unity because it's through working together that we can have an impact in the changes that we want to make. We have spaces like Popular Social Bloq that looks at all needs and tries to come up with a collective solution and make a plan. Within the University too, an attempt to bring together different groups, coming together in a common platform.

I haven't seen the entire United States, so this is based on my limited vision of the experiences that I've had here. Something missing here is a body that is giving a longer-term vision. Organizations here are providing immediate solutions but not creating the context for what creates these conditions. The movement here needs a larger sense of vision, that there be a collective vision among those organizing that seek a way of coming together. In El Salvador, we're resistin'; here, you make change because you're in the

belly of the beast.

As a movement, we need not just education, but follow up with those interested and plug them into spaces for action. Out of action, people develop a consciousness of reality. Once you have a consciousness, you have a real commitment to make change. ■



Oswaldo's stops along the tour, clockwise: meeting with Latino youth in Washington D.C.; speaking at an anti-war march in Los Angeles; with CISPES Development Director Sha Grogan-Brown and Program Director Krista Hansen at the School of Americas protest at Ft. Benning in Georgia.

Hasta la Victoria: Oswaldo Nataren in Denver, Colorado

by Hector Ricardo Urrutia

My cell phone had never rang so much. Each person that called wanted the details on the young Salvadoreño who was visiting the Mile High City.

As his host, I fielded questions like: *where is Oswaldo speaking tonight? What issues will he be addressing? Is he available for dinner? Is he available for interviews?*

The interest Oswaldo's visit generated was a reminder of just how thirsty people are for information. Despite the current nationalist and anti-immigrant sentiment polluting our airwaves, those of us in Denver who are interested in creating a better world knew we had to lend our ears to this *hermano* from abroad.

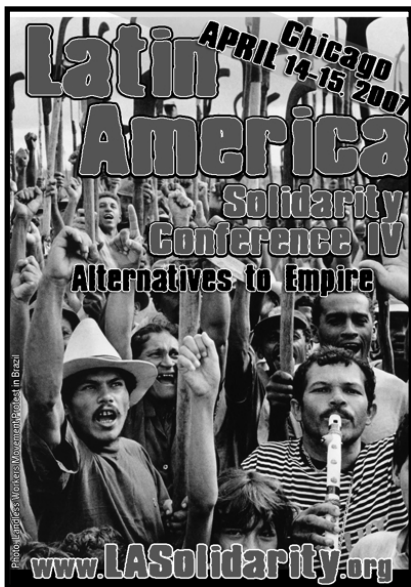
On Oswaldo's first night in Denver, he spoke before a group of 30 local activists at the Denver Area Labor Federation. Within the group were union members and staff organizers. I found it particularly interesting to watch my fellow labor activists react when Oswaldo talked about the role and structure of unions in El Salvador.

Oswaldo reported on the efforts of Salvadoran union members who are attempting to make the worker, student, campesino, women's and community struggles completely intertwined and inseparable from each another.

That way when the Salvadoran water workers union protests the privatization of their utility, they can count on the support and solidarity of student groups and of course, vice-versa.

Personally, I learned a basic lesson in union leadership accountability. Oswaldo mentioned how Salvadoran union presidents come directly from the rank and file and when they're elected to leadership positions they maintain their jobs on the shop floor. This is in stark contrast to the undemocratic, bureaucratic and staff-driven nature of many unions in the United States; the hierarchical structure of US unions oftentimes allows union leaders to distance themselves from the membership. As a result, union members don't feel ownership of their organization and participation understandably dwindles.

Oswaldo's description of the structure of Salvadoran unions is something I plan on sharing in conversations with union members who are looking to democratize their organization.



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It was both a reminder of what pure unionism is and a challenge to my role as an academic in the US union movement. I was filled with hope as my fellow labor activists were forced to hear and grapple with this idea.

The following day Oswaldo was the featured speaker at Café Cultura, a monthly open mic event in Denver. Each month Café Cultura fills a church gymnasium with mostly Latin@, Chican@ and Indigenous poets, students and activists. Café

Cultura's poets routinely spit rhymes on social and political justice and no one is ever censored while on the microphone. Because no one is censored, I like to think of Café Cultura as "liberated territory". Only in our case the church gymnasium is liberated from the noise generated by the likes of Bill O'Reilly, CNN, Rush



Oswaldo meets with union organizers in Denver.

Limbaugh, George W. Bush, John Kerry, etc. Oswaldo was welcomed by more than 100 Café Cultura attendees.

Within the Café Cultura crowd was some of the Latin@, Chican@ and Indigenous youth who earlier in the year had participated in student walk-outs to protests anti-immigrant legislation. Before grabbing the microphone Oswaldo engaged with some of the students and talked to them about the student movement in El Salvador. It was so powerful to hear Oswaldo talk about the student walk-outs in Denver and tell the youth at Café Cultura that they are being enthusiastically watched from El Salvador.

It was difficult to accept how much he knew about the student walk-outs here and how little we knew about the students in El Salvador. Of course, the purpose of his visit was to fill in that gap of knowledge.

Oswaldo was interviewed for a Denver Latin@ youth radio program that aired the next day. He spoke on the need for students and youth in the US to become politically informed and engaged. He also spoke specifically on the exploitations that accompany free trade agreements.

In short, Oswaldo's two-day visit offered us profound lessons on political theory, practice, and history that forced us to think critically about our work in Denver and how it affects our sisters and brothers abroad. Furthermore, his visit reminded me how borders were created for economic gain and that our solidarity is the force which will counter the exploitations of free trade and militarism.

¡Hasta la Victoria hermano!

Ricardo Urrutia is a young Salvadoran-American activist in Denver who is working to start a local solidarity committee.

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