

EL SALVADOR

Watch



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The ILEA: U.S. Exporting “Criminal Justice” to Latin America from a Base in El Salvador

In May, Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa made a visit to El Salvador in support of foreign investment, “free trade”, and transnational gang-fighting. However, his visit was ironically interrupted by brutal LAPD attacks on a peaceful May Day protest in Los Angeles, underscoring the increasing connection between repressive police institutions in the two countries. Nowhere is that connection more obvious than in the construction of the U.S.-sponsored International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) in El Salvador.

Though Villaraigosa’s visit to El Salvador was ostensibly about attracting foreign investment to El Salvador, the LAPD’s May Day assault on an immigrant rally and Villaraigosa’s apparent willingness to promote similar tactics abroad played not only to the demands of foreign investors but also conforms to a new U.S. government mandate to appear tough on crime. Fears about “gangs” are to domestic policy what “terrorists”



Riot police attack vendors in downtown San Salvador on May 12, 2007 (Photo La Prensa Grafica)

are to U.S. foreign policy – a convenient scapegoat for state-sponsored violence. Villaraigosa’s visit illustrated the ongoing refusal of politicians to address root causes of poverty and forced migration, choosing instead to promote cross-border strategies in which U.S. law enforcement agencies coordinate with their counterparts in other

countries to sharpen surveillance, interrogation, and street combat techniques.

U.S.-Sponsored ILEA: Not the solution

In July 2005 Condoleezza Rice announced the opening of the ILEA, a regional police training academy which, according to its directors, is designed to make Latin America “safe for foreign investment” by “providing regional security and economic stability and combating crime.” Hundreds of police recruits, along with prosecutors and judges from throughout Latin America, will receive training at the

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Solidarity in Action: CISPES May Day Delegation

By Jana Barney, Boston CISPES and Kristin Parks, Bay Area CISPES

From April 27 to May 7 of 2007 we had the opportunity to be two of 16 delegates, representing eight U.S. cities and two European countries, from CISPES. The delegation traveled to El Salvador and met with an array of social organizations, government officials, and FMLN deputies as well as experts on the political, social, and economic dynamics of El Salvador. The delegation was composed of people from the non-profit, healthcare and technology sectors, as well as artists, veterans, students, scientists, and teachers. We met three groups nearly every day, and were blown away by the level of the trust the Salvadoran people granted to us. Many of us came to El Salvador to put a face to our solidarity work, and were astounded at the cohesion among social groups in El Salvador.

The Women’s Secretariat

The main objective of the FMLN Women’s Secretariat in their campaign towards El Salvador’s 2009 elections is to reach out to women, particularly in rural areas, and politically educate and empower them. The Secretariat

fights an uphill battle against sexist stereotypes, fear, limited education, culturally enforced gender roles, and familial expectations that specifically affect women. One approach they use for outreach is to go door to door during the day when women are more likely to be home with children and can engage fully. Another method is to draw women into a public space to do artisan skill-building activities such as knitting or crafts. These meetings, politically innocuous at first, gradually stimulate consciousness raising conversations relating to their socioeconomic status and the country’s politics.

May Day San Salvador: 70,000 in the Streets!

On May 1, 2007, San Salvador, we joined nearly 100,000 Salvadorans for the May Day March: organized unions, DVD/CD vendors, students, teachers, health care workers, agricultural cooperatives, organized sex workers, women against domestic violence, LGBT activists, and the FMLN. Children marched in cardboard water droplet costumes that read “no privatizar” and elderly women adorned in crimson FMLN *continued on pg 4*

U.S. Intervention in Latin America: the Bush Years

by Burke Stansbury, CISPES Executive Director

In March President Bush made a high-profile visit to Latin America. Throughout the trip—to Brazil, Uruguay, Colombia, Guatemala, and Mexico—he ironically spoke the language of “social justice” in an apparent attempt to counter the Leftist tide in the region.

In the end, it was clear that Bush’s trip was a failure and that Hugo Chavez and the progressive tide of new leaders in Latin America maintain the upper hand. Yet the mainstream U.S. media chose a telling twist for the story of Bush’s visit: Latin Americans, they said, were concerned about the U.S. “ignoring” them, and yearned for the days of American presidents showering “attention” on their plight. The media seemed intent on setting the stage for a return to the fabled “Good Neighbor” policy, most recently idealized in the multilateralism of former president Bill Clinton. Once Bush is out of power, the assumption goes, the U.S. will finally get back to coddling its less-fortunate Latin American neighbors.

However, the idea that the Bush Administration has been “disengaged” in Latin America is flat out false; in fact, political and military intervention in the region has continued throughout his presidency. Moreover, it is a demeaning and racist assumption to imply that Latin Americans are lost without their more advanced neighbors kindly offering assistance and aid. The truth is that most people in the Latin America, like the rest of the Global South, would rather that the U.S. government either truly disengage in the region, or drastically change its foreign policy.

Political Intervention during the Bush years

A quick look at events over the past six years shatters the myth about Bush Administration “neglect” in Latin America. One of the earliest and most blatant U.S. intrusions into Latin American politics came in April 2002 with the attempted coup in Venezuela against President Hugo Chavez. There, the State Department funded Venezuelan groups that ultimately lead the coup, primarily through the ironically misnamed National Endowment for Democracy (NED), which has become the primary tool of U.S. “soft” intervention over the last decade. The U.S. quickly became one of only two governments to acknowledge the interim coup government, and after Chavez returned to power due to a popular outpouring of support in his favor, the Bush Administration continued to fund other failed attempts to dispose the democratically elected government.

Next up was Haiti, where president Jean Bertrand Aristide was pushed out in early 2004 after the NED and other quasi-non governmental institutions supported by the U.S. State Department bolstered the brutal anti-democratic opposition in Haiti. Violence and repression ensued, yet the U.S. never acknowledged its role in the coup and the bloody events that followed.

A story well-known by CISPES members and supporters is the tragic intervention that occurred in El Salvador around the same time as Aristide was disposed. There, State Department officials and Bush’s own brother Jeb stepped in to undermine the FMLN campaign and its candidate Schafik Handal, who was in a close race for the



Anti-Bush march in Montevideo, Uruguay while Bush met with Uruguayan President Tabare Vazquez (photo CNN)

presidency with the right-wing candidate Antonio Saca. Old cold warriors like Otto Reich and Roger Noriega – retreated from the Reagan and Bush Sr. administrations – stepped in to fuel fears about El Salvador losing its status as a U.S. ally should Handal take the presidency. Underhanded threats about Salvadorans immigration status in the U.S. and the cutting off of remittances – one of the primary sources of wealth for El Salvador – helped turn the tide in Saca’s favor.

In recent years the U.S. has also sided with conservative candidates in Bolivia (against leftist indigenous leader Evo Morales), Nicaragua (against Sandinista Daniel Ortega), and in Mexico, where conservative candidate Felipe Calderon narrowly won the presidency in July of 2006 after a widely questioned – and protested – squeaker victory.

Militarization, Policing, and the Drug War

As if such political intervention were not enough, the Bush Administration has directly funded the construction of new military bases and police schools in Latin America, while increasing overall military funding to the region, most prominently through Plan Colombia. The U.S. maintains numerous military bases in Latin America and has steadily increased military aid during the past 6 years. The opening of the ILEA police training academy in El Salvador also marks an important shift in U.S.-funding of repressive regimes, now focusing on police and anti-gang intelligence as much as military. Indeed, the increased links between US institutions like the FBI, the DEA, and ICE (the immigration authority under Homeland Security) and their counterparts in Latin America does not bode well for a region that has suffered decades of brutal US intervention.

Moving forward: A United Solidarity Movement to confront US Militarization in Latin America?

The leftist shift in Latin America continues, and Bush’s visit to the region proved to be a failed response. Overall, this trend gives hope to millions of people in Latin America whose dependence on the United States will be transformed into an increasingly autonomous, and integrated, Latin America.

In April CISPES and dozens of other Latin America solidarity groups came together to assess the current state of politics in Latin America and strategize about how to better confront US military and eco- *continued on pg 5*

ILEA every year by instructors mostly from U.S. agencies such as the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and the FBI, the latter of which has had a remarkably large presence in El Salvador since opening its own office there in 2005.

Salvadorans refer to the ILEA as a new “School of the Americas” for police. ILEA training was already underway in November 2005, even as the Salvadoran legislative assembly illegally passed the formal agreement with a simple majority rather than the 2/3 vote usually required for international treaties. In 2006 the US Congress voted to approve the ILEA in a buried funding request in the Foreign Operations Appropriations bill.

Though it’s impossible to say what exactly ILEA graduates have done since the academy opened, the conduct of the Salvadoran police – 25% of those graduates – has shown an alarming turn for the worst since the ILEA was inaugurated. In early May the Archbishop’s Legal Aid and Human Rights Defense Office (*Tutela Legal*) released a report implicating the Salvadoran National Police (PNC) in eight death squad style assassinations in 2006 alone. Meanwhile, the Salvadoran Human Rights defense office has also published reports connecting the PNC to death squads, denouncing the militarization of the National University in July 2006, and noting repeated cases of corruption and misconduct within the PNC.

Anti-terrorism: Cracking Down on the Left in El Salvador

In late 2006 the right-wing passed two draconian new laws: an anti-terrorism law and anti-organized crime law. These laws give the police and the government the authority to target protesters and organizers who challenge policies like CAFTA and the privatization of public resources. Common protest tactics, from building occupations to streets blockades, are now conflated with terrorism, and organized student and youth have especially become targets of the latest crack-down. In mid-May the Salvadoran government announced that it would employ the anti-terrorism and anti-organized crime laws against street vendors arrested during a protest in downtown San Salvador.

Such laws are justified by stoking fears over gang violence, but in fact they correspond to a new crack-down on political organizing. By turning a blind-eye to PNC misconduct, and by granting political support to the ruling right-wing ARENA party, the U.S. State Department has endorsed this strategy of repression. The strategy corresponds to draconian policies in the U.S., especially the Patriot Act which has been used to isolate and criminalize social movement and political forces in our country. Like in Latin America, law enforcement policies in poor communities of color in the U.S. are taking a dangerous turn. Anti-gang and anti-immigrant injunctions in the U.S are on the rise, and a provision in the current Senate immigration reform bill could further this process by taking away the burden of proof for arresting suspected gang members.

Instead of bolstering repression, surveillance, and police misconduct through the ILEA, U.S. officials like Villaraigosa could use their clout to push for an independent investigation into the assassination of Gilberto Soto, a Teamsters organizer who was shot in El Salvador in 2004; or to inquire about the eight death squad style assassinations which the PNC has been implicated in; or to question the whereabouts of disappeared students like Francisco Contreras, an organizer last seen with PNC agents in February of this year. Sadly, Villaraigosa played the same role as former Ambassador Douglas Barclay, pushing for beefed up police and advocating on behalf of U.S. corporations who fear an “unsafe climate for business” in El Salvador.

The ILEA vote in the US Congress – Take Action now!

In June the U.S. Congress will vote on funding to the ILEA. After CISPES members visited the ILEA in early May a report was published outlining the problems with this nascent institution. Since then, CISPES has moved ahead to advocate for an amendment that would strip funding for the San Salvador ILEA from the Foreign Operations Appropriations bill in the house. ***Find out more information, take action, and join the ILEA campaign by going to www.cispes.org/ilea.*** ■

Paul Raymond, 1932-2007

A good friend and compañero of CISPES, Paul Raymond, passed away on May 10 in Seattle.

Paul was in the South during the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s working alongside Martin Luther King Jr., and later moved to Seattle, continuing his commitment to justice. He helped found the progressive Northwest School in 1980—the same year CISPES was founded—and taught there for 27 years before retiring in February. Many students had their first exposure to struggles for social change through traveling to El Salvador with Paul and CISPES delegations.

Paul visited El Salvador many times with CISPES over the years, and was a stalwart supporter of the struggle in El Salvador. He was one of the original members of Seattle CISPES back in ‘80-‘81 and he and his wife Ellen graciously opened up their home for CISPES meetings and events. Over the years, Paul became known by some as the “Gringo Schafik” because of his resemblance to historic FMLN leader Schafik Handal and his affinity for Cuban Guayabera shirts. Paul is an amazing example of solidarity, someone who gave his life to building community, challenging power and fighting for a better world. He will be greatly missed.

Paul Raymond, Presente!



DELEGATION *cont. from Pg. 1*

apparel sold bags of water and passed out photocopied literature.

The intricate level of organization in the social movement of El Salvador is well represented in the May Day March in San Salvador. In the months leading up to the march, it was decided that unions would lead the march, followed by the broader social movement. The FMLN brought up the tail of the march, demonstrating the Frente's supportive relationship with social movements. The May Day March is testimony to the extent and diversity of people and social groups who are affected by oppression, as well as their alliance to fight against privatization, free trade, repression, and multinational corporate interest.

Water Workers Host Public Forums to Stop Privatization

Several days after the march, the CISPES delegation traveled to the department of Morazan to accompany SETA in a water forum, one of SETA's 80 in the past year. The union organizers have worked long unpaid hours traveling around the country to raise consciousness and mobilize El Salvador's citizens about the precarious status of their right to water. One speaker exclaimed, "We must stop privatization, not tomorrow but now, or else they will even privatize love." Another cried out that "people can live with out cell phones, they can live with out electricity, but they cannot live with out water."

The proposed legislation would privatize not only water from public water systems, but water from streams, natural bodies of water and small wells on private land. The public water system in El Salvador has already started a process of decentralization, wherein municipalities are given responsibility for their water system without financial support, and most, out of financial burden, are forced to sell to private companies. Although it is clear that the road ahead against water privatization will be long and difficult, it is clear that SETA will continue their struggle to preserve their country's human right to water.

Visiting the International Law Enforcement Academy

The 2007 CISPES delegation was the first CISPES group to tour the International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) and meet with ILEA officials (see article on the ILEA on page 1 for more history). It was difficult to suddenly be face to face with men of power, whose job is to further oppress the marginalized and struggling faces with whom we had been

meeting with all week. The staff of the ILEA claimed that their institution is completely transparent. However, our requests for any sort of documentation of the school's operations, including course descriptions, a list of instructors, and a list of students, were all denied.

When confronted about records of human rights abuses in the National Police Academy (PNC), the ILEA staff denied this, but admitted that, "If the PNC is corrupt, everything we do here is tainted" and the ILEA would have to disassociate from the PNC. These statements came hours before the *Diario CoLatino* printed a front page story about 8 cases in which the



Photos from the Delegation, left to right: Roger Blandino Nerio, FMLN Mayor of Mejicanos; SETA water forum in Perquin; 2007 May Day March in San Salvador; Sandra (and Martin to the right), CD/DVD vendor movement leaders in El Salvador, presenting their struggle to the delegation

PNC is connected to death squad-style murders in 2006. The days before our meeting with the ILEA, El Salvador's Human Rights Ombudswoman, Beatrice DeCarillo informed us that a great majority of the human rights abuses reported to her office are complaints against the PNC.

Our visit to the ILEA reinforced how important it is for us to carry the lessons of El Salvador's social movement home. The Salvadoran organizers we met with are diligent in the face of their own exclusion from political spaces. In El Salvador, U.S. policies and institutions are active oppressors; as people in the U.S., it is our responsibility to educate ourselves about our government's domestic and international policies, as well as the impact that our own privilege has on other people's human rights. Organizing in the United States can be difficult because many activists do not fight against neoliberalism out of a need for basic human rights like water, food and healthcare; we fight out of choice, out of consciousness, and even out of guilt. One of our biggest challenges is to develop ways to raise consciousness about U.S. imperialism in communities that do not already have this analysis, taking inspiration from the creative strategies of groups like the Women's Secretariat. ■

CISPES at the Latin America Solidarity Conference: Toward a Strong Coalition, United in Action



Above, left to right: Jacoby Ballard, Sha Grogan-Brown, Dan Denvir, Rosalie Pedroza, and Burke Stansbury lead CISPES workshops; Coalition of Imokalee Workers announce victory at the 'Concert for Fair Food' celebration on April 14; LASC participants at the final plenary

Five years ago this April, the Venezuelan people rose to defeat the U.S.-backed coup attempt to undercut the Bolivarian Revolution, the anti-imperialist project at the forefront of Latin America's leftward tide. On the anniversary of Venezuela's triumph the Latin America Solidarity Coalition (LASC) held its fourth national conference in Chicago entitled "Alternatives to Empire."

Founded in 2000, this year's LASC conference was endorsed by fifty grassroots organizations and included over 300 participants. The Conference strove to educate about the diverse struggles against neoliberalism and develop a common theoretical understanding of the problem, culminating in a unified plan to concretely support these struggles.

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) opened the weekend with the announcement that they had just scored a huge victory over the McDonald's Corporation. The agreement with McDonald's decided that McDonald's would pay more for the tomatoes they purchase, and that increase will go directly to tomato growers. CIW is a community based worker organization in Florida comprised mostly of migrant tomato pickers from Mexico and Central America and a member organization of the Latin American Solidarity Coalition (LASC).

As we heard at a victory rally that was thousands-strong, the CIW attributed its historic victory to innovative organizing that relied on a broad coalition of supporters—from diverse sectors including traditional labor unions, students, the religious community, and even politicians including former president Jimmy Carter—and its unity of action. The CIW's victorious campaign pointed the way forward for the LASC but also underscored the significant distance we must still travel to build a unified and strong coalition that CISPES envisions. The victory also confirmed a conversation within CISPES, that social movement organizations only remain viable if they are in motion, making progress through struggle.

To this end, CISPES' eight representatives made a strong case for developing a central coalition campaign that could unify the LASC membership through common action. While many of the conference's forty-five workshops focused on specific issue-education. CISPES activists led three workshops aimed at strengthening the LASC's strategic thinking, focused on solidarity movement history and movement-building strategies. The first contextualized the current struggle within movement history and demonstrated to the next generation of activists what has been successful and what lessons can be applied to our current organizing. CISPES' second workshop shared and developed alliance-building strategies among grassroots organizations and more policy-oriented organizations. CISPES' third workshop began planning unified action to challenge U.S. imperialism in Latin America. CISPES-led workshops were well-attended and filled with a compelling and clever energy to dismantle U.S. imperialism. The only true test of intention is action, and member organizations have risen to the challenge, already meeting about unified campaign possibilities.

The Venezuelan uprising that put the anti-imperialist Bolivarian Revolution back in power is significant because it sits at the forefront of the unified struggle of the Latin American left for integration and independence from the U.S. CISPES views the growing unity amongst the Latin American left as a call for U.S.-based solidarity activists to also unify in struggle.

After the LASC, Adelante! ■

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conomic intervention (see article above). One priority that emerged is the need to challenge all US military aid and training in Latin America, be it through the School of the Americas, the ILEA, Plan Colombia, or the various military bases. Upcoming elections in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Paraguay are also seen as a great opportunity to con-

tinue the tide of leftist leaders coming to power. Key to that effort will be countering US intervention in those elections so that the US-preferred right-wing candidates are unable to use fraud and manipulation in beating back the Left. ■

We Are All Together in the Struggle: Intergenerational Organizing

by Elizabeth Velasquez with Larry Mosqueda, Olympia CISPES

We are writing this article to reflect on how an older generation of CISPES activists have been role models.

Since the 1980's many activists have joined CISPES to organize against U.S. economic and military intervention in El Salvador and to help in the building of a new society with participatory democracy, respect for human and labor rights, and economic justice. CISPES has an incredible history of organizing, carrying on successful campaigns, and the most solid, consistent, and long-standing international solidarity movement with the people of El Salvador. It is the work of each of the CISPES activists that has constructed this history. However, as an older generation of activists moves on to other areas of organizational support, they take with them important experiences and history. This needs to be shared with the younger generations to help them to develop their organizing skills, strengthening the longevity of the organization, and build cross-generational movement. We are all together in this struggle.

In the Olympia CISPES chapter, Larry Mosqueda has continued to participate in meetings, educational nights, fundraisers, summer camps, national conventions, and other public events. Along with other long-

time committed CISPES activists such as Don White of Los Angeles CISPES, this has shown young activists in Olympia how to integrate their everyday life with activism and how to participate in the struggle in a sustainable way. There is great insight to be gained from cross-generational organizing. Older activists have learned to listen, support, and encourage young activists in their work.

For example, before the 2006 delegation to El Salvador, Larry and I met with several young activists interested in going to El Salvador. We explained to them how they could get involved with the delegation, and we helped them to develop fundraising events that brought the struggle of the people of El Salvador into the local com-

munity's conversations. This gave young activists a goal to work for, helped them to develop their organizing skills, and consolidated new members into the organization. They felt part of the struggle. In the end we had nine people on the delegation from Olympia, the vast majority of them young people.

By working together on educational nights, fundraisers, and other events, young and older activists are building a cross generational movement. While the older activist mentors, the young activist learns, flourishes, and embraces the work of the organization. This creates common knowledge for both. It strengthens the solidarity work within the organization, and builds on the struggle for social justice. At the same time this working together invites new and young people to get involved with the organization, feeling that there is space for all to organize against U.S. economic and military intervention in El Salvador. The intelligence and youth of our leadership and the experiences of our older members are mutually reinforcing strengths that can help the people of El Salvador as well as people here in the belly of the beast.

[note: this article is part of a forthcoming proposal by Olympia CISPES leading up to the Convention] ■



Larry Mosqueda, Josh Elliot, and Elizabeth Velasquez of Olympia CISPES at a CISPES gathering

CISPES Updates:

CISPES' 12th National Convention

Every two years, CISPES activists and organizers come together with representatives and partners from El Salvador to decide on organizational strategy and program.

This July, Boston CISPES will host the Convention, titled: "Nothing can Stop Us: ¡Organización es Nuestro Derecho!"

CISPES would like to welcome new staff:

Lisa Fuller - Boston CISPES coordinator
Alexis Stoumbelis - Bay Area CISPES coordinator
Wendy Vasquez - New York CISPES coordinator

New Healthcare Policy

CISPES would also like to announce our new Gender-Identity Related Health Care policy, which was implemented in March. We are proud to support the medical needs of our transgender and gender non-conforming staff! Inspired by the work of the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, CISPES is one of the few organizations to address this need. Please read our press release at www.cispes.org/healthcare.php.

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