

EL SALVADOR

Watch



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

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A United Left is Unstoppable: The 23rd FMLN National Convention

El Salvador will likely be the next country in Latin America to elect a president on the left.

On Sunday November 11, more than seventy thousand Salvadorans attended the FMLN 23rd National Convention celebrated at the Cuscatlan stadium in San Salvador. Buses from throughout the country began arriving in the morning and by the early afternoon, the stadium had become a red sea of FMLN shirts. The stadium was not big enough to hold everybody, so more than twenty-five thousand people had to listen to the speeches of FMLN Presidential and Vice-Presidential candidates Mauricio Funes and Sanchez Ceren from a nearby hill. The wide range of participants, from El Salvador and from throughout Latin America, are part of a growing left movement throughout the region. The Latin America left turn is united and it is unstoppable.

With numerous ovations, Mauricio Funes and Salvador Sanchez Ceren were welcomed at the stadium. In October Funes, the most popular independent journalist in El



Candidates Mauricio Funes and Salvador Sanchez Ceren at the FMLN Convention

Salvador, was selected by the party to be its candidate in the March 2009 elections, and his candidacy has ignited the country. *Viva Funes! Viva Ceren!* was chanted over and over on the day of the convention, and the candidates welcomed their wives, families, friends, Salvadorans in the country and abroad, FMLN members, mayors, and legislators of the party, and diplomatic delegations from Latin America. The

candidates went on to address the social, political, and economic issues that they, with the people's input, will work on when they win the presidency of El Salvador. The changes needed in El Salvador, they emphasized, could not be copied from any other country and must be developed in response to the people's needs.

A euphoric crowd welcomed historic leader Salvador Sanchez Ceren. "The march for the 2009 victory has begun today" he declared. "Latin America is constructing its own destiny with creativity and inspiration

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CISPES Fall Tour: We Are Not Terrorists! Organizing IS Democracy!

By Jacoby Ballard, CISPES National Organizer

From late October through mid-November, CISPES hosted Salvadoran Vendors Movement leader Josefina 'Fina' Lazo and Salvadoran Union Front leader Ricardo Calderon. Both leaders spoke of the daily effects of the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), the rising repression in El Salvador, and the great potential for profound change in El Salvador with the elections of 2009, while highlighting the unique impact of neoliberal policies on their own particular organizing efforts.

Fina toured the West Coast and then culminated her visit at the annual School of the Americas protest in Fort Benning, Georgia. Along this tour she met with vendors in Los Angeles, Latino day laborers in San Francisco and Seattle, Congressional Representatives, college students and high school classes, and inspiring community organizers. Ricardo's tour included steelworkers and teacher's unions, the AFL-CIO, Washington D.C. and Minneapolis committees of the FMLN, graduate students at Carnegie Mellon University, a Presbyterian church in Pittsburgh, and a freshman economics class at the University of Massachusetts.

Boston CISPES organizer Shane Stewart was impressed with Ricardo, saying, "if you just picked a unionist from the U.S. and asked him to talk about the general social, economic and political situation in the U.S., you'd be hard pressed to find someone who can do it. But Ricardo can!"

Attacks on Vendors and the Social Movement: "Although peace was signed, it wasn't achieved"

Throughout the tour, Fina painted vivid descriptions of government repression of street vendors, whose only source of income for their families is selling items such as CDs and DVDs in the streets. Fina explained that the vendors are "not just vendors. We also have to pay water, electricity, rent and so we have to be part of the movement against privatization." Fina gave powerful evidence about the cost of living in El Salvador, stressing that the minimum wage is \$6.50 per day (not per hour, but per *day*); out of this wage, low-paid workers must find a way to afford the average electricity bill of \$40 per month. She explained how she and the other vendors plead with the

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Collective Resistance: October Day of Action in the Bay Area

By Alexis Stoumbelis, Bay Area CISPES coordinator

I held the megaphone in my hand, waiting to speak, wondering what I would say to get everyone's attention. An energetic group of 25 people had gathered outside the Salvadoran consulate in San Francisco as part of a National Week of Action to stand in solidarity with thirteen people in El Salvador who face up to 60 years in prison on charges of terrorism. In July, the "Suchitoto-13" participated in a successful protest against the privatization of water, and Salvadoran government is retaliating with an "anti-terrorism" law backed by the United States.

I felt pretty small standing in front of that building. How could my words echo the rallying cries in El Salvador, reflect the will of thousands who are taking to the streets week after week? How could our presence outside the San Francisco consulate convince a judge hundreds of miles away to defy the orders of the ARENA government and the U.S. State Department? Would I be courageous enough to stand here with the megaphone if I could be arrested for terrorism for raising my voice?

I looked over at several Salvadoran *compañeros* who had driven to the Consulate from hours away, bringing signs with the names of the 13 political prisoners. Collective resistance remains the only force that will stop this trial. All of a sudden I heard myself saying, "We are here today in front of the Salvadoran consulate to demand that all charges be dropped against the Suchitoto-13!"

One of the most powerful experiences on the Day of Action was to stand together with CISPES activists both old and new. We were joined by activists who had been observing elections in Central American since the 1980s and by college students who had yet to work closely with CISPES. It was an important reminder that getting out into the streets to recruit new people really matters! That's where

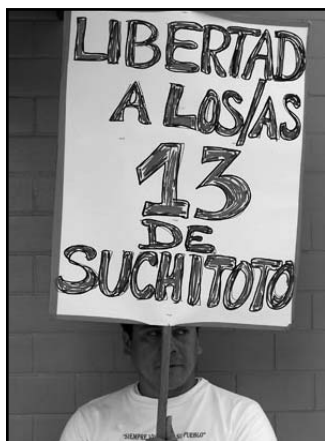
we find friends in the struggle, the people who will help us build our base. Over the summer, our chapter was doing regular street outreach, tabling and clipboarding to educate people about the current political repression and get them to take action. In doing this kind of street outreach, we can connect a new generation of activists with a legacy of struggle and solidarity. We also met a lawyer who had done sanctuary work for Central American refugees in the early 1980s—I think this was the first protest he'd been to at the Salvadoran consulate in many years!

It was also really exciting to be joined by allies and speakers from organizations like Food and Water Watch, Gabriela Network, Global Exchange, the Living Wage Coalition, and Globalize This! Months of building organizational ties were starting to pay off. It was powerful to see how many people know that El Salvador is still a critical point of resistance to US intervention in Latin America. New allies at Food and Water Watch explained the insidious role of financial institutions like the IMF that mandate the privatization of water in El Salvador and how their inspiring struggle is one of many around the world, including in the US, to defend the right to public water. Our *compañeras* at Gabriela Network, doing women's solidarity work between the US and the Philippines, illustrated how "anti-terrorism" legislation is being used to directly target social movements in countries that are organizing to get out from under the thumb of the US. This is one critical way we can act in solidarity with the people of El Salvador; to build and mobilize a united front against U.S. imperialism from within.

We were very proud that photos from the San Francisco protest were recently printed in the *Diario CoLatino* newspaper in El Salvador, to show the movement in El Salvador that we are still out in the streets and that we will stand with them for as long as it takes! ■



A few other highlights from the CISPES October Day of Action: Above: New York CISPES participates in 'Justice for the Bronx'; Seattle CISPES performs street theater.



Bay Area CISPES activists rally outside the Salvadoran Consulate.



Manipulation and Pressure Tactics win the CAFTA Referendum in Costa Rica

CISPES, the Stop-CAFTA Coalition, and the Alliance for Responsible Trade organized a delegation to monitor the historic CAFTA referendum process in Costa Rica in October. Two CISPES activists participated in the delegation, and brought energy from the Costa Rican people – and their denouncement of the stolen results – back to their local work. The following excerpt is from an article by Tom Loudon written in the aftermath of the referendum.

With the final polls predicting a resounding win for the opponents of the US-Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) in a referendum on October 7, the U.S. government and the business elite in Costa Rica pulled out all the stops. In spite of a law which explicitly prohibits all public discussion of the issues in the two days before the referendum, several TV stations ran "news" programs

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without copying models. With the integration of the people we built new governments” referring to the recent electoral victories for the left throughout the region. Sanchez Ceren also emphasized that the FMLN would implement the Peace Accords after 18 years of ARENA obstruction.

In his speech, Funes criticized the ARENA government’s effort to rewrite history, decrying the recent approval of legislation in the National Assembly declaring November 11 a National Mourning Day, supposedly in memory of the people who died when the guerrilla movement launched a national offensive on that day in 1989. Funes stated that “there can not be a national mourning day because everyday there are on average 10 homicides in this country and until those numbers significantly decrease, Mourning Day should be every day. As a candidate and the next president of El Salvador, I declare November 11 a National Peace Day in recognition of the people who gave their life to build a new El Salvador”.

Funes criticized ARENA’s regressive economic policies, saying that “If it wasn’t for the four billion dollars a year that Salvadorans send in remittances to our country, this economy would have collapsed already.” He also criticized the government’s approach to crime in making security a lucrative business for Saca’s friends who own private police services. Funes asserted that the PNC should provide security for the people while the government must address the social conditions that breed violence and crime.

Funes said that he would maintain ties with the United States, but that the relationship would no longer be one of servility. One of his first diplomatic decisions will be to

bring the troops back home from Iraq. After the speech, convention delegates and representatives from throughout the region ratified the Funes-Ceren presidential slate.

The left forces in El Salvador and Latin America have ARENA—and the Bush Administration—scared. Saca has been traveling to the United States to drum up support for supposed “improvements” ARENA has made. Meanwhile, ARENA continues to intimidate people by saying that Funes is a “little Chavez,” referring to the Venezuelan leader who is constantly demonized by the press.

There is much work to do to support an FMLN victory in 2009. In El Salvador, Mauricio Funes, Salvador Sanchez Ceren and other FMLN leaders have been visiting various municipalities. In late November Funes visited the Lower Lempa region of the country, an area known for its poor economy and vulnerability to flooding. The visit is part of the FMLN’s Open Social Dialogue initiative (or Dialogo Social Abierto), which will create a presidential platform with input from throughout Salvadoran society. The Open Dialogue will travel to San Francisco, Los Angeles, Washington DC and New York in December in an effort to consult with Salvadorans living in the US.

Solidarity activists in the United States continue to support the left turn in Latin America by denouncing any U.S. attempt to intervene in the 2009 Salvadoran electoral process and denouncing ARENA’s dirty campaign of fear against the FMLN and their politics of repression against the country’s social movements. Que viva el FMLN y la solidaridad internacional! ■

COSTA RICA cont. from pg. 2

designed to instill fear in the population if they voted against CAFTA. One program featured a 1 ½ hour interview with President Arias, elaborating the multitude of negative consequences rejecting CAFTA would bring. Additionally, a high level Arias cabinet member filled the “news” programs with analysis around the doom Costa Rica would face if CAFTA were not ratified.

White House confirms no renegotiations of the FTA

All of the threats coming from the U.S. government received wide coverage in the Costa Rican media. The one which had the most impact was a White House statement the day before the vote affirming that if CAFTA were rejected there would be no re-negotiating a new treaty with Costa Rica. Given that the Bush administration is practically a lame duck government, and can’t predict the actions of the next administration, there is no validity to this statement. Nevertheless, it was effective in spreading and amplifying the well rooted campaign of fear administered by President Arias and his team.

These fraudulent tactics helped turn a significant margin for the “NO” campaign into a narrow victory for the pro-CAFTA forces. With over 1.5 million votes cast (75% of the voting population), only about 50,000 votes gave the “Yes” campaign their victory (51.6% to 48.4%). A victory

gained through such deliberately orchestrated and blatant violation of Costa Rican electoral law that it provides grounds to declare the referendum null and void. But the Costa Rican Supreme Electoral Council failed to act in the moment, when challenged to do so, and continues to be silent, something which demands a questioning of their impartiality and credibility as an independent body.

There were reports of grave violations in many locations across Costa Rica. While these are important, the central abuse was planned, organized and systematically carried out at a much higher level. The failure to act by the Supreme Electoral Council must be denounced and their authority challenged. From the time this propaganda blitz began, leaders from the “NO” campaign made formal demands to the Election Authorities that the propaganda be stopped, or that the stations be shut down. Those demands were completely ignored. The neutrality which should be central to an authority of this nature was missing from the equation.

In response, the Alliance for Responsible Trade and the Stop CAFTA Coalition mounted an international organizational sign-on letter campaign to the Organization of American States (OAS), demanding that they declare the results of this referendum null and void. In the U.S., we deeply understand the consequences

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police: “this is our livelihood. How am I going to buy food for my children tomorrow? How am I going to pay for their exams for school?”

The vendors face police raids on their stalls and then face false charges: during a recent raid, vendors were accused of breaking windows and lighting a car on fire. This is “an attempt to criminalize the organized vendors’ movement,” Josefina explained. Still, their peaceful protests, which include elderly as well as teenage vendors, continue to be met with rubber bullets and tear gas.

In addition to government action, corporate policy of intimidation, harassment, and targeted firings are tactics used to suppress unions in El Salvador. Ricardo spoke about the specific challenges that union organizing currently faces in El Salvador, citing one example of trying to organize the maquila sector: “We go [to the maquilas] so that workers can know about their rights. Owners send people to observe who take the pamphlets, and the next day, these workers are fired.”

In the last 3 months, union organizers in the healthcare and water sectors have been arrested. “This [repression] is the destruction, at birth, of any kind of labor organization. It is possible that these laws will change with the election of 2009 that could bring in a new government. That is our hope.” Ricardo explained.

Free Trade Smacks El Salvador: Dollarization and CAFTA

Fina spoke about the process of being “woken up” by CAFTA. She shared a story about a TV commercial that was running before the vote on CAFTA that showed a woman wearing one of the vendor’s aprons and making a pupusa. The ad said that with CAFTA, she would be able to export these pupusas right to the US. She said, we looked at each other and said, that sounds pretty good. “We didn’t even know that television was just lies and manipulation from the right wing. We were eating television for breakfast, lunch and dinner!”

Intellectual property rights under CAFTA stipulate that thousands of vendors such as Josefina cannot sell pirated CDs, DVDs, and other branded products. Josefina related that as many as 100,000 Salvadorans now work in the informal sector, because of worsening economic conditions due in large part to CAFTA, and because more and more Salvadorans are being deported back from the U.S. to El Salvador. In San Francisco, Lazo talked about how dollarization has increased living expenses; for example, a pound of beans costs \$1 and a family needs 6-7 pounds per week, which means that a family spends an entire day’s wages on a week’s worth of beans.

Connecting Locally: Mama’s Hot Tamales in LA; SEIU 1199 in Boston; Casa Latina in Seattle

In Boston, Ricardo met with SIEU Local 1199. During the meeting an organizer from Haiti identified the military-government alliance of repression as how things



Ricardo speaks at a Boston CISPES event; Ricardo with local legislator Ana Sol Gutierrez at an event in Washington DC

are and have been in Haiti. The CISPES-organized meeting inspired 1199 to have monthly meetings to keep abreast of the global context of the struggle.

On October 30 Fina was featured at a lunch at Mama’s Hot Tamales, a delightful restaurant and training center for vendors in the MacArthur Park neighborhood. Mama’s Hot Tamales is a training ground for tamale vendors who seek event contracts and then use the restaurant kitchen to prepare the food. Rocio, a former street vendor, transitioned into Mama’s project a number of years ago; people broke into applause when she reported she has one child in college and has bought her own house! Rocio and Fina bonded as two strong, dedicated, hard-working and politically sophisticated women vendors.

On a Saturday morning in Seattle, 30-40 day laborers from Casa Latina crammed into a little room to meet with Fina. Casa Latina is a Seattle organization



CISPES National Staff with Josefina Lazo at November’s School of the Americas Protest

working to support immigrants through ESL classes, a women’s program, and a day laborers’ center. After Fina spoke about her experiences working in El Salvador’s informal sector, several day laborers spoke about having been street vendors in Mexico before migrating to Seattle. One day laborer, Antonio, spoke of how immigrants here in the U.S. are also subject to bad treatment by the police. This meeting made visible that both vendors in El Salvador and day workers in Seattle are criminalized by the very political system that forces them into these areas of marginalized work in the first place.

Solidarity Toward an FMLN Win in 2009

According to both Ricardo and Fina, the real hope for change in El Salvador lays in the potential of FMLN wins in 2009, not only on the presidential level, but on every level of government. Now more than ever the movement in El Salvador supports the FMLN as the only way to affect real deep social and economic change in the country. Unions and the social movement are extremely hopeful and working more closely to vocalize their support of the FMLN and turn folks out in support.

Both tourees made it clear that the left in El Salvador needs international solidarity movement to send large delegations of election observers to the 2009 elections. “We are asking for solidarity so that the Bush government can change its attitude and actions in the area,” stated Ricardo, referring to the alliance between the ARENA government in El Salvador and the Bush Administration in the United States. Fina echoed this sentiment, stating that, “the people will elect Mauricio Funes president unless corruption and fraud steal the victory.” ■

CISPES Chapters Meet in a Northwest Gathering

By Stefanie Skiljan, Seattle CISPES activist

In October, Northwest CISPistas got together to share ideas and knowledge from Portland to Seattle. Those of us from Seattle arrived Friday night to kick off the weekend of analysis, workshops, and dance parties, joining Olympia CISPES, Jacoby and Heyward from the national office, and the Portland Central American Solidarity Committee (PCASC). We began with the film “Un Poquito de Tanto Verdad,” a documentary about the 2006 uprising in Oaxaca, Mexico, with a focus on the importance of independent media. After the outstanding film, we had a slumber party at the home of long-time CISPES member Larry Mosqueda, and went to bed that night with dreams of revolution.

On Saturday we began with an Immigration and Trade presentation by Seattle, which uses historical analysis of the structures of poverty in Latin America to frame the affects that US trade and immigration policy have there. As a Seattle committee member, it was inspiring to see my compañeros’ work presented.

After a delicious lunch, Jacoby and Heyward led a workshop about gender identity and solidarity, guiding activities that highlight the weight and expectations that gender carries, and encouraging us to look at how this plays out in our lives. We ended with role plays about acting as an ally to trans people, with essential insights for those who are still learning about gender identity. The Seattle committee particularly appreciated this workshop; it was very helpful to us in our commitment to anti-oppression education within the group. We took away important information and perspective that we were able to share with the rest of the committee at our following meeting, where we began with a shortened version of the workshop.

We finished Saturday with an organizational structure discussion in which PCASC especially had some valuable experience to share in the way of structure, that was pertinent to Seattle’s recent development of sub-committees. The day ended with good energy and anticipation of pupusas from a local Salvadoran restaurant. PCASC had to head back to Portland, but Olympia CISPES showed the rest of us a night out on the town.

Sunday began with a phone banking training, led by the expertise of our beloved West Coast Fundraiser Heyward. We got some practice in asking for money, an exercise that proved to be harder for some than others, but definitely a valuable experience for all.

We wrapped up that day talking about committee plans over the next six months, which was a great chance for Olympia and Seattle to coordinate some program, and ended up with a grand plan for a Northwest solidarity bicycle trip beginning on May Day 2008... keep a look out for more information coming up!

We all felt so close at that point that Seattle decided to hang around Olympia for just a little bit longer, where we hit up some local establishments before heading home. For myself, the regional gathering was a valuable experience not only in the way of learning and planning, but also developing a closer relationship to all that is CISPES. It continues to inspire me to meet CISPES folks from other areas, to hear about their projects and to see their commitment, and it comes back to strengthen my dedication to the work. Thanks to everyone that came and shared! ■

COSTA RICA cont. from pg. 3

of stolen elections. Given the complicit role of our government in the corrupting the process, we owe it to the people of Costa Rica to demand their right to vote freely without foreign interference.

NO is better, the battle continues

The elation of a people standing up for their rights – which we witnessed at multiple polling places on Referendum Day – has been replaced by dread and disillusionment. After the results were announced, people from the “NO” campaign were in shock. They didn’t expect their estimated 55% lead would be lost in the final days. Once the shock has passed, this dread turned into coordinated and coherent action. For more than twenty years Costa Rica has succeeded in resisting many of the prescribed economic reforms imposed by the North and international institutions, providing an alternative model of development that has clearly worked. Costa Rica and the world have too much to lose if this model of development is unraveled by the greed of the transnational companies and their client state, the U.S. ■

Check out the latest
CISPES/Stop CAFTA Coalition
CAFTA monitoring Report at
lasolidarity.org/CAFTA_report

Burke Stansbury, CISPES
Executive Director, doing some
stop-CAFTA street theater (to
right); below, protesters in
Costa Rica oppose CAFTA’s
ratification.



CISPES National Office Settles in Washington DC

By Burke Stansbury, CISPES executive director

On a beautiful New York day this past August, a crew of volunteers showed up at the CISPES Brooklyn office to help make our national office move a reality. 27 years of solidarity files, folders, desks, posters, sweat and tears were crammed into a 36 foot U-Haul and soon we were on our way. It took us about a year of planning and searching to settle on a new space in Washington, but just 14 hours to pack up and replant ourselves firmly in a beautiful new office and community. Though it was sad to move CISPES and our staff away from long-time New York friends, the love and support we got all the way through the move confirmed that we had made the right decision.

Having arrived in DC, we set out on the task of expanding our relations with the Salvadoran community, holding events in our great new office (which is shared with a host of dynamic community organizations) and supporting the local FMLN committee in its work. Though we've always had a great relationship with the small Salvadoran community in New York, the nearly half a million Salvadorans that live in greater Washington DC provide an even stronger, more militant base for our solidarity work. At our first big event almost all of the 50+ participants spoke Spanish, a positive sign in our effort to expand our contact and solidarity with immigrant communities throughout the U.S.

Meanwhile, our proximity to the nation's capital has helped us support a number of grassroots lobby days on trade policy, while bringing voices from El Salvador directly to the U.S. Congress. Though we have no intention of ever becoming an inside-the-beltway lobby machine, the presence of a radical national organization like CISPES in the belly of the beast should indeed contribute to the contentious dialogues in Congress about trade, US intervention in Latin America, and our country's support for repressive institutions like the School of the Americas and the International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA.) In the long-run we're working to permanently alter the foreign policy of the U.S. government towards Latin America and the rest of the world, so setting up shop a mile from where these decisions get made seems prescient.

We've also found Washington to be a great place to ride our bikes! In mid-October five CISPES activists joined 3 bikers from the Quixote Center in riding over 110 miles as a fundraiser for the organization. The "Solidarity Cyclers" tradition promises to continue next year with a longer 3-4 day "ride for justice." You can find out about all the exciting things happening with CISPES in Washington DC at www.cispes.org/washingtondc.php ■



Far left: the Brooklyn moving crew packs CISPES up and out; center: CISPES at our new home at St. Stephen's Church in Washington D.C.; to right: an excited Solidarity Cyclers crew gets riled up for their 110 mile ride this fall.

CISPES Holiday Wish List

- * **Frequent Flyer Miles** (go to www.cispes.org and click on "get involved" to find out more)
- * **ink cartridges** (call us for the specific fax and printer types)
- * **laptop computer**
- * **digital camera**
- * **volunteers!** (go to the "local committees" section of our webpage to find out more)

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