

EL SALVADOR

Watch



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

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Fact-Finding Delegation Kicks Off Campaign to Stop U.S. Intervention in Salvadoran Elections

By Callie Arnold, Bruce Millies, and Rob Andolina

From June 20-29, we were part of a sixteen-member delegation of CISPES activists from across the U.S. that traveled to El Salvador. We met with leaders of a variety of Salvadoran social movement groups: labor, youth, human rights, anti-privatization and pro-democracy.

We also met with leaders from the left-wing FMLN political party. Shortly after we arrived, the FMLN was the first to inform us that long-time Los Angeles CISPES activist Don White had passed away (*see below*). The delegation dedicated its work to his passion and commitment.

We were inspired by our visits with the three groups receiving CISPES material aid funds: the FMLN Women's Secretariat, the SETA water workers' union, and the Municipal Youth Center of Mejicanos (a city governed by the FMLN). At this last site, CISPES Executive Director Burke Stansbury suffered an ugly defeat at the hands of the Mejicanos youth table tennis squad, while other delegates were entertained by young martial arts students engaged in a friendly "battle of the sexes" melee.

We promised the Salvadorans with whom we met that we would express their concerns in a report describing human rights abuses and electoral fraud taking place in El Salvador – with a focus on the U.S. role in exacerbating these problems. CISPES activists will share this report widely with the U.S. Congress and the media. The goal is that sufficient grassroots pressure, both in El Salvador and the U.S., will prevent and mitigate U.S. electoral intervention and enable the FMLN to freely and fairly compete in the 2009 presidential elections. Recent polls show the FMLN with a significant advantage over the right-wing ARENA party.

In a rare meeting with the U.S. Ambassador, Charles Glazer, we raised specific concerns about U.S. policy towards El Salvador; a policy that unapologetically supports the repressive rule of ARENA, which has now governed the country for nearly 20 years (*see related CISPES press release on page 2*). Specifically, we demanded that the Embassy commit to neutrality in the electoral campaigns that are now under way in El Salvador. Shockingly, the Ambassador admitted that the U.S. had intervened in the 2004 elections on ARENA's behalf. He also pledged to non-intervention in 2009. *continued on pg 5*

ARENA's Shady Electoral Dealings

Though the campaign season does not officially begin in El Salvador until the fall, the country is already energized and buzzing with excitement over the prospect of fundamental change being effected through the ballot box in the 2009 elections. A series of polls released by various institutions this spring indicate that the leftist FMLN's presidential candidate, Mauricio Funes, has opened up a 20 point lead on ARENA's Rodrigo Ávila, former director of El Salvador's police. A victory by Funes, a former journalist, in the March 2009 vote would end 20 years of rule by the right wing ARENA party.

However, ARENA does not seem inclined to give up power without a fight. In fact, evidence points to the party's use of dirty tactics, even in this early, pre-campaign period. It is possible to identify five methods of electoral manipulation that ARENA has already begun to employ as a last ditch effort to maintain control of the government. These methods are: political violence, changing electoral laws, manipulating the electoral register, fear-based campaign tactics, and soliciting U.S. intervention. *continued on pg 3*

Don White Presente!

With heavy hearts, CISPES announced on June 23 that our inspirational compañero Don White had passed away in Los Angeles. He was found in his apartment by family members on June 21 having suffered a heart attack.



Don White, also fondly known as Don Blanco, has been the face of solidarity for many decades. He was at the founding convention of CISPES in 1980, and played a key role in the organization up until the very week of his passing. Don is well known and loved by so many of us for his unwavering commitment to social and economic justice, his tremendous humility, his infectious enthusiasm, his bold yet extremely diplomatic conviction, and his lively spirit.

It is hard to imagine the world without Don White, but as we know he would insist, the struggle must always continue. And so in his memory we will continue to fight for justice not only in El Salvador, but in the US, in Latin *continued on pg. 2*

US Embassy Admits to Intervention in 2004 Salvadoran Presidential Elections

CISPES Pledges to Hold Current Ambassador Glazer to Non-Interventionist Commitment for 2009

During a recent heated meeting at the US Embassy in El Salvador, Ambassador Charles Glazer admitted to U.S. intervention in the 2004 Salvadoran Presidential Elections. The meeting on June 27 was requested by a group of 12 U.S. citizens, including professors, students, journalists and community activists who were taking part in a 10-day delegation organized by the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES).

In their meeting with the Ambassador, the group focused specifically on the history of U.S. political and military intervention in El Salvador. They cited statements made by US State Department officials denouncing the leftist Farabundo Marti Liberation Front (FMLN) party during the 2004 presidential campaign. The delegates also referenced legislation put forward in Congress by Rep. Tom Tancredo (R-CO) that threatened to cut off remittances sent by Salvadorans in the U.S. to their families in El Salvador should the FMLN win. "The U.S. Embassy in El Salvador never countered this absurd threat or clarified the impossibility of such legislation being passed," said Rosa Lozano, a delegate from Washington D.C. "Ultimately, such intervention helped turn a close race for the presidency into a decisive victory for the right-wing National Republican Alliance (ARENA) party."

When asked directly if the U.S. government had intervened in the 2004 presidential elections on behalf of the ARENA party, Glazer replied in the affirmative. When asked if such intervention would occur again, he said "no". "We believe that this is the first time that a representative of the Bush Administration has taken responsibility for the manipulative interference that took place during the 2004 presidential campaign," said Burke Stansbury, Executive Director of CISPES and a participant in the meeting with the ambassador. "It's really quite remarkable; CISPES and others have been crying foul since State Department intervention began in mid-2003 but the Embassy has always denied it played a role in President Saca's victory," continued Stansbury. "But admitting fault last time is not enough. We will continue to demand that no such intervention occurs, not in 2009 nor ever again."



Members of the CISPES delegation speaking at a press conference

During the meeting, the Embassy labor attaché claimed that the possibility of fraud in the 2009 would be diminished because of the active monitoring of various international organizations and emphasized the role to be played by the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI), both subsections of the National Endowment of Democracy (NED). When challenged about the partisan nature of these quasi-non governmental organizations, as well as accusations that the IRI and NDI have played an interventionist role in other Latin American elections, the Embassy representative admitted that there was controversy and doubts surrounding the NED.

"In 2007, the IRI – headed by Republican presidential candidate John McCain – presented President Saca with its 'Freedom Award', showing its clear ideological preference in the polarized Salvadoran political process," said Laura Embree-Lowry, a member of the Boston chapter of CISPES and a participant in the Embassy meeting. "We believe that the presence of partisan groups like the IRI and NDI will in fact be counterproductive to the goal of the Salvadoran people, which is to hold free and fair elections in 2009." (*view the entire press release at www.cispes.org*)

Don White, cont. America, throughout the world, and as Don sometimes said "even in outer space!"

Don was not only the tireless leader of LA-CISPES for the past decade after retiring as a school teacher; he also served on various boards (such as the local Pacifica station KPFK and the Office of the Americas) and worked as a volunteer for other local causes. He travelled to El Salvador a dozen times since 1980 and also observed elections in Nicaragua and Guatemala.

In order to remember him, CISPES created a blog where many people have posted stories and photos of Don to share with those who loved him and struggled alongside him. **You can visit the blog at www.cispes.org/donpresente/**

At his birthday party last year, his biography ended with these words: "Don has said many times that the work he does in the movement enriches his life, brings him into contact with "the most beautiful people in the world," and helps him move into his senior years knowing he will leave the world a somewhat better place than he found it when it all started in 1937."

We will miss you, Don. Whenever we feel that fiery spark that ignites us to work for change, we will know that a little piece of your spirit is in our hearts forever.

- *your compañer@s from CISPES, July 2008*

Don will be honored at a service on August 10th at 6 pm at the Immanuel Presbyterian Church in Los Angeles. Contact CISPES at 202 521-2510 for more information

ARENA dealings cont. from pg. 1

With five months remaining before Salvadorans head to the polls in January to elect legislative deputies and municipal governments – the presidential election will follow in March – it can be expected that ARENA’s use of underhanded campaigning will only intensify.

Political violence

In January, Wilber Funes, mayor of the town of Alegria, was gunned down alongside a fellow municipal employee as they drove to the site of a public works project that was under construction. The assassination of Funes, who was preparing to run for reelection as one of the FMLN’s youngest mayors, continues to be an ominous sign. A cursory investigation by the National Civilian Police led to the arrest of two members of the FMLN’s city council. The party’s leadership rejects these arrests and asserts the innocence of the accused.

More recently, prominent youth activist Hector Antonio Ventura was assassinated in his home near the town of Suchitoto. Ventura had become recognized in El Salvador as a member of the ‘Suchitoto 13,’ a group of activists who were charged with terrorism as a result of their participation in a protest against water privatization last summer. After all charges were dismissed in February, Ventura was killed on May 2. There have yet to be any arrests made in this case, despite the likelihood of political motivation.

These two high-profile murders come on the heels of a number of other assassinations of political and labor activists over the past three years, none of which have been resolved by El Salvador’s law enforcement institutions. This recent history of unresolved political killings – combined with the precedent of widespread violence in Guatemala’s 2007 electoral process – threaten to limit political participation on the left during the current campaign in El Salvador.

The U.S. embassy in San Salvador has resigned itself to a violent campaign season. In a meeting with CISPES representatives last month, an embassy representative said that she expects close elections, which will inevitably be accompanied by a violent campaign.

Changing electoral laws

El Salvador’s electoral laws are governed by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE). A number of actions, inactions, and proposals threaten to jeopardize the transparency and fairness of the 2009 elections. Two of these threats have to do with proposed alterations to the Salvadoran Electoral Code.

Walter Araujo, TSE president and representative of the ARENA party, has threatened to exclude some international observers from monitoring the 2009 elections, even though the right of observers to monitor the elections is a key tenant of the 1992 Peace Accords. Furthermore, the TSE, under Araujo’s leadership, recently relaxed the mechanisms used to certify and verify individual ballots, opening the door to fraud.

Additionally, Araujo has recently been embroiled in a scandal related to his attempt to unilaterally back out of an agree-

ment with the Organization of American States (OAS), under which the OAS is set to play a major role in overseeing certain aspects of the elections. The OAS’s oversight is viewed as an important check on the highly politicized TSE’s actions during the electoral and vote-counting processes.

Problems with electoral register

Despite long-standing concerns over the integrity of El Salvador’s national electoral register, which is the database of all eligible voters, the right-wing controlled TSE refuses to conduct a sufficient audit of the list. Most recently, the OAS has criticized the TSE’s failure to maintain an accurate list of voters. It is frequently alleged that deceased persons, foreigners, and other ineligible voters remain on the list. Such irregularities provide ample opportunities for fraud.

Additionally, the results of last year’s national census were recently released, placing the population of several municipalities – specifically those that regularly support the FMLN at the polls – at levels much lower than municipal records indicate. These discrepancies could serve to disenfranchise likely-FMLN voters in these areas.

Fear-based campaigning

Prominent members of ARENA have recently made statements linking the FMLN to the Colombian FARC rebels. (*See related article on the CISPES Fact-Finding delegation.*)

U.S. Intervention

As in previous Salvadoran elections, the influence of the United States figures to loom large in 2009. Despite a series of assurances from U.S. State Department officials that the U.S. will not intervene in El Salvador’s elections, such intervention is already beginning to take place.

In a visit to Washington, D.C., in November 2007, Salvadoran president Saca openly called for U.S. intervention to prevent support for the FMLN. A U.S. national security report issued earlier this year, and widely publicized in El Salvador, predicted that the FMLN would accept “generous” campaign funding from Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez. In June, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte echoed Salvadoran officials’ warnings about an FMLN-FARC connection during a visit to El Salvador.

Lastly, the groundwork for repeating the tried-and-true U.S. intervention strategy of threatening Salvadoran immigrants is in place. The Temporary Protected Status (TPS) that some 250,000 Salvadorans receive from the U.S. government, enabling them to work in the U.S. and send money to their families in El Salvador, is set to expire in March 2009, just before the presidential election. In previous election years, the renewal of TPS has been used by ARENA as a campaign stunt, with the message to the Salvadoran people being that an FMLN government would not be able to maintain good relations with the U.S. With approximately 20% of El Salvador’s GDP comprised of remittances from migrants living in the U.S., such threats carry much weight for Salvadoran voters. ■

Important Legislation Affecting Central America Put Forward in U.S. Congress

Three bills related to Central America have been discussed in recent months in El Salvador. CISPES continues to pressure Congress for a just U.S. foreign policy in the region.

Merida Initiative and the ILEA

Two important bills affecting the level of funding for repressive police forces in El Salvador could be signed by the president before the end of this summer. The first, the so-called Merida Initiative, is a 3-year, \$1.4 billion anti-drug and anti-gang aid package for Central America and Mexico. The approximately \$100 million per year for Central America represents a significant funding increase for the region, with El Salvador and Guatemala – the countries that have most aggressively implemented “iron fist” and anti-terrorism polices – as the largest recipients.

The Latin American Solidarity Coalition (LASC), of which CISPES is a leading member, published a comprehensive critique of the Initiative calling on Congress to not fund the project. According to the LASC statement, “The Merida Initiative, also known as Plan Mexico, builds on the troubling model of Plan Colombia, which has poured billions of dollars into a failed military approach to combating drugs while doing little to address rural poverty and urban unemployment. Central America has already become a satellite for U.S. military and police training in Latin America, despite the poor human rights records of some governments in the region... Meanwhile, the Initiative wholly ignores the root problems that continue to compel regional involvement in drug trafficking—poverty and unemployment.” You can read the entire statement at www.lasolidarity.org.

The Merida bill also includes some funding for the International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA), which CISPES has opposed since its inception in 2005. The ILEA, a special academy located in El Salvador and operated by the U.S. State Department, trains police officers from throughout Latin America. Congress will vote on additional funding for the ILEA as part of the annual Foreign Operations Appropriations bill, which will likely be taken up by the House of Representatives in late July. Though the current situation in Congress – with gridlock on spending bills and most of the attention focused on the upcoming presidential election – is inopportune for a renewed push to eliminate ILEA funding, CISPES has continued to meet with Congressional allies to pressure for a hearing in the Foreign Relations Committee about the ILEA and the situation of increasing repression in El Salvador. **For more information about CISPES’ campaign to shut down the ILEA, visit www.cispes.org/ilea.**

TRADE Act

On June 4, Representative Michael Michaud (D-Maine) and Senator Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio) jointly introduced the Trade Reform, Accountability, Development and Employment (TRADE) Act, which seeks to overhaul U.S. trade policy. By creating a framework for future trade agreements that emphasizes workers’ rights, environmental protection, public health, and national sovereignty, the proposed legislation stands in sharp contrast to the corporation-friendly trade agreements that were negotiated by the Clinton and Bush administrations.

The TRADE Act encompasses four key provisions:

- 1) Initiates a review of existing U.S. trade agreements, including NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) and CAFTA (Central American Free Trade Agreement).
- 2) Mandates renegotiation of those agreements, based upon the findings of the review.
- 3) Establishes a set of provisions and principals that must be included in all future U.S. trade deals.
- 4) Asserts that the role of Congress in negotiating future trade agreements must be strengthened.

The act seeks to protect national sovereignty by ensuring that neither the United States nor its trade partners would be forced to undermine domestic legislation that is meant to protect public health, human rights, food security, or access to essential public services. However, the legislation does not explicitly address the increasing wealth and income inequality that has been a result of U.S. trade policy, and does not question the overarching conventional wisdom that free trade is the only path to development for poor countries. Despite these shortcomings, the TRADE Act represents a dramatic improvement on the past 15 years of U.S. trade policy, and consequently, many unions, environmental organizations, public health advocates, and others have voiced their support for the bill.

According to co-sponsor Michaud, “This bill sets forth concrete ways to deliver on our shared conviction that trade must serve as a means for achieving goals such as economic justice and promotion of basic human rights, healthy communities and environmental well-being.” The legislation currently has over 60 sponsors in the House and Senate, though it is unlikely to move forward in Congress this year due to the political pressures surrounding trade issues during the ongoing presidential and Congressional campaigns.

For more information on the TRADE Act, go to www.citizenstrade.com.

Meanwhile, CISPES continues to raise awareness in Congress and beyond about the negative effects of CAFTA in El Salvador and the rest of Central America. The Stop CAFTA Coalition will publish its third CAFTA Monitoring Report in September. **For more information go to www.stopcafta.org**



Fact-Finding cont. from pg. 1

However, the Ambassador's assurances of neutrality ring hollow in light of his recent public actions. In statements to the Salvadoran press in June, Glazer made thinly veiled, unsubstantiated allusions to the FMLN, in effect alleging that the party has ties to terrorists and plans to rescind civil liberties if elected. Glazer asserted that the U.S. would not support a party that regulates the mass media or has connections to the FARC guerrillas in Colombia. The ARENA party is running a media campaign to spin these comments against the FMLN, implying that the Salvadoran people can expect U.S. reprisals if a majority votes for the FMLN.

This "tag-team" approach revives a strategy from the 2004 elections, when right-wing members of the U.S. Congress and the pro-ARENA media in El Salvador threatened that an FMLN victory would prompt the U.S. to cut off Salvadoran remittances, a powerful threat given that a quarter of the Salvadoran population lives and works in the U.S., and that the money they send back to their families makes up 20% of El Salvador's GDP. CISPES continues to demand that Ambassador Glazer disavow reports being spread in El Salvador's media, while clearly asserting and maintaining a non-partisan stance toward the 2009 elections. Failure to do so implicates the U.S. in electoral fraud on behalf of a corrupt regime with an ever-worsening human rights record.

During our stay in El Salvador we also met with members of labor unions representing several sectors, including health care, telecommunications, manufacturing, public water, teachers, and others. They described an anti-union climate fostered by government repression, failure to enforce labor laws, and firing of union activists. Health care workers told

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us of lockouts at hospitals and discrimination against union members with regard to required wage increases. We also learned how the public hospitals downgrade patient services, part of an effort – the union believes – to create support for privatization of the health care system.

Workers in clothing and electronics assembly plants told us of twenty years of repression and humiliation under successive ARENA administrations. "We just can't take any more; we want a change in government. We have families living on just a dollar a day."

We also met women from a clothing assembly plant who persevered in the face of suffering and injustice. Money withheld from paychecks – earmarked for a government program that pays home loans and rent – was kept by factory owners instead. When the workers demanded their money, the company fired everyone, closed the plant, formed another corporation, moved to a new location, hired new workers and denied all responsibility. Amazingly, these workers pursued justice through lawsuits, acting as their own attorneys and learning to navigate the judicial system. They even won court cases against their former employers.

However, the government has failed to enforce those judgments. Now these courageous workers are continuing to meet and organize other sweatshop workers. Their goal is to form a legally recognized association of clothing assembly workers.

On this delegation we met with many inspiring Salvadoran workers, organizers, human rights activists and FMLN militantes – and one disingenuous U.S. Ambassador. The Salvadorans all asked us to return home to the U.S. and work to prevent U.S. intervention in the upcoming Salvadoran elections. Please join us in defending real democracy in El Salvador! *Visit the CISPES website to sign the People's Pledge of non-intervention: www.cispes.org* ■

Opposite Coasts, Same Solidarity Cycling

This spring, CISPES offices on the east and west coasts organized "Solidarity Cyclers" fundraising adventures. On May 3-4, a group of 19 Seattle CISPES activists biked 80 miles over the course of two days between Seattle and Olympia, WA. A couple of weeks later, the National Office crew in Washington, D.C., followed a three-day loop, covering 180 miles.

After a May Day send-off party, the Seattle CISPES team left for Tacoma on Saturday morning, May 3, under grey skies, with wind and rain to come. The weather improved on day two, but riders faced a menacing route along highways and interstates! Through it all, they had tons of support and kept in high spirits. In addition to raising funds for their local committee's organizing efforts, the cyclists and their sponsors contributed \$1,500 of "material aid" money for SETA, the union representing the workers of El Salvador's public water



system, who are fighting privatization.

On the east coast, CISPES and Haiti Reborn jointly organized their expedition of 19 cyclists. After some ceremonial head shaving, the crew rode out through Virginia to an organic farm for the first night. They then rode up through a pass in the Blue Ridge Mountains and along curvy country roads in West Virginia. After a cozy campfire on Sunday night, they biked home through Maryland in their last push to a welcome home party. The DC crew also raised thousands of dollars for CISPES. *Look out for Solidarity Cyclers 2009 coming to a city near you!*

Portland CISPES Committee Update

By Amanda Aguilar Shank

For those who haven't lived in the Pacific Northwest, it's hard to imagine the collective ecstasy we experience at the end of 8 months of grey skies and continual rain. Well it has finally happened. People are wandering around smiling and blinking at the mysterious reappearance of the sun, and even on moderately warm days are dressed for a day on Key West. Here at the Portland CISPES committee, we are scheming to take advantage of this collective delirium to bring together our local Salvadoran community and longstanding allies, and we have everything going for us.

The Portland Central America Solidarity Committee (PCASC) has been a member group of CISPES since 1980. Throughout our history, our work has at different times prioritized solidarity with El Salvador and other Central American countries during the difficult 1980s, supported revolutionary movements in Latin America, and more recently we have focused on supporting immigrants in their struggle for justice and dignity in Oregon.

But in 2008, we can't help but be drawn back to our roots as a Salvadoran solidarity organization. The convergence of events this year is magnetic. It will not only be transformative for Salvadorans, but will also bring El Salvador to the international spotlight. In the context of the unprecedented leftward shift throughout Latin America and the very real possibility of the first FMLN presidential victory, it is impossible to not be inspired to action.

Our first major success of the year was securing funding for a part-time position that will focus exclusively on our El Salvador program. The PCASC board will be interviewing and hiring in July, and the position will be funded through the March elections in El Salvador. This is a huge step forward in terms of capacity, as our CISPES work in the past has been coordinated primarily by a rough gang of volunteers and with support from the eternally overworked PCASC coordinator.

Our top priority for this year is to bring the Salvadoran elections into the public eye, and to send a strong delegations of observers. Through this we will create accountability and push for fair elections practices, and also build the commitment of our solidarity movement.

One example of this commitment is found in Nan Stark, our 2008 link to the Salvadoran social movement, who participated in the June fact-finding delegation to El Salvador. In an on-the-ground comunicado, she wrote, "the information that people are sharing with us, so passionately and with such hope, is more inspiring than I can begin to convey." This first-hand experience, which has inspired hundreds of CISPES delegates over the years, is what keeps our organization alive. Nan and others will host a report back in early September as a way to bring the Salvadoran elections front and center for Portlanders.

This summer, we're also looking forward to a Salvadoran barbecue, where we expect that attendance will far exceed the potential of basement meetings, and which will serve a similar purpose. We will bring together Portlanders from all walks of life who have shown dedication to the social movement of El Salvador throughout the last 30 years of struggle. We look forward to sharing ideas and strategizing with compañer@s old and new.

Lastly, in June, PCASC's Lolo Cutumay (Jesus Rivas) of the revolutionary Salvadoran musical group Cutumay Camones appeared in Los Angeles to welcome presidential candidate Mauricio Funes to what is often referred to as El Salvador's "15th department" with his renditions of El Sombrero Azul and Casas de Cartón. He will also be recording an original song that the FMLN will use to promote the vote throughout the electoral campaign in El Salvador. For those who have not yet heard Lolo's inspiring music, he is on the road this summer, with a show in Vancouver, BC on July 17th. In September, the group Cutumay Camones will come back together for a US tour in memory of Paco and Eduardo Cutumay, playing in Los Angeles on September 13th and 20th, and continuing the tour with shows in San Francisco, San Jose, Maryland, and Washington D.C. Contact PCASC for information about where and when he'll be in your neighborhood: info@pcasc.net or the CISPES committee at cispes@pcasc.net. ■



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