

The Coalition Depot the 'Migra' (The United States Immigration Service or Homeland Security) of which CISPES is part of here in the Bay Area brought an anti-imperialist message to the march, bringing up the issue of why it is that an ever increasing number of people leave their countries and risk their lives to cross the border. These immigrants who come to the U. S. not only keep this country literally moving forward but are also the landless of their countries, those who come fleeing the military and economic oppression imposed by the United States in many countries of the world.

Protesters were very receptive of our message, and it was evident that the true nature of U.S. foreign policy is being exposed to the people of the U.S. The main purpose of our message in the demonstrations is for people to see that beyond marching, we must organize and take action to attack the root of the problem. Our other message is the hypocrisy of the border, since the effects of free trade agreements like CAFTA and NAFTA only exacerbate the massive exodus of the working poor into the United States. This migration has always served the interests of large corporations because they keep a steady flow of cheap, unorganized labor to the U.S.

CISPES has played a key role in reminding and educating people that the unending greed of this economic system, the cause of global displacement, is not stronger than our resistance! ■

By Yeni Solis, Bay Area CISPES

Seattle and Olympia
CISPES
Activists
come
together at
the Seattle
Immigrant
Rights
March to
protest
HR4437,
April 10,
2006.



remembered for the occurrence of some of the worst violations to the constitution, the electoral code, and the will of the people. Some examples of legal violations and interventionist practices included the prevalence of President Sacca, who is also the president of the ARENA party, in ARENA's campaign, the use of state resources for ARENA's electoral campaigning, and the presentation of the friendly relationship between President Bush and President Sacca as a de facto U.S. endorsement for ARENA.

The actual voting day was characterized by general chaos, disorder, and fraud. In some rural areas ARENA activists intimidated voters or other party representatives at the voting tables, taking advantage of the fact that a lot of them come from poor backgrounds and are timid. Some common legal violations and irregularities that would facilitate fraud included: voting centers opening late (making it impossible for many workers to vote), the indelible ink that would mark people as having voted didn't work in many places, voter's right to secrecy was constantly violated, along with many other violations that jeopardized the possibility of a smooth, transparent electoral process.

But it was only after an entire day of observing, when voting centers finally closed and started sending out results to the main office of the TSE, that things started getting really interesting. First, Sacca made a public national announcement declaring his party victorious. This act is highly prohibited by the Constitution and the Electoral Code because the only person that can divulge results is the president of the

TSE, and certainly not the president of a country acting as a party activist.

Most Salvadorans, however, did not believe the announcement. Days before the elections all national polls showed the FMLN ahead in the race. Although doubts about the TSE began immediately, it was not until Monday afternoon that people became convinced that something was truly wrong in the TSE center, and they began congregating in the downtown Central Plaza to demand the TSE give the real results. As TSE officials continued to stall the process all day Tuesday and then all day Wednesday, more and more people gathered until Wednesday night, when a large group decided they had had enough. They marched directly to the TSE to demand that their vote be respected. People would not accept ARENA's self-proclaimed victory. As always, the government responded with violence, calling out the riot police and injuring three people. But Salvadorans did not give up.

Long after midnight on Wednesday night, the TSE president finally had no choice but to declare Violeta Menjívar, the FMLN candidate, as the new mayor of San Salvador. Many of us were still in El Salvador to witness the widespread joy and celebration of the victory for the FMLN and for the power of an organized resistance. As we celebrated with the people of El Salvador, I thought about the spirit of Salvadorans, who do not tolerate being cheated and are willing to take to the streets to defend their dignity, their rights, and their sovereignty so that one day El Salvador can be a truly free, democratic and just country. ■

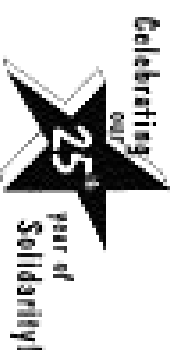
By Susana Solis, Bay Area CISPES

Produced by CISPES
Distributed locally by:
a national organization
with chapters around the US.

National Office:
130 W. 29th Street, 9th floor
New York, NY 10001
(212)465-8115
www.cispes.org

Sources this month include:
CISPES El Salvador Office, BPS, FMLN,
Bay Area CISPES, Olympia CISPES

EL SALVADOR WATCH



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

Number 115 Summer 2006

FMLN Victory: First Woman Mayor of San Salvador

As part of the continuous work of solidarity with the struggle of the people of El Salvador, CISPES said *presente!* once more with a delegation of 27 people to observe the municipal and legislative elections that took place on March 12, 2006. We were witness to an incredibly emotional victory. For the first time in Salvadoran history a woman – Violeta Menjívar – won the mayoral race for San Salvador, the most important municipality of the country. Furthermore, despite all the problems leading up to and after the elections, the FMLN was able to win the most votes nationally, securing enough seats in the legislative assembly to force the right to negotiate the most important national legislation and appointments.



Violeta Menjívar, Mayor of San Salvador at a press conference

right wing ARENA party tried to steal the elections, were filled with confusion, disarray, polarization, and manipulation. But the chaos actually began months before. ARENA began committing electoral fraud back in 2005 when the magistrates of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, or the TSE, were elected in an unconstitutional manner. The majority were right wingers, including the president of the TSE, Walter Araujo, an open ARENA activist. There was also major manipulation of the voter registry by ARENA and their ally, the private company that oversees distribution of voter ID's. The manipulation that took place helps explain why ARENA ended up winning the most legislative seats despite the fact that the FMLN had more total votes. (The final legislative breakdown in the legislative assembly was ARENA 34, FMLN 32, and 18 seats split between 3 smaller parties.)

The 2006 elections will also be *continued on pg 4*

Immigrants' Rights Struggle in the Bay Area and Across the U.S.

“We are here because you are there,” read one of the signs an immigrant protestor carried in the immigrant rights march held in San Francisco, where protestors joined people in many other cities throughout the United States in the streets on May 1st. Over the past few months there have been countless demonstrations of support by pro-immigrant organizations and groups who work to defend immigrants' basic rights and which reject that infamous immigration bill HR4437. This bill would criminalize any and all immigrants who reside in the U.S. illegally; it would also criminalize any U.S. citizen or legal permanent resident who offers services to undocumented immigrants. Furthermore, the children of undocumented parents would not have access to a path towards citizenship in “gringolandia” (the U.S.) All of these measures have brought about the indignation of millions of people across this nation.

Political actions started in mid-March in the Bay Area, including a hunger strike which lasted a week. After the March actions, the Bay Area continued its mobilizing for the April 10th Day of Action with a similar objective. That day the streets of San Francisco were filled with the sense-

tion that immigrants are about to change the course of history in this country.

Then there was a call to action for April 23rd, and again there were more than 10,000 people who took to the streets of San Francisco to call for immigrant rights and mass participation and support for subsequent protests. The thunder of Korean and Mexican drumming announced that the call to action would be successful.

As the sun rose on May 1st, so too did the courageous struggle for immigrant rights, dawning all across the United States and other countries like El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico and Peru. Many other places around the world took part in boycotting U.S. products on International Worker's Day as well. The streets of the Latino Mission District in San Francisco looked like a ghost town, as did many other neighborhoods all over the United States where many local businesses supported the boycott. It was surprising to see at least 100,000 people present in San Francisco even though there were other marches taking place in Sacramento, Oakland and San José at the same time with an estimated 100,000 to 500,000 people participating.

Stopping Privatization and Repression at Forefront of Concerns in Elections

Last March was a decisive moment for Salvadorans. Elections provided them with the opportunity to vote for municipal and legislative representatives from two parties with immensely different priorities. The CISPES delegation to El Salvador during this time not only served as international observers on March 12th, but also met extensively with social movement groups from different sectors of society. Despite the variety in these groups, a common thread in their analysis prevailed: the importance of these elections in determining the overall direction of the country for the next 3 years. In addition, people raised many worrisome issues at our different meetings, particularly in relation to the recent implementation of CAFTA and the plans around the establishment of an ILEA in El Salvador.

CAFTA implementation began just days before we arrived in El Salvador, on March 1st. Because people are increasingly seeing how CAFTA will affect them directly, opposition to its implementation is growing. Privatization of various public services under CAFTA, such as water and healthcare, would transfer control and profits to corporations. For example, the delegation met with Salvadoran union leaders representing workers in the public water administration. These unionists worked to stop CAFTA's implementation; they are worried not only about losing their jobs if water is privatized, but also about the large numbers of low-income Salvadorans who likely will not be able to afford water – a necessity for sustaining life

itself.

CAFTA's provisions also allow private ownership of intellectual property, which will mean harmful consequences for many people. Limited access to low-priced medicines is one important example. Protections for intellectual property rights will also adversely impact the "informal" sector which is made up of people who sell items on the streets due to lack of work opportunities elsewhere. A large portion of "employed" people in El Salvador are those who work in the informal sector, and they have become one of the leading groups organizing to oppose CAFTA. Their concern is that under CAFTA-related rules the sale of copies of materials like CDs has been redefined as a criminal offense punishable with up to six years in prison. People work in the informal sector because other employment opportunities are nonexistent. CAFTA's potential impact for workers in the informal sector would amount to criminalization of the poor.

The delegation also met with a small rural farm cooperative. They expressed a lot of concern about the way free trade would allow El Salvador's markets to be flooded with agricultural goods produced elsewhere, and sold more cheaply than food grown in El Salvador.

The other issue the delegation heard a lot about was the ILEA, the "International Law Enforcement Academy," which will be established through funding from the United States as a police training school in El Salvador. The ILEA is the latest manifestation of U.S. presence in the coun-

try – which also includes a U.S. military base, FBI office and DEA office. Many people see the ILEA as a partner with CAFTA – in this partnership CAFTA provides the mechanism for the imposition of privatization and free trade, and ILEA provides police training for purposes of intimidating and silencing opposition to CAFTA.

Members of the delegation heard many speakers voice opposition and concern about the imposition of the ILEA. The organizations opposed to CAFTA and other forms of US domination have already endured increased repression, including the recent death of a union organizer and the disappearance of the son of a leader of a community organization. ILEA will no doubt magnify the intimidation.

Similarly to CAFTA, the proposal for the ILEA was passed through the Assembly secretly and without debate. Because of El Salvador's brutal military history, the 1992 Peace Accords specifically prescribe the separation of military and police forces, a separation that is currently very blurred. In addition, the Human Rights office has proved the ongoing use of torture by state officials. One of the fundamental points that is extremely worrisome to Salvadorans is the fact that police attending the ILEA will be trained by U.S. military officials. As a representative explained: "militarization does not help consolidate the Rule of Law; rather it represents a step backwards for our country".

The victory of the ultra right wing ARENA party would have guaranteed this next step towards the consolidation of a neoliberal economic model and a civil dictatorship, embodied both in CAFTA and the ILEA. But because the of the FMLN victory in the elections, and because of the increased mobilizations rejecting this model, ARENA and the U.S.'s agenda is far from secure. As groups that we met with told us, whether the fight takes place at the legislative level or in the streets, resistance to repression is present and on the rise. ■

By Patty Mosqueda, Olympia CISPES

Solidarity Victory!

Activists Force U.S. Embassy to Grant Visa to Salvadoran Labor Leader

This past March 23rd, the U.S. Embassy in El Salvador denied Salvadoran union leader Wilfredo Romero a visa to come to the U.S. to speak about his union's activities at the Labor Notes Conference in Detroit, Michigan. Romero is Secretary General of SETA, the public water workers' union in El Salvador that is actively leading a campaign to resist attempts to privatize water under the U.S. Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). Romero had documentation showing that he is a 26-year veteran worker at the public water company and is the current SETA Secretary General. However, the Consulate denied him the visa without even reviewing the letters of invitation from U.S. unions or the other documents he had prepared.

CISPES, Labor Notes, the Communications Workers of America (CWA) and other U.S. unions immediately responded, sending alerts and blasting the U.S. Consul General in El Salvador with calls, faxes, and letters denouncing the decision to deny Romero a visa. Initially the Consul had rejected even the opportunity for another interview. But in an amazing twist, the Embassy ceded to the pressure - citing "significant interest in this case" – and called Romero back into the Embassy to review his case. Finally, on April 3, they granted Romero a visa, a great victory for international solidarity. Romero was therefore able to join CISPES director Burke

Stansbury and two other Salvadoran unionists – Wilfredo Berríos and Rene Guillen of the SUTTEL Telecommunications Union – at the Labor Notes conference in early May, where he discussed the defense of worker rights with unionists from across the U.S. and around the world. Romero and the other labor leaders shared their experiences of fighting CAFTA and defending union members from government cutbacks and the threat of privatization. Romero also spoke about SETA's participation in the larger coalition to defend public management of water for all Salvadorans.

The reversal of this visa decision is an especially important victory since the U.S. government, through its Consulate in El Salvador, has denied visas for educational tours and exchanges to over 20 labor and community organizers over the past year. Hopefully the pressure exerted on the Embassy by CISPES and others has not only helped Romero gain his visa, but actually set a precedent that will allow more Salvadoran organizers to attend conferences, tours, and exchanges in the U.S. With the implementation of CAFTA and the attempts to privatize remaining public services in El Salvador, it is more critical than ever that workers across borders are able to share experiences and build common strategies. *For more information check out:*

www.cispes.org/english/Tours/index.html.

Massive May Day Turnout

This May 1st workers in El Salvador celebrated a major turnout at the annual International Workers Day march, with an estimated 50-70,000 people marching to denounce CAFTA and support immigrants' struggle in the United States. The massive march was made up of people from labor unions, the national movement of "pirated" CD-DVD vendors, religious groups, women's organizations, campesinos, students, market vendors, and the FMLN.

The march was led by the public sector labor federations and unions rejecting privatization, demanding an end to the criminalization of immigrants in the United States, and demanding government ratification of ILO agreements that guarantee freedom of association and protection of the right to organize and bargain collectively. "Because immigrants are not Criminals, from El Salvador we Demand Just Laws," read the main FESTRASPE union federation ban-

ner. A thousand university students – loudly rejecting capitalism and US imperialism – marched from the National University and met up with the main march at Boulevard de Los Heroes. Other banners rejected the increasing repression of organizing in El Salvador and the International Law Enforcement Academy, or the ILEA.

For days the government had attempted to intimidate and scare Salvadorans from participating in the march by publishing articles in El Salvador's main newspapers that portrayed the May Day celebration as violent, and by broadcasting ads warning that the police would intervene in the case of property destruction. On May Day, hundreds of police were deployed to "protect" US and Salvadoran corporate stores and restaurants. There was also a police helicopter that followed the march and circled over the Central Plaza clearly to take video recordings of march participants. The immense march ended in the Central Plaza, where the head of the march ended in the square while the tail of the march was just stepping off over 30 blocks away. Speakers denounced the neoliberal economic model as the cause of deterioration in

CISPES Wish List!

- * Digital Camera, new or used *
- * Lap Top Computer *
- * Frequent flyer miles *

The camera and computer will be put to use in our San Salvador office, and frequent flyers mile donations help us keep our costs down!

Contact Alicia Grogan-Brown about any donations, including the mileage donation program – 212-465-8115, or alicia@cispes.org.



Jennie Swanson

Street vendor of "pirated" CD's carries sign listing El Salvador's corrupt government officials as the real pirates.