

# EL SALVADOR Watch

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## Radical Roots, Radical Action

### *A Reflection from CISPES' first Salvadoran youth delegation*

by Janette Linares

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As a grassroots organization dedicated to supporting the Salvadoran struggle for social justice, the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES) has long reached out to North Americans to support the cause. Now, CISPES is creating programs that specifically seek to get Salvadoran-American college students and youth involved in the organization. This past June, CISPES took the first group of 11 Salvadoran/Salvadoran-Americans from around the U.S. and Canada on a week-long "Radical Roots" delegation to El Salvador. Seeking to get more involved with my own community, I decided to go on this delegation, hoping that this trip would strengthen my personal connection with El Salvador and fortify my desire to contribute to the Salvadoran struggle for social justice as well as the solidarity movement here in the U.S.

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*The delegates meet with the FMLN Women's Secretariat*

One of the delegation's objectives was to reconnect Salvadorans/Salvadoran-Americans to our heritage and familial background. The delegation met this objective, as it took us through a historical journey of El Salvador, and educated us about present day issues. The delegation began with a presentation by Lety Mendez, an FMLN party leader and advisor to El Salvador's Vice President, Salvador Sánchez Cerén. Lety took us through the historic and victorious journey of the Frente Farabundo Martí por la Liberación Nacional (FMLN), the *guerrilla* movement which became a *continued on pg 4*

## Concerns loom about Obama's trade policy

Over the past several years, economists, politicians and corporate tycoons have weighed in on the national debate about economic collapse and recovery. Though few in the mainstream discourse have scrutinized free trade as a contributing factor, the connections have been made by hundreds of thousands of unemployed U.S. workers, namely in states like Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Indiana and California, where manufacturing industry job loss has been highest. In February 2008, the Seattle Times reported, "A September NBC/Wall Street Journal poll found 59 percent of the country believes existing trade policy 'has been bad for the U.S. economy'."

Laura Carlsen of the Center for International Policy wrote, "The economic crisis only strengthens demands [for a fair-trade model]. If international trade and investment policy is the pillar of the current economic model, its revision must be a foundation of global restructuring plans."

Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama tried to distance themselves from NAFTA on the 2008 campaign trail, making explicit commitments to overhaul trade policy for the benefit of U.S. workers; less was said about the millions of workers around the world who have suffered economic exploitation as a result of the same policies. As candidate Obama said to the Wisconsin Fair Trade Campaign, "NAFTA's shortcomings were evident when signed and now we must now amend the agreement to fix them. While NAFTA gave broad rights to investors, it paid only lip service to the rights of labor and the importance of environmental protection."

Since President Obama's inauguration, it seems that the discussion of trade policy, let alone reform, had nearly disappeared. Soon after entering office, President Obama assured Prime Minister Harper of Canada and President Calderón of Mexico that the renegotiation of NAFTA *continued on pg. 5*

# Now Serving the *Pueblo*: Ministry of Education is “Educating for Life”

A new *El Salvador Watch* column highlighting progressive change in El Salvador’s social ministries

by Erika Del Cid, National Office Intern

Since the beginning of Mauricio Funes' presidency in El Salvador in June 2009, the Ministry of Education (MINED) has created several new plans and initiatives to help students from low income families and to educate all students more effectively.

The Minister of Education is Salvador Sánchez Cerén, who also serves as the country’s Vice-President. Known during the 1980s as “Leonel”, he is a long-time and well-respected leader of the FMLN, having served as a commander during the war and later as head of the party’s legislative fraction. He got his start organizing in the 1970’s as a member of the teacher’s union. One of the party’s highest priorities after the 2009 victory was to ensure that FMLN leaders committed to the ideals of a people-centered government took the helm of the ministries whose work is closest to the people, such as education and health.

The largest task for Sánchez Cerén as Minister of Education is to lower illiteracy rates and improve access to education. The goal is to reduce illiteracy rates from 17.9% to 16.1% in 2010, and to 4% by 2014. There are clear demographic inequalities that have determined who has received a good education in the past and who has not; about 62% of people who are illiterate are female and from rural areas. The Ministry’s new programs are meant to address these systemic inequalities.

“Not knowing how to read nor write is not being prepared for life,” says Sánchez Cerén. The “Educating for Life” program was inaugurated last March. The MINED is not alone in its efforts, having united with social organizations, international groups, universities, churches, and the academic sector to bring educational opportunities to people who previously didn’t have access to education. The “Educating for Life” program is part of a larger plan to foster equality and to fight against poverty and social exclusion by preparing students with skills.

One central component of the new illiteracy program is El Salvador’s renewed diplomatic relations and collaboration with Cuba, which implemented one of the world’s most successful campaigns to end illiteracy. Not surprisingly, the right-wing media in El Salvador has accused Sánchez Cerén of “communist indoctrination”!

Computer literacy is another key goal of the MINED,

and two programs have been created in this area. The first Center for Refurbished Computers was inaugurated on July 27 in La Paz with the goal of educating people, especially in rural areas, on technological tools. The “Computers for My School” program is meant to improve the technology that schools are currently using and improve teaching methods.

The computers and other hardware used for these centers are donated from the government and the private sector.

This equipment is then refurbished and installed by recent graduates from technical schools, providing a key source of employment for Salvadorans who have valuable technical skills.

The public schools in El Salvador have been historically underfunded, and requirements that parents provide their children with uniforms and school supplies, have been a barrier to many children pursuing their constitutional right to

education. One of the most successful and popular programs of the Ministry thus far has been to contract with local producers in every department to provide uniforms and shoes for all students, especially those in rural areas. As of July 2010, one year into the program, over ninety percent of schools had received the materials; parents and teachers are thrilled.

The MINED is also working to expand nutritional aid to schools. Under the Program for School Nutrition and Health, more than 4,000 schools will receive \$27 million of milk, beans, rice, sugar, oil, and health drinks for over 1.3 million students. There is hope that better school nutrition will lead to fewer students repeating a grade, higher attendance, and higher graduation rates.

The arts have not been forgotten in the new administration’s plans. The Ministry has initiated a new program called “Art, Culture, Recreation, and Sports.” In La Unión, the first Festival of Folk Dance took place in July, in which more than 15 schools from the surrounding area participated.

The National Association of Salvadoran Educators (ANDES-21 de Julio), the historically militant teachers’ union, has been supportive of the new initiatives. Isreal Montano, Secretary General of ANDES, stresses the importance of projects centered on arts, culture, and sports. “Through school and the engagement of the teachers, we will improve the conditions of our country to prevent the high rates of violence that are being seen.”

The National Network of *continued on pg. 4*



*Minister of Education visits factory where new school uniforms are being produced*

## President Funes backs metallic mining ban as lawsuits against El Salvador move forward

Salvadoran president Mauricio Funes openly endorsed the FMLN party's legislative proposal to ban metallic mining throughout El Salvador on in an August 22 interview. "If such an initiative is presented, I will give it my full political backing," Funes said, noting that "it is the legislative deputies that will decide if they will approve or not approve this legislation." Should such a bill be passed, it would make El Salvador the first country in the world to enact such a ban.



*Solidarity activists are escorted out of Pacific Rim shareholder meeting by CEO, Thomas Shrake!*

Over the course of 2010, Funes has taken a progressively more strident stand against mining. In January, the president reiterated his campaign promise to deny all permits for metallic mining while in office. However, his recent statement in support of a legislative ban was his first public endorsement of that proposal, which has been pushed by anti-mining and environmental activists for years.

Funes' backing of the ban comes at the end of an eventful summer in the legal battles between the government of El Salvador and two North American gold mining companies whose mines are stalled by the government's refusal to grant extraction permits.

After failing to receive permits for its proposed El Dorado mine near the town of San Isidro, Vancouver, B.C.-based Pacific Rim Mining filed a lawsuit against El Salvador in a special free trade tribunal in April 2009.

Citing the investor rights rules of the U.S.-Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), Pacific Rim argues that El Salvador is illegally limiting the company's right to make a profit from its investment in the country. Under CAFTA, the case is administered by the International Centre for the Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID), a dependency of the World Bank in Washington, D.C.

The three-member ICSID tribunal met for the first time on May 31 and June 1, 2010, and on August 3 announced that it had rejected El Salvador's preliminary objections to Pacific Rim's lawsuit, which the company's CEO says seeks compensation in the "hundreds of millions of dollars." This decision moves the case forward to a jurisdictional phase, in which the Salvadoran government will argue that the suit should be thrown out on the grounds that Pacific Rim committed an "abuse of process" by changing its nationality from Canada to the U.S. solely for the purpose of filing its lawsuit under the auspices of a U.S. free trade agreement. El Salvador further argues that the corporation cannot seek compensation for acts taken by the Salvadoran government prior to CAFTA entering into force. No date has been set for the jurisdictional hearing at the ICSID, though it will likely convene next spring.

*continued on page 5*

### FALL ACTIONS AGAINST MILITARIZATION

This fall, we need to develop a cohesive strategy to confront U.S. militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border, the seven proposed U.S. military bases in Colombia, the occupation of Haiti, and the propping up of the *golpistas* in Honduras. We recognize that U.S. military, political and economic intervention in Latin America is directly tied to the attacks on workers, immigrants and people of color in the U.S. **Here are three exciting opportunities this fall for uniting and mobilizing -- we'll see you in the streets!**

**October 2:** The anti-war and labor movements are bringing hundreds of thousands of people to **Washington DC for One Nation Working Together** to build a multi-racial coalition to demand jobs, housing and education.

**October 11: National Day of Action Against Militarization in Latin America.** Actions are planned in over **25 cities across the U.S.** Please visit [www.lasolidarity.org](http://www.lasolidarity.org) to join an action near you or download an organizers' guide to plan your own action.

**November 18-21: Organizers Conference and Vigil at the School of the Americas** ([www.soaw.org](http://www.soaw.org)). Every year, tens of thousands gather to demonstrate at the infamous U.S. training facility for Latin American military in **Ft. Benning Georgia**. We'll kick off the weekend with an organizers conference to develop the tools we need to build the solidarity movement.



***Radical Roots, continued from page 1***

political party after the signing of the Peace Accords in 1992, which set the tone for the upcoming week. During the week, we met with several politicians and organizers who provided us with a historical background to the present-day struggles that are being faced by the Salvadoran population; for example, the privatization of many of the country's industries, including electricity and telecommunications, during the late 90s contributed to the high level of unemployment today.

The delegation also focused on CISPES' anti-mining campaign and the struggle to prevent Canadian mining company Pacific Rim from operating in the Salvadoran department of Cabañas. We met with a representative of the National Coalition against Metallic Mining in El Salvador ("La Mesa"), who explained to us the long-lasting, negative effects that mining could have on El Salvador. We also met with environmental groups in Cabañas and participated in a commemoration ceremony for those who have been assassinated in their struggle against mining in El Salvador. The ceremony was quite inspiring and eye-opening. Seeing everyone speak against the mining plans made me realize how this campaign is not as simple as protecting our environment, but is about protecting the future existence of El Salvador. Upon our return from Cabañas to San Salvador, we held a widely-attended press conference in which we demanded that action be taken by the Attorney General to investigate the assassinations of three anti-mining activists in 2009.

The most powerful and inspiring moment came when we went to the Attorney General's office immediately following our press conference to demand further investigations into the assassinations. I remember presenting the correspondence we had written and saying to the staff person who welcomed us: "*Nosotros como Salvadoreños tenemos el derecho de exigir que se haga investigaciones más profundas* (We, as Salvadorans, have the right to call for more thorough investigations)." It was at that moment that I realized how important of a role I can play in this solidarity movement. As Salvadoran-Americans, we not only have to fight for justice of our people, but have every right to do so. We are a key to the future of this solidarity movement. As

Salvadoran-Americans, who belong to this dual world, we have the advantage of being able to demand such rights. This will prove to be our strength in calling for more Salvadoran-Americans to participate in the solidarity movement. We must continue to educate the Salvadoran-American youth about the issues facing our country, to build not only a stronger solidarity movement in the U.S., but to support the transnational movement for justice in El Salvador. This duty lies upon the youth of both the United States and El Salvador.

Such efforts have been taken up by several student groups that we met with during the delegation. When we met with the Frente Universitario Roque Dalton (FURD), a revolutionary student group at the University of El Salvador, they mentioned the importance of understanding the context in which we live, our history, and where we come from. Three years ago, the Union Salvadoreña de Estudiantes Universitarios (USEU) was formed at Cal State, Los Angeles. Within three years, USEU has managed to establish nine chapters on campuses around California. USEU's main objectives are to develop awareness about cultural, political and economic issues that are directly affecting the Salvadoran community, to preserve the historical and cultural identity of El Salvador, and to mobilize the Salvadoran student population to take action. Like the FURD emphasized, USEU acknowledges the importance of knowing the context in which we live in and the importance of knowing our history. It is through groups like USEU and FURD that we can begin building new leaders, and also carry on and strengthen the longstanding solidarity between organizations in the U.S. and El Salvador.

As CISPES' objectives and outreach strategies are expanding, I believe that as Salvadoran-Americans our potential is immense; the delegation in and of itself is proof of what we are capable of contributing to this solidarity movement. I believe that with the involvement of Salvadoran-Americans and those that stand in solidarity with our people, we can only strengthen this movement. *Please visit [www.cispes.org](http://www.cispes.org) for more photos, videos and testimony from this powerful delegation!* ■

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***Education, cont. from page 2***

Educators has been created by the MINED to give teachers direct involvement in the formation of well-rounded students. Sandra Alas, a national coordinator of the Network, which includes 3,000 teachers, said says that education is "one of the fundamental professions for the development of the state."

Overall, the general public approves very highly of the new education programs. According to a recent national poll, 80.4% of Salvadorans approve of the way in which the Administration and Ministry are directing the educational system. This approval rating was highest for education, among health, transparency & anti-corruption, attention to women and children, and local development, all of which had over 60% approval ratings.

Sánchez Cerén is enthusiastic about the changes, and says, "We are looking to strengthen the students' knowledge, for example, in the arts, culture, and science. We want to create from a student a critical, thinking young adult." ■

**Obama Trade Policy** *cont. from pg. 1*

was off the table. On the positive side, the Obama administration and the Congress seemed relatively uninterested in passing left-over FTAs with South Korea, Panama and Colombia that had been negotiated by the Bush administration.

Perhaps the proposition of passing another NAFTA-style agreement during the country's most severe economic crisis since the Great Depression was just too much of a slap in the face.

Thus, the recent decision by U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk, to move forward on Bush's 2007 U.S.-South Korea Free Trade Agreement took the trade justice movement by surprise. According to Citizen's Trade Campaign, "Since Bush first pushed it, not one U.S. labor union, faith group, family farm organization or pro-environmental entity has yet to endorse or support the Korea FTA, or advocate for its passage."

The Citizen's Trade Campaign is spearheading a national effort to press for a real renegotiation of the agreement, including high labor, environmental and human rights standards. This promises to be a hard fight; U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk has stated that re-negotiation will focus primarily on U.S. concerns over beef and auto import quotas, sidelining other concerns in order to expedite the process. President Obama will visit Korea in November, when he plans to sign a "renegotiated" deal, which would then move to Congress for a vote.

Behind the scenes, President Obama is also in the midst of negotiating a major multilateral agreement called the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which would supersede existing trade agreements between the U.S. and Peru, Australia, Chile, and Singapore and also include Brunei, Vietnam and New Zealand. The Teamsters have vowed to support the TPP only if it includes core labor standards as defined by the International Labor Organization (ILO), the elimination of foreign investor protections (such as those currently permitting Pacific Rim Mining to sue El Salvador), and strong environmental and food safety protections, among other requirements. However, the President's willingness to move forward on the Korea agreement without guaranteeing such fundamental changes raises major questions as to whether the TPP will break significantly with the NAFTA model that Obama criticized as a candidate.



*President Obama and U.S.T.R.  
Ron Kirk, former mayor of Dallas (UPI)*

The clear eagerness by the USTR to continue forward on the same path paved by Clinton and Bush, rather than to enact the overhaul promised on the campaign trail, should fire up the global justice movement. There are three different, yet complementary, strategies that CISPES and other fair trade advocates expect to pursue in the coming year:

1) Fight to block the Korea, Panama and Colombia FTAs from coming up for a vote. The passage of these treaties was largely blocked in the previous Congress thanks to some in the Democratic leadership responding to the demands of fair trade organizations and labor unions.

2) Continue to fight to pass the Trade Reform Accountability and Development (TRADE) Act, which already has the support of the majority of Democrats. The bill would require the President to renegotiate existing trade agreements, including NAFTA and CAFTA, to meet a new set of labor, environmental and human rights standards, and would require any future trade agreement to include the same language.

language.

3) Build more support for a bill that would require the U.S. to withdraw from NAFTA. A small group of Representatives, ranging from leaders of the progressive caucus to a few arch-right Republicans, introduced such a bill earlier this year. Social movements throughout the Americas demand that their governments get out of this agreement, which has displaced so many millions from their factories and farms.

El Salvador is facing two lawsuits filed by foreign corporations for alleged violations of CAFTA's investor rights provisions. There is tremendous urgency to repeal or renegotiate CAFTA, not only to stop future lawsuits but for the 500-700 Salvadorans who leave home every day in search of economic opportunities in the U.S. As the border gets increasingly militarized, the path northward grows increasingly deadly for these economic refugees. The FMLN government is already implementing social programs to lower the cost of living and work opportunities that will allow more Salvadorans to remain in their country, but CAFTA will continue to constrain them until we join forces and take action to roll it back.

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**Lawsuits**, *cont. from pg. 4*

Following in the footsteps of Pacific Rim, Commerce Group, based in Milwaukee, filed a copycat suit against El Salvador in June 2009 seeking compensation for lost profits on its mine in La Unión, the permits for which were revoked due to severe water contamination. On July 1, the ICSID announced that the three members of the tribunal had been assigned, with a likely first hearing set for November 15. Twenty-six other metallic mining projects are currently proposed by foreign companies in El Salvador, leading to worry and speculation that further lawsuits could follow.

# CISPES Activists Head to the Countryside

By Verónica Ramos-Coreas, D.C. CISPES

For five days in mid-August, CISPES members from around the U.S. came together near the nation's capital for workshops on campaign building, fundraising, organizing and so much more. The location of the 2010 CISPES Summer Camp was a farm in Culpeper, Virginia, and we were not alone. We were surrounded by tons of land and tons of open space, but also by cows, making the experience that much better.

We had the pleasure of having Audelia López – an FMLN representative in the Legislative Assembly and member of the party's Women's Secretariat – come all the way from Chalatenango, El Salvador to share her knowledge about the past, present and future of the country, focusing on the history of popular resistance to colonialism and imperialism; the fact that she was also a former *guerrillera* made her presentation much more authentic! She was able to answer many of the questions about the successes of the first year of the FMLN government, for example opening neighborhood health clinics in rural areas, and some of the serious challenges the country faces, for example the impact of thousands of people being deported to El Salvador every month. Not only did she share her knowledge with us, but she also participated in various workshops alongside the CISPES members (I think her favorite was the history of Salvadorans in the solidarity movement).

As a first time Summer Camper, I did not know what to expect when it came to the workshops. We had several workshops that directly pertained to our ongoing anti-mining campaign, which is focused on defeating Pacific Rim Mining's lawsuit against El Salvador and working toward an overhaul of CAFTA. At first, the broad array of workshop topics, such as Black and Brown unity, facilitating bilingual meetings, and art in organizing, struck me as unrelated. But after attending these and other workshops, it became clear that this was all part of the bigger plan - to dismantle oppression, to build as inclusive a community as possible, and to incorporate different mediums in our organizing.

Not to be overshadowed by the hard work that went into the workshops were plenty of opportunities for laughter, dancing, swimming and good times amongst all the CISPistas, new and old. The night before everyone had to leave, we chatted and danced the night away. Some even made their acting debuts for a *telenovela* (soap opera) that was spontaneously written and filmed on location.

One of the highlights of summer camp was being able to hear about the Radical Roots delegation, the first trip of its kind for CISPES (see article on page 1) from the Salvadoran/Salvadoran-American youth participants. The five delegates who attended summer camp, including myself, gave our testimonials. Although every delegate had her or his own unique story and experience, we shared a sense of solidarity with the movement in El Salvador and the movement here in the U.S. The delegation was lucky enough to have two amazing people document the experience every step of the way, which we were able to share at camp. A photo show, shot by David Castillo, followed the stories from the delegates. Another delegate, Nicola Chavez-Courtwright, was there in spirit when the summer campers got to see a preview of the film she had been recording throughout the whole trip.

Another highlight was the participation of two very special guests. Angela Sanbrano, current President of the National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities and CISPES' first Executive Director, shared her organizing experience to help us develop both political and base-building strategies. Professor of Latin American Studies at UC Santa Cruz Hector Perla imparted invaluable knowledge and analysis on the history of El Salvador and the history of the solidarity movement, highlighting the key role that Salvadoran organizers played in founding it.

The Summer Camp experience is definitely an interesting one. You are learning from your fellow CISPistas, the same way that they are learning from you. Everyone had something to contribute, whether it was facilitating and leading a workshop or asking questions and listening in on a discussion. This was a great way to get inspired – here's looking to the future! *¡Adelante!* ■



*Building community is an essential part of grassroots organizing!*

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