

EL SALVADOR Watch



Number 133 Summer 2011

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

1525 Newton St. NW * Washington DC * 20010 * phone: (202) 521-2510 * fax: (202) 332-3339 * www.cispes.org

President Obama Visits El Salvador on Latin America Tour

Promotes “common prosperity,” but for whom?

Inside this issue:

- * El Salvador's New Police Inspector General (2)
- * Building a movement against militarization (4)
- * East Coast Political School! (6)

In March, President Obama made his first presidential tour of Latin America, visiting Brazil, Chile and El Salvador. For decades, right-wing political parties in El Salvador held on to power through an intense fear campaign, threatening that if the leftist Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional

(FMLN) were to win the Presidency, it would mean the end of diplomatic relations with the US. These threats, for example, that the US would block the remittances that Salvadoran immigrants send home to their families, were echoed by some Congressional Republicans as recently as 2009. Thus President Obama's decision to meet with El Salvador's first progressive president, and his pledge to support President Funes' economic and social development plans, has effectively deflated one of the right-wing's oldest threats, giving the government and the popular movement some important breathing room to continue El Salvador's political transformation. As President Funes told reporters, "We have won the battle against disinformation. We

have dispelled the fear that relations would deteriorate." To the contrary, forming strong "partnerships" with Latin America was the overarching theme of President Obama's tour. But are these partnerships really designed to promote "common prosperity and common security" as President Obama stated, or do they promote continued US control in Latin America, albeit in a better disguise?



President Funes and President Obama in El Salvador, March 2011 (Photo: Naples News)

Before taking off for Latin America, the President declared that his top priority for the trip was to increase US exports to the region, that is, to ensure that Latin America import a majority of its goods from the US: not from China, the European Union, or other countries in Latin *continued on pg 3*

May Day in El Salvador: Workers and FMLN Unite in Struggle

At eight in the morning on May 1, 2011, crowds began to gather at the Salvador del Mundo monument in San Salvador under the already intense sun. Buses transporting people from other zones of the country—some who had left their homes as early as 3:00 AM—began to arrive. As more and more people arrived to commemorate International Workers Day, the rally organizers helped the gathered masses into bloques that would lead the march to the Civic Plaza in downtown San Salvador. The rally and march were organized by the Salvadoran Union Front (FSS), the Coalition for a Safe Country without Hunger (CONPHAS), the Workers' Union Confederation of El Salvador (CSTS), the Homeland for Everyone Movement (MPT), and the Social Front for a New Country (FSNP), who invited the general public to turn out en masse for the march during a press conference on April 5. The organizations and coalitions then invited the leadership and bases of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN)

party to accompany the march and rally.

The invitations were met with a massive turnout of more than 100,000 workers, unions, campesinos/as, members of women's organizations, students, members of the FMLN, and other social movement groups. International Workers Day, or May Day, is honored around the world as a commemoration of the four striking unionists who were executed in Chicago in 1886, a day for workers and others to unite and honor the struggles that have won so many benefits throughout history, and as a day to take to the streets and demand greater changes to benefit the working class. The march in San Salvador was led by a banner that read: "To expand the change for the people, we continue forward in the popular struggle." The use of the term "seguimos de frente" – or "we continue forward" – also has the dual meaning of "we continue with the Frente" or with the FMLN. According to Francisco García of the Salvadoran Union *continued on pg. 5*

Now Serving the *Pueblo*: Zaira Navas, Police Inspector General

A new El Salvador Watch column highlighting progressive change in El Salvador

Zaira Navas, Inspector General of the National Civilian Police (PNC) is one of the most courageous officials in the current Salvadoran government. Even in the face of death threats and right-wing legislative commissions designed to “investigate” her work, she has persevered in her mission to weed corruption out of El Salvador’s police force. She was appointed to the position of Inspector General in July of 2009 by PNC Director Carlos Ascencio and given the task of purging the PNC of corrupt officials and those with ties to organized crime and drug-trafficking. This position, which is similar to the Internal Affairs departments that exist in many US police departments, has been highly ineffective under the previous right-wing administrations and led to widespread corruption in the PNC at all levels. In 2006, the Tutela Legal de Arzobispo (Legal Guardians of the Archdiocese), for example, reported that members of the police were implicated in thirty percent of all murders attributed to death squads (8 cases).

Since Navas took charge, she has purged more than 150 agents from the PNC and brought sanctions against more than 1,000 agents. Although many of these agents were low-ranking officials—who were investigated for their ties to gangs—she has not hesitated to go after high ranking officers, including:

- former PNC Commissioner Godofredo Miranda
- former Director General of the Police Ricardo Menesses
- Salvadoran Interpol Director Ángel Barquero Silva, and
- Police Commissioner Douglas Omar García Funes.

Notably, García Funes was the chief of the Transnational Anti-Gang (TAG) initiative, a US-El Salvador joint program created in 2007 to share intelligence information and coordinate operatives between El Salvador’s police and the FBI and local police agencies in the US. According to the U.S. State Department, “The TAG program was developed to ... [counter] transnational criminal gang activity in the United States, Central America, and Mexico.” The fact that the former director of this program is now being investigated for ties to organized crime speaks to the depths of corruption that the new administration faces, as well as raises serious questions about rising levels of U.S. security aid to El Salvador.

Only six months after being named Inspector General, Inspector Navas began receiving death threats for her work. These threats came only weeks after she initiated

her investigations into some of these high-ranking officers. The situation is reminiscent of the threats faced by former Human Rights Ombudswoman, Beatrice de Carrillo, in 2006 when she began denouncing the re-emergence of “extermination” and “social cleansing groups,” including some operating within the PNC.

The right-wing has also united to make Inspector Navas’ work as difficult as possible. In September 2010, a



Zaira Navas, El Salvador’s new Police Inspector General (photo: *Diario CoLatino*)

coalition of right-wing political parties in the Legislative Assembly formed a special commission to look into 36 investigations of 21 police officials that are being conducted by the inspector’s office including Ricardo Menesses and Godofredo Miranda mentioned above. This special commission, led by Deputy José Antonio Almendáriz of the PCN (National Conciliation Party), accuses Navas of specifically targeting former member of the

Salvadoran Armed Forces in her investigations. Shortly after the announcement of this commission, Congressional Representative McGovern (D-MA) made a lengthy speech on the House floor in which he praised the work of Navas saying that she is taking “courageous action...to ensure that an honest hardworking police force is not sullied by corrupt cops.”

This commission has caused substantial delays in the work of Navas and her team of investigators because they have been required to send their files to the commission. There is only a 5 year time limit to bring formal charges against these officials; since the commission has only looked at six cases in a period of six months, this time limit is quickly approaching. It is probable that this delay will cause the crimes that some of the officials have allegedly committed to remain in impunity, which may have been the intention of the commission in the first place.

The Constitutional Chamber of the Salvadoran Supreme Court has agreed to hear a case claiming that this commission is unconstitutional because it oversteps the bounds of Congressional authority and doesn’t respect the separation of powers.

However, the obstacles and threats have not deterred Navas from continuing her work. Furthermore, her work has received praise from many of the highest government officials, including President Funes, who has said “No other inspector would have dared to do what the current inspector is doing.” She has also received interna- *continued on pg. 4*

Another top US priority is to expand its foothold in Central America through the “War on Drugs,” with El Salvador as its top security partner. During his visit to El Salvador, President Obama pledged \$200 million for the new Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) to combat organized crime and narco-trafficking. Both Presidents alluded to the “Mérida Initiative” in Mexico and “Plan Colombia” as guides for CARSI, despite overwhelming evidence that these disastrous policies have only increased the profitability of the drug trade at the cost of tens of thousands of human lives.



Salvadorans and Honduras protest President Obama's visit “No more Yankee meddling in Latin America and the world.” (photo: TeleSur)

One positive change, however, was that both Presidents stressed the importance of Central American countries, not the US, crafting the initiative to suit the region's particular needs. President Funes emphasized the need for rehabilitation, prevention and job creation programs and both Presidents agreed that poverty is the root of violence and forced migration.

Unfortunately, Obama shamelessly promoted more of the same neoliberal economic policies as the solution to poverty, despite the fact that El Salvador is being sued by a North American mining company, the very kind of foreign investor that Obama was promoting as a path to development. Before his trip, Obama received letters from 150 organizations and 19 Congressional Representatives calling on him to condemn the lawsuits filed by two mining corporations under the rules of the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) [one of the lawsuits, filed by Wisconsin-based Commerce Group Corporation, has since been dismissed]. The letters also called on President Obama to initiate a renegotiation of CAFTA in order to eliminate this form of corporate extortion; by maintain-

ing his silence on the lawsuits, Obama once again ignored the chorus of international voices demanding change in US trade policy.

With a progressive president at the helm in El Salvador, there is certainly a greater chance that US economic assistance will be used to promote dignified employment and alleviate poverty. But with the US pushing its corporate interests every step of the way, El Salvador faces significant challenges to any real economic advancements through these “partnerships” with the US.

Perhaps the most widely-publicized moment on the trip was President Obama's visit to the crypt of El Salvador's revered martyr, Monseñor Romero. While Obama is the first US president to honor the “voice of the voiceless”, the visit fell short of recognizing the US role in training Romero's assassins at the infamous (and still operating) School of the Americas.

Hundreds of Salvadorans gathered outside the presidents' press conference, carrying photos of those killed and disappeared by the US-backed armed forces and death squads during the civil war. They were joined by Hondurans bearing crosses and carrying photos of resistance members who have been killed since the June 2009 coup, calling on Obama to end support for the murderous Lobo government in Honduras.

The day before Obama's arrival, an estimated 6,000 union members and campesinos filled the boulevard outside the US Embassy to deliver a message: “The global economic crisis, climate change, narco-trafficking, insecurity and the food crisis have their origin in the economic model imposed on our people by the great world powers, primarily the United States.”

Though Obama's trip demonstrated that the pillars of US policy in the region remain largely unchanged, the political landscape in Latin America has shifted dramatically. Popular movements and leftist governments continue to resist the neoliberal agenda and chart a people-centered course, successfully forcing the US government to contend with some of the very political forces, like the FMLN, that it spent hundreds of millions trying to defeat in the 1980s. ■

Police Inspector, cont. from page 2

tional recognition for her work from Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) who said, “She is doing an outstanding job for justice and the people of El Salvador,” after hearing about that threats that she had received.

The International Brotherhood of Teamsters and the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) have also recognized the work of Inspector Navas, demonstrating their belief that ending police corruption is instrumental if El Salvador is to “protect the rights of its citizens to participate in union activities and other forms of engagement in civil society without risking their lives.” In January 2011, the union printed ads in El Salvador's main newspapers calling for a deeper investigation into the murder of Salvadoran Teamster organizer Gilberto Soto in 2005, who was organizing dockworkers in El Salvador. As they stated, “We are especially alarmed that the forces of reaction continue to threaten officials, such as Zaira Navas, who are seeking to end corruption and ensure that no one, regardless of rank or class, is allowed to act outside the law with impunity.”

Ending corruption has been one of the highest priorities of the Funes administration and of the FMLN, and despite the incredible obstacles, they are making headway. In April 2011, the ex-Minister of Health Guillermo Maza and seven other former ARENA functionaries, including a former sub-director of the PNC, were arrested for the theft of several million from the public treasury. One of the challenges, however, the Attorney General, who also served in the previous ARENA administration, has been largely unable or unwilling to effectively prosecute organized crime. President Funes is proposing to develop an international or regional body to investigate and confront these powerful, deeply-entrenched networks. ■

¡Alto a la Militarización! Stop the Militarization!

A Reflection on the LASC Education and Strategy Conference

From April 12-14, over four hundred students, solidarity activists, artists, community organizers and academics gathered at American University to rally against militarization of the Americas for the fifth conference of the Latin America Solidarity Coalition (LASC). The weekend's goal was to raise consciousness about escalating militarization throughout the Americas – from seven proposed U.S. military bases in Colombia to police collaboration with Homeland Security through the “Secure Communities” program – and to develop solidarity strategies to accompany anti-militarization movements in Latin America.

Movement leaders from Latin America and the Caribbean shared the analysis, images and stories guiding their movements. Testimony from Honduras, where over three hundred resistance leaders and LGBT activists have been assassinated since the 2009 coup against President Zelaya, from Mexico, where nearly 40,000 people have been killed in the first four years of the U.S.-sponsored “War on Drugs” and from Haiti, where UN “peacekeeping forces” continue their repressive occupation, exposed the extent of and linkages within the aggressive U.S. agenda throughout the hemisphere. The U.S. currently spends an estimated \$1 billion every year in police and military “aid” to Latin America.

Most importantly, speakers and workshop facilitators highlighted the economic and political reasons why the U.S. continues to push its military might throughout region. During his opening address, Jesus Emilio Tuberquia, a leader in the San José de Apartadó peace community in Colombia, held up a dollar bill and a Colombian *peso*, declaring, “This is the reason for all the violence we must live through!” before tearing up the bills into tiny pieces and exhorting the participants to seek cooperative alternatives as his community has done.

Dan Kovalik, Assistant General Counsel for the United Steelworkers, also emphasized this when discussing the pending U.S. free trade agreement with Colombia, where, since President Uribe took office in 2002, more union organizers have been murdered than in the rest of the world combined. Over the weekend, a broader analysis emerged around the corporate economic agenda that fuels most of this militarization. First, militarization creates tremendous financial benefits to U.S. weapons manufacturers and private security contractors. Second, the regions and communities that are the sites of the most intense militarization, from Colombia to Guatemala to Mexico, are typically home to valuable natural resources, including gold, oil and land itself.

Hector Aristizábal, Colombian artist and organizer, opened Saturday’s full workshop schedule with a dynamic storytelling of a Cherokee creation legend. He eventually directed the full auditorium in singing operas to one another, tapping into the healing and powerful artistic centers necessary to fuel major political change. Saturday featured skills-based workshops to build a stronger grassroots movement, from using FOIA requests to do research for anti-militarization campaigns to building multilingual and multiracial movements for social justice. Much of Sunday was spent caucusing by sector – students, labor, women, faith – to define collaborative strategies and priorities to fight U.S. militarism in its multiple forms.

Despite the enormous challenges to organizing against the military-industrial complex, we left the conference in high spirits. Special thanks are due to the artists and activists who shared their music and poetry with us throughout the conference, further emphasizing the importance of integrating our cultures into the heart of our campaigns and movements. We also gained incredible inspiration from the powerful resistance movements throughout Latin America, from the Continental Campaign against Military Bases to the No Más Sangre movement being led by women and youth in Ciudad Juárez, México against the “War on Drugs.”

Perhaps the greatest reason why we left the conference with the spirit of struggle was Sunday’s exciting mobilization to the White House, where twenty seven people were arrested in an act of civil disobedience to demand an end to militarization and closure of the infamous School of the Americas in Fort Benning, Georgia. Led by solidarity activists, religious leaders and incredible puppets – from an *abuela* trailed by floating handkerchiefs, representing the mothers of the disappeared, to the four horsemen of the apocalypse led by Uncle Sam on stilts – we marched together to the gates of the White House for a spirited, bilingual rally to show our commitment to the ongoing struggle for social justice and lasting peace. ■



A larger-than-life “grandmother of the disappeared” led the march to the White House to demand an end to U.S. militarization in Latin America (photo: Ted Majdosz)

May Day cont. from pg. 1

Front (FSS), the popular and social movements of El Salvador must not fall prey to the right wing's current strategy of trying to separate grassroots movements from the FMLN. "The FMLN is the only party that works in favor of the working class, of the great majority of Salvadorans," said García as he



Salvadoran unions take to the streets on International Workers' Day!

marched behind the lead banner at the head of the march. The leading bloque of thousands of unionists represented workers from all sectors: government, municipal, autonomous public institutes, the private sector, and the informal sector. Hundreds of workers from the Social Security Workers' Union (STISSS) marched alongside drum crews and dancers. Over the sound system, a STISSS unionist told her fellow workers that this was a day to commemorate the Chicago martyrs, "but martyrs are not for crying over, they are for imitating." She called on all workers to continue in the struggle for workers' rights, reminding the crowds that the enemies of El Salvador's working class have not changed.

The primary demands of the marchers were for businesses to stop tax evasion and start paying taxes, for the Funes Administration to create a new, progressive tax structure and for ANEP, the Salvadoran National Business Association, to raise the minimum wage to equal the public sector minimum wage, which President Funes recently raised to \$300 per month. Other social movement groups carried their demands on banners, including: a law to ban metallic mining in El Salvador, the need for the government to address the high cost of living which has recently spiked as gas prices have reached almost \$5 a gallon in some parts of the country, for corrupt judges to be removed from office, and to oppose the ratification of a pending free-trade agreement with the European Union (known as an Association Agreement—or AdA).

Tens of thousands of base members of the FMLN followed the social movement organizations. Elected officials like Vice President Salvador Sánchez Cerén and President of the Legislative Assembly Sigfrido Reyes along with party leaders marched with the base of the party, creating a sea of red that accompanied the organized workers, campesino/as, students, and communities.

As they reached the Civic Plaza, marchers gathered to enjoy historic music celebrating the Salvadoran struggle along with some newer revolutionary anthems by local rock groups. The march was so massive that as the first people were arriving at the Plaza, the end of the march was still leaving from the starting point. Finally, representatives of the social movement took the stage alongside Sanchez Cerén FMLN Secretary General Medardo González and the rally began with

a full minute of applause as balloons were released into the air in commemoration of the Chicago martyrs.

Francisco García of the Union Front spoke on behalf of the workers, reaffirming that their strategy must be one of class struggle, focusing on the wealthy oligarchy and business class as the true targets. He said that the oligarchy is represented by ANEP and the Salvadoran Foundation for Economic and Social Development (FUSADES), "their so-called 'think tank,' which actually just provides the justification for their neoliberal [economic] measures."

García pointed to past positions of ANEP and FUSADES to show they were the enemy of workers, having recommended the economic measures that did away with well-paid work in El Salvador, destroyed the agricultural sector and driven the speculation that increases the cost of basic goods. He accused ANEP and FUSADES of driving a partisan political agenda so they could return to the days when they were given special privileges by the government, including not having to report property holdings for tax purposes. He called for a fiscal reform "in which whoever earns more pays

more and whoever earns less pays less" and for workers and the greater social movement to unite with the FMLN to continue fighting for systemic change.



Led by a skeleton wearing a construction helmet, "The rural working class says NO to mining"

After García, Sanchez Cerén spoke on behalf of the FMLN, reiterating the party's commitment to serve as the political movement of the working class and acknowledged some of administration's achievements – such as public sector workers' raises, measures to lower the cost of living, and new agricultural credits. He recognized, however, that this isn't nearly enough. Sanchez Cerén spoke about this moment as a transition in a longer process of democratization: "The true transformations are just starting and in this moment of transition it is time to create and cultivate the bases of a new, truly democratic society of a new generation that enjoys equality of conditions and underpin the foundations of change."

The historic leader of the FMLN and Vice President called for a change from the neoliberal economic model to one that responds to the workers' demands, stating, "In the Government of Change, we are committed to your labor rights and to a more dignified and humane social policy," and proclaimed that, "This May 1st, we make your demands as workers our demands."

Reflections on East Coast Political School

By Dan Blumenthal, D.C. CISPES

In May 14 & 15, three members of the DC CISPES chapter traveled to New York City to attend CISPES's regional political school. Though we weren't sure exactly what to expect, we felt that it would be a good place to learn more about the history of CISPES, the FMLN, and the Salvadoran social movements, to get to know the members of the NY and Boston chapters, and to have discussions about the strategic impact that CISPES can make today. Fortunately, political school exceeded our expectations!

Considering that many of our chapters have new members, one of the main priorities of the political school was to develop a deeper understanding of our own history. We got off to a roaring start on Saturday with a workshop on the Salvadoran liberation movement of the 1970s and 1980s led by historian Joaquin Chávez, who talked about the unique and powerful collaboration between urban intellectuals and organized farmers in resisting and ultimately defeating the military regime. Long-time CISPES organizer Phil Josselyn also shared his perspective on the role of international solidarity, emphasizing that CISPES has remained true to its goal of standing in solidarity with the people of El Salvador despite changing political climates in the U.S. Hilary Goodfriend and Mara Komoska from NY CISPES facilitated a workshop on the role of women in the Salvadoran revolutionary movement. Hilary shared some findings from her interviews with women in the Salvadoran labor movement, including that several of them expressed reservations about feminism, considering it to be elitist. This revelation took many of us by surprise and led to a lively discussion about the intersections of gender and class struggle. Mara gave a presentation on COMADRES, an organization led by women whose family members were disappeared during the Civil War. We were particularly interested in how they used their status as mothers to maneuver through highly dangerous situations and inspired to learn how resilient they've been in their efforts to preserve historical memory and fight for justice long after the end of the war. Another key goal of the political school was to develop a deeper analysis of the economic systems that have devastated most of Latin America over the past twenty years, the effects of which are becoming more and more visible in the US today. Lisa Fuller, CISPES Program Director, and Eli Latto, Boston CISPES Coordinator, gave a very succinct rundown of neoliberalism and "free" trade. They really connected the dots, showing how neoliberalism is also the guiding philosophy underlying the budget cuts and austerity measures being implemented in the U.S. and around the world. The workshop was an example of the kind of popular education that chapters can do with our members and with allied student, labor, immigrant rights and social justice organizations in our communities. In another workshop, Boston CISPES veterano David Grosser provided some background on Marxist theory and the "crisis of capitalism," opening up a discussion about what, if any, relevance it has to the problems we face today. Many participants found this workshop particularly exciting, since few of us have had much exposure to philosophies that run contrary to capitalism.

It was also important to talk about how we can move from theory to action! We ended with a workshop on the nuts and bolts of engaging with new people and recruiting new members, one of the most important elements of grassroots organizing. Jacob Blickenov and Ilana Feingold from the National Office got us up out of our chairs and into some funny and illuminating role plays! In our final discussion, we explored where El Salvador might be going in the coming years, wondering how far the new government could go to promote the FMLN's vision without incurring the wrath of the US government. We also grappled with the threats that powerful, US-backed, right-wing governments in Honduras and Colombia pose towards their own people and toward people's movements throughout Latin America. We really enjoyed getting to know fellow CISPES members, as there was a good mix of CISPES "veterans" and first-time attendees. We realized that only through building a vibrant and cohesive community of activists can we most effectively promote our program of solidarity with the people of El Salvador and learn from their inspiring and effective organizing to create change here in the U.S. ¡Adelante! ¡Adelante! ¡Que la lucha es constante! (Let's move forward! Keep up a constant struggle!) ■



Political school participants hard at work during a workshop on recruitment!

Produced by CISPES, a national organization with chapters around the US.

Distributed locally by:

National Office:
1525 Newton St. NW
Washington DC 20010
(202) 521-2510
www.cispes.org

Sources this month include:

CISPES El Salvador Office, DC CISPES, Latin America Solidarity Coalition (LASC), Diario CoLatino, U.S. Embassy in San Salvador, FSS/CONPHAS, School of the Americas Watch, Alliance for Global Justice, US LEAP