



committee Fall 2009 update

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CISPES launches anti-mining campaign

National organization commits to fighting lawsuits filed by U.S. companies against Salvadoran government

By Phelia Lorenzen

At CISPES' recent biennial national convention (*see article on page 5*), the organization adopted a proposal to focus its energies on supporting the anti-mining movement that is being led by grassroots organizations in El Salvador. Environmentally destructive metallic mining operations are being proposed in the Cabañas and Chalatenango departments, and grassroots groups there have united to fight this threat to their environment, health and livelihoods.

CISPES' new anti-mining campaign brings together two important issues we have worked on for many years: the fight against CAFTA (the Central American Free Trade Agreement), which has facilitated the mining companies' free reign over El Salvador's natural resources, and the broader struggle against neo-liberalism, the economic model that has brought abuses and impoverishment to the

marginalized sectors in El Salvador.

Anti-mining coalitions have been in a struggle in the northern areas of El Salvador since 2005, when U.S. mining companies began exploration activities in sensitive watershed areas. Activists have used human chains to prevent company employees and machinery from entering certain areas, protested in the streets of San Salvador, and presented anti-mining proposals to the Legislative Assembly. Due to this popular pressure, the Salvadoran government has thus far refused to grant mining permits.

Organizers have developed effective educational campaigns to bring awareness to the people of the true cost of mining – deforestation, soil degradation, water contamination, and the loss of land titles won after the 12-year civil war that cost 77,000 lives. The Catholic Church in El Salvador has joined with human rights, labor, education,

continued on page 5

CHECK OUT OUR NEW BILINGUAL WEBSITE: www.seattlecispes.org

Special thanks to volunteers Alison McKay, Mauricio s, and Brandon Waterman for developing and translating the site

Hope is born: a personal reflection on the historic election of President Mauricio Funes

By David Ayala Zamora

"...May my blood be a seed of liberty, and the sign that hope will be soon be a reality."

-Monseñor Oscar Romero

On June 1st, 2009, Mauricio Funes of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) took office as the first leftist president in the history of El Salvador. After twelve years of civil war – years of death, torture, state terrorism, lies and a multimillion-dollar military campaign sponsored by the U.S. government – followed by two decades of presidential reign by the right wing ARENA party, the FMLN was elected to the presidency on March 15. This victory is the hope that Monseñor Romero spoke of: the hope that a new form of government would someday come to change the destiny of the country.

Monseñor understood the problems of poverty, injustice and lack of democratic liberties in his country. He experienced the electoral fraud that led to the presidencies of colonels Molina and Romero in the '70s. He received thousands of peasants in his parish, who came to confide in him about their economic struggles and the injustices they were living in their communities. But above all, his life was changed in 1977 with the murder of his close friend, Father Rutilio Grande. On many occasions, Monseñor denounced the abuses of the death squads. He knew well the protection that they received from the founder of ARENA, Major Roberto D'Aubuisson.

continued on page 3

INSIDE:

Solidarity Cycle / Seattle hosts CISPES National Convention

The Bicycle Chronicles

50 Solidarity Cyclists pedal 80 miles and raise over \$5,000 for grassroots organizing in Seattle and El Salvador

By Tom Buchanan

As the Solidarity Cycle approached, I had already collected the contributions for my donation to CISPES, my bike was cleaned and aligned, but the weather forecast for the weekend was IFFY. But given Northwest weather, I wasn't surprised. So, I woke up on Saturday, June 20th, anticipating a beautiful ride from Seattle to Tacoma and back, via the Kitsap Peninsula and Vashon Island, as part of the CISPES Solidarity Cycle.

7:30AM - At the CISPES office, bikers of all stripes are arriving, last minute brake checks. We gather for some wild cheers and instructions for the two day ride. Two support vehicles, with food and our packs, are on the street. I meet Gregg and Linda Herrington, who will be alternating with one another: bike riding, then driving one of the "sag wagons."

8:00AM - Travis Thomas is down! He's crashed on Jackson Street, hitting a rough piece of pavement on his way to meet up with the group. We arrive with medical aid and it's clear he's got a fractured wrist. The support crew takes him to the hospital. Is this an omen of things to come? Don't dwell on it.

8:30AM - One tire has flatted before the ride even begins. Another omen? It's repaired...

8:45AM - We're off! 50 of us ride across the West Seattle bridge, around Alki Point to the Fauntleroy ferry. It occurs to us that we may not beat the cars traveling to the same destination, but we're doing it with a lot less stress and a better look at the neighborhoods and the Sound. One point for the bike riders. Energy required? Maybe 1/2 of a peanut butter & jelly sandwich.

10:30AM - We take the ferry to Southworth on the Kitsap Peninsula. Great ride so far! No more flats and no seagull attacks on the ferry; everyone is safe and cool.

Arriving on the Kitsap requires checking the maps and a little history: The area was named for Chief Kitsap, an 18th century leader of the Suquamish, a fishing tribe of the Coast Salish group of peoples, their ancestral grounds are on this eastern shore of the peninsula. We are riding south along the waters of Colvos Passage, through forested lands that are still dense and beautiful. The sun is peeking out of a high cloud cover. It's a perfect day.

The route features what some cyclists describe as "rollers." These are hills that aren't too extreme, then you catch your breath going down before you hit another one. The rollers appeal to those of us that imagine ourselves on a bike race. No one seems to be racing, but the pace is quick, especially with Brandon Waterman calling out, "Go, Go, Go!" behind me.

We make our first stop at Olalla, a little cove that used to be a shell fishing spot, now more famous for a bluegrass



Solidarity Cyclists on the ferry from Fauntleroy to Southworth *Stefanie Skiljan photo*

festival in August and a Polar Bear Swim on January 1st. Sharing food and talk becomes our regular habit on this trip. It's relaxed, we get to know other folks on the ride, some from El Salvador. It gives us time to talk about what the money that we've raised will do in El Salvador. Our partners there are building a more just society in their own country. They have needs like rent for offices, telephone lines, the basics to carry out campaigns and organizing projects. The progressive left of El Salvador has won its first ever presidency this last Spring. Much of the U.S. conservative support for the previous right wing regime was successfully countered by groups like CISPES here in the U.S.

We ride another 20 miles to Gig Harbor. Beautiful nature with more views of the Puget Sound. We do another snack stop at downtown Gig Harbor, scout for ice cream. We mix with the regular summer tourists in town, take in the bay and marina. Then the talk turns toward our destination: Tacoma,

continued on page 5

Hope is born *continued from page 1*

Since 1989, ARENA has held the presidency, continuing the unjust policies of the past military regimes, and has opposed any recognition of Monseñor Romero's words and legacy.

The hope of Monseñor Romero is based in sacrifice and the desire to obtain his dream. The FMLN's coming to power is the fulfilment of the prophecy of that sacrifice. The FMLN originated amidst a scarcity of resources, and rose out of the creativity that was needed to bring to a head the struggle for justice. Out of the fear of prison and death rose the bravery



60,000 celebrate the inauguration of Mauricio Funes at the Estadio Cuscatlán in San Salvador on June 1

Adam Kufeld photo

and the strength to resist. Because those who started the armed struggle could not always stay in the mountains, their lives were marked by secrecy and intrigue.

The FMLN learned how to take its struggle to the streets, and learned from the demands of students, and from the labor struggles in factories and plantations. From here the armed struggle took off – not out of a desire to be guerilla fighters, but out of necessity because political avenues were closed by fraud and repression. The FMLN became the most prominent guerilla force in the 1980s, giving it the leverage to negotiate for peace and become a political party. But we did not stop there. The FMLN learned the tricks of electoral politics – that is to say, of the “American” style of democracy. And it is important to recognize that the FMLN is the only guerilla force in the world that, after negotiating peace accords and transforming into a political party, has won a presidential election. (And this is with complete respect to the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, who won presidential elections after coming to power through a revolution.)

The FMLN's triumph has enormous significance for other countries. It is inspirational – an example of a constant and sustained struggle. The ability to change strategy and tactics was necessary in this fight. And those changes were not at the whims of the leaders, but in response to the needs of the people.

At the same time, the FMLN's victory continues to promote a unified movement of the left in Latin America. Defending our economies against free trade will be an integral part of the struggle in the coming years, and it is imperative to

promote the sovereignty of our countries in the face of political coercion and foreign pillaging. President Funes' resumption of diplomatic relations with Cuba is an important first step.

The FMLN's victory will improve the wellbeing and the future of the Salvadoran people. The President's inaugural address expressed the new government's preferential treatment of the poor. Urgent measures have already been implemented to immediately alleviate the economic and social crisis that the poor

experience on a daily basis. School supplies, uniforms, and free lunches are now provided for all students in public schools. This is not only to alleviate the family's expenses, but also to improve hundreds of thousands of students' ability to learn and have self-confidence. Credit for small businesses and rural farmers is being provided through the creation of a new national bank, because the private banks do not open lines of credit for those sectors. This will help to give opportunities to more citizens and will promote the equitable distribution of national wealth.

In conclusion, I want to thank the *compañeros y compañeras* of the United States who have worked in solidarity with El Salvador over the years. The fight was not in vain. CISPES *compañeros*, thank you for your valiant contribution when it was needed most. I am sure that if pressure had not been put on the Obama administration – which declared that it would work with whichever party won the Salvadoran presidential election – ARENA's traditional strategies (manipulating the country's dependence on remittances from family members in the United States to frighten voters) would have worked. But instead, the right-wing was disarmed. The people who struggle will triumph! ★

Seattle hosts CISPES National Convention

By Stefanie Skiljan

Over the weekend of August 7th, Seattle CISPES was honored to host the 13th CISPES National Convention right here in our hometown! Although the convention was a new process for many of us, it is an important part of the long-held tradition of democratic and inclusive decision making that has kept CISPES strong through the changing struggle in El Salvador.

At this year's biannual convention, representatives from as near as Olympia and as far as San Salvador came together over a long weekend to discuss the strategic, programmatic, and organizational proposals that our *compañeras* and *compañeros* had previously drafted. Eight local committees were represented, along with the National Office, our National Executive Committee, and our San Salvador office.

The convention, held at the Cascade People's Center, kicked off on Friday with a day-long workshop focusing on different forms of oppression and CISPES' anti-oppression work. Then committees had the opportunity to review proposals in preparation for a full two days of discussion and debate. On Saturday, committee members mixed it up and talked with others about their committees' feedback to proposals. Afterward, proposal authors went hard to work to incorporate the feedback they received. This convention process was intended to make the proposals for our new strategies, programs and internal goals as effective and comprehensive as possible, with input from all committees. Although it was a sometimes difficult and often lengthy practice to include everyone's voices, in CISPES we see this process as part of our commitment to REAL democracy and grassroots organizing.

In a wonderful coincidence, this year the CISPES convention fell on the same weekend as the *Día del Salvadoreño*,

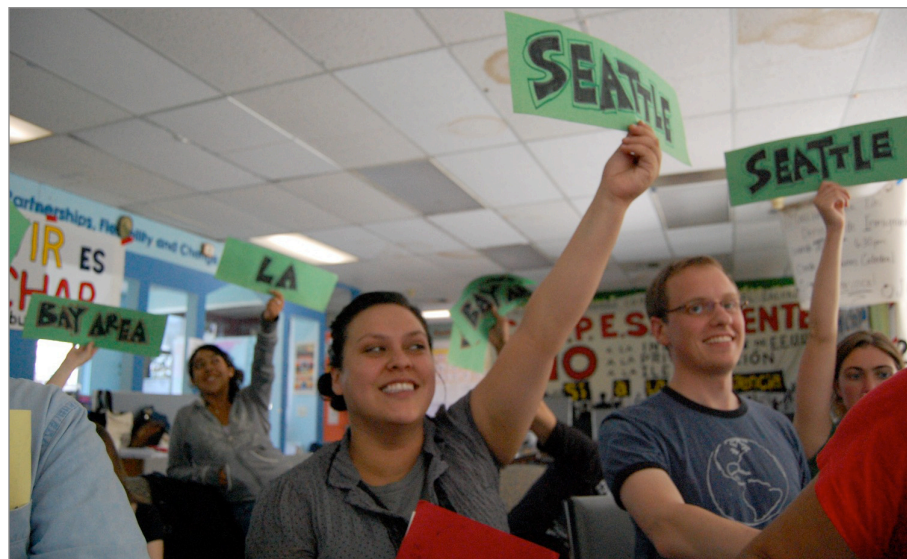
National Salvadoran Day here in the U.S.! We had the opportunity to celebrate this important day as a unified organization, and with the Salvadoran community of greater Seattle. Seattle CISPES committee members worked with the local Salvadoran Committee to put on a beautiful event at the Cascade People's Center. Delicious Salvadoran food and the Salvadoran national anthem began the evening,



Lolo Cutumay performs for *Día del Salvadoreño*

followed by revolutionary songs played by Lolo Cutumay, a Salvadoran musician and member of CISPES' Portland committee. The room filled with Salvadorans, Salvadoran-Americans, and CISPistas as we sang together, and celebrated the determination embedded in Salvadoran history with our bellies full. Guests also heard updates from Burke Stansbury, CISPES' former Executive Director, and Sonia Umanzor, an FMLN representative who traveled from Washington, D.C., to participate in the convention. The evening ended with a piñata and dancing! The celebration gave CISPES an inspiring context from which to continue our work, and a reminder of the history that we are a part of.

Sunday closed the convention. After reviewing the revised proposals once again in our committees, all CISPistas present gathered for the final vote. Last debates for or against proposals were heard, and committees had the chance to hold their voting cards high and proudly participate in deciding our work for the next two years. Look out in the coming months, as our decisions to confront neo-liberalism, combat CAFTA, stand up for resource rights, work with labor unions, take part in immigrant rights struggles, and expand our anti-oppression work are put into action! ★



Delegates proudly cast their votes during the CISPES National Convention
Stefanie Skiljan photos

Anti-mining campaign *continued from page 1*

and community organizing groups to oppose further mining efforts in the country, and those groups have appealed to the new Funes administration to adopt the mining reform act recently introduced by FMLN legislators, which would ban metallic mining throughout the country.

A recent spate of violence against anti-mining activists in Cabañas has added to the urgency of the situation. Earlier this summer, prominent community leader Marcelo Rivera was tortured and murdered, and his body later found in a well. Soon after, another anti-mining activist was shot several times, miraculously escaping death. A priest narrowly escaped kidnapping, and community radio reporters have received death threats for their coverage of the situation. The political motives behind these crimes are going uninvestigated by *de facto* Attorney General Ástor Escalante – a holdover from the Saca administration who remains in power while the right-wing bloc in the Legislative Assembly refuses to confirm any of President Funes' nominees. Fear is mounting and community members are calling for international pressure to support their movement.

Two mining companies – Pacific Rim Mining and the Commerce Group Corporation – have filed lawsuits against the Salvadoran government under the investors' rights chapter of CAFTA, which allows companies to sue for compensation when their efforts to profit from investments

are impeded. The impact of such lawsuits, should the companies win the arbitration, is a staggering \$200 million in costs for the cash-strapped Salvadoran government. And this is where CISPES can help.

In the next two years, CISPES will combine our mission to support the social movement in El Salvador with our target to revoke or reform CAFTA. We plan the following:

1. Create new partnerships with Salvadoran groups that organize against mining
2. Take action against those mining companies currently in lawsuits under CAFTA
3. Educate the U.S. public of the costs of CAFTA and neo-liberalism in El Salvador
4. Educate the U.S. Congress about the detrimental effects of CAFTA and support alternatives to the NAFTA/CAFTA model of free trade agreements.

We will keep you up-to-date with information about the anti-mining struggle in El Salvador, and the response of the new Salvadoran government. We hope to bring visitors from El Salvador in the coming months so you can meet and hear directly from the people leading this movement. In the meantime, we have an opportunity right now to engage in solidarity: On Friday, October 16, several groups will be protesting Pacific Rim at its Vancouver, B.C., headquarters. Contact the Seattle CISPES office if you would like to join us: 206 325-5494, seacispes@igc.org ★

Solidarity Cycle *continued from page 2*

and the ride approaching the city over the Tacoma Narrows Bridge.

Here's what Stef Skiljan had to say about the next few miles of cycling: "We were winding along on a beautiful, wooded road. I realized I had a giant smile on my face, and that I was elated to be on a bicycle, sharing a trip with so many kind, determined people. It was a powerful representation of solidarity, which is what CISPES is all about." Approaching the Narrows Bridge, with the sun slightly behind us, is quite spectacular, especially when surrounded by 50 bicyclists coming down the road.

We arrive at the Guadalupe House in Tacoma, the Catholic Worker collective, and count our blessings: no flats, no blood, sunny day, low traffic, excellent road trip. We see their gardens, terraced and productive. Inside, the support crew has arrived and is already cooking dinner. We hear a presentation by Peter on the history of the Catholic Workers, which began in 1933 and sold their newspaper, *The Catholic Worker*, for 1 cent. It's now 25 cents and you can't get it online. There are over 185 worker collectives like the Guadalupe House worldwide.

After dinner, many drifted to a local bar to talk about the day, watch the Mariners, drink local beers and find out more about each other. At 6:15 the next morning the cell phone

alarms woke us for day two.

Sunday was a beautiful morning, biking through the still-sleeping Tacoma neighborhoods after breakfast and a presentation about CISPES' work. We made it to the Pt. Defiance ferry for the short trip across to the south end of Vashon Island. If you haven't taken this ferry lately, do it. It's like a trip 40 years back in time on a classic, well-maintained small ferry.

After lunch on the beach on Vashon we faced some challenging conditions. Here's what Cameron Herrington had to say about it: "We pedaled the length of Vashon Island in an absolute downpour. After riding for an hour in the rain, we made it to the ferry landing, where everyone was cramming into a Mexican restaurant. I went inside, prepared to encounter a group of cold, wet, grumpy cyclists. But instead, the rainstorm had only increased the camaraderie and solidarity. Everyone was laughing, wringing out wet clothes and eating nachos. The joy was contagious. By the time the ferry got us back to West Seattle, the storm had passed and we rode through the warm early-summer sunshine for the last dozen miles."

The Solidarity Cyclists raised over \$6,000! After expenses (ferry fares, gas for the support vehicles, t-shirts, food) about \$5,200 was left. \$2,000 to fund Seattle CISPES, and over \$3,000 to be sent to our partners in El Salvador. Good work everyone. It was a great weekend! ★