EMPIRE AND SOLIDARITY IN THE AMERICAS CONFERENCE

Legacies of Central American Solidarity

Lindy C. Boggs Conference Center
Room 256

October 15 & 16, 2010
The 2010 Empire and Solidarity Conference explores how different solidarity movements were shaped by, or consciously modeled themselves upon, the Central American solidarity movement of the 1980s. Central American solidarity in the 1980s drew on pre-existing organizations, ideas, and traditions, created its own new forms of thinking and organization, and left important legacies for the movements that succeeded and grew out of it. What are the historical continuities and discontinuities between the people, strategies, traditions, and organizations that comprised Central American solidarity in the 1980s and subsequent struggles around global justice, free trade, immigrant rights, militarism, and many others?

Friday, October 15th, 3:30 – 6:00 p.m.

Session One:
THE GLOBAL JUSTICE MOVEMENT
ANXIETIES OF EMPIRE: CLASS, NATIONALISM, AND THE ROOTS OF THE “ANTI-GLOBALIZATION” MOVEMENT
Eric Larson, History and Literature, Harvard University

As the Cold War ended and a “New World Order” emerged, elites in the U.S. and Mexico created a continental “free trade area” that dramatically exposed workers to international market forces and challenged their class and national identities. This paper will trace the roots of the global justice, or “anti-globalization,” movement of the late 1990s by examining the grassroots internationalisms that surfaced in the labor left in the U.S. and Mexico in the 1990s. It will explore how anxieties about empire and “globalization” spurred organizers in both countries to challenge labor officialdom and re-work ideas of class and nation, two categories they had forged in the 1980s, in part through the influence of the Central American revolutions and their international solidarity movements. The paper will do so by analyzing the histories and political networks of two grassroots organizations, one at each end of the globalized North American economic order – the U.S.-based labor coalition Jobs with Justice (JwJ) and the Mexico-based Popular Indigenous Council of Oaxaca - Ricardo Flores Magón (CIPO-RFM). The progressive unionists who led JwJ into the global justice agitation of the late 1990s built on activist networks born in Central America solidarity efforts in the early 1980s. Simultaneously, in southern Mexico, Marxists inspired by the Central American struggles re-worked their ideas of class, indigeneity, and “popular” struggle in the 1990s to create a new politics of global solidarity through CIPO-RFM.

FROM SEATTLE TO GENOA, AN BEYOND: TRANSNATIONAL RECYCLING, ALT-GLOBAL PROTEST, AND WORLD SOCIAL FORUM
John French, Professor of History and African-American Studies, Duke University

This paper examines the new alt-global politics born at the 1999 Seattle World Trade Organization protests (French 2002) and carried through the sequence of anti-globalization protests that climaxed with 300,000 marchers at the G-8 meeting in Genoa in July 2001. In particular, explores the after-life of styles, tactics, slogans, and critical discourses associated with what was, in essence, a U.S. only protest in Seattle in 1999. How did they achieve an impact and influence sufficient to spark a world-wide protest cycle that saw a remarkable global interchange of protest tactics (all fraught with meanings). These post-Seattle protests, which have still to be studied comprehensively, were accompanied by alt-global political innovation: the rise of the World Social Forum that began in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 2001, at first without any U.S. participation. With each successive year, the WSF grew and by 2003 had attracted the energies that were stymied by the violence at Genoa and the 9/11 attacks. The rise of the WSF, with its slogan “Another World is Possible,” marks the creation of a new practice and style of politics, with its critique of traditional forms of political representation and action (a movement of movements, a space of encounter, the “multitude”). As such, the WSF is a striking story of movement entrepreneurship but one that, unlike Seattle, originated in the global South. Throughout, it makes the case for recycling as the most useful metaphor to understand this phenomenon, which is traced across a complex inter-, multi-, and trans-national and cultural terrain. In doing so, it exemplifies creative rethinking on the left that draws on past movements for solidarity and radical change, while taking the issues facing these movements to a global level.

The conference organizers, Steve Striffler (UNO, Latin American Studies) and Aviva Chomsky (Salem State, History) thank the University of New Orleans, Salem State College, and the Doris Zemurray Stone Chair in Latin American Studies for sponsoring this conference.
This paper, which is part of a broader research project exploring how war-displaced campesinos (roughly translated, peasants) in Latin America utilized national and international solidarity networks to garner both short- and long-term benefits, examines how displaced Salvadoran campesinos forged strategic relations with solidarity United States citizens via Ciudades Hermanas (Sister Cities). Using dozens of oral histories, along with archival materials from Central America, the United States and Europe, I trace the U.S.-El Salvador Sister Cities network through 25 years. More specifically, I examine shifts in organizational focus over time: from the narrow foundational objective of ensuring the physical security of specific repopulated communities in the midst of civil war; to the promotion of national peace and democratization efforts; to countering more regional and global threats (e.g., privatization of public services, exploitation of natural resources, and free trade agreements). I also explore how and why U.S. and Salvadoran narratives of Sister Cities diverge. Why, for example, have longtime U.S. participants’ narratives focused on specific (often horrific) events and emphasized drastic differences between then and now, whereas Salvadoran narratives have tended to feature patterns and continuities? I show that even as U.S. participants today debate how to “stay relevant” in peace-time, Salvadorans utilize the network in much the same way they did upon its founding in the mid-1980s: as a tool to heighten their visibility within the national arena and to strengthen their resistance to ongoing state-sponsored marginalization and repression.

“TOTAL REJECTION” VS. “SEAT-AT-THE-TABLE”—TWO APPROACHES TO THE CHALLENGE OF CAFTA
Katherine Hoyt, National Co-Coordinator, Nicaragua Network

In early 2002, Central American solidarity groups in the United States and social justice activists in Central America became aware that President George W. Bush wanted to begin work on a free trade agreement with Central America. The announcement of an agreement that would extend what these organizations saw as the disaster of NAFTA to Central America brought them immediately together to oppose it. The groups that founded what came to be known as the Stop CAFTA Coalition along with their traditional partners in Central America opposed the model as a whole, calling their position that of “rechazo total” [total rejection]. However, both in Central America and in the United States there were other organizations that felt that it was worthwhile to participate in the process and push for changes to the agreement. By the end of the negotiations, the two groups ended up on the same page and opposed CAFTA. This paper examines in detail the struggles in opposition to CAFTA by both factions from the perspective of an activist participant in the Stop CAFTA Coalition.
paper will trace the contours of the campaign, examine the political transformation and tactical
decisions made its supporters, and analyze the different factors and forces that led to the release of
the majority of the FALN prisoners by 1999. It will also discuss the campaign’s connections to as well
as tensions with the Central American solidarity movement to develop a realistic picture of the
challenges faced by solidarity activists working to free prisoners fighting U.S. colonialism on the island
(externally) as well as within this country (internally).