Reshaping the US Left

Popular Struggles in the 1980s

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'The North American Front': Central American Solidarity in the Reagan Era

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Conditioning Intervention

Since its defeat in Indochina, the United States has been unable to restore its hegemony in the Third World.[1] Nothing has signaled this more than Washington's shifting responses to the tide of revolution that began rolling over Central America in the late 1970s. Successive administrations have lurched from a cooptive strategy in which the Good Neighbor with the Big Stick relied in the end on the military option for 'containment', to a grandiose scheme of 'rollback', in which the US would pen, undercut and smash the popular movements, country by country.

Neither liberal nor rightist forms of intervention have succeeded as yet. The peoples of Central America are not pacified; the imperial backyard is no more secure than it was in 1980, just more heavily garrisoned. The US, as ultimate antagonist, has been unable to seize the initiative on the ground from the revolutionary forces. Popular power has deepened and consolidated in Nicaragua, if on the grim terms of a permanent war economy. In El Salvador the massive subterranean base of the Farabundo Marti Front for National Liberation/Democratic Revolutionary Front (FMLN-FDR) has proven ineradicable, the hydra of an oligarch's nightmare.

The failure of the US to achieve lasting political-military solutions through its proxies is closely linked to the necessity of using proxies at all. At every turn, the policymakers and their congressional attendants have had to contend with pervasive

popular alienation from the basic premise of anti-communist interventionism: that we should 'pay any price', in President Kennedy's phrase, to eliminate subversive assertions of sovereignty within the perimeters of the Free World.[2]

On pragmatic or isolationist grounds, this sentiment even extends into the middle reaches of our ruling-class bloc, from orthodox military officers leery of another drawn-out collapse on a secondary front, to neoliberals and technocrats hoping to build a new 'national' capitalism and seeking an Era of Good Feeling, peace and cognitive harmony within which to reconstruct. Among much greater numbers of people, from the working poor to small farmers and schoolteachers, those who really do 'remember Vietnam' (as lies, as never-forgotten grief, as disgust and shame), anti-interventionism is both low-key and visceral. It has become an aspect of the elemental political consciousness Americans share, relatively impervious to the thunder of demonological Reaganism.

A national-security state is of course adept at whipping up provocations to overcome reluctance in its electorate; witness the subjugation of Grenada. The arms-loaded dugout canoes that cross the Gulf of Fonseca from Leninist Nicaragua to Democratic El Salvador (or so the CIA maintains) might brazenly open fire on a passing US warship, and soon enough there would be a Red, White and Blue Dawn over Managua. Though unarticulated peace sentiments and a skeptical wariness inhibit the use of imperial force, they alone could not have restrained for six years the violent men and women of this Administration, hellbent on driving Moscow's beast from the hemisphere. In the absence of visible opposition, it is likely that surgical applications of US air and land power would have set back the process of Central American liberation for a generation. The Frente Sandinista would be holding out in mountain fastnesses, harassing the Marines and the Guardia Nacional. With its liberated zones carpet-bombed and no mountains to withdraw to, the FMLN would go to ground in the Christian base communities, churches and refugee camps. Facing a homegrown total war onslaught under Israeli tutelage, the militants of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) have already hunkered down.

Instead the US has had to prosecute its war in Central America at arm's length, on the cheap, internally divided and fencing with legality. Ever larger amounts of formal and informal credibility have been invested merely to sway the roundheeled

CISPES Demonstration

Congressional Democrats. The most signal victories in terms of funding the war and massaging public opinion – making the addled demagogue Napoleon Duarte into the model of an elected, centrist reformer; playing off Nicaragua's phantom 'totalitarian dungeons' and 'Soviet MiGs' against the 'freedom fighters' of a 'democratic resistance' – have been short-term, sabotaged by the realities the Central Americans themselves construct. The *primary* factor in the whole regional war has been the sustained resilience and political creativity of the political-military and mass Left, but there is also the intransigence of Central America's fascists, learned from Guatemala's National Liberation Movement, the original death squad. The subtleties of North American projects have repeatedly run aground on their preference for simpler policies of public extermination.

The diverse fractions which collaborate in class and state power in the US, from those permanently chastened by the Vietnamese to the truculent young Reaganites prattling about 'low intensity conflict', do not disagree on the necessity of countering revolution, whether through economic boycott or direct assault, especially on 'our' mainland. But they have been prodded into anxiety, confusion and timidity regarding the scale, form and pace of intervention by an insistent and inventive grassroots movement. This organized opposition has spoken for and sometimes goaded the widespread (if passive and uninformed) distrust of *any* activist policy in Central America. Just as important, the Central America movement has raised the spectre of massive societal dislocation, of unending disobedient protest by all sorts of people, in the event of any all-out escalation towards another Vietnam.

What or who is this movement? Where did it come from and how is it organized? To begin with, how to name it?

I choose to call this opposition the 'Central America solidarity movement' because its origins, its tenacity and its measure of autonomy from the rigidities of US political culture (from tunnel vision aboveground to sectarian futility on the Left) are all conditioned by human, quite 'subjective' ties of respect, obligation and love to the peoples of Central America – not as faceless victims, but as resistant women and men. We speak of Ramon and Victoria and their children who are in sanctuary with us, or Arnoldo who came and spoke to our group about why they are fighting, or Rosario, the cooperative leader we

met whose daughter was killed in Esteli in 1978. This is where solidarity begins, in accepting and sharing responsibility, in beginning to learn instead of to instruct, in staking out one's own agency as an imperial citizen while imagining unbounded Americas. Despite the persistence of crippling if not chauvinist sentimentality, of illusions of altruism, some element of this instinctual solidarity brings together the 'non-political' sanctuary volunteer in his or her respectable parish with the self-conscious solidarity 'cadre' who reads Omar Cabezas and spends vacations picking Nicaraguan coffee.

In the early 1980s, a sterile division was publicly asserted (on all sides) between the 'solidarity' and 'anti-intervention' movements. On the one hand were those who supported the revolutionary projects, including the armed struggle, as defined by the vanguard political-military fronts in each country; on the other were those who 'only' wanted their government to adopt an enlightened policy of non-intervention and respect for self-determination. In fact, the difference was mutual stylistic discomfort. Solidarity activists were committed to a posture of enthusiastic and continual militance on behalf of an anti-imperial revolution. Anti-intervention workers often came from the older, more experienced peace movement which favored persuasion over confrontation, and a carefully 'American', humanitarian approach. Now most people at both national and local levels have come to recognize, as the Right has charged all along, that the results *for Central America* are likely to be the same: hindering intervention means 'one, two, many' popular victories in the long run.

More concretely, since 1983 thousands of clergy and faith-based peace activists have gone to the Nicaraguan border to ward off Contra attacks by their 'witness' (and some are now accompanying defiant Salvadorans back to their bombed-out villages). Meanwhile, organizations formally 'in solidarity' realized that often the most real solidarity is successful anti-intervention work: reaching the public on its own terms, limiting aid as much as possible, buying time and space in small increments for the Central Americans. In the end, then, the internal logic of the war itself and the roots of opposition in growing personal engagement have tended to overcome differences, so that the movement against intervention has, since Reagan's re-election, coalesced around a sense of 'standing with the people in Central America'. In this sense it is a solidarity, and not just a peace or anti-war movement.[3]

A Brief History

If this solidarity movement has actual founders, a historical vanguard, they would be found among the thousands of US churchpeople who flooded Latin America from the early 1960s on. As an ecclesiastical accompaniment to the Alliance for Progress, akin to the Peace Corps in their reforming idealism, these missionaries from the Catholic orders and mainstream Protestant denominations met head-on the facts of US-sponsored repression and responded, starting in the 1950s, with what would come to be called Liberation Theology. Legitimized by the Medellin Conference in 1968, where the Latin American bishops endorsed a 'preferential option for the poor and oppressed', and thus implicitly organizing for political change, radicalized sectors of the Latin American Church started not only to reconcile Marxism with Christianity but also to 'missionize' their North American brothers and sisters. (Behind everything is the impact of the Cuban Revolution, which cannot be gainsaid. It stimulated US revival of interest in its hemisphere of influence; the exemplary effect on Latin Americans, including those in the church like the Colombian priest and revolutionary martyr Camilo Torres, has been longer lasting than the most pessimistic State Department planner could ever have imagined.)

As early as 1965, with Johnson's invasion of the Dominican Republic, a few of the expatriate North Americans began realizing that Latin America's problem was US hegemony. For many, this understanding eventually led them to return home, committed to turning their own religious institutions away from complicity in dominating the hemisphere. These interdenominational 'returnees', in regular contact with Latin and North American activists to the South, as well as the many others exposed to a new Latin America at places like Ivan Illich's training center CIDOC in Cuernavaca, Mexico, formed the first small, personal networks of inter-American concern and solidarity.

The organizational roots of the Central America movement thus stretch back tenuously to the late 1960s. The most important research center, the North American Congress on Latin America, was founded in 1966. In 1968 the oldest activist group, the Ecumenical Program for Inter-American Communication and Action (EPICA) was started by Philip Wheaton, an Episcopal missionary in the Dominican Republic from 1952 to 1964. By the late 1960s, the US Catholic Conference and the National

Council of Churches collaborated on high-level 'Inter-American Forums', bringing together Latin and North American academics and churchpeople, as well as more establishment figures, to discuss themes like 'Humanization and Modernization in the Two Americas'.[4]

The electoral victory of the Unidad Popular (UP) in Chile in 1970, and its destabilization by Nixon, were watersheds, coming at a time when the United States, socially convulsed, was inching its way out of Vietnam, and various *focoista* guerrilla movements throughout Latin America had failed. A 'peaceful road to socialism', strongly supported by Left Christians in Chile, inspired a small but coherent North American solidarity movement. By 1972 groups like EPICA, with active Chilean participation, were issuing organizing packets on the gains of the Allende government, and sending North Americans to Chile to observe first-hand and establish links. The First Latin American Encounter of 'Christians for Socialism' in Santiago on 23–30 April 1972, was a transforming event for several churchpeople who would later play crucial institutional roles in Central American solidarity.

After the coup, however, while organized solidarity with Chile quickly grew, antagonisms on the US Left similar to the balkanization of the Vietnam anti-war movement surfaced and persisted, as they did in so many movements in the 1970s. New Leftists who supported the Movimiento Izquierda Revolucionario (the MIR, which had remained outside and critical of the UP's 'popular frontism') were active in Non-Intervention in Chile (NICH), which at its peak, with several dozen chapters, was the largest Latin America grouping of the decade. Meanwhile, the more traditional Left, Communist Party milieu, which had strongly supported the UP, solidarized with the exile front, Chile Democratico. Today's functional unity within the Central American solidarity movement, without constant charges of 'revisionism' and 'ultra-Leftism' in the air, or multiple tendency-to-tendency solidarity groups in each city, seems rather mature by comparison.

Throughout the 1970s embryonic Latin America networks and local committees came and went, usually based in large urban areas on the East and West coasts. Their members were an eclectic mix of exiles (in particular, many experienced Chilean activists), a few North American Leftists, and church or human rights activists with personal ties to the country in question. The activities of these groups are all too familiar to those who have

worked in urban solidarity committees more recently: small, hasty pickets at consulates and airline offices to demand the release of political prisoners; an occasional larger action when a major target appears (a visiting generalissimo, president or minister, Milton Friedman, official artists and performers); educational events featuring exiled leaders; 'cultural nights'.[5]

At the national level, there were a few key developments worth noting. In 1974 the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) was established by some of the major churches to act as a lobbying arm in Congress for hemispheric non-intervention. At the same time, a conception of direct 'people-to-people' contact and solidarity was slowly forming. These two avenues superseded an earlier, naive hope among the church-based activist core of pastorally educating and influencing policymakers.

In the latter half of the 1970s, with Chile locked in Pinochet's grip, solidarity activists' efforts gradually shifted to other parts of Latin America and the Caribbean. In October 1975 a 'North American Anti-Imperialist Group' of forty people – mainly religious activists, progressive educators and members of independent local Latin America groups – visited Panama to express solidarity with the nationalist Torrijos government's struggle to reclaim sovereignty over the Canal Zone. This large delegation had grown out of combined efforts since 1973 by the Latin America Working Group of the National Council of Churches, EPICA and Panamanian representatives who had systematically toured the US. On the delegation's return, the US Committee for Panamanian Sovereignty was organized, and by January 1976 it was able to hold coordinated events in Washington, New York, and Boston.[6]

Also in 1975, the Puerto Rico Solidarity Committee (PRSC) formed after a rally at Madison Square Garden. The PRSC had a significant national presence for several years, with 20 chapters sending delegates to its second National Conference in March 1977, and close ties to important wings of the *Independencista* movement on the island. It also prefigured some of the maximalist tendencies to come in the Central America movement. At its 1977 conference the PRSC expanded its original political objective of supporting Puerto Rico's independence to include organizational goals of (1) focussing on US workers because 'the working class stands in the forefront of the struggle against imperialism'; (2) tying the independence struggle to the efforts of Third World peoples and women in the US, and (3) opposing domestic racism. This was in fact the moderate position against

a strong minority from the Prairie Fire Organizing Committee who, *in direct opposition to all the Puerto Rican nationalist organizations present*, called on the PRSC to center its work on championing the immediate 'armed struggle' for independence in the US.

The content of this debate presented in undiluted form the problem that would plague the more 'political' sectors of the Central America movements in a few years: the refusal to listen to the representatives of the people doing the struggling. This was coupled on occasion with instructions to those same representatives on appropriate strategies for their revolution and the dogmatic conception that the highest form of solidarity is monolithic public cheerleading; most important, in the absence of any coherent mass Left in this country, the constant pressure (from inside and out) to expand a successful solidarity group's work to more than its solidarity objectives – the Panglossian desire to 'piggyback' strategies and programs that might further build a Left in the US (as though the people 'there' could afford to wait for the creation of a general progressive movement in the US).[7]

For whatever reason, the PRSC did not sustain itself over the long term. In the Carter period, there was a 'Latin America solidarity movement' in only the most general sense – a Committee on US-Latin America Relations here, a North Americans for Human Rights in Argentina there; remaining NICH groups; the scattered veterans of the Venceremos Brigade who had cut Cuban sugarcane in 1972 as well as later delegations; most importantly an unnoticed seeding of churchpeople well-informed about daily disappearances and torture in Guatemala, Bolivia, Uruguay, El Salvador.[8] Throughout the mid and late 1970s, the main thrust of formal solidarity work in the US was with Southern Africa, but after the liberation of the Portuguese colonies in 1975–76 and Zimbabwe in 1979 this too wound down.

By 1978, however, there were numerous unconnected stirrings of solidarity with the Central American revolutions. At first, most of the activity came from exiles working in their own communities, assisted by literally a handful of North Americans around the country. As early as the fall of 1975 a Comite de Salvadorenos Progresistas formed in San Francisco in response to the massacre of National University students in San Salvador on 30 July 1975. They put out a newspaper, *El Pulgarcito* (*The Flea*), in both English and Spanish, and by April 1978 were

strong enough to occupy the local Salvadoran consulate to protest mounting disappearances at home. First within the Salvadoran community and then drawing in stray independent North American Leftists, the base was laid with the Bay Area as a center and generator for El Salvador work through the present.

At the same time, scattered concentrations of Nicaraguan exiles began mobilizing in 1977–78 as popular outrage coalesced against the Somoza regime in Nicaragua and the Frente Sandinista bloodied the dictator's Guardia in regular battles. Early in February 1978 the first coordinated protests on Nicaragua were mounted: consulate occupations in San Francisco and Los Angeles, and a mass march in the capital.[9] In particular, 'Los Muchachos de Washington DC' began regular protests with a closeknit core of North American activists from EPICA, WOLA and other groups. National coordination of Nicaragua solidarity work grew from this collaboration.

Even at this stage the larger number of Salvadorans active in the United States, the closer contacts they had with popular organizations in their country, and their higher degree of self-organization than in the Nicaraguan exile community, all manifested themselves. These differences, most obvious in the organizing and political development among the base of sympathetic North Americans, have deeply conditioned the different histories of solidarity work for the two countries. That the FSLN liberated Nicaragua at the beginning of this process and pursued détente with the US when it could, while the Salvadorans salvaged and hung onto 'dual power' amid a civil war of unremitting savagery, directly opposing the US since 1980, is obviously the larger difference: after 19 July 1979 most progressive Nicaraguans went home to rebuild their country.

On 29 September–1 October 1978, an international conferece to discuss support for Nicaragua was held in Panama. Six North Americans, contacted through EPICA, attended, including returnee churchpeople and activists from the National Lawyers' Guild. On their return they set about organizing the National Network in Solidarity with the Nicaraguan People (NNSNP). In February 1979 a national meeting was held in Washington, endorsed by several trade unions, religious denominations and orders (the Maryknolls and Capuchins), and a few liberal Congresspeople. As many as 200 activists attended from 27 national and local organizations (drawn heavily from the New York–Washington axis), and Yvonne Dilling of EPICA became temporary national coordinator.[10]

Within the frayed human-rights ethos of the Carter administration, NNSNP tried to prevent a last-ditch attempt to save Somoza. It lobbied the Administration and the International Monetary Fund to withhold final loans or aid to Somoza. It coordinated protests against the barbarism of the Guardia Nacional in Nicaragua's barrios (22–28 April was called as a National Week of Solidarity, with activities in at least eleven cities).[11] North Americans had paid little attention to the obscure countries between Mexico and the Canal since Jacobo Arbenz was overthrown in Guatemala in 1954. Now the casual televised execution of ABC cameraman Bill Stewart by the Guardia in June 1979 initiated a new era, kindling real outrage for the NNSNP's burgeoning committees to tap.

By the time of the Sandinista triumph, the NNSNP had grown to perhaps 20 member committees, an impressive figure by standards of the 1970s. That May it had also acquired as fulltime national coordinator David Funkhauser, an Episcopal minister who had been a Peace Corps volunteer in Colombia in 1967–69. On 22 July three days after the FSLN entered Managua, several thousand people gathered near the Lincoln Memorial to celebrate Nicaragua's freedom. It was a fleetingly hopeful, halcyon moment. The Carter administration was belatedly establishing relations with the FSLN and even offering aid to the Junta of National Reconstruction; an accommodation appeared possible and no one feared US military action in the foreseeable future. The aides to liberal Representatives and the church activists who knew firsthand so much suffering in Latin America lauded a new day. Congressman Tom Harkin of Iowa told the crowd 'Yo soy Sandinista!'. A few days later the 'muchachos' and the North Americans liberated Somoza's embassy: a small, heady triumph of their own.

In this optimistic atmosphere the NNSNP continued as a friendship association between the two countries; its activists cannot be faulted for assuming that the worst was past. Another conference was held in Detroit in November 1979, this time attended by several top representatives of the Frente, and a regional structure was organized (which was a non-starter, abandoned at the third and last NNSNP National Assembly in December 1983). The network's major public projects were supporting Nicaragua's literacy crusade in the winter of 1979–80 by producing 50 000 cloth badges for the voluntary *brigadistas*, and a fifteen-city speaking tour of Frente representatives in late March and early February 1980.[12] In that year its membership levelled off at 40 or 50 groups, and in the summer of 1981 an

official relationship was initiated with Nicaragua's own solidarity committee.

During these early days, while Nicaragua was trying to maintain decent relations with, and secure aid from, the US government, communication between the NNSNP and Nicaragua was very irregular. One participant remembers receiving a list of monthly material aid projects, far beyond the NNSNP's capacity, and how the network in turn set unrealizable goals which were promptly forgotten. Apparently, there was scant awareness of what the network could or could not do, or of how important a solidarity formation with clear appreciation of Nicaragua's needs might be in the future. No one in either country, understandably, anticipated the obsessive virulence with which the Reaganites would turn on Nicaragua, or the need for a cohesive solidarity movement which could counter the 'Soviet-Cuban threat' imagery of Alexander Haig and all who followed him.

During 1980, the attention of the media, the organized Left, the liberals, and a whole new generation of activists was sharply drawn away, towards the spectacular carnage in El Salvador. The NNSNP marked time, lagged and noticeably lost visibility, in terms of drawing in new committees or explaining effectively why Nicaragua work was still important. As for sheer size – staffpeople, money, regional offices or any infrastructure between local and national levels – the NNSNP remained underdeveloped. It continued into the 1980s as a loosely-connected 1970s-style network involving church and peace activists and traditional Left sectors like the US Peace Council, dominated by active committees in a few major cities on the coasts, especially Boston, New York, San Francisco and Seattle. Its limited national resources were used to facilitate support for Nicaragua among individuals with solid institutional bases, through delegations and meetings (leading church and community activists, even businesspeople), rather than organizing a separate, grassroots apparatus for Nicaragua solidarity campaigns. However important the former work might have been (then disparaged as an 'elite strategy'), when the activist base sprang up of its own accord, the NNSNP was in no position to lead it.

The Emergence of CISPES

In dealing with the period since 1980s, when the US intervende in earnest it is useful to demarcate the solidarity movement's trajectory into three periods: roughly 1980–82, 1983–84, and

1985 to the present.

In the first period, 1980 through early 1982, the movement formally 'regionalized' as national networks for El Salvador and Guatemala developed in the wake of the NNSNP. An actual national (though hardly 'mass') movement, not limited to the coasts and the largest cities, sprung up in these years, but it concentrated almost completely on El Salvador. Explosive growth took place on two fronts. Most obviously, there was the surge to power on the Left by the US Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES), sparked both by the imagery of a tidal White Terror (campesino families drifting facedown in the river after the massacre at the Rio Sumpul, headless teenage militants stacked in the trucks of the Treasury Police) and by the FMLN's ability to instill revolutionary hope, not only in the ravines of Chalatenango and Morazan, but far to the north. Just as significant, though less evident than the dozens of new CISPES chapters, was the rise of activist groups in the churches, galvanized by the murders of Archbishop Oscar Romero and later the four North American churchwomen in 1980. Faced with international publicity about the unrestrained brutality of the war itself and the growth of these forces at home, the new Administration was unable to make significant headway in building a consensus for intervention.[13]

More than anywhere else, El Salvador work originated in San Francisco. By January 1980, the largest group, the Bloque de Solidaridad–'Farabundo Martí', had a core of a hundred militants, including a few key North Americans (who formed the US Friends of the BPR, which became the US Friends of the Salvadoran Revolution a few months later, and finally San Francisco CISPES), and a base of several thousand sympathizers in the exile and Left communities to be mobilized for demonstrations. From 1979 on, groups began springing up elsewhere, like the Frente de Solidaridad Popular Salvadoreno in Los Angeles and the Comite de Apoyo a la Lucha Popular Salvadorena–'Farabundo Marti' in New York, involving Salvadorans, other Latinos, and North Americans.

The strongest among these early committees, in particular those on the West Coast, expressed their solidarity with the Bloque Popular Revolucionario (the BPR, more commonly just 'the Bloque'), largest of the Salvadoran 'popular organizations' linking labor and peasant unions, high school and university students, slumdwellers, women's and cooperative groups, and which supported the Fuerzas Popular de Liberacion–'Farabundo Marti' (FPL), oldest of the guerrilla organizations.

After January 1980 and the resignation of the First Junta created in the 'reform' coup of October 1979 (which included the Communist Party, the Left wing of the Christian Democrats and the National Revolutionary Movement, all of whom then helped form the FDR and FMLN), El Salvador entered a convulsive revolutionary crisis. The multiple popular and political-military organizations at last moved towards unity and, it seemed then, the seizure of power. The response of the Carter Administration, as it provided 'non-lethal' aid and tried to shore up the successive new juntas, was critical. Salvadoran solidarity activists here, well-positioned from their strong participation in the Nicaragua work, reached out quickly across the country. At first they toured speakers and coordinated extensive film distribution: the very timely *Revolution or Death*, with its martial, deeply stirring vanguardism, exemplified the young revolution for the even younger movement marshalling itself to the north just before the Reagan era. They hoped to stimulate a national movement of solidarity, not yet planning a single organized network (by that spring there were groups in at least seven cities, in some cases more than one).[14]

The Washington-based national groups (EPICA, WOLA, the National Council of Churches) turned strongly towards El Salvador after Archbishop Romero's appeal to Carter, in February 1980, not to send military aid to the junta was followed by his murder the next month. In July a few key activists met with the newly-formed Democratic Revolutionary Front in Mexico and agreed to help initiate a national solidarity effort. After consultations between activists on both coasts, two regional conferences were organized in October, the first in Los Angeles, followed a week later by one in Washington – partly to avoid resentment over the perception of 'East Coast domination' of the NNSNP. These funding conferences of CISPES involved perhaps 700 people, many religious, many unaffiliated Left, many completely new, from dozens of committees and many states. They were quite unprecedented for Latin American solidarity, and they set a new direction. The major issue was not political; without great division points of unity were adopted, whose white-hot rhetoric would cause considerable embarrassment today.[15] Instead the debate centred on whether CISPES should, following the model of past networks, function as a coalition of local and national groups, or pursue a more distinct identity of its own, rooted in a structure of local CISPES committees. The established progressive and Latin America

groups expected the looser coalitional structure by which they would stay very much 'in CISPES' to carry the day. Unexpectedly the newer conception won, promoted by the strong centers of El Salvador solidarity on the West Coast, emphasizing the primacy of grassroots organizing and a more 'organizational' character for the network as a whole. Heidi Tarver, an indefatigable Los Angeles organizer with close personal ties to El Salvador, was elected national coordinator and moved to Washington to set up an office. From the beginning, CISPES was breaking ground with its determined if inexperienced 'cadre' style, asserting both itself and a far more ambitious expectation of mass solidarity work.

Over the next year and a half CISPES experienced hectic growth. Chapter applications came in from rural college towns, small cities and the country's interior; regional centers were created, not just in Los Angeles, New York, Boston and San Francisco, but also in Austin, Miami and Detroit. Pronunciamentos, urgent appeals, fierce bulletins on the war and a monthly newspaper, the *El Salvador Alert!*, poured out of the national office (though far less in the way of professional quality leaflets or organizing guides). At every level, it was a period of continual militant action and high expectation. The major benchmarks were mobilizations, from the May 1981 demonstration in Washington, which brought out as many as 100 000 people, to 27 March 1982 when 60 000 marched, but there was a multitude of now-forgotten regional and local actions: East Coast caravans to Fort Bragg to denounce the training of Salvadoran officers; commemorations of the founding of the FDR; pickets of Administration spokespeople (if not driving them from the stage).

Many people remember that period ruefully, as one of 'triumphalism', the unquestioned conviction that Washington was incapable of framing an effective counter-insurgency strategy; and that sooner rather than later 'EL PUEBLO VENCERA!' (It should be remembered that there was far more space then for suggesting that the FMLN/FDR *should* win, given that the alternative appeared to be those, like Roberto D'Aubuisson, whom Carter's ambassador to El Salvador had labeled 'pathological killers'.) That the Salvadorans themselves maintained a stance of invincibility was understandable; it was central to their ability to stand up to the colossus.

In retrospect it is quite natural, if less useful, that CISPES activists in contact with the swelling ranks of political refugees fresh

from the charnel-house of San Salvador would emulate their convictions, their style, their presumed toughness. In these years CISPES activists acquired a reputation as insistent red-flag-waving partisans of the FMLN (sometimes accurate, and too long a habit). What was less understood is how personally committed and bound to the Salvadoran revolution some dozens of these activists became, and how their tenacity would enable them, despite an often appaling amateurism, to consolidate CISPES as the largest, most effective single Central America group in the US.

The mushrooming of CISPES, of this unseemly new player in national progressive politics, was met with considerable distrust, if not resentment, on the part of established peace and Latin America groups and fund-raisers, which helps explain the public division in those years between 'solidarity' and 'anti-intervention' forces. The latter focussed on the nuts-and-bolts of limiting military aid to El Salvador, far less confrontational politics than much of CISPES's base would tolerate.[16] The older groups, in Washington under the aegis of the legislatively-oriented Coalition for a New Foreign and Military Policy (a legacy of post-Indochina hopes for non-interventionism in the 1970s), were also suspicious of the close connections between Salvadorans from the BPR and much of the CISPES leadership. For the latter, political and personal ties to the people you are 'in solidarity with' were nothing to be ashamed of. Among the Salvadorans one tendency had emphasized North American solidarity early and often, and therefore had the strongest relations with the North Americans. This contributed to tensions with Salvadorans aligned with the other organizations of the FMLN/FDR (usually organized into two or more Casa or Comites El Salvador in a major city) – what was always called the 'unity' question – but CISPES simply shrugged off its uneven relation to these groups.

CISPES was not the only source of opposition to US policy in El Salvador. From late 1980 there was also a dramatic grass-roots expansion of work among faith-based activists. The seeding of the 1970s bore fruit in the shock and grief following the murder of Romero and the four North American churchwomen in 1980, and outrage at all levels of the churches followed the suggestion by Haig and Jeane Kirkpatrick that Ita Ford, Maura Clarke, Dorothy Kazel and Jean Donovan had 'run a roadblock' and thus earned their fate. With clear internal backing, members of many denominations, orders and dioceses began sustained

agitation against the atrocities of the Salvadoran security forces.

Again San Francisco was the organizing center: a priest of the archdiocese, Father Cuchulain Moriarty, had built a network of progressive church support for Chile. In 1980 he and others began to aid the first wave of Salvadoran refugees through the office of Catholic Social Services while the Archdiocese's Commission for Social Justice focussed on human rights work. With the first phone link in the country for receiving regular, detailed reports on each week's death squad killings and disappearances, the Commission initiated a newsletter eventually reaching 350 church contacts up and down the West Coast.

Though religious people had directly participated in the founding of all three solidarity networks (for the Guatemala network, see below), and in the early activities of local solidarity committees, most faith activists during 1981–82 concentrated on building active resistance and awareness within their own sector. This division of the movement did not have the bitter character of a political schism, nor did it involve a rejection of the 'Leftism' of CISPES and others (though an old-fashioned anti-clericalism still impedes some solidarity activists' ability to work with a Reverend or a Sister). It was rather an accurate assessment that as the movement's secular wing moved forward on its own power, the most important task was to mobilize America's churches and laity, the one national constituency whose moral basis for opposing intervention could disarm anti-Communism and deflect the red-baiters.

Becasue the faith movement is much more rooted in institutions and also more personal (as in the informal network of ex-missionaries) than the solidarity groups, it is considerably harder to trace its history. Structured national networks, each with its own linear path, do not exist. Evidently in those years the number of local and statewide faith-based organizations increased dramatically; groups ranged from the Carolina Interfaith Task Force on Central America (CITCA) to the Michigan Interfaith Committee on Central American Human Rights (MICAH), or the Jean Donovan Memorial Committee in rural Connecticut. Their national counterparts were the Catholic, Washington-based Religious Task Force on El Salvador and the Protestant, New York-based Inter-Religious Task Force on Central America, which provided resources to several hundred local groups and contacts as well as initiating and planning what became the major annual events for religious activists (respectively, the commemoration of the four churchwomen each

December and Central America Week in late March, focussed on the anniversary of Oscar Romero's murder). The latter's very identities as 'task forces', even at the national level, indicates the decentralized, albeit closeknit, 'movement' quality of the religious wing of the Central America movement.

The history of this period is neatly summed up in the very first Central America week in 1982. For CISPES the 27 March national demonstration in Washington, timed to offset the 28 March Constituent Assembly elections in El Salvador, was a low point. No large new numbers of activists were in evidence, indeed the crowd had dwindled since May of 1981, and the day was, from all accounts, a chaotic and dispiriting one, as an endless list of speakers droned on about issues and causes far removed from Central America. The precipitate withdrawal of some mainstream peace groups from the march just a few weeks before heightened a sense that CISPES was more responsive to the concerns of its most self-consciously Left members and allies than to the larger realities of intervention. On the West Coast, however, CISPES northwest office collaborated in a sensational regional action on the same day, 'blockading' Port Chicago, the naval facility from which weapons are shipped to El Salvador.

That same week, on 24 March, two years to the day since the assassination of Archbishop Romero, the faith movement took a historic step. Five churches in Tucson, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Washington and Long Island jointly declared themselves sanctuaries for Salvadoran refugees. Their decision was based upon the experiences of the border ministry of Southside Presbyterian Church in Tucson, helping desperate families crossing the desert, and the California churches involvement in a campaign to stop the Salvadoran airline TACA's 'death flights' of deported refugees. Sanctuary came at a crucial time, when religious activists were searching for a way that churches could engage the war as part of their pastoral work, and that opposition to intervention could be grounded in broader constituencies. Sanctuary's emergence, seemingly out of nowhere, as the bold initiative of a few ministers and their congregations, suggested the hidden depths of the general antipathy to intervention, and the ways it would bedevil the government.

The big event of March 1982 was of course the Salvadoran election. To the surprise of most activists, the US print and electronic media unanimously applauded the picture show of a fledgling democracy under fire from guerrillas. It was naively assumed that since American journalists had avidly detailed the

Hobbesian brutishness of the Salvadoran Right they would as eagerly expose the cynical fraud of a demonstration-election. Even more unhappy was the off-repeated assurance that the effect of the election in the United States did not really matter, that the Salvadoran revolution was so irreversible that no massaging of centrist and Congressional anxieties could slow it down. (This latter line of 'ultra-solidarity' so dismaying to the Central Americans who must pay heavily for successes as well as defeats effectively releases North Americans from any sense of their own responsibilities.) After 28 March, though the FMLN's military advance on the ground and its consolidation of new zones of popular control had not been contained, the Reagan administration succeeded in constructing a case for expanded bipartisan support to Salvadoran 'democracy', and the solidarity movement had no effective response, no plan to unmask the elections before or after. What followed was the 'Great Slump', as a CISPES leader then called it, that lasted into early 1983.

The El Salvador movement's inability to anticipate the shifts or subtleties of US policy – that is to say, its incapacity for strategic intervention in the public discourse – was also a problem for the Guatemala and Nicaragua networks in the early 1980s. Without political struggles *on the homefront* to focus public concern (which in this decade have almost always taken place in Congress), or any strategy to build an organized base of concern, they labored in obscurity.

The Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala (NISGUA) predated CISPES. In August 1980, thirty North American and exile activists representing about ten Guatemala-oriented committees were brought together by Washington's Association in Solidarity with Guatemala. The purpose of the conference was to search for a response to the Lucas Garcia regime's state terror, a repression as vicious if less messily flamboyant as that of the Salvadoran *escuadrons*.

From the first, NISGUA activists operated under severe disadvantages: since the falling-out between President Carter and the Guatemalan officer corps in 1977, the United States has officially played a very minor role in Guatemalan affairs; 'stopping US intervention' is a less evident issue than it should be, even to the Left. Further, as the struggle in Guatemala has been waged longer than anywhere else in the hemisphere, the Guatemalan army has been countering insurgency for a generation: they had Green Beret trainers fifteen years before their much-derided Salvadoran counterparts.

Not surprisingly, NISGUA has functioned in the manner of the smaller, more intimate Latin America groups before 1980. Guatemalans and North Americans have always worked together in the dozen or so Guatemala-specific committees (since the founding of CISPES, the Salvadorans have carefully stayed external to the 'North American solidarity movement'), and its longterm support comes from academics and churchpeople with an abiding personal interest in Guatemala. In its earliest years NISGUA coordinated support and information on Guatemala for local Central America groups quite successfully: 300 people attended a national 'teach-in' co-sponsored with the Guatemala Scholars' Network in November 1981. By late 1982 the literally genocidal slaughter of the highland Indian peoples following Rios Montt's coup in March of that year (intended to eliminate the base of the growing guerrilla movement which had come together in the URNG that February) at last excited greater concern in the United States. NISGUA organized the longest speakers' tour in the history of the solidarity movement, sending Guatemalan representatives like Rigoberta Menchú (about whom the film *When the Mountain Trembles* would be made) to 100 cities over six months.

Many nominally 'Central America' committees then incorporated Guatemala into their work, but the network was not able to build a comprehensive national structure or full-scale campaigns to project Guatemala into the larger reaches of the movement. NISGUA's dozen or so 'zones' do not incorporate much of the United States, nor even all the areas where Guatemala solidarity work is strong (for instance, Nebraska and Kansas where the other networks actually have little influence). Outside NISGUA'S national office, which has performed many of its support functions with notable efficiency compared with the other networks, there are no fulltime Guatemala activists. Finally, given that for years NISGUA, like the NNSNP, had no thematic and time-specific national program, other than blocking the small aid requests to the various juntas, much of the Central America movement at the base has done Guatemala work only occasionally or never.

Meanwhile over 1981 and 1982 the NNSNP slowly foundered, not simply because the administration was dealing with its most immediate crisis, 'drawing the line' in El Salvador, but not yet fully gearing up its Contra war machine. With the reorientation of so many existing groups towards El Salvador and CISPES, the NNSNP was thrown back on its human resources, which were not sufficient. After David Funkhauser left, a murky and

acrimonious factional situation developed involving the two new national co-coordinators and the network's Coordinating Committee, on which a few major committees permanently hold seats.

Many problems of the network's leadership in this period, and since, derived from the persistent hostility, dating back many years, of Old Left elements centered in Seattle towards those in their own and other networks they considered 'ultra' or 'New' Leftist. Amid the abrupt firing of one co-coordinator by the other, a sudden move from offices shared with NISGUA and CISPES in Washington, and other staff crises in late 1982 and early 1983, the NNSNP's core membership shrank to a handful of groups. Although holding the official 'franchise' for Nicaragua solidarity work in the United States, NNSNP has exerted only negligible influence over the larger movement. Though it later regained membership and respect under a new national coordinator and staff, the dispersed and particularistic growth of Nicaragua work in the hiatus (in one sense, a strength) limited the space for any political leadership over so much new activism (in another, a grave weakness).

Growth at the Grassroots

The period leading up to Reagan's triumphal re-election saw an extension of Central America organizing in several new directions. In particular, the radical effectiveness of the religious sector was evident in all the important and popular campaigns of those years. Much of the work turned towards Nicaragua; often at a distance from, and with little relation to, the established national centers. Task-defined and sector-specific projects abounded; again, often Nicaragua-oriented.[17]

As the Freeze bandwagon slowed, increasing numbers of the traditional local peace activists – often motivated by faith, with solid community bases but less of a 'solidarity consciousness' – began taking up Central America work. In some places, the movement shed its Left coloration; in many others Central America work began where there had been nothing like it for a generation. Though the administration was achieving measurable success in those years, especially in the mobilization of broad public support for crushing Grenada and the consolidation of a Congressional consensus for massive aid to El Salvador in Spring 1984, self-generated local knots of opposition to the policy of intervention multiplied.[18]

Among the host of new efforts in 1983–84 a few deserve particular attention because of their effect on the movement

itself and on US policy, as well as for their exemplary quality. Witness for Peace (WFP) grew out of the decision by a delegation from North Carolina's CITCA touring Nicaragua in April 1983 to visit the border where the Contras' slash-and-burn raiding was intensifying, with little protest in the United States. From this experience came a commitment to 'witness', to place North Americans among the victims – the health workers, teachers, cooperative members and ordinary campesinos trying to reconstruct their country – with the goal of limiting the covert, dirty war in all possible ways while building support for Nicaragua's people one by one among devout American Christians. In July of that year 150 people from 30 states went to the border villages; by the end of 1986, 2400 had witnessed.

With a few years' hindsight, it is obvious that the waves of North American visitors, first to Nicaragua and more recently also to El Salvador, transformed and catalyzed the Central America movement as nothing else could. With WFP, the most important vehicle for bringing North Americans to Nicaragua has been work brigades, so powerfully evocative of the battered, hidden Left's best common memory of internationalism almost fifty years before. In the winter of 1983–84 the NNSNP organized the first brigade, sending 600 people to help pick Nicaragua's vital coffee harvest. A key organizer of this seminal project and next coordinator of NNSNP was Debra Reuben, a 'returnee' herself from the small group of people who worked in Nicaragua in the early 1980s. This original brigade was followed by many others, as tens of thousands of North Americans (and many Europeans) volunteered themselves at least symbolically to aid Nicargua's rebirth.[19]

Witness for Peace continued to be important in its own right, and it played a major role in forming the Pledge of Resistance (POR), the largest collective effort by the Central America movement to date, and one of the most effective in terms of hindering the war. The POR came out of the institutional religious community, and originally focussed exclusively on blocking an expected US invasion of Nicaragua.

In November 1983, thirty-three leading faith activists gathered at Kirkridge, a retreat center outside Philadelphia, to discuss the urgency of counteracting the administration's virulent insistence that Nicaragua was a cancer gnawing at the vitals of the Americas. The radical, evangelical Protestant Sojourners community in Washington, known for its magazine of the same name, helped initiate the meeting, and found itself coordinating the plan of non-violent pre-emptive action that ensued. The

'pledge' itself, to commit or support civil disobedience in case of an invasion, became public in the August 1984 issue of *Sojourners*, and initially pledgers were recruited within, and identified with, the religious community (by that time, there were 10000 signers from faith groups). On 17 January 1985 Pledge representatives Jim Wallis of Sojourners, Reverend Timothy McDonald of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and Jane Grunebaum of the Freeze Campaign went to the State Department to present the names of 42352 Pledgers to Craig Johnstone, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, who 'appeared sobered by news of the pledge of so many US citizens to resist their government', especially such large numbers of local and national religious leaders.[20]

WFP organizers and networks provided the Pledge with much of the infrastructure indispensable to any coordinated national campaign. (WFP was the only other Central America group besides CISPES with an effective national structure of regional offices in all parts of the country.) The small core of national organizers from Sojourners and the Inter-Religious Task Force, which agreed to house the Pledge national clearinghouse, contacted people they knew, in particular the WFP coordinators in various places who had been targetting potential 'witnesses' and were ideally located to mobilize for the Pledge within the many personal faith activist networks (eventually many American Friends Service Committee offices also played a coordinating role). From mid-1984 on, state and regional coordinators were signed up, and they quickly linked together the POR's spontaneous organizing in hundreds of Congressional Districts.

With its brushfire appeal and cooperative tone, the Pledge was genuinely ecumenical, muting if not effacing the accepted boundaries between solidarity and anti-intervention or peace groups and religious and non-religious orientations. Since it was never projected as a new, overarching organization for general purpose Central America work, but rather as a membership action plan, a network of commitment, the POR was supported across the board and across the country. Though in many places leadership came from local religious taskforces and the like, in others the Pledge-building was closely integrated with solidarity work (usually in areas where the demarcations between types of activists had not been exclusionary or unfriendly, for example, parts of New England and northern California).[21]

In October 1984 the Central America networks and peace

groups like the Freeze and Mobilization for Survival were brought into the Pledge's national structure, and the focus officially broadened to include any major escalation by Washington in Central America, including bombing, quarantines or naval shelling.[22]

Through 1983–84 the Sanctuary movement too was quietly proliferating via random self-organization, assisted only by word-of-mouth and the manuals and occasional newsletters of the Chicago Religious Task Force on Central America, which had taken on early responsibility as a national clearinghouse at the request of Sanctuary founders. The only organized national network, nameless and addressless, was the 'Underground Railroad' for conveying refugees to new Sanctuaries. Operating from border areas in the southwest and the upper midwest states, it became the government's main target in the various trials. It is important to underline that the impulse to declare Sanctuary usually was an individual faith response to the war from an ordinary local congregation. In retrospect, some activists now think that more systematic outreach, more actual organizing support and ongoing coordination, might have led to more Sanctuary sites, and a deeper understanding of the full implications of Sanctuary in the long run.

From a handful of declared Sanctuaries in January 1983, there were approximately two hundred by January 1985. For a long time, the government ostentatiously refrained from prosecution, biding its time, infiltrating and keeping watch on the key points on the border like Casa Romero in Brownsville, Texas, and the Tucson Ecumenical Council. Clearly it recognized how the terrible realities of Central American oppression, the subversive commitment to personal solidarity, and a growing willingness to defy the state's holiest embodiment, the law, were all infiltrating America's heartland, its churches, through the individual presence of Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees.

The irony is that large parts of the 'official' Central America movement missed the import of the Sanctuary movement, or were bemused by it. The avowedly non-political intentions of many original Sanctuary organizers, partly due to the heavy presence of Quakers in Tucson and elsewhere, contributed to this underestimate. So did the specificity of saving refugees 'here' when solidarity and anti-intervention activists were so deeply conscious of and directed towards 'there'. And for many of the newer activists from 1984 on, 'there' has been mainly the Nicaragua they had just visited, with El Salvador and Guatemala

largely ignored. There was also of course the clandestine and personal basis of trust required in actually creating a Sanctuary (transporting the refugee to the site while avoiding arrest), and the physically church-centered quality of particular Sanctuary itself, quite foreign to many secular solidarity activists. For a while it seemed, or was, a movement entirely of its own, and some Sanctuary partisans claimed this as an advantage and protection.

Inside CISPES, largely invisible to activists in local chapters, decisive struggles over strategy and the meaning of solidarity took place in these years. CISPES haltingly confronted what it meant to be a responsible national organization, as it edged further and further from 'network' status.

As it moved beyond general support functions and calls to action, questions came in rapid succession, questions evaded in the localist and consensual milieu of a network. How effective are you really? How to measure this? How do you actually (not wishfully) effect policy through mass action? How to build a structure which balances democratic decision-making and tactical flexibility, with real accountability of all levels to common agreements?[23] Always, of course: how to spend political capital and limited resources of money, time, and organizers? These questions were raised because in this period CISPES felt the first possibilities of transition from a 'name' network with a huge committee mailing list to that unknown animal, an actual mass organization.[24]

The premise underlying questions like these, and the solidarity networks themselves, was a particular understanding of what 'solidarity' meant among the most committed activists. It was a conception strongly advanced by all the Central Americans, especially the Salvadorans, who were from the beginning concerned that solidarity work should not become enmeshed in the political projects and the sectarian rivalries of the US Left. Instead solidarity was seen as directly committed to responding (in those years the unfortunate slogan was 'guaranteeing the needs') to the immediate conjunctures and long-term dynamics of a revolutionary process as defined by the organizations representing the people you support. The solidarity group itself was defined ultimately as another actor in the war, and the United States as another front, no more and no less – a conception which has the merit, among other things, of matching the hemisphere-wide planning and propaganda of the US government.[25]

With confusion, defensiveness and much stern rhetoric, CISPES leaders acknowledged the wide gap between this theory of solidarity and their actual practice. By the end of 1982 national CISPES had recovered from its post-27 March demoralization and financial crisis and begun to implement its first 'national campaign', with lengthy planning sessions at every level, setting of goals, monitoring reports, organizing manuals, check lists and the rest. This 'People-to-People Aid to Build the New El Salvador' campaign, which met its goals of raising $150 000 for health care within the 'zones of control' while publicizing their existence, was quickly followed over the summer and fall of 1983 by a canvassing drive, the 'National Neighborhood Protest', promoting massive visibility through window signs and local billboards. About one hundred committees participated to some extent in each campaign, but no quick gains for CISPES or the movement as a whole were registered: the 12 November national demonstration that year, while far better organized and unified than that of 27 March 1982, brought a bare 35 000 people to Washington just weeks after the invasion of Grenada, quite pathetic in comparison with the quarter million who had rallied in remembrance of Martin Luther King Jr the preceding 27 August.

CISPES's New York-based Mid-Atlantic Regional Collective, which had long seen itself as an alternative, far more sophisticated political leadership to an inadequate national office of West Coast activists, concluded by late 1983 that the solidarity movement had reached its limits of size and power. The conception of a vast potential for mass organizing, for pulling in the unorganized through grassroots tactics, at last realized through some systematic national program, was repudiated as naive and ineffective.[26] Coming from a region which included New York and many of the other largest urban centers, this was a serious critique. They asserted instead that solidarity work needed an organic link to the building of a mass domestic 'peace and justice' movement of the oppressed, because only such a movement could hope to alter US policy in Central America, presumably through challenging the fundamental inequalities of power in American society. It was also felt that *any* radical US organization like CISPES had an obligation to contribute to struggles in the US, whatever else it did. When the appeal of the Rainbow Coalition was joined to this argument, it acquired emotional force for many of the Leftists in CISPES, all too aware of their distance from the exploited, especially peoples of color, on their own doorstep.

Clearly, what the New Yorkers proposed rested on a different conception of solidarity, and ultimately a different CISPES. No longer would the guiding premise of work be the strategic requirements and the immediate necessities of the Salvadoran *guerra prolongada popular*, thousands of miles from the coalition meetings and personality politics of New York (or the living-room socials and shopping mall-oriented tactics of Kalamazoo, for that matter, as CISPES encompassed both of these). CISPES would have more than one purpose, and multiple solidarities had to be balanced against one another at any given time: from the beginning one suspected that the huge scale of the United States and the long-deferred dream of a new, multiracial Left would simply swamp the more mundane tasks of blocking another dozen gunships, funding a mobile clinic, or publicizing an air war in a distant country the size of Massachusetts.[27]

A National Coordinators' Conference of forty regional and subregional coordinators in January 1984 failed to resolve any of these questions. Suzanne Ross, who would become national relations coordinator after the conference, charged that national CISPES was abstaining from the larger Black-led progressive movement (in this case, the 27 August March on Washington), with the implication that this was inopportune, unprincipled and racist. Then and later, she urged CISPES to concentrate its forces on Jesse Jackson's presidential campaign as the way to inject the best possible position on Central America into the mainstream debate. At the same time Mike Davis, a key architect of the remarkable growth of Northwest CISPES, went to the national office to coordinate a new national leadership collective drawn from both New York and Washington. With these protagonists, the two sides quickly squared off.[28]

This precarious situation intensified over the next sixteen months, while nationally CISPES managed to develop an increasingly complex program (no longer one campaign but many, too many) and a potent direct-mail funding base. The National Administrative Committee of regional and national coordinators was soon split, with a majority frequently supporting the New York group against what was seen as the autocratic national office. Little of this debate and long-distance infighting was allowed to reach local committees, though *Alert!*, now revived and edited from New York by Bob Ostertag, projected the politics of building the 'broad, progressive movement', as well as reportage on El Salvador and Central America.

By 1985 CISPES as a whole was bigger and far more cohesive, but it was still in only the earliest stages of learning to apply

'direct solidarity' with immediate impact in El Salvador itself. In fact, the grassroots movement expanded of its own accord and this largely spontaneous germination, most signally that of the religious sector, was the major deterrent to escalation in this period.[29] Despite fractiousness in CISPES there was no disintegration of El Salvador solidarity work, no vacuum or 'open season', even while energy and grassroots activism shifted rapidly to Nicaragua and its more accessible revolutionary process.

1985 to the present has seen the movement's growing impact and effectiveness on many fronts, though the moment for fully coordinated mass action has not yet arrived.[30] Sanctuary has surfaced as the most genuinely 'mass' wing of the overall solidarity movement, as demonstrated by its expansion to almost 400 sites, and the attendance of 1300 activists at the Inter-American Sanctuary Symposium in Tucson in January 1985, immediately following the sweeping federal indictment of activists in the same city. In June the Pledge of Resistance issued its first all-out nationwide 'signal' timed to a Congressional vote on aid to the Contras, generating actions in at least 300 cities and two thousand arrests, despite obvious efforts to limit the numbers in some places.

Over that Memorial Day weekend, the first CISPES National Convention met in Washington. By a margin that reflected the New York tendency's lack of interest in hands-on organizing of CISPES, even in this instance, the 350 delegates overwhelmingly rejected proposals that CISPES chief priority become 'movement building' via work within multi-issue coalitions for peace and justice.[31] Angela Sanbrano, Southwest coordinator, and Michael Lent and Mary Ann Buckley, Northwest coordinators at different times, were easily elected as a National Executive Committee over a slate led by the *Alert!* editor. The Convention also voted to strengthen the 'central purpose' of CISPES as solidarity with the struggle in El Salvador, and to build it as part of forging a movement against intervention in Central America.[32]

As attention focussed overwhelmingly on defending Nicaragua, many of the newer committees as well as whole areas (such as the New England Central America Network affiliated to all three national networks) virtually dropped El Salvador, let alone Guatemala. But the obvious weaknesses of Nicaragua solidarity are that there have been neither identifiable organizing centers nor a clear strategic perspective to integrate this widespread activism. Nicaragua work is effective in its energy and

variety, but it is also inchoate, sometimes contradictory (as when the national groups have disagreed on which Democratic Party proposal to support on blocking or limiting Contra aid) and episodic, from vote to vote, or event to event.[33]

What is missing is some central leadership, from the National Nicaragua Network (the renamed NNSNP) or someone else, in the form of sustained campaigns of public education and action that would tell the truth about the Nicaraguan revolution. The aboveground non-intervention discourse now relies entirely on the Contras' practical and moral deficiencies as an alternative to the FSLN, which is a slim reed indeed: with liberals insisting that the Sandinistas are untrustworthy and tyrannical, the Contras edge towards lesser-evil status. At the same time the Nicaragua Network's Coordinating Committee has reiterated that Nicaragua is *the* primary US target and has rejected a regional perspective on intervention as a basis for common work with other groups.[34] This defensive attitude of freezing the movement's current emphasis on Nicaragua while refraining from any systematic national program that would concentrate Nicaragua work for the future as part of a comprehensive analysis, instead sticking to supporting 'what's out there', appears self-defeating.

More positively, since 1985 better practices of unity within and between the networks, organizations and sectors of the movement have emerged. Where there were mutual suspicions of hegemonism reinforced by distaste for what was seen as either pointlessly confrontational tactics or cozying up to liberals, there is now *campañerismo* and increasing joint work. No longer does one group only lobby and another only march.[35] In earlier years the CNFMP (now the Coalition for a New Foreign Policy, CNFP) assumed a proprietary stance over all Central America legislative work and often acted as if its main rival, CISPES, did not exist. Conversely the New York grouping in the latter stressed the consolidation of 'Left forces' to combat the collaborationism of 'centrists' like the CNFP who sought alliances with progressive Democrats.[36] Now the solidarity networks are within the Coalition, while the latter acted as convener of the Southern Africa/Central America march on 25 April 1987, itself a sign of increasing unity and breadth because it was called by dozens of national labor and religious leaders instead of the usual motley crew of peace and Left groups.[37]

The CNFP, CISPES, SANE (the largest US peace organization), and other organizations have worked together since

1986 on a series of projects. First came the emergency 'Campaign to Stop the Half-Billion Dollar Giveaway to El Salvador' that summer, targetting members of the Foreign Operations Subcommittee of the House, which narrowly failed after deploying several dozen field organizers and generating 15 000 'opiniongrams' from local constituents. In the fall of 1986, a conference 'In Search of Peace' took 176 North Americans to El Salvador to meet the National Union of Salvadoran Workers, the huge new unitary popular coalition. Potentially most important, in the spring of 1987 these three organizations, along with the Religious Task Force on Central America and NISGUA, sponsored the National Referendum to End the War in Central America, a campaign of 'street work' and legislative pressure inviting people to vote symbolically for or against intervention in the whole region.

There is now a sense of much greater cooperation and practicality in what seems a single movement with wide variations on common themes of resistance and people-to-people connection. Sanctuary has weathered the distrust of some of its founders towards what they considered the centralizing, 'political' inclinations of others. These included the Chicago Religious Task Force organizers, who said that giving Sanctuary to people fleeing oppression could not be simply 'refugee resettlement' but was at once humanitarian *and* political; that by its own logic it leads to understanding the causes of the war, and then to action. At the Tucson symposium a proposed National Sanctuary Coordinating Council was limited to a 'Communications Council' linking autonomous regions (a return to the purely networking conception, blocking any hierarchical decision-making process) in deference to those who felt an empowered leadership violated Sanctuary's ethic of direct, decentralized personal commitment.

The increasing numbers of refugees and their growing involvement in the internal processes of the Sanctuary movement have led ineluctably to deeper 'conscientization' among North Americans about the nature of the war. There is also simply the necessity for more and better organizing to confront the government's attacks (the National Sanctuary Defense Fund raised over two million dollars, surely not all from Sunday collections). Repression has moved many activists towards seeing Sanctuary as part of a worldwide process of resistance to intervention; one indication of this was an international Sanctuary conference in the Netherlands in August 1986. Some are now organizing *accompanimiento*, returning together with refugees to their

villages in El Salvador to face down the expellers, perhaps to suffer with them in the renewed bombing raids. At the Sanctuary Celebration bringing thousands to Washington in late September 1986, itself an experiment in coordinated national action, a small group was mandated to consider new strategies and structures for the movement.

Even Guatemala solidarity work, the poor relation of the larger movement, has made considerable gains in the past few years. In 1985 NISGUA undertook its first systematic campaign, joining an urgent international effort to protect several hundred union workers occupying the Coca-Cola plant in Guatemala City. Given the long and bloody history of repression suffered by this union, the eventual success in pressuring Coke headquarters in Atlanta was a very tangible victory. Since then NISGUA has emphasized human rights work, the Achilles heel of the Guatemalan Armed Forces return to 'normalcy', and especially the lone struggle of the Grupo de Apoyo Mutual, demanding to know the fate of thousands of family members, and justice for their killers. In late 1986 the network implemented a first 'organizing training project' in Los Angeles, building a longterm human and financial base for a fulltime zonal organizer through a concentrated human rights campaign (following CISPES, which by mid-1987 had placed almost two dozen of these 'OTPs' in targeted congressional districts).

Some Prospects

The history of the Central America solidarity movement has no ending. It is more than ever a spectrum of possibilities. The movement's strength is that it has persisted; it has hung on for eight long years, neither fragmenting nor receding as progressive fashions come and go (keep in mind that when the first network formed, the largest mobilizer for demonstrations was the movement against nuclear power).

It must be deeply frustrating to the Reaganites to watch its penetration into the communities and institutional sectors of American society, even into the professions, so that there are now separate small organizations of doctors, lawyers, professors, teachers, architects, computer technicians and even agronomists involved, as well as layers of church activism from obscure parishes to the top of the hierarchy. Reagan's supporters must know that while direct commitment of US forces in the region

would have caused mass protest in 1981 or 1984, that protest now would reach further and deeper. It would be no ad hoc affair, no replay of 1967 – they would have no breathing space at all.

There are perhaps some grounds for optimism then, along the lines of 'we have helped to hold them off for this long; a lame-duck Administration mired in scandal cannot pull off any major new escalations.' The larger reality is that Washington has committed itself more and more thoroughly to total victory in Central America, and this unseen momentum has its own weight of *realpolitik* with bankrupt liberals and a confused public. If the Central America movement is ever to confront interventionism fully and stave off another Vietnam (only the fools who think 'we' stopped that war can calmly predict US defeat, at the likely cost of another two million to rival Indochina's dead), or quickly cripple the war effort at home when the time comes, it must overcome several endemic weaknesses.

The first of these is an absurd degree of *localism*. There are considerable numbers of activists in all parts of the movement who believe that absolute local autonomy is the best guarantor of vitality and who resist any support to, membership in, or leadership from, the various national groups, believing that we each act best when we act on our own, and that national centers should provide only the necessary information on the war and perhaps cheap leaflets; whatever opposition there is is what opposition there can or will be: organizing drives or unified thematic campaigns only deaden initiative through inevitable 'hierarchies'. A much larger number reject this wilful and perversely imperial mentality, the worst of post-1960s consensual post-Leftism (easily manipulated by sectarian groups to attack national organizations), but are unwilling to apply basic organizational principles to their own work. Discipline and internal democracy in the movement have both been poorly served becasue, unwilling to commit the time required for the latter, there is little sense of the former. Even the Pledge of Resistance, the most willingly implemented national effort, has suffered a drastic fall-off in the accountability to its signals of local Pledge coordinators, groups and signers.

Just as bad, many movement leaders have accepted localism as a fact of life, and entrenched it by not offering concrete programs or hands-on organizing support. Where grassroots groups have never received any significant benefit from organizational membership, they become used to denigrating it. The

eagerness to attack leadership whenever possible is ultimately debilitating: not surprisingly, positions of responsibility often go begging. It is no accident that the most popular and effective programs, like New El Salvador Today's annual 'Work-A-Day for the People of El Salvador', are those a committee can select consumer-style, with no permanent commitment.

Localism's handmaiden is *tactical dogmatism* posing as strategic vision. Fashions in the movement come and go, and someone is always insisting that *only* mass mobilizations, or 'militant' civil disobedience, or the most polite and circumscribed institutional lobbying, or a fullblown anti-capitalist coalition, can arrest the war. In fact most local groups practice and acknowledge a reasonable form of eclecticism: tactics vary based on the needs of the moment, but the shrill annexation of debate by those with the most fixed viewpoints, or other agendas, prevents the rational discussion of strategic perspectives and differences.

These problems, and many others, are largely effects of our Janus-faced historical burden. The Central America solidarity movement is perpetually caught between the excesses of ultra-Leftism and the political timidities of a 'pragmatic' progressivism, the legacies of thirty years of Left defeat and anti-Communism. The former excess, as the preceding history indicates, has been the greater problem, largely because the movement's strength and hope derives from its relations with people in the midst of real revolutions (as Left as could be!). It is the inability to accept a daily, functioning solidarity that has angered and left behind many proud, earnest Left activists. At the same time, less evident but nagging deficiencies include the fear of many churchpeople that they will be branded as 'political'; the slowness of much of the peace community to perceive the full scope of intervention; the shying away from choosing sides in the war: and the blinkered focus on blocking Contra aid to the exclusion of everything else.

The unspoken promise of our movement is that we may overcome all of these limitations, with the Central Americans' help and their example. Already thousands of people, hardly consciously Left, understand in the most visceral way the role our country plays in the world, and why, and have committed themselves fully to the side of the victims. Others have dispensed with simply bandying the terminology of Marx and Lenin in kindergarten wars, as the newer Lefts have done for too long, and grope towards a praxis appropriate to mass organizing

within post-industrial capitalism. The sterile obsessions of the past are slowly falling away: the defeatist idealism, the insistence on our own exceptionality, the easy bait of anti-Sovietism. Perhaps, at last, we have just begun to fight.

Notes

1. Though documentary sources were used throughout this article, the most valuable information was derived from interviews with a range of activists and from my own observation. Those who generously gave their time include: Henry Atkins, Jean Walsh, Arnoldo Ramos, Arturo Sosa, Bob Armstrong, Marge Swedish, David Funkhauser, Tom Ambrogi, Dennis Marker, Gus Schultz, Bob Stix, Peggy Hutchinson, Phil Wheaton, Debbie Reuben, and, over the years, Mike Davis. Thanks are also due to Eileen Purcell and especially John McClure. The title is taken from a speech at the First National CISPES Convention, and was meant as a negative prescription – what ought not to be. My own views should be clear.

2. When Barry Sussman, who had been polling director for the *Washington Post* for ten years, was leaving that job in January 1987, he wrote in a final column of his 'few hard impressions of the American people'. '[the] polls ... year after year have shown that our largely ill-informed public holds dearly to set [sic] of unifying values, concerns and goals that constitute what I like to think of as a people's agenda. What Americans want as public policy are: no more Vietnams ... Almost everyone – whites, Blacks, the old, the young, the rich, the poor – shares those concerns.' *Washington Post*, National Weekly Edition, 19 January 1987, p. 37.

3. While the basis of popular anti-interventionism is the 'Vietnam syndrome', active opposition to 'another Vietnam' in Central America has its own, quite distinct history from that of the anti-war movement. Leading solidarity activists who played a major role in the 1960s are rare. Claiming authority on that basis is usually unwelcome because that movement is not seen as a model: it did not put down organizational roots, was deeply split and though its eventual mass penetration helped cripple the war, this took many years, during which hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Indochinese died. Usually only aging Yippies and SDSers, as well as Trotskyites for whom it was a Golden Age, celebrate the 'heritage of the 1960s', and only the least experienced students are impressed by this idealization.

4. From the program for 'The 1969 Inter-American Forum', 22–23 January, 1969, Columbia University, courtesy Phil Wheaton. That year the participants ranged from a vice-president of W.R. Grace and Company and the Assistant Secretary of State for Latin-American Affairs to radicals like James Petras and Sidney Lens.

5. For the religious activists, there were major national events, like the first 'Theology in the Americas' conference on Liberation Theology in Detroit in 1975, organized by the Latin America Bureau of the US Catholic Conference and the Latin America Department of the National Council of Churches. Such events, and publications like those of Orbis, the Maryknolls' press, indicate how church activists were ahead of academia, including the academic New Left, in revealing the new liberation processes; this needs stressing because of secular unwillingness to admit their pathfinding role, then and now.

6. EPICA report, 'US Anti-Imperialists Build Solidarity with Panamanians'; 'Rallies Back Panamanian Sovereignty', *Guardian*, 21 January 1976.

7. 'PRSC Debates Strategy at Conference', *Guardian*, 2 March 1977.

8. 'Seeding' is Phil Wheaton's image for the percolation of ex-missionaries in these years.

9. 'Protests in US Call for Somoza Exit', *Guardian*, 15 February 1978.

10. While one of the key organizers remembers perhaps 100 people, half of whom he knew well from work earlier in the decade, the *Guardian* report ('Nicaragua Solidarity Advances,' 14 March 1979) says 'more than 250 activists' attended. The reporter, Vicki Baldassano, also reported that, reflecting 'the various political and ideological approaches of conference participants, a discussion developed on the usefulness of lobbying ... the majority agreed that useful concessions could be gained by working with congressional members sympathetic to the cause of Nicaragua'. Reflecting the tentative and coalitional nature of networking at that time, 'proposals ... would be a guide to action rather than a strict binding agreement ... different organizations would have autonomy over how to carry out the work'.

11. See *Guardian*, 'Nicaragua Week Planned', 25 April 1979; 'NYC Action Demands: "Down with Somoza"', 2 May 1979; 'Nationwide Nicaragua Solidarity Week— "No More Loans to Somoza"', 9 May 1979. Actions took place in New York, Boston, Washington DC, Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Pittsburgh, San Diego, Camden (New Jersey) and San Francisco.

12. The Detroit conference voted a wholly unrealistic series of projects, including multiple priorities for material aid, a national effort to lobby Congress for aid to Nicaragua and a pressure campaign to cancel Nicaragua's debt, and finally a 'mass educational work' program on the Nicaraguan revolution and the effects of North American imperialism.

13. An excellent précis of the trouble the interventionists faced at home is found in 'Distrust and Dissent', *Newsweek*, 1 March 1982. Cataloguing a 'powerful sense of Vietnam *déjà vu*', the article covers the 'broad-based' opposition from the religious hierarchies to CISPES and stresses, with hefty poll readings, that 'the memory of Vietnam clearly is influencing public perceptions— and adding momentum to the anti-interventionist movement'.

14. The 7 May 1980 issue of the *Guardian* had a 'partial list of solidarity groups' at the end of one of Robert Armstrong's brilliant weekly reports on El Salvador, with one or more committees in New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, Washington DC, Boston, and Cincinnati. The first nationally coordinated demonstrations on El Salvador took place over two weeks in late January and early February of that year, beginning with marches supporting the newly united Salvadoran Left in San Francisco, Chicago, Washington and New York on 22 January.

15. The 'Resolution' from the East Coast Conference, held on 11 and 12 October, 'with participants from over 125 community and nationally based organizations', states that (adopting virtually word for word the resolution of the West Coast Conference) 'the Salvadorean [sic] people express their immediate and historic interests through the Democratic Revolutionary Front ... the Unified Revolutionary Directorate [about to become the FMLN] is the political-military vanguard of the Salvadorean people ... US imperialist intervention is an instrument in the genocide of the Salvadorean people ... the oligarchy and the military-Christian Democratic junta represent the anachronistic structures of political and economic power that have degenerated into an irreversible crisis'. After resolving to 'work in unity' with the FDR and the DRU, 'to repudiate firmly US imperialist intervention in El Salvador' and 'condemn the

genocidal war ... and recognize the just war of legitimate defense', the document ends with the slogans 'IN THE FACE OF IMPERIALIST INTERVENTION, INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY! UNITED IN COMBAT UNTIL THE FINAL VICTORY! LONG LIVE A FREE EL SALVADOR!'.

16. As should already be clear, I see a stubborn ultra-Leftism as one of the most persistent problems of the solidarity movement, and nothing is more emblematic of this than the anti-parliamentary stance, whether doctrinal or simply stylistic, which continues to surface. Alliances are always simmering between ossified sectarians, for whom the Democratic Party is a siren to be avoided at all costs, and those, young and old, conditioned by two decades of 'counter-cultural' alienation from the rigid norms of American political culture. Contragate has even been used by this sort to demonstrate that the endless debates and narrow votes in Congress really did not matter at all!

17. For a while, it seemed as if every delegation upon its return created another campaign for a clinic or school supplies to 'their' village or barrio, the well-meaning but ineffective side to entirely grassroots, dispersed solidarity work. In recent years the Nicaragua Network has put considerable political effort into centralizing and channeling material aid for Nicaragua through its ongoing 'Let Nicaragua Live' campaign and national-level coordination with other projects.

18. This reflected the characteristic 'lag' between national politics and local activism. People did not organize in immediate response to (or leave the work in immediate demoralization from) whatever administration successes or outrages took place in Washington. Out in the hinterlands especially, a boom time for spontaneous local organizing coincided with a period of great confusion, dismay and retreat at the national level of the movement.

19. I well remember a tumultuous teach-in on the Grenada invasion at Queens College, designed as a 'builder event' for the 12 November 1983 march on Washington, when a famous Latin Americanist scholar dramatically announced to great cheers that he would not be in Washington for the march but in Nicaragua with an 'international brigade'.

20. Vicki Kemper, 'We Will Do What We Promise – Resistance Pledge Delivered to State Department', *Sojourners*, February 1985.

21. More than any program before or since, the Pledge brought together for a while, and for limited goals, the disparate elements of the Central America movement: the various multi-issue 'peace and justice' groups affiliated with Clergy and Laity Concerned, SANE or Mobilization for Survival (as often, affiliated with no-one); the Central or Latin America Solidarity Committees (CASCs and LASCs, also COCAs, COLAs, CASAs, CAUSICAs, CISPLACs, CISCAs, and CISPESs) that get their information from, and sometimes belong to, one or more of the solidarity networks; the parish Social Justice taskforces and peace commissions; the Pax Christi, New Jewish Agenda and various denominational Peace Fellowship groups, and the Sanctuaries.

22. The POR may have widened its focus to all of Central America, but for the majority of signers it had been formed to prevent a seemingly imminent invasion of Nicaragua, and it has proved difficult to get them to demonstrate, let alone get arrested, on the whole regional war, beyond the immediate issues of Contra aid. The POR called one El Salvador-specific action, on 24 September 1985.

23. This last point of accountability has proved the stickiest one of all. Many CISPESistas, like North American activists of any stripe, are always ready to pronounce their alienation from 'hierarchy' of any sort, and to denounce

leaders for ignoring the will of the base. It is still very difficult to convince them that *if* they take part in decision-making (and within CISPES there have been meaningful democratic processes, and room for much more if anyone so desired – most elections go by default), there is an implied commitment to carrying out those decisions.

24. The clearest evidence for the leading role of CISPES and the threat it has offered to US policy, has been its targetting by the FBI. In early 1986, Frank Varelli, a disaffected Salvadoran informant, revealed the details of a massive 'terrorism investigation' carried out in twenty-seven cities against CISPES. In a similar backhanded compliment, when Albert Shanker attempted a high-profile red-baiting attack on the April 1987 mobilization, the Mephistophelian red in the woodpile was CISPES. This was certainly an exaggeration of its role in organizing that march, but reflected real fears on the part of the Social Democrats USA who run the labor wing of the Cold War machine.

25. Though the word is hardly ever mentioned, a rigorous, longterm solidarity is old-fashioned 'internationalism' in a new, hemispheric garb. If the Central American revolutions have exported anything northward, it is the insistence that North American activists place themselves inside the long arc of struggles stretching from Simon Bolivar, October 1917 and now 19 July 1979 – not rhetorically, with unwarranted pride, but humbly, with action.

26. In the early years of CISPES, the Mid-Atlantic Region (New York down to Virginia) was second only to the Northwest in terms of organizational consolidation, as defined by number of chapters and subregional coordinators. In the latter region, a regional office became an organizing pivot to carry out CISPES' program systematically. In the Mid-Atlantic, neither the fundraising nor the support work with local committees was done to achieve this result. Just as importantly, New York was never consolidated as a political center for solidarity with El Salvador, as San Francisco had been with a neighborhood-based ballot initiative in 1982–83 and many other grassroots efforts before and since. In the East, the initial wave of mobilization which built CISPES was receding fast by 1983, as gerrybuilt structures decayed, and different options appealed to many (including, for instance, the formation of a 'unified' New England Central America Network out of what had been a CISPES region at the end of the year). The overall conditions for building any new mass organization are very different from one part of the country to another, of course, and it may be that the Northwest, retaining a considerable post-1960s legacy of progressive politics, was especially fertile, as against the Mid-Atlantic 'rustbelt' states, suffering from a decades-long decline of the New York-based Left.

27. A 'Proposed Amendment to CISPES National Goals Statement' from the Mid-Atlantic Regional Administrative Committee (the Regional Collective and the subregional coordinators) and the *Alert!* editor, who had been Regional Coordinator until reviving the newspaper from New York City, would have added the following to CISPES' basic solidarity position: 'To contribute in a positive way to the building of a movement for peace and justice in this country.' The 'Political Rationale' for this amendment, which was tabled at the 1984 Coordinators' Conference, stated that '...as North Americans, who live and work in the US, our work cannot be removed from the issues and concerns that affect the daily lives both of those we are trying to organize to a solidarity/anti-intervention position, and ourselves, who daily confront the complex realities of our country.' Some people found this sentiment compelling, and wanted CISPES to provide a vehicle for their feelings about poverty, racism and

alienation of people right here. Others believed (this was the pragmatic side of the argument) that by taking up others' struggles, formally at least, they could br brought to Central America work. This implied a very top-down way of reaching sectors, in particular Black people, who were not visible in the solidarity movement, through existing organizations and formal coalitions. It also assumed that the actual threat of 'another Vietnam' was not likely to be an issue to Black or working-class Americans of any color, which was contradicted by hands-on organizing where this was done.

28. Throughout much of 1984, the internal battles of CISPES focussed on the Central America Peace Campaign, and CISPES's relation to it. The CAPC originated in the dissatisfaction many funders felt with the solidarity movement, and CISPES in particular. The legislative battles in Congress were swinging in the administration's favor, and clearly no existing formation was going to do much to redress the balance. The CAPC was set up to do targeted congressional organizing, with a practical 'peace and non-intervention' line, intended to bring the resources and professionalism of the community organizing movement to Central America work (its first director, Karen Thomas, was hired directly from Citizen Action). But to avoid divisiveness, the CAPC was also a coalition of the national peace, religious and solidarity groups. The 'national office' group in CISPES felt that the CAPC was an important vehicle, from which the network could not afford to be marginalized. The 'New York folks', who considered themselves the Jackson partisans inside CISPES, saw the CAPC as a dangerous stalking horse for mainstream liberal Democrats. This division came to a head at the Democratic Convention in San Francisco, where two national CISPES leaders, Ross and Tarver, in effect worked different sides of the street (Ross was one of the official seconders of Jackson's nomination). Outside the top level of CISPES and other national organizations, these issues were unknown and irrelevant.

29. By the end of 1984, there were probably at least a thousand local groups doing Central America work, and that number has surely increased in the years since.

30. It is the dream of uniting around a single effort that both excites and frustrates so many. By early 1987 there was a growing sense that the time had come (*The Guardian*, the closest thing to a general activists' voice, called for 'coordinated mass antiwar actions' in the weeks before 25 April). Total mobilization with its own self-generation at the grassroots is of course the best memory of the Indochina struggle. Yet even when a significant coalition develops nationally, as in 25 April or in the National Referendum to End the War in Central America, the response at the local level is still guarded. In the long run, it may be a good thing that the base of peace and solidarity activists has husbanded its energies, spreading them among many projects, nurturing organization. This accumulation of forces is surely worrisome to the interventionists, and there has not been any single campaign or march that by itself offered a reasonable chance of stopping the war.

31. The proposals from New York also called for an emphasis on 'militant action', and leaving congressional work on El Salvador to other groups. Other than an idea of driving a large vehicle filled with medical supplies directly through Central America to the zones of control in El Salvador, they hardly mentioned direct support. The winning program was for a revitalized 'Campaign to Stop the Bombing in El Salvador', extensive congressional work and detailed human rights and material aid drives. A paper by Sanbrano forcefully attacked the shibboleth that multi-issue organizing is inherently superior. She pointed

out that in the absence of a large Left organization or party, powerful single-issue groups historically had contributed most to building a movement in this country, whether the United Farm Workers in the 1960s or the Free South Africa Movement today.

32. Initial proposals to initiate a merger with the other networks reflected frustration among many committees over the perpetuation of distinct country-specific networks, each with its own analysis of the war and urgent demands, each relating to the same mass of unitary committees. Most delegates recognized, when confronted, that the Central American revolutions were, as the analogy was at the time, 'running on parallel but different tracks, at different speeds', and required their own structures of solidarity in the US.

33. The most recent phenomenon of this mainly decentralized activism on Nicaragua is the plethora of sister-city and friendship-city initiatives, many officially endorsed by city councils. There were at least sixty such relationships at the beginning of 1987, with more on the way. Apparently this is the work of the newest generation of solidarity workers, the older peace people who have come on board since the waves of *brigadistas* in 1984–85. The sister-cities have resulted in much targeted material aid (as in providing the specific machinery needed for local development projects) and real relationships between municipal officials dealing with Contra attacks and communities in the US, which could be a potent force if and when the Marines go in. Under much more difficult terms, 'sister' relations have begun with El Salvador, so that by mid-1987 at least five cities (including Baltimore) had officially adopted *repoblacions*, the villages refugees return to in defiance of the government. In addition, perhaps twenty campuses had sister-campaigns of official ties with the National University of El Salvador, as ever a key site of opposition. Although probably a third or more of local committees are campus-based, most of the movement has turned a blind eye to the possibilities of student solidarity – only CISPES has had national student organizers.

34. This was their official position at the first joint meeting of the full leadership bodies of the three networks in early December 1986.

35. A snide piece by John Judis in *In These Times* in 1983, one of the first serious assessments of the solidarity and anti-intervention movement, cited CISPES and the Coalition for a New Foreign and Military Policy as the key players, and opposite poles: the pragmatic lobbyists in clean offices versus the ragtag New Lefties with revolutionary posters everywhere.

36. It was not until mid-1987 that the danger of actual collaboration and sell-out arose, when the Democrats – mainstream and liberals both – united around a revived 'containment' policy. This meant they would oppose Contra aid and overthrow of the sovereign government in Nicaragua, in exchange for consensus around stepped-up aid to all the other governments in the region, the so-called 'fledgling democracies'. This posed a brand of non-intervention devoid of solidarity, a phony and self-defeating pragmatism that, accepting the anti-Communist premises of the liberals, played the game only on their terrain. Unfortunately, one of the most powerful new players on the organizing front, Neighbor-to-Neighbor, dedicated to targetted congressional pressure campaigns, appeared in mid-1987 to accept this rationale. N2N came out of the ex-United Farm Workers milieu, a network of highly skilled organizers. Some of these, under the rubric of the California Institute for Effective Action, had been CISPES' main campaign consultants, especially for the latter's targeted Organizing Projects. At the time of the 25 April march, N2N was advertising for 20 field organizers at $1300 a month, a considerably higher salary than any other

Central America group. This unprecedented capacity, combined with its reputation for sometimes steamrollering local or state groups, led to concern about N2N's willingness to narrow the war in Central America down to voting for or against Contra Aid.

37. Obviously, the entire area of labor solidarity is a lacuna in this history; at least partially because it has developed on its own, careful to avoid the official solidarity movement with its recognition of various 'Communist' liberation forces. (This is especially true of the National Labor Committee for Democracy and Human Rights in El Salvador, whose members include the heads of many of the largest AFL-CIO unions; local labor committees have had more leeway.) The breaking of the Cold War hegemony in the American trade-union movement over the issue of Central America, as revealed by the floor fight at the Federation's 1985 convention, is of incalculable significance for any long-term movement to the Left in the United States. More immediately, the early flood of local labor activism around El Salvador has resulted in many solid union-to-union relationships, some at the national level. This kind of direct solidarity, impervious to Embassy flow charts showing so-called guerrilla influence, has helped provide the space for the resurgent mass movement in El Salvador.

2

Struggles for Disarmament in the USA

John Trinkl

The contemporary US peace movement emerged in 1980–81 as a direct response to the Reagan Administration's advocacy of first-strike, 'winnable' nuclear war. It was inspired by, and in turn helped to inspire, parallel protests in Western Europe against the deployment of cruise and Pershing missiles. After reaching an initial climax in the huge 'Nuclear Freeze' demonstrations of 1982 – which were followed by much debate over whether to participate in the Democratic primary process in 1984 – the peace movement became less visible. But what has occurred is not so much a 'decline' as a shift in contexts and parameters. Whereas Reaganism seemed both invincible and terrifying in its early days, it is now wounded and faltering – a situation which creates new openings for peace work while also making it more difficult to mobilize people through immediate anxiety. At the same time, the NATO command's Euromissile victory has been counterbalanced by the audacious disarmament proposals and dynamic negotiating stance of the Soviet Union under Gorbachev. In this complex conjuncture, the US peace movement is consolidating and retrenching behind the strategies and structures that will carry it through the 1990s.

The movement against nuclear weapons, after a burst of activity in the 1950s and early 1960s, was largely quiescent until aroused by Reagan's nuclear sabre-rattling. An amorphous, cross-class movement, it can be roughly grouped into three, sometimes overlapping, categories: (1) professional disarmament or arms-control organizations, often established in the last