

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW ORLEANS
LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES

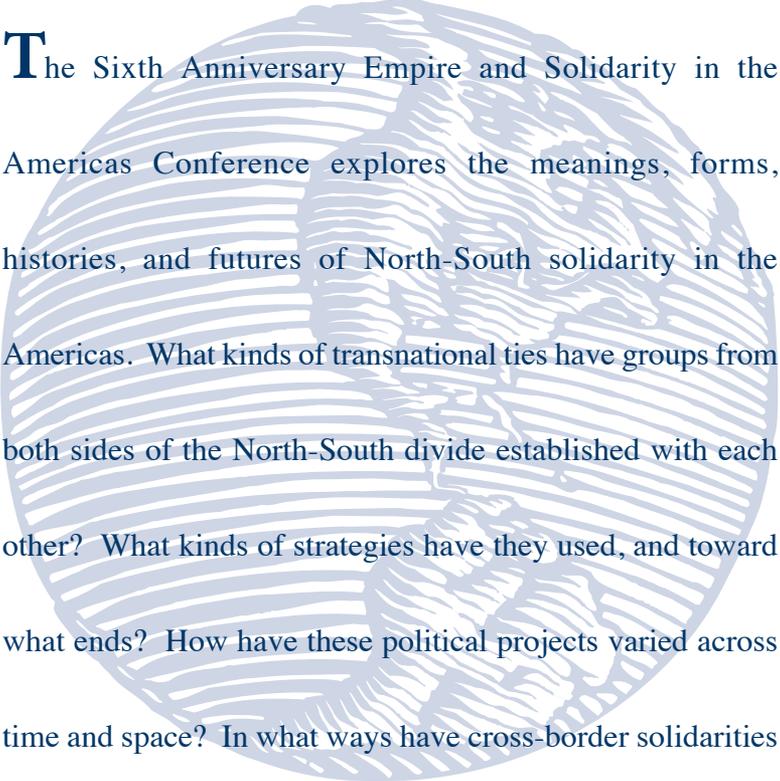


EMPIRE AND SOLIDARITY
IN THE AMERICAS
CONFERENCE

Lindy C. Boggs Conference Center
Room 250

October 18 & 19, 2013





The Sixth Anniversary Empire and Solidarity in the Americas Conference explores the meanings, forms, histories, and futures of North-South solidarity in the Americas. What kinds of transnational ties have groups from both sides of the North-South divide established with each other? What kinds of strategies have they used, and toward what ends? How have these political projects varied across time and space? In what ways have cross-border solidarities shaped and been shaped by imperial power?

The conference organizers, Steve Striffler (UNO, Latin American Studies) and Aviva Chomsky (Salem State, History) thank the University of New Orleans, Salem State College, and the Doris Zemurray Stone Chair in Latin American Studies for sponsoring this conference.

Friday, October 18th, 3:30 – 6:00 p.m.

**Session One:
RESOURCE EXTRACTION AND POLITICAL OPPOSITION**

**EXTRACTIVISM AND THE CHANGING LANDSCAPES OF
STRUGGLE AND SOLIDARITY IN PERU**

Gerardo Rénique, City College, New York

During the last decade, Peru -- like the rest of Latin America-- has embraced what M. Svampa aptly describes as the “commodities consensus.” Sustained mostly by the export of minerals and hydrocarbons, this “neo-extractivist” strategy of development has generated new challenges for solidarity and opposition politics in a country where opposition politics were previously organized around Leftwing parties, labor and peasant organizations. As labor unions and peasant federations have lost ground in the face of Peru’s sweeping neoliberal reforms, peasant and indigenous communities have stepped forward to protest the expansion of mining and hydrocarbons operations in their territories.

What kind of practical and theoretical challenges does this changing local field of forces pose to international solidarity with anti-extractivist political movement, and with socio-environmental struggles in particular? In search of a possible answer and drawing of the Peruvian case, my paper will examine: first, the nature, trajectory and repertoires of struggle of the emerging constellation of organizations, collectives and networks now active in anti-extractivist struggles in Peru; and second, how political traditions from the “old” Left and union movements inform the emerging socio-environmental movements, their understanding of how labor and environment coalesce in the new anti-extractivist struggles, and their relationship with indigenous and peasant organizations.

**GOLD RUSHING IN EL SALVADOR: STRUGGLES OVER MINING IN THE ERA OF
NEOLIBERALISM**

Steven Osuna, UC-Santa Barbara

This paper discusses the social struggles over gold mining between Pacific Rim Mining Corporation and the country of El Salvador. In April 2009 Pacific Rim Mining Corporation, a Canadian transnational corporation, filed a lawsuit against the state of El Salvador through the International Center for Settlement of Investment Disputes, a transnational institution with ties to the World Bank. The \$100 million dollar lawsuit claims El Salvador is in violation of the Costa Rica-Central American Free Trade Agreement (CR-CAFTA) since it has refused to award Pacific Rim a mining exploitation permit. Although Pacific Rim is not part of CR-CAFTA, it has filed its claim through its U.S. subsidiary based in Nevada. The government of El Salvador, governed by the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), environmental justice organizations, and social movements, have argued against metal extraction due to the environmental impacts on the Lempa River, one of the country’s main water sources. In a country in which only 1/3 of its water is healthy enough to drink, this paper argues the state, social movements, and environmental justice activists have coalesced to struggle against transnational capital, neoliberalism, and environmental racism. This conflict exemplifies environmental inequalities and labor struggles in a global context.

BETWEEN NATIONAL PATRIMONY AND MOTHER EARTH: UNDERSTANDING SOLIDARITY IN THE FACE OF RESOURCE CONFLICTS IN BOLIVIA

Sonja Killoran-McKibbin, York University

Debates over mining frequently consider battles between individual communities and transnational capital with a weak or absent state at the service of capital but what does solidarity mean in the context of an avowed anti-imperialist government? In Bolivia, the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) government is seeking to enact a new development model based on a decolonizing the state, vindication of indigenous rights and ways of knowing, national ownership of natural resources and state-led extraction. Under the language of the new extractivism the government has expanded mining, oil and gas projects with the aim of strengthening national sovereignty and building an alternative development model. However, this extraction continues to provoke conflicts over labour conditions, distribution of profits, environmental issues and territorial rights. By examining these battles as examples of struggles over exploitation and dispossession this paper interrogates the MAS government's new extractivism and the conflicts it has provoked. Underlying this inquiry is the significance and modality of international solidarity in a context of conflict between (and within) domestic labour movements, environmental concerns, indigenous rights and a government that seeks to shift the mode of production and confront empire.

Saturday, October 19th, 9:15 – 11:30 a.m.

Session Two:

LABOR AND ENVIRONMENTAL INTERNATIONALISMS

JOBS VS. ENVIRONMENT: STRUGGLING FOR SOLIDARITY ACROSS EMPIRE

Aviva Chomsky and Steve Striffler

This paper looks at how peasants, workers, corporations, and communities have struggled to make sense of tensions surrounding economic development, in particular the mining and use of coal. The case study looks at solidarity campaigns related to communities affected by coal mining in northern Colombia. We place the study in the context of larger debates in labor and environmental history, and in contemporary debates about economic development, extractivism, and the environment. We are particularly interested in how rural peoples and workers have generated alternative visions, cultural practices, economic forms, and political struggles that have challenged capitalist development; and how those projects have changed over time and been influenced by the broader rise or resurgence of indigenism, environmentalism, international solidarity, and the Left in Latin America.

RADICALS, LIBERALS, AND ONE-PERCENTERS: THE U.S. SOLIDARITY CAMPAIGN WITH GM-COLOMBIA WORKERS, 2012-2013

Diana C. Sierra Becerra University of Michigan

Kevin Young, Stony Brook University

We examine the strengths and weaknesses of the recent U.S. solidarity campaign with the Association of Ex- and Injured Workers of General Motors Colombia (ASOTRECOL), workers fired from the GM plant in Bogotá after suffering injuries on the job. Two sources of campaign strength can be identified. First, hunger strikes by ASOTRECOL President Jorge Parra and other workers were a key factor in mobilizing U.S. supporters and in compelling limited support from the United Auto Workers (UAW) leadership. Second, pre-existing organizations in Michigan, Oregon, and Washington provided the “movement infrastructure” for mobilizing protest and

raising funds for the workers' families. However, there was a stark political divide between radical and liberal campaign participants, with the latter prevailing in conflicts over whether to target Obama campaign offices in fall 2012 and over the appropriate methods for pressuring the business-unionist UAW leadership (whom Parra reluctantly came to label "part of the 1%") to assist ASOTRECOL. Through a reconstruction of movement actions and target responses, plus reference to the literature on social movements, we suggest that a more confrontational strategy—and one more aligned with the desires of ASOTRECOL—might have increased the movement's leverage, even given the unfavorable external "opportunity structure."

LABOUR, CLIMATE BARGAINING AND THE STRUGGLE TO SLOW GLOBAL
WARMING: A CANADIAN PERSPECTIVE ON THE POTENTIAL OF LABOUR
LEADERSHIP AND INTERNATIONALISM

Carla Lipsig-Mummé, York University

Geoff Bickerton, Canadian Union of Postalworkers

In 2010, a group of Canadian trade unions, labour academics and environmental groups began a five year funded community-university research project, Work in a Warming World, to develop effective ways for labour to take leadership in the struggle to slow global warming. At an ILO-GURN Workshop in March of 2010, we stated the problem this way:

How can labour broaden and deepen its capacity to protect work and workers from the unique threats posed by climate change, all the while contributing to the struggle to slow global warming within the context of increasingly pessimistic climate science, global economic crisis, a hostile national government and strategic paralysis in the national and international political arena? In this paper Lipsig-Mummé and Bickerton, respectively Lead Investigator of Work in a Warming World and Research Director of the Canadian Union of Postalworkers, explore the challenges and dilemmas of labour leadership in the current political climate in Canada, and the unexpected uses that research can be put to, in catalyzing activist international engagement for climate bargaining. The first part of the paper frames the issues; the second presents examples of works and what doesn't work, and the third asks: what do we still need to know?

Saturday, October 18th, 12:30– 2:15

Session Three:

GLOBAL TRADE AND THE POLITICS OF FOOD

FARMERS RECLAIMING FOOD SYSTEMS VIA A TRANSNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS

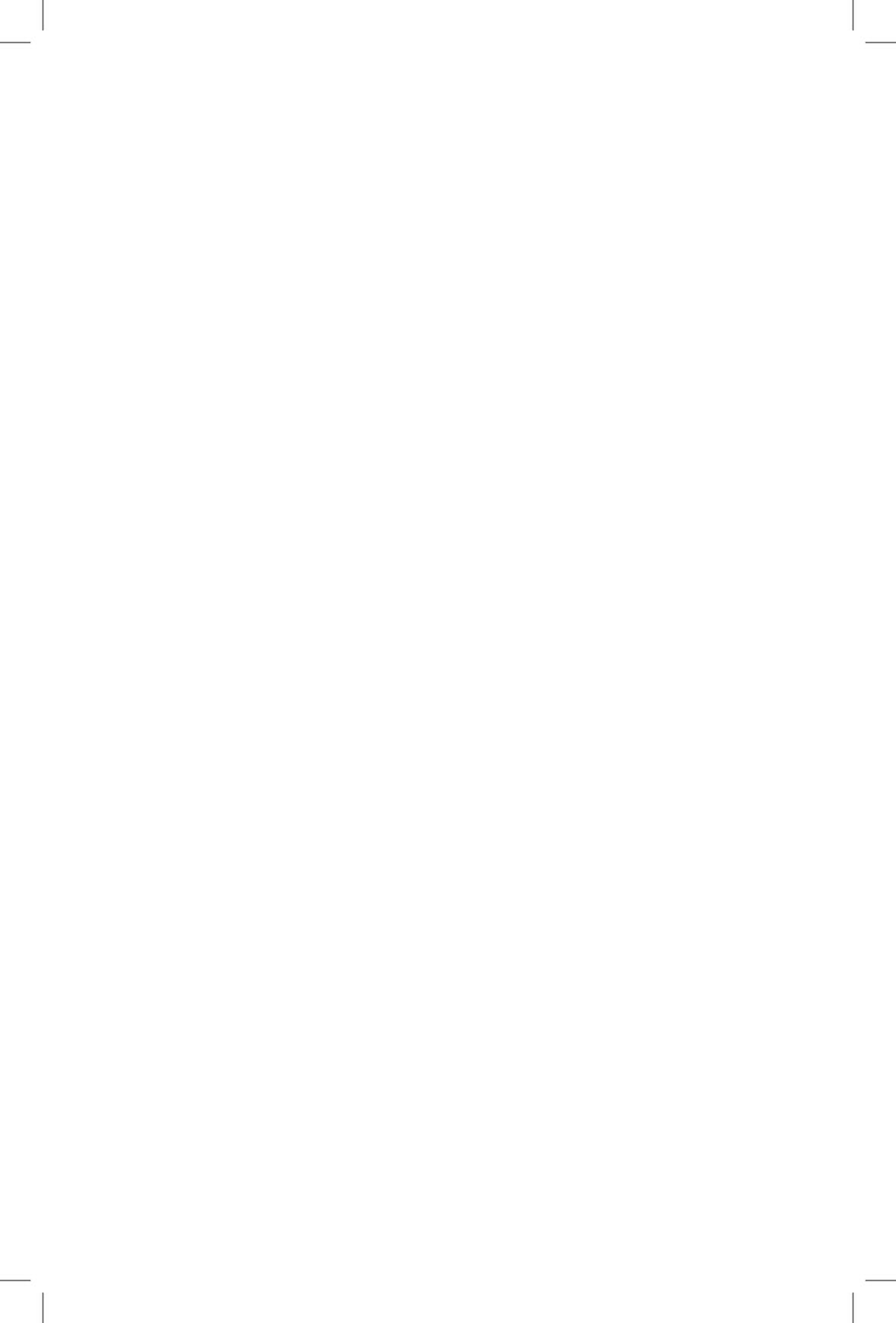
Rachel Odhner, Independent Researcher

With the rise of global environmental politics, activist food producers and agricultural workers have found a broader audience for their advocacy. Capitalizing on agriculture's position as the quintessential intersection between labor and environment, these activists have shaped their discourses to emphasize the symbiotic relationship between environmental health and labor rights, to denounce the social and environmental costs of corporate control of food and agriculture. Examining the case of Ecuador, the paper traces, historically, farmers and agricultural workers' political movements to gain control over land and labor, beginning with calls for agrarian reform in the early twentieth century, to the contemporary engagement of farmers with the Via Campesina—a transnational organization that proposes a neatly-bound politics of food sovereignty in which local communities have the right to define and self-sufficiently practice their own food and agriculture systems. The paper looks at how, while agriculturalists and labor activists frame food sovereignty in terms of both worker and environmental justice—and while agroecology is a central tenet—environmental discourses have been subjected to the more immediate political goals of farmers. In other words, the environmentalist dimension of the movement has not yet translated into changing agricultural practices on the ground.

HEGEMONIC SOLIDARITIES: HOW FAIR TRADE NETWORKS FOSTER CONNECTION AND CONTROL IN COFFEE PRODUCTION

Lindsay Naylor, University of Oregon

An intriguing tension exists within global fair trade certification systems: certification is used to promote environmental sustainability, labor rights and economic stability yet simultaneously it is used to exert external geopolitical control over territory. Fair trade certification of agricultural goods, such as coffee, creates partnerships between growers and roasters and offers an example of networks that span the globe, yet visions of how the fair trade certification of coffee should function come into conflict in farmers' fields. In this paper, I argue that while strong networks of solidarity tied to social, economic and environmental causes are being built, fair trade certification extends the grasp of 'Empire' into previously unregulated spaces—the territory of farmers' fields. I use the case of Maya Vinic, a coffee-producing cooperative in Chiapas, Mexico to tease out these contradictions. For the cooperative, producing under the fair trade label has assisted with establishing important ties to buyers in the U.S. that allow not only for secure sources of income, but also a critical space for information sharing. Although such connections are significant to the cooperative, it comes at a cost; certification regulations—largely developed by groups in the U.S. and Europe—rule the everyday actions of the cooperative and its members. Through an examination of the everyday practices of members of the Maya Vinic cooperative and specifically their experience with their annual certification audit I detail the experience of this contradiction as it plays out in producer communities and individual coffee plots.





Latin American Studies
Milneburg Hall, #273
2000 Lakeshore Drive
New Orleans, 70148