



SIEMBRA

A Newsletter for Farmworker Friends and Advocates

Winter 2007

Documenting the Contributions of the Undocumented Community in Bridgeton

Vanessa Cardinale and Crecenciano Sanchez

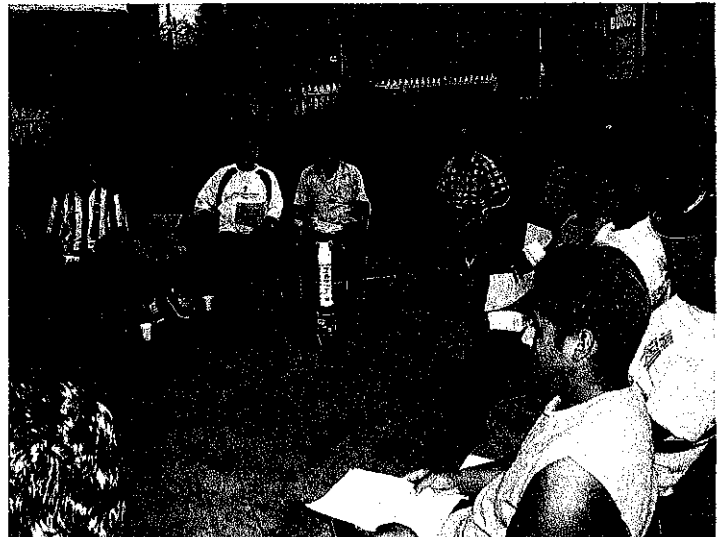
Over the months of July and August, migrant worker leaders of CATA's Bridgeton community committee traveled door to door to conduct a survey designed to quantify the economic contribution of the undocumented residents of Bridgeton to the local community. This project was developed to challenge the growing misinformation being disseminated about the impact of undocumented immigrants, both within the community of Bridgeton as well as other small communities and on a larger national level. In recent months, the negative perception of undocumented immigrants has given momentum to a movement to pass local ordinances, most notably in Hazleton, Pennsylvania and Riverside, New Jersey. These ordinances terrorize the immigrant population in small communities by fining employers and landlords who rent to or employ undocumented immigrants and making English the official language.

In Bridgeton, the implementation of periodic police checkpoints that began in January 2006 has resulted in the seizure of hundreds of cars. This has served to create a hostile relationship between local authorities and the undocumented community who are reliant on their cars to travel to work, which may not be reachable by public transportation. In addition, the recently elected mayor of Bridgeton, James Begley, won the election on a "get tough on immigrants" platform, creating further antagonism towards the estimated 3,800 undocumented immigrants living in Bridgeton. The idea for the CATA survey came out of a need to "...**Show the larger community and politicians that the contributions of immigrants are positive,**" explains CATA Board member and Bridgeton resident Crecenciano Sanchez.

Drew Fredreck, a student at Princeton University and CATA summer intern sponsored by the Princeton Class of 1969 Community Fund, designed and helped to implement the survey, as well as synthesized the results during a period of ten weeks between June and August 2006. Beginning with the Board of Directors, Drew met with CATA leadership to gain insight and participation from CATA membership in Bridgeton. Crecenciano explains that **"It was a process that required participation from every level of the organization working along side the workers."**

The survey consisted of questions aimed to gather basic demographic information about the participant and their family, income generated, and spending patterns, both locally and in their country of origin. Committee members along with CATA organizers explained the survey to people and answered any questions about the organization and how the information was going to be used. Initially, **"many people were fearful for the same reason that they are afraid of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement police."**

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CATA members meet to discuss the results of the survey and strategize how to best utilize the results.

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***CATA is a non-profit, migrant
farmworker organization
governed by and comprised
of farmworkers who are
actively engaged in the
struggle for better working
and living conditions.***

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They weren't very trusting. We had to explain to them the motive of the visit and create trust to be able to do the survey." Crecenciano goes on to explain through conducting the survey, that relationships were formed and that he and other CATA committee members **"achieved recognition with people that we are working for and representing the wellbeing of the community, supporting them in an organized way."**

The survey determined that the undocumented immigrants who are working either in Bridgeton, in other nearby South Jersey towns, or in Pennsylvania, annually contribute between \$25.7 and \$29.6 million directly to the local Bridgeton economy. This figure becomes \$128.5 and \$148 million respectively when considering the additional money generated through creation of jobs. Other important findings of the survey showed that the undocumented population pays sales and property taxes, as well as income tax, thereby significantly supporting the public services in Bridgeton, refuting the accusation that undocumented immigrants are a drain on public resources and endanger small towns.

Crecenciano feels that the survey project **"...was good work. Through it we can show the community that the contribution of every person is integrally important."** It was with this sentiment that CATA prioritized releasing the survey results to the Spanish media, hoping that many of the undocumented readers, who are constantly bombarded with anti-immigrant messages, would see in print what they already know – that they contribute in a positive way to their communities.

Currently, the Bridgeton committee has met with the mayor to present to him the results of the survey and to explore ways to work together. The goal is that both the information gathered from the survey and community involvement will create an environment where the mayor and committee can work together to **"improve the situation of the undocumented immigrant community and create more security, so that the police wouldn't collaborate with the work of the immigration police,"** thereby making Bridgeton a sanctuary community. The committee is also hoping to gain the mayor's support for a statewide proposal that would create a drivers' certificate, enabling undocumented people to drive legally and obtain insurance in New Jersey.

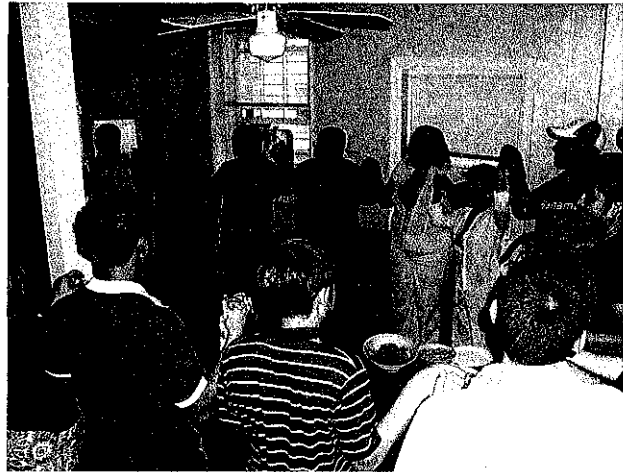
The next step is to use the survey to continue challenging anti-immigrant messages and using the survey as a platform to initiate dialogue and better the conditions for immigrants on both the local and national levels. Crecenciano hopes that other communities **"...can take this same example to be able to develop similar activities."** This survey is a powerful model of community organizing to educate themselves and others about the issues.

To read the full report on the Bridgeton Resident Survey, you can access it through our website at www.cata-farmworkers.org.

Editorial: A Call for Solidarity

Nelson Carrasquillo

The United States proclaims to be the lone super power, and as such dominates the global economy. It promotes policies to further the interests of corporate entities as opposed to those of the people. As a result, trade agreements ignore the well being of workers and the environment without regard for the short and long term negative consequences. One of the immediate results is the displacement and inability for hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of families to make a living in their home communities and in turn are forced to leave and become migrants.



Migrant Dialogue between CATA and JUNTOS in August

It is CATA's position that the discussion of immigration in the U.S. is a direct result of this situation. There is a deliberate effort to systematically undermine workers and environmental rights, not only here in the U.S. but globally, for the benefit of corporate interests.

The current immigration debate is geared towards distracting US citizens to prevent them from realizing how their own rights are being undermined and diminished by the government. Corporations, and the families they represent, become richer while working families become poorer.

By encouraging fear and distorting the real economic contributions of the migrant communities, the government aims to divide and confuse citizens. This xenophobia will prevent citizens from seeing how they are equally affected as workers. Fear will prevent us from working together to spread and increase benefits to all workers.

The strategy of divide and conquer has historically been used to the advantage of corporations. Even though we all recognize this, we still are unable to commit a dedicated effort to building solidarity and collaborate towards an agenda that generates the momentum to shift the national debate. Big business is in control and the political system is so dominated by their economic influence that politicians compete to represent their interests if elected. This needs to change and requires the action of grassroots people to make the change.

Solidarity work has to begin first and foremost with the workers themselves. The migrant community has to create space where it can meet and discuss ways to address their common interests. Organizations such as unions, cultural associations, religious communities, and community-based organizations who face similar problems must also engage in dialogue and understand their common interests. We must all come together and build a common agenda where there is one struggle.

Only then will there be enough popular power to achieve justice, creating a movement that holds governments accountable so that decisions are made that benefit the people and not the corporations.

Recent Upsurge in Immigration Activity

Jessica Culley and Yesica Guzmán



On Sunday, August 1st, in the quiet community of Penns Grove, NJ, Yesica Guzmán was awoken from a deep sleep by someone pounding on her back door. **"They arrived in the middle of the night, at 4 a.m. They almost broke the glass in the door they were pounding so hard. They wanted us to open the door. They didn't want to wait until we could get dressed. I didn't even have a t-shirt on, only a little robe."**

Although police and immigration officials inquired about people who no longer resided at the house, they also began questioning people who were currently living in the house. They first arrested Yesica's husband, Juan Guzmán. **"[The policeman] said 'turn around, I'm going to handcuff you', but he had already turned him around, pushed him against the refrigerator, and was putting the handcuffs on him. He asked him if he knew his rights and Juan said yes, and the policemen didn't read them to him or anything. They asked us who else was in the house and we told them that there were three other men. They asked where they were and we told them that there were two upstairs and one downstairs. They called for more help and eight men came inside the house. They came inside with pistols. They asked us if we used drugs, if we had weapons..."** Along with Yesica's husband, they took her brother and a friend into custody and left her with a letter to appear at the immigration office in Cherry Hill, NJ. She asked what would happen to her if she didn't appear at the immigration office. Yesica remembers clearly that the immigration official told her **"that I had to show up, because if I didn't come that he would make sure to come take my children away with DYFS (Department of Youth and Family Services) and deport me."**

Yesica has struggled during these past several months. Although she has the right to remain in the country until there is a decision by the immigration judge, she has become a single mom with three children. **"They didn't give me permission to work. I can't work, but I can't ask for any help from the government because I am undocumented. I have to pay rent, utilities... buy food for my children, clothing, shoes, and they don't want me to work."**

Stories like Yesica's have been repeated over and over in the past few months. In September, more than 115 immigrants were arrested in the Philadelphia area. A new Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Fugitive Task Force office was opened in Newark this summer, the first one of its kind in New Jersey, and one of seven new offices nationwide. Along with Penns Grove and Philadelphia, other communities in the Tri-State area have been affected.

Most of these arrests have been a part of "Operation Return to Sender," an initiative begun by ICE in May 2006. This year, ICE has arrested more than 23,000 individuals nationwide. According to the news, these arrests were conducted as ICE officials strive to seek out illegal aliens with criminal records or those with previous deportation orders. Although this seems to be partially true, many immigrants with no other crime than having entered the country without permission have also been detained and deported. As ICE officials investigate the homes or work places of specific individuals, they question everyone about their documentation, and they take anyone who admits to being undocumented into custody. The stories we have heard from Penns Grove residents show that even if the person they are seeking is not present, any

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undocumented immigrant who is present is in danger of being taken into custody. In a week long blitz of activity in Collier County, Florida in September, 163 immigrants were taken into custody. Only 26 of these people had criminal records. The others either had previous orders of deportation (for civil immigration violations) or were found to be present illegally within the country.

When you read news articles that have been printed, they focus intentionally on the "criminals" being rounded up. They tell you about the man who molested a 12 year old, or the man who stole cars and beat up his wife. They don't profile the man who has a wife and three children, who works 80 hours a week to take care of his family, and still send some money home to his elderly parents, or the young man who works full-time in order to be able to take classes at the local community college, and who dreams of becoming a lawyer or a doctor.

The effects of "Operation Return to Sender" have been devastating on an individual level. Yesica has been left without the principal income earner in the household. She has had to take on two jobs (under the table) to be able to care for her three children. Her children continuously ask why their father left them, and all are suffering. Her daughter has been having problems in school, and one of her sons has asked if his daddy doesn't love them anymore, if he abandoned them. She has begun the process of selling all of their belongings, so that if she has to leave the country, she is prepared. However, these raids have been timed so strategically, that the effect has been far more than the suffering or inconvenience to individual families. Entire communities have been terrorized. Immigrants who have never committed a crime do not sleep peacefully at night because they do not know if the mere association with a fellow tenant or co-worker may lead to their being deported as well.

This past spring, the immigrant community made great strides in coming out publicly to demand immigration reform. They marched, spoke to the press, and shared their stories. The last large national mobilization occurred on May 1, when more than 1.5 million people participated across the country. ICE began its efforts for "Operation Return to Sender" in May. ICE's activities, combined with a deep frustration at the lack of movement from Congress on the issue of immigration reform, successfully paralyzed the movement for several months. Just now workers and organizations are beginning to regain momentum. They are protesting ICE's activities as an unjust method for thinning the immigrant population to decrease pressure on the federal government for immigration reform or to decrease the number of people who could potentially benefit from a reform.

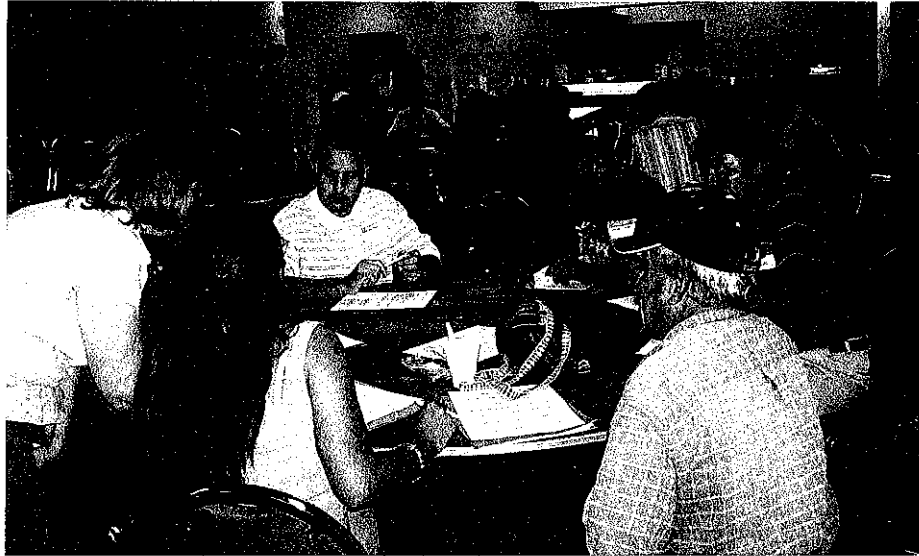
This summer, different communities across the country began to enact anti-immigrant ordinances that made employers and landlords liable to be fined for employing or renting to undocumented immigrants. They were designed to make those

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CATA's Annual Assembly: Looking Back and Planning for the Future

José Manuel Guzmán
and Jessica Culley



CATA members discuss the work plan in small groups at the annual assembly

During this year's annual assembly, held on September 17, 2006, approximately 60 of CATA's most involved members participated in Seabrook, NJ. The purpose of the Assembly was to review the goals identified by the membership in 2005, to evaluate the work accomplished in the past year, and to plan the direction for the work in this next year. Also, vacant positions in the Board of Directors were filled with new leadership.

The Assembly began with a welcome and an invocation from the members of the Board of Directors. We continued with several reports of on-going work among the membership. First, Richard Mandelbaum, CATA's policy analyst, and Mariza Ibarra, member of the Board of Directors, reported on CATA's participation in the United Nations. Each regional Concilio also gave a report about the situations occurring in their respective areas and about the work they are doing. A report on the plan to paint a mural in Moroleon, Guanajuato, Mexico reflecting the immigrant experience and struggle was given as well as a report on a proposed trip to meet with communities and organizations in Oaxaca and Chiapas.

After the reports, participants broke up into small groups in order to more fully discuss the different themes the organization focuses on and our goals for the upcoming year. Each group focused on a different facet of CATA's work including: environmental justice and the use of pesticides, immigration, housing, health services, workers' rights, driving certificates, and continued membership growth. All of these discussions revealed how strongly the membership feels about the need to continue involving new leaders as well as building their own capacity to tackle difficult issues that they confront. Also apparent within the group discussions was the importance of building relationships with other immigrant organizations and other groups within the community which will be key to our continued success.

Over the next few months, each committee and Concilio will elaborate their goals and plans for the next year. The Board of Directors met in October, and discussed holding a strategy retreat for membership in March to bring together all the different plans for the next year.

Kaolin Workers Union News

Serafina Youngdahl Lombardi

The last few months have been busy ones for the Union where our commitment to stand up for ourselves has been tested and affirmed. We have seen over and over again how little consideration the company shows for its employees and their primary concerns are.

In February, the company made some alterations to the box that workers used to put the mushrooms they have picked. Long-time and active Union representative Fidel Vasquez, at the request of his co-workers, asked a general supervisor how much they would be paid per box. The Union office also issued three letters requesting immediate communication concerning the new boxes. It was a hot topic and we had daily discussions about it. We felt the company was underpaying us given the requirements for these boxes.

A company supervisor then accused Fidel of promoting a work stoppage saying that he told workers to stop picking the "new boxes". Although we questioned the company during a disciplinary meeting, they could not say who specifically had heard Fidel. The company insisted the incident had occurred and Fidel was issued a verbal warning.

We objected the warning the same day and promptly had our grievance denied. Now it was in writing that "other supervisors had heard Mr. Vasquez" attempting to create a work stoppage, which was an extremely serious accusation. We were outraged – but not surprised at the company's technique to try and intimidate a Union representative from doing his job.

The issue was brought to arbitration, which was prolonged as Kaolin presented issues that seemed irrelevant. As the Company's witnesses testified, it was evident that they had no case against the Union.

We were elated to receive the Arbitrators decision a month latter, which not only favored our arguments but clearly strengthened our rights as contained within the contract. We feel it was an important step in showing the company that they can not invent stories at whim to serve their own interests.

Another situation that has shown us once again the importance of protecting our interests as workers has emerged as a health and safety concern. In May, Kaolin began using trade secret chemicals for the purpose of general sanitization and the whitening of mushrooms and we have been battling them on it ever since. We immediately consulted with Teresa Niedda of the

(Article continues on page 11)



Migration and Development at the U.N.

Richard Mandelbaum and Mariza Ibarra

The year 2006 marked the first time that the United Nations (U.N.) has put the issue of migration squarely on its agenda. In June, Secretary General Kofi Annan released a report on Migration and Development, and on July 12, the Office of the President of the General Assembly held an Interactive Hearing with Civil Society on Migration and Development, bringing to New York Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) from around the world to advocate respect for the human rights of migrant workers and their families. The report of this hearing in turn informed the High Level Dialogue of the General Assembly at the beginning of September.

CATA has been active throughout this process, not only in attending the events but also in planning for NGO participation, together with other members of the Migration Caucus and the NGO Subcommittee on the Human Rights of Immigrants and Refugees. CATA was one of only fifty-four NGOs from around the world selected to give testimony at the July hearing, and sent a delegation of members and staff to participate in the hearing, as well as attend the High Level Dialogue and related NGO events.

Mariza Ibarra, a member of CATA's Board of Directors and a participant in this year's U.N.-related events, thinks it is **"important that the organization work at these kinds of levels. It is so important to have access to a place like that – to be able to learn more about the decisions being made."** But it is not just about attending events or observing what decisions others are making: **"An important point for me,"** she says, **"in having the opportunity to go to New York and the United Nations, is to build the knowledge necessary to participate. The point isn't to just go and speak our minds, but to have a real impact – and for that, one has to prepare carefully in order to express herself or himself in the most effective way."** Mariza also hopes that new leaders will emerge from within CATA's membership as a result of our engagement at the U.N.

While it is positive that attention is finally being paid to the issue of migration, the U.N. is still very much an entity dominated by the political and economic elite, with too little access for Civil Society, and even less for grassroots organizations. **"It is sad and frustrating,"** says Mariza, **"to see so many people come from around the world, from so far away, investing so much money to come, and then only have five minutes in which to express themselves."** For this reason CATA has joined other NGOs in advocating the creation of a permanent U.N. forum on migration, that would allow for a more on-going



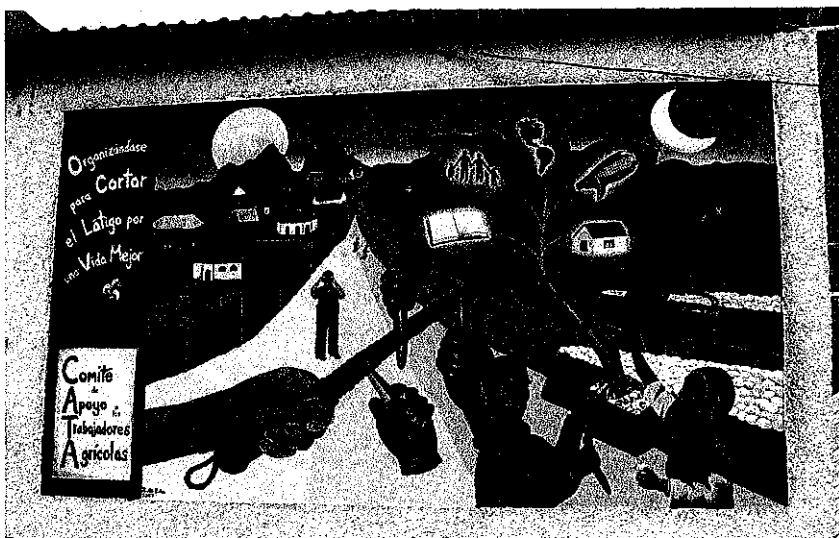
(UN article continues on page 10)

CATA board members and staff at the United Nations

Art and Struggle: Painting Across Borders

Jessica Culley and Krista Zabor

Often in the United States, immigrant workers are exploited for their labor while their identity as a community is ignored or disregarded. For this reason, during the month of January CATA actively created an enduring testament to the struggle of immigrant workers in the U.S. With the artistic vision of Krista Zabor, a former Jesuit Volunteer with CATA, a mural entitled, "Organizing to Cut the Whip for a Better Life" was painted in order to create a way for workers to claim their identity and express in visual form the experience and struggle of immigrant workers from Mexico.



The finished mural in Moroleon, Guanajuato.

During the spring of 2006, CATA membership in Kennett Square met to discuss the mural project and to provide input that would allow Krista to create a design that is a direct product of their vision. The design resonates with the hopes and dreams that many workers immigrate to the United States for the dream of providing a home for their family, education for their children, etc. It depicts how those dreams become attacked by exploitation, and how by working together, people can fulfill their goals.

The mural was painted in Moroleon, Guanajuato, Mexico. As the hometown of many workers who have settled into the Kennett Square area, it was the perfect place for this beautiful representation of the struggle of workers. The municipality of Moroleon supported the mural project by facilitating the use of a wall at the town's cultural center. As it is located in a very visible location on a main road leading into town, many folks stopped by during the painting and seemed to really resonate with the message of the mural.

The mural was inaugurated on January 13, 2007. CATA members and family, members of the community, as well as the Municipal president and the Director of the Cultural Center all attended. The process, as well as the final product, is one of great significance to both workers and the general community. It conveys a message of struggle for a better life and the importance of solidarity in achieving our goals.

(Immigration raids article continued from page 5)

communities as inhospitable as possible to undocumented immigrants. More recently, a new trend is emerging, one to make communities a safe place, a sanctuary for immigrants. Communities across the country are considering "no-coordination" policies that would prevent ICE from deputizing local police for civil immigration enforcement. While these types of policies have long been in place in major cities, they are new topics of discussion in the smaller communities.

It is a priority of CATA to work for the establishment of sanctuary policies in the communities where our members live. Immigrants are valuable community members and human beings struggling to have a positive impact in their local communities, the U.S. and their home countries through their work and contributions. Local committees in Coatesville, PA and in Bridgeton, NJ are moving forward with plans to implement sanctuary policies in their towns. Towards the end of our interview, Yessica said, **"We deserve more respect....a better chance at building a life for our families than to have immigration tear us apart."**

(UN article continued from page 8)

participation by migrant workers' organizations. Recently, CATA was asked to serve as an officer on the newly formed CONGO Committee on Migration (CONGO is the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Status with the U.N.), and will continue playing an active role in strengthening migrant workers' voices at the U.N.

There is also much to be done to ensure that decisions that are made benefit migrant workers themselves. The dominant political ideology at the U.N. and even more so amongst so-called "receiving states" – those wealthy countries such as the United States, the European Union, and Australia into which the majority of migrants are crossing – is a neoliberal ideology that views migrant workers as commodities, and often only pays lip service to human rights. This is reflected in Kofi Annan's selection of Peter Sutherland, former President of the World Trade Organization, as his special advisor on migration, and in the resistance of the wealthy, industrialized countries to ratify the *International Convention to Protect the Human Rights of Migrant Workers and Their Families*.

"It has been a very difficult year for immigrants," says Mariza, **"but maybe an important year as well, because we have managed to gain more access, and hopefully God will allow us to achieve something to improve our lives."**

CATA's interventions at the U.N. are based on the following principles:

- *That respect for human rights must be the underpinning of all discussions regarding migration policy,*
- *That undocumented migrants' rights be respected as well,*
- *That guestworker programs violate workers' rights and are not an acceptable "solution",*
- *That the nations of the global North must take some responsibility for exacerbating the current international explosion in migration by their imposition of neoliberal free trade policies, that are undermining the self-sufficiency of poor people around the world, forcing many to leave their homes,*
- *That migrant workers themselves must have a significant role in determining what migration policies are adopted in the future.*

(Kaolin Workers Union article continued from page 7)

Farmworker Health and Safety Institute, Barbara Rahke of Philiposh, and eventually Vince Gallagher of Safety Research, who has taken on the role of the Union's Health and Safety Expert. This struggle has shown us how disposable we are to the company and how little respect they have for the health and safety of their employees. On October 20th a group of frustrated workers, some experiencing negative effects of the new chemicals (itchy skin, dry throat and nose, tingling lips, nausea, and various other problems including eye damage and vomiting blood), marched into the Kaolin offices demanding a meeting with the company. A meeting with the company's environmental health specialist was immediately set. We continue to struggle to get to the bottom of this issue, wading through the company's resistance to provide us with information to understand workers exposure and reactions.

This year we have faced many challenges, and as we develop our abilities we have been grateful for the role CATA has played in strengthening our leadership. We have found that our vision of justice and empowerment for workers in the mushroom industry keeps us strong as every little battle we win reminds us of how much further we must go.

Host a CATA presentation



Would you be interested in hosting a presentation at your church, union or community meeting about issues affecting farm or immigrant workers? CATA staff and members would love to come to show a video ("Los Trabajadores" or "Pesticides: From the Fields to Your Table") and facilitate a time of dialogue.

Los Trabajadores, *The Workers*, was produced in 2001-2003. Planned, filmed, and edited by a team of farmworkers, volunteers, and staff, **Los Trabajadores** tells the story of farmworkers, the reasons and conditions that move them to travel to the U.S.A. and the types of conditions that they confront in the workplace. Lastly, it tells the story of CATA, and the role that workers' organizing efforts play in creating lasting changes in the community.

Pesticides: From the Fields to Your Table was produced in 2004 by the Farmworker Health and Safety Institute. The documentary takes a look at the reality of farmworkers in this country and their exposure to pesticides as they plant, tend to, and harvest the food that we eat. We see an intimate connection between farmworkers' health and safety and the well-being of consumers regarding the use of pesticides in food production.

If you are interested, please call Vanessa Cardinale at 856-881-2507 or by email at catavc@aol.com.



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