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Bill Schlotter

Chicano Studies Professor to Discuss and Sign New Book, 'Globalization and Cross-Border Labor Solidarity in the Americas'

Each day, thousands of people around the world report to factories where they toil in arduous conditions for very low pay to produce clothing for the global market. Efforts to organize these sweatshop workers into effective unions that can effectively fight for better pay and working conditions have yielded little change in working conditions.

In "Globalization and Cross-Border Labor Solidarity in the Americas: The Anti-Sweatshop Movement and the Struggle for Social Justice," published this month by Routledge, Ralph Armbruster-Sandoval looks at four cases of labor organization in Central America and why those efforts ultimately did not produce long-term success.

Armbruster-Sandoval, an assistant professor of Chicana and Chicano Studies at UC Santa Barbara, will discuss his book at a talk and book-signing beginning at 3:30 p.m., Tuesday, Feb. 22 in the McCune Conference Room (Room 6020) of the Humanities and Social Sciences Building at UCSB. The talk is free and open to the public.

Over a 10-year span that began in the mid-1990s, Armbruster-Sandoval examined four efforts to organize garment workers in Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua.

"I was trying to find out how workers and social justice activists were trying to challenge sweatshop labor practices," Armbruster-Sandoval said. "I wanted to know how they were successful and how they were not successful.

And I wanted to know why those that were successful in the short-run were not so successful in the long-run."

In three of the efforts, workers---after long resistance by their employers and government officials---won better wages and conditions after hard-fought campaigns that lasted several years and resulted in the firing of many union organizers. In the fourth case, workers succeeded in getting better working conditions, but not better wages.

But as time passed, the companies continued to attempt to bust the unions.

Two of the factories with union contracts eventually closed their doors, one of them moving operations to another country. The third company with a contract remained open after paring its force of union workers.

Armbruster-Sandoval said three factors played the biggest roles in the demise of the unions.

Some unions and U.S.-based activist groups were fraught with internal discord and a resulting inability to agree on strategies and tactics.

Union organizers also found themselves without leverage over companies who were willing to endure any and all efforts to expose and embarrass them publicly through demonstrations, ad campaigns and other public relations efforts. Unions also lacked leverage over companies who threatened to take their factories elsewhere rather than give in to union demands.

"Some employers you have leverage over and some you don't," Armbruster-Sandoval said. "At the end of the day, you have to hope that in the long run, labor unions will strengthen in the United States, Latin America and around the world so these companies don't have any place to run and hide."

Armbruster-Sandoval's talk and book-signing event is sponsored by the Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies and the Interdisciplinary Humanities Center and also supported by the Center for Chicano Studies, the Racial Studies Project, the Latin American and Iberian Studies Program, the Center for Global Studies, the Center for Research on Women and Social Justice, the Center on Work, Labor, and Democracy, the Citizenship and Democracy Research Group, the Department of Sociology, and the Global and International Studies Program.

Related Links

[Book Information](#)

[Ralph Armbruster-Sandoval's Web Page](#)

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