

Conference Keynote Address: Prof. Greg Grandin

Seeds of Bush grew during Reagan's Latin American adventures in 1980s

Keynote speaker, Professor **Greg Grandin**, professor of history at New York University, and an expert on Latin American history, said President Ronald Reagan's policies in the 1980s formed the "crucible" of current Bush Administration political coalitions, including links to the religious right.

A widely respected historian and author, Grandin linked Reagan's Latin American policies with the restructuring of the U.S. economy. He pointed out that the U.S. supported the Contras in Nicaragua and the violent death squad states in El Salvador and Guatemala.

The Reagan Administration's policy in Latin America is a "key to explaining many of the ideas, alliances and strategies that make up the Bush doctrine," he said.

He said several current Bush Administration "assertions" come out of the Reagan Latin American policies. They include, first, the "right to pre-emptive warfare," and that "pre-emptive warfare" is justified by idealistic rhetoric or language, such as the phrase, making the world safe for democracy. A second assertion is that democracy is defined very specifically into the terms of "economic rights." The third assertion is the growth of the imperial presidency.

Indeed, the Reagan Administration's Jean Kirkpatrick called Central America the most important part of the world, somewhat surprising since Central America had little power and few resources, Grandin said.

It was in the Central American nations where the new right cut its teeth in linking economic and foreign policy in a way that would benefit the corporations and stagnate the economic fortunes of working people, Grandin said. He said the Reaganites worked on the religious right to enroll them in order to bring a moral and/or religious justification to their causes. The struggles in the Central American nations were characterized in a

way to indicate the U.S. was rescuing the nations from moral degradations.

Grandin said that the Reagan foreign policy succeeded to weakening Third World nations, forcing them to become havens for global corporations to enter; this was coupled with the always stated justification of offering freedom and western style democracy to the peoples of those nations. Thus, he said, these nations yielded to the International Monetary Fund and cut subsidies, lowered tariffs, slashed social spending on education and health care, devalued their currencies and broke labor unions, he said.

Meanwhile at home in the United States, the increasing inequality, the gutting of labor power, the increasing insecurity and the dismantling of the middle class was occurring, he said. In other nations, he said, the situation was worse, with the destruction of the agricultural sectors leading to the increasing emigration, particularly from Mexico.

Reaganomics involved a budget-breaking arms buildup and a tax giveaway, Grandin said, while continuing an austerity program that meant that not everybody could nuzzle up to feed off the trough. The effect was changing American society that rendered political and economic liberalism no longer viable. "This created permanent budget shortfalls and slowly bleeding the New Deal and Great Society programs, he said. He largely shifted the burden to payroll taxes which only helped to weaken government program."

"Tight money led to rising unemployment and organized labor's bargaining power, automatic wage increases, job security, guaranteed pension were thereby consigned to the ash heap of history and American corporations began moving America's industrial production to the south and southwest and over seas," he added.

In the Third World, the tight money programs overwhelmed Third World governments.