

## Good Jobs, Good Neighbors: Thriving Communities Across Borders 2017 Midwest Speaking Tour **September 19-26**

### Introduction.

Alianza Americas will launch its next tour, Good Jobs, Good Neighbors: Thriving Communities Across Borders, in the Midwest as part of Alianza Americas 2017 US Speaking Tours series. These tours seek collective solutions to highly sensitive issues such as immigration and economic, racial, and social justice, as part of a shared struggle across immigrant and non-immigrant communities.

The tour will draw on local expertise and relationships by working with Alianza members and allies and deepen these relationships by providing a transnational context to local issues faced by communities in the United States. The goal is to add value to local work while strengthening collaborations with other stakeholders, and at the same time, shape and strengthen the national and transnational impact of Alianza Americas as a network.

This tour is part of a series that will draw parallels across struggles and build bridges for shared collaboration around an agenda of social, economic and racial justice in the US and across Latin America.

### Objectives.

The tour will travel through the Midwest and focus on the state of good jobs as well as the lack of living and sustainable wages to support workers both here in the U.S. and abroad in places like Mexico and Central America. It will seek to look at the question of jobs from both a local and transnational perspective as well as to shine a light on a problem that has displaced thousands of workers in our hemisphere: the movement and scarcity of good jobs. The tour will also look at globalization and the effects of free trade agreements like NAFTA and CAFTA on workers and local economies. What do we mean by good jobs? What can we – workers, advocates, policy-makers, and businesses – do to be better neighbors as we share a common struggle? How can we work together across borders to create opportunities for everyone?

### Background.

Human beings have always moved around to find opportunities to work, find resources, and build better lives for future generations. These are the reasons that enterprising families pushed westward in the United States during the 1800's and why people sent their children to the cities during the depression. Migration has become a very charged issue in US politics, but the drivers of it remain very similar.

Recent statistics from the OECD put the US and Mexico at the bottom of developed countries in terms of wealth inequality. This comes as no surprise to immigrant families, nor to the millions of low-wage workers who struggle to make ends meet on wages that have stagnated for decades. At the same time, the gap between the US and its closest neighbors remains enormous. The lowest paid workers in the Caribbean, Central America and Mexico may earn one quarter of what a similar job might pay the United States.

The promises of NAFTA remain broken for most workers. More than a million Mexican farmers are estimated to have lost their livelihoods in the decades after the trade agreement, and poverty in Mexico remains stubbornly over 50%. The wage gap between Mexico and the US is the same or higher than it was twenty years ago. The analogous Central American trade deal (CAFTA) has not yielded better results. Honduras, for example, remains at the bottom of nearly every measure of social and economic wellbeing in our hemisphere, including income inequality, education inequality, and violence.

This conversation is about basic human rights, the right to dignified work; the right to provide for one's family; and the right to thrive and live a healthy, functional, fulfilling life.

## Where are the ‘Good Jobs?’

Workers in the US often wonder where the good jobs are and why it is so hard to make a decent living. Unfortunately, this reasonable question has been manipulated to drive a wedge between immigrants and native-born workers. Policymakers and corporate interests who benefit from low wages and insecure workers encourage this idea.

This tour will flip the frame, asking instead, “How can we get more good jobs for everyone?” As the tours move across the Midwest, we will bring together people who are advocating for good jobs in the US Midwest with folks working on labor rights and worker protections in Central America and Mexico.

We will explore the ways in which migration policy and economic systems converge to oppress and marginalize immigrant and non-immigrant workers and what we might do about it.

## The Unintended Consequences.

What happens when people are forced to move in search of good jobs? What are the short and long-term effects that contribute to the continued deterioration, displacement, and disenfranchisement of poor people and families here in the US and in Mexico/Central America?

Family destabilization: long commutes or re-location, working longer hours.

Lack of access to healthcare: Families at risk of illnesses that could have been prevented.

Lack of upward mobility: Workers recur to temp agencies or contractual work, which many times do not offer benefits.

Lack of economic opportunities: Hard to purchase a home, a car or to send children to college if the family is just making ends meet.

These conditions collide to deepen economic inequality in our nation.

## Asking the questions.

This tour will challenge participants to ask each other hard questions and listen to the answers. What do immigration and the economy have to do with each other? Why is it important to talk about them together? What impact do migration policies have? What about trade policy?

For the last 30 years, poor people have become poorer, while the rich have become richer. This is as true in the United States as it is in Mexico. Transnational companies seek to manufacture products at the cheapest possible cost, generating the highest profit for a small minority. Many times this has meant moving manufacturing plants to places with lower wages, lower environmental standards, and lower worker health protections. But what does this mean for the people living in the United States and Mexico? Who has benefitted? Who has paid the cost for those profits? Does growth really “lift all boats” as the economics textbooks tell us? What do labor and broader economic policies have to do with good jobs?

The pursuit of good jobs driven people to migrate for as long as we can remember, so what has changed? What happens when jobs move? Who is this benefiting? Who is this hurting? What happened to jobs in the Midwest and in Mexico after NAFTA? Why do so many people have to work more than one job to get by? What can we do together to change these dynamics?

## Inquiries.

For questions about this tour or to co-sponsor an event as part of the tour, please contact Cristina Garcia at [cgarcia@alianzaamericas.org](mailto:cgarcia@alianzaamericas.org)