

# El Salvadorean student speaks to UPEI

By Ruth Edgett

Armando Paredes speaks dispassionately about the strife in his country; of the government-sponsored death squads, of the violence and the closure of his university.

It's not surprising these events no longer cause him to show shock or grief. The violence in his home country of El Salvador began two-and-a-half decades before he was born and shows signs of continuing for some time to come.

Although he is currently a medical student in Canada, Paredes has more than a second-hand view of what is happening to his people. He's been there. He is the representative to Canada of the General Association of Salvadorean University Students (AGEUS) and is conducting a cross-country tour to make Canadians aware of the situation in his country.

He told a small Monday gathering at the Chaplaincy Centre his speaking engagements at various universities are designed for four purposes: to raise awareness of Canadians to the situation of students and the people of El Salvador; to gain support for the campaign to reopen the university; to get financial support for the university medical campaign and to tell people Salvadoreans don't want military intervention or government assistance from other countries.

The struggle in the tiny Latin American country began with the depression of the 1930s. Peasants began to revolt. They wanted food and an end to the crisis in a country whose economy depended largely upon coffee exports.

From that time, students of the university have assisted the struggle against successive governments. As a result, the university was closed for the third time in June of 1980, its president was killed, and the killing continues of students and professors who dare to defy the government.

Despite the closure of the university and destruction of many of its buildings, some faculty members continue to volunteer to teach about a third of the students in make-shift classes. The institution remains a legal entity with its own governing body.

The university was closed for the first time in 1964. It was shut down again in 1971 but reopened after the government located enough pro-military professors to allow a military system on campus. Guards were installed, and students were not allowed to hold meetings.

Naturally, this action led to many fights between

guerrilla and rebellious students, and in 1975, the students staged a riot.

They had seen television shows in which riot squads with truncheons and tear gas were sent to disperse protestors. They were ready for some violence, said Paredes.

"But we never expected that they were going to kill us".

Instead of clubs and gas, the students were met with military tanks and fire arms. Paredes said the students were ambushed and attacked.

"My best friend was killed by a tank when they (moved) against our demonstration," he recalled.

Paredes said he is confident the university will again reopen if enough international pressure is brought to bear on the government. To add to that, "our parents are getting mad," he said.

The university students in El Salvador are not the leaders of the popular revolution against the government, said Paredes. But, he said, they play an important part in assisting the peasants of the countryside to better fend for themselves. The medical students are providing medical training for the peasants who don't have access to clinics controlled largely by the rich elite and the government, he said. As well, other students have carried out literacy training.

Paredes gave listeners a brief history of the revolution in El Salvador. He said Canada at one time sent troops to support the government of the 1930s, but they didn't participate in actual fighting.

The United States has been actively involved in his country since the mid-1960s and the Cuban Revolution, he said. At that time, the U.S. began sending aid to El Salvador, some of it in the form of unfamiliar food

products and a sterilization program for women. Paredes said the U.S. sent doctors who were paid by the job to sterilize women who didn't know what was happening. Later, husbands were angry with their wives because they couldn't have children, something the Salvadoreans believed was a God-given right.

It was around this time that general strikes were occurring. Workers and professional unions would band together in strikes with crippling effects.

Paredes said university students began to analyze the social changes and violence in their country, and the more they analyzed the causes, the more politically involved they became.

Despite concerted efforts by successive governments to put down the revolution by banning unions and organizations and by outright murders of anti-government people, the revolution will continue, said Paredes.

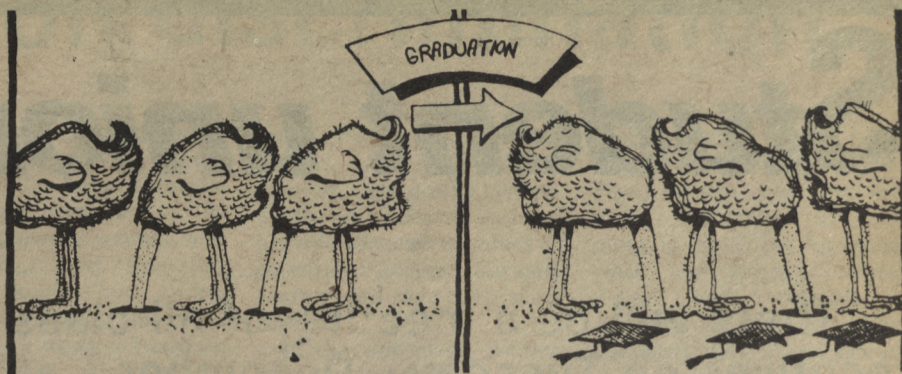
He said death squad killings designed to show people sympathetic to the revolution what could happen to them only serve to strengthen the resolve of younger Salvadoreans against the government.

Tens of thousands of people have already died in El Salvador since the revolution began, said Paredes; but he said the fight springs from the people who will continue to battle for their freedom.

He said he expects military intervention from the United States. In fact, he said, he can foresee the U.S. using the El Salvador conflict as an excuse to heighten East-West tension to the point of a world war.

Whatever happens, he said, "we are not afraid."

"We are committed to go on to the end and have a free country for the first time in El Salvador."



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