Popular Power spokesman at U of A

Salvadorans seek justice

by Bill Doskoch

A description of life inside the rebel-held areas of El Salvador was provided for students last Thursday by the international representative of Local Popular Power.

Popular Power is a collectivist movement that helps administer the one-half to one-third of the country under the control of the FDR-FLMN rebels.

Santiago Rodriguez, 40, has been involved with Popular Power since 1980. He had previously worked for the Christian Democratic Party in the 1960s and for various Christian-based groups in the 1970s.

Contributions towards the popular power movement have been made by all levels of society, said Rodriguez, who spoke through an interpreter.

He singled out students for their sacrifices.

"It is students who have offered their lives," said Rodriguez, noting the 1975 massacre — where students were killed by the army while protesting the closure of a university — as one of the tragic but unifying events of the revolution.

One of the most important contributions to be made at present by students and others was developing treatments for the chemical weapons being supplied to El Salvadoran government troops by the United States, Rodriguez said.

Two types of weapons were being used: Invisible Fire and poison cartridges, he said.

Invisible Fire is a mortar shell that bursts 50 metres above the ground. If its contents touch human skin it causes mortal burns, he said.

The cartridges are fired out of normal weapons. A person grazed by a cartridge must receive immediate medical attention or he is dead, Rodrigues said.

A less lethal area of importance to Rodriguez is education and literacy.

He claimed that illiteracy rates have been reduced to 20 per cent in Popular Power areas, as opposed to 80 per cent in govenment-controlled areas.

Political education and "eduction for productive work" are also considered important by Rodriguez.

"We must make the people understand why they are poor," he explained. "We don't have many schools but we have the will to teach, even when the roof of the class is the branch of a tree."

Food self-sufficiency is another important goal. Experimentation with different crops and techniques is constantly going on, he said.

When asked about the prospects for a negotiated peace, Rodriguez said: "We will not lose at the bargaining table what we have gained through our sacrifice. The only doors open for us have been opened by force. The only doors opened for us by Duarte have been bomb-bay doors."

On goals for El Salvador, Rodriguez wanted "a just democracy with a pluralistic government that respects the people. We want to eliminate illiteracy and have a society where people are not asleep in ignorance and where those who work the land also benefit from it. That's democracy," continued Rodriguez.

"But they paint us as Communists. We don't come from the Soviet Union, we come from hunger," he explained passionately.

In conclusion, Rodriguez said: "Good luck in your studies, discover your own society and be good to people. And thank you in the name of the people of El Salvador who are also discovering themselves."

Photo Bill Doskoch

Popular Power rep. Santiago Rodriguez says students have been important contributors to the Salvadoran revolution.

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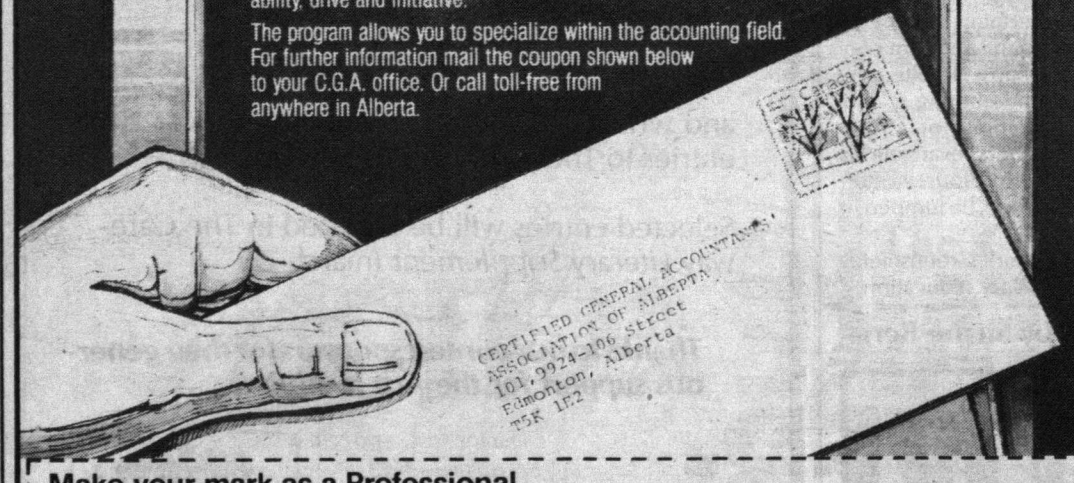

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