

# Imprisoned in El Salvador

by Joey Goodings

Canadians must pressure the Canadian and American governments to stop supporting the government of El Salvador, says Karen Ridd of Peace Brigades International, an organization promoting non-violence.

"How dare we give aid to the government of El Salvador?" asked Ridd at her lecture at St. Mary's last Thursday. Ridd, who made national headlines last November when she was incarcerated in El Salvador, is lecturing across Canada to raise awareness about the country.

According to Ridd, the Canadian government gives \$8 million a year to the government of El Salvador, while the American government gives approximately \$1.5 million of aid *per day*. Ridd says this legitimizes the government of El Salvador and its killing of innocent people.

Ridd began her lecture with a slide show. She paused at a pic-

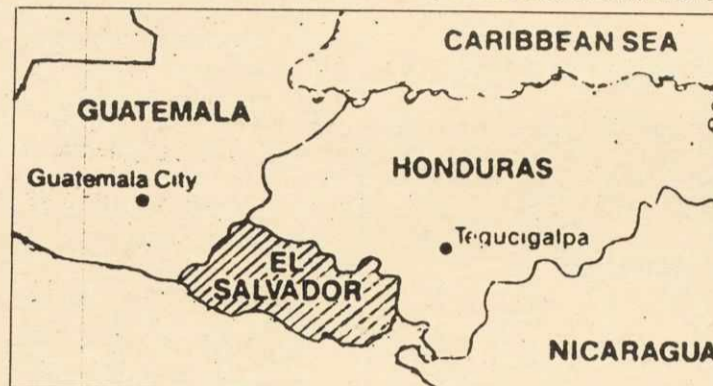
ture of her Salvadoran friend, Daisy, who was working with unemployed people. Ridd explained how Daisy was taken by the military to be tortured, raped, and beaten many times only to be released later without any charges being laid. She returned to work, fully aware that this endangered her life, only to be taken by the military again. This time Daisy was killed.

"The whole world is a little less bright when people of such life and light are lost," said Ridd. She said her experience of being jailed for fourteen hours was "just a shadow of that."

Ridd said the presidential election was not as democratic as the North American media portrayed it, criticizing the process for not reaching enough of the electorate and for not being confidential. "You must go to a table where people can watch, you must mark an X with a black felt pen, and then you have to put it in a plastic bag. Everyone can see how you

voted, and the army is present." Behind Ridd was a slide of a plastic bag filled with ballots, and the black X marks were clearly visible to the audience.

Ridd described the problem of "disappearances" in the country as an "insidious act" that breaks



families and communities apart. "At least with assassinations there is proof, but with a disappearance there is the friction of hope and no hope," the hope that the person is still alive and the "no hope" at the thought that

maybe the person, if alive, is being tortured, she explained.

Ridd emphasized the importance of non-violent organizations such as the Committee of the Mothers of the Disappeared, Peace Brigades International and many others. She believes that the

on the world market. The peasants, who supply this cheap labour, are landless and must work for a wage. According to Ridd, the maintenance of a society divided between the rich landowners and the poor peasants requires tremendous repression.

Ridd was humble about her own experience in El Salvador. She refused to leave the jail unless her colleague Marcela was also released. "It wasn't courageous," she said, "but just seeing what had to be done." While in jail, she asked the soldiers to put her in the same cell as Marcela. She appealed to the soldiers' sense of comradeship, asking them to understand. "Yeah, we do understand," was their response," she said, and the soldiers took her to Marcela's cell.

Due to the international pressure, Alfredo Christiani, the president of El Salvador, phoned the police, and Ridd was released before the curfew that night. "This speaks to the kind of influence we can have if we choose to use it," said Ridd.

Ridd urged people to do something, whether it is writing letters to the government, giving money through a non-governmental organization, or even volunteering with an organization such as Peace Brigades International. "We need to be aware of the power we can have," she said.

## Referendum off to cold start

# DSU Annual General Meeting

by Alistair Croll

The McInnes Room was filled with students concerned about the upcoming referendum on abortion when DSU chair Royden Trainor called the Annual General Meeting to order yesterday.

Trainor asked students present to vote on the mature students' society's application for "A" status, which passed despite some questioning of the need for another representative on the student council.

The meeting then moved on to the upcoming referendum on abortion policy. Trainor emphasized that the referendum was to decide whether or not the DSU should adopt a policy or remain indifferent to the issue. There were heated arguments from several students attending the meeting.

In order for a referendum to pass, eight per cent of the student body must vote on the issue. If there is a majority of this eight per cent, the DSU accepts the motion as a "Binding Opinion". According to Trainor, this means the DSU has a position on the issue, but does not necessarily mean the student union will actively campaign in favour of its views.

Several students attending the meeting voiced their concern over the effects of such a policy. Were the DSU to adopt a policy, asked one student, would societies that were opposed to the DSU position be banned from DSU funding?

Trainor pointed out that the distinction between constitutional policies — such as the DSU position against sexism, racism, and homophobia — and binding opinions like the position on abortion did exist, but the audience greeted this with skepticism.

Another student expressed his concern about the lack of student involvement in the process of the referendum, saying the DSU was acting beyond its mandate. Other students claimed the need for the referendum had been pushed through the DSU by an interest group made up of DSU members.

**"Better dissatisfied and informed than happy and ignorant"**

Trainor questioned his wisdom in discussing the referendum before it took place, but said it was "better to have you somewhat dissatisfied and informed than to have you happy and ignorant".

According to Trainor, the DSU won't act on its policies, but will use them when it must take a stand on an issue. As some of the students in attendance said, if the DSU adopts a policy on abortion,

and then allows student societies which promote the opposite view, it should theoretically fund organizations which promote racism, sexism, and homophobia.

Trainor's explanation of the distinction between policy and constitution didn't satisfy many of the people who attended the meeting. "I have a tough time with this," said the DSU chair. "I don't think I should be in the position to decide on this."

In contrast to the discussion on the abortion referendum, the rest of the meeting went very smoothly. Ralph Bastarache spoke out in favour of the Mature Students' Association promotion, whose delegates were conspicuously absent from the meeting. Trainor's explanation of Dal's Public Interest Group and the South African Education Trust fund passed without a hitch, as did the report on the Union's finances.

Trainor affirmed his views on the abortion referendum after the meeting, saying this referendum was to decide if the student body wanted the DSU involved — or if they should "stay out because it isn't our business".

The referendum will take place as part of the upcoming DSU elections. Students will present valid ID cards at a voting booth, at which point they will be presented with a ballot and a referendum question sheet. Voter turnout is often influenced by controversial referendum topics such as abortion, said one DSU representative.

present situation is militarily unwinnable, and that there needs to be more pressure for negotiations.

"We oversimplify it as an armed struggle, but we don't consider the non-violent struggle," said Ridd. The FMLN has been fighting the government of El Salvador since the early sixties. Their principle demand is land reform.

El Salvador, she said, has had approximately 500 years of repression, beginning with the Spaniards up to the present day. The main crop is coffee, which is a labour-intensive crop that depends on cheap labour for sale

## Fears grow as loans shrivel

by Stuart Flinn

There is a growing fear among many students that loans and bursaries will be adversely affected as the government moves to privatize the system.

Lara Morris, chair of the Student Union of Nova Scotia, said many students she had spoken with were "shocked" by what could happen to the loans and bursary system if it is privatized.

On Dec. 15, the federal government announced a plan to privatize the loan administration system in post-secondary education and add a three per cent tax on all student loans. The government already has a collection agency to collect on overdue loans.

"Nova Scotia could be hard hit by the new plans of privatizing the loans system, since nearly 50 per cent of students in post-secondary education receive some form of student aid assistance," said Morris.

At present, the maximum student loan available is \$3,360 per year, plus a \$2,000 bursary. Morris sees this equation as lopsided. "The balance between loan and

bursary should be 50-50, not the one-third bursary and the two-thirds loan that we're seeing now," she said.

The move to privatize the loan system, with banks becoming more involved, could result in higher interest payments for students.

"Right now, the loans are interest free until the student graduates or leaves university, but that could change when the banks become involved. They are interested in the profit motive and that could mean that students would have to pay interest on their loans while attending university," said Morris.

The proposed three per cent tax on student loans could also hurt accessibility, according to SUNS. The tax will come into effect in 1991. It is intended to deter loan defaults by making borrowers more responsible, while putting an estimated \$60 million into government coffers.

"This new three per cent tax is regressive and could further jeopardize the ability of students from marginal socio-economic backgrounds to attend university," said Morris.