

Refugee doctor attacks US policy in Central and South America

by S.J. Millar
The Meliorist
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Dr. Jorge Osorio escaped from El Salvador in 1980. He lived as a refugee in the nearby Central American nation of Belize for 3 years before coming to Canada. Today, Osorio works in the University of Lethbridge Biology department, studying *Giardiasis*, better known as "Beaver Fever".

Osorio has worked in human parasitology before, as a medical doctor in El Salvador, and during his medical training in Chile. He took time out to discuss some of his experiences as a doctor and a refugee from a country caught in the middle of a brutal civil war.

For the first three months following his departure from El Salvador, Osorio and his family of four lived in a refugee camp. "There were thousands of them [refugees] there," he said. "We had to sleep on the floor. They had little clothing to give us."

The reason for leaving El Salvador in the first place concerns events in March of 1980. At that time, Osorio was working in a Catholic church clinic as a physician, treating poor people.

"I was working with the priests in a cooperative, helping the poor people," said Osorio. "It was very dangerous for every doctor in the country. In March [1980], the leaders of the popular movements were killed. Monsignor Romero, who

was working with the poor people, too, was killed by the death squads."

Osorio's own decision to leave was prompted by threats against himself and his family. "On March 15th, the death squad gave me the first phone call. They told me to stop working with the poor people and go abroad, or I would be killed, and my family would be killed."

But Osorio continued to treat patients. "I treated one patient who had been sexually abused by the soldiers. One of them had put a bayonet between her legs."

Then the death squads repeated their threats. "I received a second phone call because I was still working with the poor, and especially this patient (the raped woman)."

The second phone call again ordered Osorio to go abroad or face execution. Osorio complied with this threat.

"I sent my wife and daughter to Puerto Barrios (El Salvador) and they went to Belmopan (Belize) by ship. My son and I went another way. We all met in Belmopan."

After his three months in a refugee camp, Osorio began to work for the Belize government as a doctor. "It was the only way to help my family," he said.

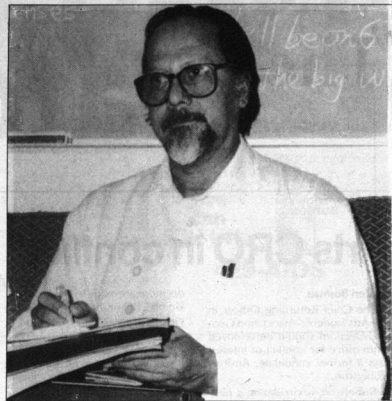
After three years of work, the intergovernmental committee for Migration, a branch of the Belize Christian Council, was able to help him come to Canada. "I hope to stay here with my family," said

Osorio, "The government of Canada is doing well with us."

Of El Salvador, Osorio feels that the situation there is even worse now. "There is much repression. The death squad is still active. The last person they killed was the Director of Human Rights in my country."

Though he does not plan to return to El Salvador, Osorio is part of a group that sends medicine and clothing to the people of El Salvador. "It is very hard," he said of this, "The government [of El Salvador] stops most of what we send."

Osorio added that the North American press and the Reagan Administration do not present a true picture of the situation in El Salvador. "Reagan is helping the contra in Nicaragua and the military in my country."



Dr. Jorge Osorio from the University of Lethbridge Photo Rob Galbraith

Oldman River divides many

by Jon Oxley and Robin Thompson
The Meliorist
LETHBRIDGE

The issue of whether or not to build the Oldman River Dam has polarized the academic, political and civil communities all over Alberta.

The University of Lethbridge held a forum last weekend to allow individuals, government and interest groups to present their views of the dam.

The forum addressed the impact of the dam on the environment, economy, and culture. The 'pro' dam argument concentrated on the themes of irrigated agriculture and economic development, while the 'anti' dam argument disputed the government's stance on economic development, and mitigated it with historical, cultural and environmental aspects.

One of the best received presenta-

tions was that of U of L plant physiologist Stewart Rood. "I'm a tree hugger," Rood said, "and I hope that all of us here are." Rood's comment was in reference to Environment Minister Ken Kowalski's statement that the "anti" dam groups were "social anarchists and tree huggers."

Despite siding himself with 'tree huggers', Rood was non-partisan on the issue. Centering his concerns on the fact that a significant percentage of the trees downstream of the existing St. Mary and Waterton River dams are dead or dying as a result of poor dam management, Rood said, "I think it would be a great shame to lose these poplars (in Lethbridge's river valley)."

There was little agreement on whether the dam would have a positive or negative effect upon the economy of the area, or the province itself. Agricultural economi-

st Terry Veeman noted that while the cost/benefit ratio for the province as a whole would barely balance out, the benefits for the region of Southern Alberta would be much greater. But overall, Veeman said that "this project falls somewhat short of economic feasibility."

Deputy Minister of the Environment Peter Melnychuk argued that "economic development, water management and environmental protection can work hand in hand... they are not mutually exclusive." Lethbridge Mayor David Carpenter was not willing to take a position on the environmental and historical questions but said that, based solely on economic benefits, the dam would "benefit everyone," and asked everyone to work together to support the dam, since he felt its construction was inevitable.

Also addressed was the effect of the dam on historical and archaeological sites in the floodplain. Archaeologists Barney Reeves and Jack Ives presented opposing views. Reeves argued that the Three Rivers site is "a unique area of international significance" and that the dam shouldn't be built at that site. Ives claimed that the damage to archaeological sites could be mitigated by excavation in advance of the flooding. Ives disputed the quality of the sites and stated that dam stoppage will not preserve sites as they are steadily eroding even now.

Providing a view of dam projects in the United States was California environmentalist Tim Palmer, who made an eloquent plea to Canadians to preserve the "best rivers in the world" because "you still have a lot of what we (the United States) lost." Palmer said that "the dam if you can" approach is being changed due to the opening of politics to scrutiny, individual political involvement, and scientific analysis, bringing to the forefront the issue of permanence in river protection.

Palmer stated that since 1980, no major dam fights in the United States have been lost by environmentalists. On a related note, Jasper-based naturalist Kevin Van Tighem challenged the assumption of a river being simply a water resource.

The Oldman River Dam Forum was largely conducted by University of Lethbridge geography professors Frank Jankunis, Rene Barendregt, Jim Byrne and Margaret Kennedy, and biology professor Stewart Rood. It was co-sponsored by the Lethbridge Herald Distinguished Speaker Fund.

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