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Further information may be obtained from the SORSE Office. A letter of application and a detailed resume should be submitted to:  
Selection Committee c/o SORSE  
Room 278 SUB  
Phone 432-5319

# Bloody revolution rages in El Salvador Citizens fight junta

by Mike Walker

Daniele Lacourse, a Canadian journalist, recently returned from the Central American country of El Salvador. She is now on a cross-Canada tour to publicise the Salvadoran revolution. The Gateway interviewed Ms. Lacourse this week.

When Roman Catholic Archbishop Romero of El Salvador was killed last spring, Canadians were told the assassination was the work of "right-wing extremists," an isolated act of violence in a comparatively peaceful country.

But the real picture is radically different.

El Salvador is a country ripped apart by a bloody war between its citizens and a government that has lost the support of all but the wealthiest landowning families.

Fifty-five people per day are killed by the military junta that took power just over a year ago, promising to end the growing internal strife that had been tearing the country apart for the past decade.

Many of those killed are tortured first. Salvadorans tell of victims with their heads blown off with dynamite to prevent identification.

In addition to the killings, thousands of citizens have disappeared in the last year.

Lacourse says when she arrived in the capital, San Salvador, she was required to register with the government. "A military officer was there. He said to me, 'Where are you going? I will accompany you.'" As they got into the officer's car, he took his handgun and placed it on the seat of the car, pointing at Lacourse.

"He started to tell me, 'You know we have a very good government here. The people don't know the difference between this and the other ones.' He said when I left, 'I hope you do a good job.'"



Photo: Kathy Kebarle

Daniele Lacourse relates her experiences in El Salvador.

The junta is concerned in the middle of its desperate struggle to maintain its hold on the country, that it have a positive image abroad.

On March 6 of this year, the five-month old junta announced a program to break the hold on the land of the 75 or so wealthy families who own most of El Salvador's land.

One day later, a massive crackdown was launched to break the back of opposition to the junta. In addition, the land reform turned out to be little more than a smoke screen for this crackdown, to bolster the junta's image abroad.

Archbishop Romero protested the crackdown and supported the peasants' revolt growing in the country.

"He said popular insurrection was better than the bloodbath that was the land reform", Lacourse says.

On March 26 Romero was killed. Salvadorans know he was killed by the junta's security forces.

However, Romero's death didn't squelch the revolt.

In June, a three day general strike paralyzed the country's economy. In August, shortly after Lacourse arrived in El Salvador, another strike was called by the central body directing what had by then turned into a revolution.

But this time, the junta was prepared, and the strike was only partly successful.

"There is a decree that those who don't go to work can be fired or suspended for six months," Lacourse says. In addition, "the National Guard went to the

workers' houses to take them to the factories." When asked why they were not striking as they had in June, some workers said, "You don't see we have a gun in our backs."

How does the junta hold onto its power if the bulk of El Salvador's citizens oppose it?

The United States has an interest in the "stability" of all of Latin America. Last year's revolution in Nicaragua shook the American business and political community, which worried that Nicaragua could trigger revolutions all over Central America. Americans have interests in plantations, industry and banking throughout the region.

"In the banana plantations, (in Guatemala and Honduras) United Fruit owns them all," Lacourse says. More seriously, "If they lose Central America, it will be more difficult to get oil from Venezuela and copper from Chile."

To protect its interests in Central America, the U.S. operates a counter-insurgency school in the Panama Canal Zone, Lacourse says, and stations advisors in many of the countries it has interests in, including El Salvador.

But Guatemala and Honduras, which share borders with El Salvador, also have strong revolutionary forces.

"There is also a movement in Guatemala," Lacourse says. "It will be the next one (after El Salvador)."

"There is a military pact between Central American countries", Lacourse says. Guatemala is reported to be massing troops along its border with El Salvador. In addition, she says, there is a chance of U.S. military intervention.

The Edmonton Support Committee for El Salvador meets every Thursday at 7:30 p.m. at the Cross-Cultural Learner Center at Mr. Carmel School, 10524-76 Avenue. It can be contacted at Box 275 SUB, U of A.

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