

William Daley
CERAMIST

WILLIAM DALEY
FREE LECTURE
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115 Lawrence, U of O

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Zapatistas fighting inequalities

Sarah Gray
For the Oregon Daily Emerald

As a political activist and a U.S. representative of the Zapatista National Liberation Front, Cecilia Rodriguez understands the problems and perspectives of the revolutionary Zapatista group in Mexico.

Rodriguez, who once chained herself and five other Chicana garment workers to sewing machines to protest sweatshops on the Texas-Mexico border, spoke before nearly 100 people Monday evening in the EMU.

The uprising of the Zapatista organization is one of Rodriguez's latest concerns. Being the United States Representative of the Zapatista Front has led her to speak around the nation informing people of the situation in Mexico.

January marked the one-year anniversary of the Zapatista uprising in protest of the invasion of the state of Chiapas, a poor and mostly Indian region of Mexico. Rodriguez said that Chiapas and many other parts of Mexico have been subjected to repression and inequality for hundreds of years.

"It's not just Chiapas," Rodriguez said. "Injustice is all over Mexico. The Mexican government is desperate to believe this is a only a local conflict; that only one group is unhappy. This is a false hope."

Guy Burton, a University psychology senior, said the invasion of Chiapas was a preview of future uprisings and conflicts in Mexico.

"It was a wake-up call, a warning shot across the bow of the neo-liberals supported by the policy of the International Monetary Fund in the World Bank," Burton said. "A structural adjustment policy was bound to fail in a developing country."

Rodriguez said growing up in El Paso, Texas showed many problems of working conditions for Chicana people.

Rodriguez began her political work at the University of Texas while working on housing and environmental issues. She participated in two hunger strikes which prompted an investigation of the garment industry by the Department of Labor, which later contributed to the passing of a bill making failure to pay wages a crime in Texas. She was the first Latina to head a national charitable foundation, the Funding Exchange, and currently heads the National Commission for Democracy in Mexico. The Commission is a national information



RODRIGUEZ

and advocacy center for the democracy movement in Mexico.

One aspect that Rodriguez feels has contributed to the many problems in Mexico is the history of interventions by foreign powers, particularly the United States. She mentioned how much the United States has used resources and people to help boost its economy.

"The effect of squeezing resources and people from the south up to the north is the exclusion from participating with future decisions and results in political conflicts," Rodriguez said.

For the past 65 years, Mexico has been governed by the Institutional Revolutionary Party, which the Zapatista group has risen against. Rodriguez said the group is attempting to change the treatment of the people of Mexico and to unite everyone, regardless of class, race, gender or sexuality. She said the Zapatistas have rescued Mexico's tradition of dignity and have a deep abiding search for justice, liberty and democracy. They are not endorsing any particular party, nor are they attempting to start a new party. Their only problem is the lack of a political structure to implement the tradition.

Rodriguez believes it is time for people to change their behaviors and discriminatory viewpoints in order for an end to these problems.

"At this point of time when there's a climate of fear and people are told these problems are from too many dark people, too many gay people and that women should stay home to care for the house, that is in our tradition to say 'no,'" Rodriguez said. "Our tradition is not based on fear."

Rodriguez also spoke of a new generation of people who will see that the health and well-being of many people is more important than the health and well-being of a few people. She said that love will be the driving force, rather than hate.

Georgia Quinones, member of Chiapas Urgent Call, an affiliate of Rodriguez's organization, said this has been one of the biggest causes she has participated in.

"Never have I been as privileged to be involved in any protest than this one," Quinones said.

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