



Lucila Mejia de Morales — "The President said the new economic policy is the salvation of our country," but he Indian peasants say it represents starvation and not salvation.

(Photo: Richard J. Brown)

## Bolivian peasant leader recent local visitor

by Bob Lothian

Bolivia, a poor, landlocked country with high mountains and a large Indian population, located in central South America, has been in the news lately because of cocaine scandals and a recent general strike.

Lucila Mejia de Morales, the leader of the Bolivian Federation of Peasant Women, visited Portland last week and spoke of the general strike and of her efforts on behalf of peasant women.

Two months ago, said Mejia, the country's new president (Bolivia has had over 200 leaders in the last 125 years) responded to demands of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank by freezing salaries and raising transportation costs. The IMF and World Bank require such measures as part of debt repayment plans for Bolivia and other Third World debtor nations.

"The president said the new economic policy is the salvation of our country," but the Indian peasants say it represents starvation and not salvation, said Mejia, talking quietly but firmly in Spanish, and wearing a wool shawl and the bowler hat popular with Bolivian Indian women, Mejia said that her two small children and future generations will suffer from being forced to pay the country's debt to the IMF and World Bank.

Workers and peasants at first asked for a dialog with the president to ask for changes, but were refused, she said. The Bolivian Workers Central, largest labor federation in Bolivia, then called for a nationwide hunger strike. A state of siege was declared, the strike leaders were arrested and taken to a prison in the jungle where they were not allowed visits and care packages from their families, she said.

The government let up on the repression after several weeks, the leaders were released, and an uneasy peace continues, according to Mejia. She said thousands of miners remain on strike underground and other groups of hunger strikers continue to occupy churches.

Strikes, repression, strict economic measures, drugs, corruption and changes in government form the fabric of life in Bolivia, a country with an impoverished 85 percent Indian popu-

lation where one in five infants don't survive. Haiti and Bolivia are the poorest countries in the western hemisphere.

Mejia, 36, from the altaplano, or high plains area of Aroma province in the state of LaPaz in central Bolivia, said she left home at age 12 and worked her way through school by doing housework.

Her efforts that led to the formation of the peasant women's federation began in a village church, where she organized a cooperative effort to teach women to read so they could form a choir. There was no chalk or blackboard. "Each person would give something and we would sell it, and with the money we bought school materials. We began with seven, then there were 15, then 30 and then 60 members," she said.

When Mejia spoke up on women's rights at a fiesta, she was asked to become a representative to the Bolivian Workers Central. Her first job was office housekeeping, but she told the male labor leaders there that she came as a leader, not an employee, and left to organize the women's federation independently.

The federation became official in 1980 with a meeting of 3,500 peasant women from throughout the country. It organizes cooperative education programs in small communities that teach young and old Indian women reading, writing, simple mathematics, cooperative sales practices, and social and labor history. Mejia said that 60 percent of Bolivia's population, mostly women, cannot read or write.

Shortly after the federation formed, she said, it had to go underground for two years after the military seized power. Mejia said she narrowly escaped an attack on the Bolivian Workers Central building, which was destroyed and turned into a parking lot by security forces. Things have improved somewhat and the federation now functions openly across the country, she said. "What we want is peace and life and food and we ask that there be no bloodshed," Mejia said.

Mejia's tour of Oregon and the U.S. was sponsored by the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, D.C., and in Oregon by the Council for Human Rights in Latin America.

## Dr. Charles Clements, doctor behind the lines, speaks in Portland

by Robert Lothian

Dr. Charles Clements returned to El Salvador recently with a delegation of Vietnam veterans.

Clements, a former pilot in Vietnam who resigned the Air Force in protest and became a doctor, went behind the lines in El Salvador in 1982 and organized medical care in a rebel zone.

Speaking in Portland last week, Clements said the delegation's first stop on the recent tour was at a hospital full of government soldiers awaiting artificial limbs. One of the American veterans unstrapped his artificial legs and held them up for the Salvadorans to see, then strapped them back on and ran up and down the length of the ward, said Clements.

"Those young men's faces were transformed," he said. "Despite the fact that they were killing civilians, there was very much an identity between these young men and the American vets, because they were a lot like us when we were 17 and 18."

Clements said that the media message that government troops are defeating the guerrillas is false. "Everything that our delegation saw there points out that the war is still very much alive."

The guerrillas and the military have reached a stalemate where neither side can win and everyone in El Salvador knows it, he said. It is the United States that is holding back peace negotiations, Clements charged. "The attitude of the U.S. Embassy is, 'We can win it this time,'" he said.

The experience of Zimbabwe-Rhodesia points to a solution for El Salvador's problems, Clements said.

After years of revolutionary warfare leading to a stalemate in that African country, a peacekeeping force was called in to keep the white security forces in their barracks and allow a free election. Over 70 percent of the population elected a rebel government

which instituted land reform and guaranteed civil rights for the Black majority. Whites retained their rights and continue to farm and do business, and Zimbabwe has not become a pawn of the Soviet Union, he said. The United States is standing in the way of a similar settlement for El Salvador, according to Clements.

If the United States gets involved in Central America, Clements said, it will be Black Americans and other minorities who are sent to kill poor peasants. The U.S. funds used to finance the wars in El Salvador and Nicaragua come directly out of food stamps, welfare and other social services, Clements charged.

The United States is supplying the Salvadoran Air Force with millions of dollars' worth of high-technology weapons used in an air war that is driving the guerrillas into the cities, he said. With AC-47 "Puff the Magic Dragon" and Hughes 500 helicopter gunships that can shred everything in their path, and planes fitted with instruments that can detect the heat from an infant at 10,000 feet, "this kind of technical escalation has made life in rural El Salvador untenable," Clements said. "It's very difficult to survive in rural El Salvador and the people that do so are very dedicated." Civilians suffer the most casualties, he said.

U.S. military strategy is failing on two counts, according to Clements. Moving civilians into strategic hamlets has only served to concentrate the opposition, he said, and the massive bombing is limited to the countryside where it is ineffective against guerrillas in the cities.

Clements said that the past year has seen a return of mass public demonstrations. Over 10,000 people defied the repression to honor the memory of Archbishop Romero at a San Salvador demonstration in March, and 20,000 marched for land reform in May, he said.



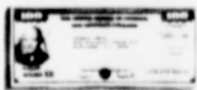
Charles Clements — If the United States gets involved in Central America, it will be Black Americans and other minorities who are sent to kill poor peasants.

(Photo: Richard J. Brown)

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**The Royal Esquire Club's Community Service Statement by A.D.S.**

Volume XIII

Red Card Holders, please don't forget Thursday, October 31, 1985 — Halloween!

As you know, the club will hold a Halloween costume party starting at 9:00 p.m., Halloween night. There will be PRIZES for the best, most original costumes. There will be 1st, 2nd and 3rd place prizes. So — unless you are very, very, very pretty, wear a costume. And let's have fun!

ALSO — remember, and don't forget to prepare for the talent show to be held in November. More about that next week.