Rapid Response Network: A Telegram May Save a Life

At our April meeting we voted to participate as a group in the Rapid Response Network. This is a human-rights project to send telegrams to Latin American authorities urging the release of individual political prisoners as soon as their "disappearance" is learned. In this way it works much like Amnesty International's local groups.

This project is organized by NECAN (New England Central America Network), based in Cambridge. NECAN handles all the mechanics of sending a telegram once a month in your name. You receive a copy of the telegram and are billed about $5.50 by Baud Telecommunications.

Over 250 individuals and 20 Central America committees across New England are participating. This project has had real successes. Last November, Milda Martines, a 29-year-old teacher and mother, was kidnaped in Jutiapa, Guatemala by eight armed men, four in military uniforms. Ordinarily she would never have been seen alive or whole again. NECAN learned of her "arrest" within hours. The resulting flood of telegrams to authorities in Guatemala played a part in her sudden and unexpected release three days later.

To participate in this project please call Alan MacRobert at 641-3266 for a simple form to fill out. Or write to NECAN, 1151 Mass. Ave, Cambridge 02138. It's easy, inexpensive, and very effective.

COMADRES Event A Big Success

A crowd of 110 turned out at the Unitarian Church for our last public event, on March 7th. America Sosa, a refugee from El Salvador living underground in the United States, told of the military reign of terror still occurring under the supposedly democratic government of Jose Napoleon Duarte. She described the torture and murder of her husband and son for working with peasant organizations.

A small, elderly woman who spoke through a translator, she impressed us tremendously with the strength that has enabled her to survive.

One purpose of Sosa's speaking tour was to raise money for COMADRES, the Committee of Mothers and Relatives of the Disappeared, Assassinated, and Political Prisoners of El Salvador. In our last newsletter we asked you for contributions. You responded (both by mail and at the event) with an amazing $709.46. We hear this was the most raised at any of Sosa's stops. We turned over 100% of this money to COMADRES and paid all costs of putting on the event from our regular treasury -- which also depends on your donations.

Sosa's compatriot Maria Tula de Canales was scheduled to speak also. But her visa to enter the United States was blocked by the federal government. Shortly after our event, she and her two children, ages 6 and 9, made it into the country illegally. A human rights activist who was raped and beaten in a Salvadoran prison, she recently surfaced to testify to a congressional hearing about threats facing Salvadoran refugees if they are deported.

Treasury Report

You're such generous and supportive people! Aside from COMADRES donations, you sent the Arlington Central America Committee $566.00 following Newsletter #1 and $245.00 following issue #2. Each issue cost about $270 to print and mail. (Our new bulk rate permit should reduce the cost to about $200.) Despite other expenses, our bank account is now $511.90. We don't expect that to last, but for now the wolf is not at the door. Our sincere thanks to you.

Greater Boston Updates

For news of many Central America and peace events in surrounding communities, call CASA's Central America Hotline, 547-3363.

For news of Pledge of Resistance demonstrations and other events, call the Pledge Hotline, 497-9311.

For legislative news and lobbying strategies, call CPPAX at 426-3040.

The April 25th March on Washington

The largest demonstration ever against U.S. policy in Central America took place last month, and we were there. Jim Roettger reports:

"Despite a cold rain, 150,000 people (according to an announced police estimate) converged on the Capitol for a protest against U.S. policy in Central America and South Africa. Carrying our Arlington banner, we joined a gigantic crowd with banners proclaiming local groups from Maine to Texas. Boston sent 30 train cars of people. Ohio had 100 buses. Despite a contrary order from AFL-CIO president Lane Kirkland, a very large labor contingent showed up. But the most organizations by far were church groups who felt U.S. policy is immoral. Ed Asner gave a speech that was absolutely superb. 'Patriotism is not allegiance to a country's governmental policies,' he quoted from Mark Twain, 'but to the country's ideals.'"

Participants were surprised when news media later reported the crowd as only 75,000.

The evening before, South Station was mobbed with people boarding the longest Amtrak train to leave Boston in years. As the train rolled south, bull sessions were struck up in the cars and new friends were made, until people began going to sleep around midnight.

The train arrived about 7:30 a.m. and people made their way to the Ellipse between the Washington Monument and White House. As the march got rolling, continuous masses of people poured past the White House chanting and singing, then continued across town to the Capitol Building. A full hour after the ACAC contingent arrived at the Capitol, marchers were still flowing in.

Among the speakers and entertainers in addition to Asner were Jackson Browne; Peter, Paul & Mary; and the Catholic Bishop of Detroit. By 9 p.m. the trains were reloading. People slept on the way back exhausted but content with a job well done. It was the biggest foreign-policy demonstration of Reagan's presidency.

Two days later, some 500 people were arrested for civil disobedience at CIA headquarters in nearby Langley, Virginia. They sat in an access road and refused to budge, while 1,000 cheered from the sidelines.

Among those speaking was Daniel Ellsberg. "Inside that building," he said, "are many people who know that what they are doing is wrong." He himself had been in their place as a Vietnam War analyst in the Pentagon when it was surrounded by demonstrators nearly 20 years ago. He was moved to take a leap of conscience, and this day he seemed to offer living hope that others can do the same.

Other Recent Actions

ARLINGTON PATRIOT'S DAY PARADE. This was our second year participating. The parade's theme was the U.S. Constitution; a star of our show was Ted Sanger in his Disabled American Veterans life-member cap carrying a sign, "Honor the Constitution -- Only Congress shall have the power to declare war -- No secret wars, no secret government." It was most gratifying to be applauded by spectators all along the two-mile route!

PLEDGE OF RESISTANCE DEMONSTRATION. On March 20, a half dozen ACAC members carried our Arlington banners in a Boston protest following the Senate's vote to release $40 million in aid to the contras. The Greater Boston Pledge of Resistance organized about 100 people to wear blank white plastic death masks and carry white crosses with names of civilians murdered by contras, resulting in a large photo in the Globe. An example of what a few people can cook up with some imagination and gumption.

BENJAMIN LINDER VIGIL. On April 29th came news of the first U.S. citizen killed by the contras. Benjamin Linder was a mechanical engineer volunteering on a rural electrification project in Nicaragua. He and two Nicaraguans were killed in a contra grenade attack. That afternoon, CASA (Central America Solidarity Association in Cambridge) asked us to alert our phone tree members for a vigil in Linder's honor the following noon at Government Center. That evening we set the phone tree in motion. Once started it passes messages to 90 of our people. We were part of why the vigil, coming unexpectedly at a crucial moment, was a success.

Your Free Copy of Central America Report

Everyone on our mailing list (all 738 of you!) will soon get a sample copy of Central America Report, a Boston-area newspaper put out by CASA, the Central America Solidarity Association in Cambridge.

We recommend that you subscribe. The Report lists more events than we could possibly put in this newsletter. It also contains much Central America news unreported elsewhere. For all concerned with this issue, the Report is vital. We voted to loan our mailing list to CASA strictly for this one-time use as a service to our members and supporters.