

SANCTUARY

by Juanita Heubner



"TRAVELER, THERE IS NO ROAD/ ONE MAKES THE ROAD BY WALKING."

— ANTONIO MACHADO

"VIRTUALLY EVERY OTHER REVOLUTION IN HISTORY JUST EXCHANGED ONE SET OF RULERS FOR ANOTHER. OUR REVOLUTION IS THE FIRST TO SAY THE PEOPLE ARE THE MASTERS, AND THE GOVERNMENT IS THEIR SERVANT. DON'T EVER FORGET THAT."

— RONALD REAGAN, 1987 STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS

Two years ago on the Mexican-American border, the U.S. government indicted sixteen North American sanctuary activists including two priests, a nun, and a minister. Many of the refugees were deported and the sanctuary workers were charged with seventy-one counts of conspiracy, and harboring and transporting "illegal aliens." When brought to court, the government's case was based upon evidence obtained by infiltration, tape-recordings from body-bugs and wiretaps, and by informants planted by the Immigration and Naturalization Service. The Reagan Administration spent almost two million dollars on the prosecution, trial and its nine month long "Operation Sojourner" investigation. Their underlying intent was to discredit the national sanctuary movement which is comprised of more than three hundred sanctuary churches and synagogues, nineteen sanctuary cities and twenty sanctuary universities.

The trial in Tucson, Arizona, was everything but a simple alien smuggling case. It involved broad constitutional principles, technical immigration laws, and an array of insidious legal maneuvers by the prosecution. During the pretrial hearings, Judge Earl H. Carroll placed stringent restrictions on the defense by disallowing any discussion of motive, religious beliefs, conditions in Central America, the Geneva Conventions and the U.S. Refugee Act of 1980 to be included in the testimony. The key government witness in the trial was INS informant Jesus Cruz, who had for years made his living by smuggling guns and Mexican farmworkers across the border until the INS offered him a job in the "Operation Sojourner" investigation, and was paid twenty-

one thousand dollars for his work on the case. Telling sanctuary workers he wanted to help refugees because he was a good Christian, Cruz infiltrated bible studies, worship services and sanctuary meetings. By the end of the trial it was proven that he had lied at least three times on the witness stand.

Despite the deportations and convictions of eight of the sanctuary activists at the end of the six month long trial, the outcome has not proven to be a defeat for the movement. Instead, the Reagan Administration's Central American policies, as well as the methods employed by the INS were thoroughly criticized and ultimately discredited. It is no surprise that the political costs involved in prosecuting religious workers and dragging refugees out of churches before the national newsmedia has been high.

Since its beginning five years ago, the sanctuary movement has aided thousands of Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees by providing them with shelter, transportation and material assistance. It has also played a crucial role in educating and mobilizing against U.S. involvement in Central America mainly by creating a forum through which refugees can present their testimony.

The act of giving refuge to Central Americans fleeing their countries is considered a felony by U.S. law punishable by up to five years in jail and a two thousand dollar fine per alien. This is, in part based on the Reagan Administration's claim that refugees from El Salvador and Guatemala are leaving for economic reasons rather than due to the reality of civil war and oppression which our government directly supports.

In 1967, the U.S. signed the United Nations Protocol on the Status of Refugees which requires that the government grant political asylum to anyone who possesses a grave fear of persecution on the basis of race, religion, nationality, or membership in a particular

social group or political opinion. Despite these principles, the Administration has made it virtually impossible for Central American refugees to be awarded political asylum. Furthermore, international humanitarian law has determined that Salvadorans and Guatemalans who have fled their countries are refugees of armed conflict. The Fourth Geneva Convention prohibits any forcible return of refugees to their country of origin. Yet since 1980, approximately fifty thousand Central Americans have been deported from the U.S. Many repatriated refugees have been found tortured or dead within a few months of their return.

As the Reagan Administration continues to harass, arrest, deport and violate the rights of Central American refugees, it also maintains a policy of military intervention based on aggression and pacification techniques designed to create refugees. Since 1983, the war in Central America has evolved into what military strategists term "low-intensity conflict," a post-Viet Nam counterinsurgency doctrine that combines economic sabotage, political attacks, psychological warfare and military pressure. This amalgam of tactics both intends to maintain a war of long duration and requires a commitment to total war.

"Low-intensity war" must be seen for exactly what it is — total and intense war for the people of Central America, while for the people of the U.S. it becomes an increasingly "low-visibility" war. In recent years more than one hundred and twenty thousand Central Americans have been killed. And the escalations of war go on — Contras are being trained in the U.S., massive sums of our tax dollars are funding the war in the form of military and economic aid to El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Costa Rica, thousands of U.S. national guardsmen have been sent to Honduras to participate in wars game maneuvers and aid in construction of military bases. The President's claims of working toward peace in the region are ridiculously and demonstrably false.

The national sanctuary movement believes in the importance of remaining visible in its work. Rather than operating as the government accuses it — as a clandestine, criminal conspiracy, the movement continues to be open about its practices and beliefs, and refuses to go underground. A common thread which fuels the work of sanctuary is that saving the lives and protecting the rights of refugees is a moral imperative, despite the fact that it means breaking the law.

This month the North Coast community will have the opportunity to welcome the Second National Caravan for Peace and Justice in Central America to Astoria. This is an informational caravan, providing a way for Salvadoran refugees to tell their stories and receive our support. Salvadorans have found wide sympathetic support among most people they meet face-to-face, many of whom knew little about El Salvador until their encounter. In the wake of the Iran-Contra scandal, the caravan intends to tell what is really happening in Central America, and further our questioning of the Reagan Administration's integrity. The caravan is also participating in two important projects which give humanitarian assistance to the repopulation movement in El Salvador while demanding a change in U.S. Central American policy.

On March 12, from 6-8 p.m. at the Buk-Store Cafe on 10th Street in Astoria, there will be a welcome gathering for the caravan and a presentation by the refugees. The community is encouraged to attend.

KMUN-FM will air a two-part series on Central America on March 15 and March 22 from 1-3 p.m. Taped interviews with caravan members will be featured in the programs.

Juanita Heubner lives in Astoria. Anyone who is interested in more information about the sanctuary caravan or in donating funds to assist in its work may contact her at 842 Harrison, Astoria.

SANCTUARY II

On Friday, March 13, refugees from El Salvador will be in Newport to give personal testimony of their experiences of separation, loss, exile and survival in their war-torn country.

The Central American Action Committee will present this "Caravan of Salvadorans for Peace and Justice in Central America" at 7 p.m. on March 13 at the Atonement Lutheran Church in Newport. For more information, call 336-3123 or 336-5215.

— LIBBY BATEMAN

Libby Bateman lives in Toledo and is a member of the Central America Action Committee.

LOSING HER FAMILY
THE VILLAGE BURNED, SCREAMED, DISAPPEARED
SHE WALKS DAYS WITH ONLY ONE OF HER CHILDREN
IN THIN, SCARRED ARMS
THAT FIRE SET MARCHING BY THE GOVERNMENT
ANNIHILATING TIME
SHE ARRIVES IN EYES, LAGRIMAS, HORROR, EXHAUSTION
THEIR LIES OF UNSPEAKABLE MEANING ROAR DISTANCES
BONDS, CORDS, RIVERS
AN UNWOVEN AND BLEEDING TRAUMA
A REFUGEE CAMP REDUCED TO SHADOW IN THE WORLD
KILLING PEASANTS FOR NOT BEING COST-EFFECTIVE
SHE STARES INTO POUNDED DIRT, CORN, SLEEPLESS
IT IS A WOMAN'S LIFE
IT IS A WOMAN'S LIFE.

— J. HUEBNER