

Zenaida is a young hondurean woman and her family lives in a small village in a rural area of the country. Including her parents they are nine in number-a typical hondurean family. Despite their humble background ~~several~~ after a tough struggle some including Zenaida managed to get to University. She graduated in Social Science and began to work in a government agency. Her brother Manfredo, 35 years old, managed finally to study economics. By then he had married, becoming the father of three children, Hector Ricardo, Herling Lizet and Nadia Walesca. He was elected ~~to become~~ vice-president of the student's union in the Economic school. Most week-ends both he and his sister <sup>ied</sup> to travel from the capital city where they live - Tegucigalpa to their own village Langue, where most of their friends are.

Then the unexpected happened. On ~~Saturday~~ 12th September, 1981 Manfredo was about to get into ~~to~~ his car in the centre of Tegucigalpa when he was arrested by several plain-clothes policemen. He was taken away and 'disappeared' becoming one of the first cases of a honuran citizen <sup>to</sup> suffering that fate.

It took some time for the Velasquez family to fully realise what had happened. They immediately filed a habeus corpus writ and mounted guard in the courts to see if he would be presented before the justice. There was no response. The university students, friends of Manfredo, protested but neither was there any response from the authorities.

The news quickly got back to Langue causing shock and concern among the poblation that knew him. After several meetings the people there decided to travel to Tegucigalpa in a public march to demand his freedom. More than 500 people took part and they presented themselves outside of the Presidential House. They sat in a circle in the Plaza under the bayonetted rifles of the army while Manfredo's Mother and the entire family publically appealed to the president to return her son. But it was no good. Rumours were that he had gone mad under torture and so could not be brought before a judge, others that he was dead.

However the villagers of Langue were not to be so easily defeated. Some days later they peacefully occupied a foreign news agency office in the city and left the building only after they had evidence that cables had been dispatched informing of the case. They even presented themselves in the national football stadium to leaflet petitioning for the freedom of a former soccer player.

The days and weeks went by with no response. By now Zenaida's life had been totally changed. Searching from prision to prision, ~~(suffering)~~ seeing her parents ageing overnight under





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the anguish, listening to her young nephew and nieces questioning for the return of their father, she began to assume more and more the burden of the search. A ~~new~~ President, Roberto Suazo Cordova was elected ~~x~~ in Honduras, and the family began to have new hopes. For Manfredo's birthday they got some money together to publish an advertisement in the papers appealing for his freedom. The months went by and still no official response.

Then something unexpected happened. A former high-ranking military officer, disgusted by the new scale of repression in Honduras fled to Mexico and in public testimony named ~~SEYER~~ at least one officer directly responsible for the arrest and disappearance of Manfredo. Zenaida lost ~~now~~ time in filing a new habeas corpus writ with this information. The judge however decided that the testimony was not 'relevant' to the case.

By now a year had gone by and many other Hondurean families had begun the same sad pilgrimage as the Velasquez family. They began to get to know ~~one another~~ and support ~~one another~~ appealing to all the political or legal possibilities that existed in order to re-encounter <sup>ER</sup> their loved ones. However the search became more and more futile <sup>AS</sup> and more and more cases began to happen.

By March, 1983 a major opportunity presented itself with the announced visit of the Pope to Honduras. The ~~xx~~ families now organised in a committee (COFADEH) decided to write to the Pope appealing to his intercession for them. And they decided to organise a public silent presence on Friday 11th of March when he arrived. Each woman including the children put on white scarves, as the mothers of the disappeared in Argentina, carrying fotos and banners appealing for their loved ones. The Pope did not receive them nor did he answer their letter but the word began to go out on the wires. Honduras is no longer the oasis of peace it was claimed to be in Central America. Here too normal families are being destroyed by the forced disappearance of one of their members. The committee decided to continue the protest every first Friday of the month. In April, as they were marching in Plaza de la Merced in front of the Presidential ~~House~~, an American <sup>a</sup> delegation arrived including Robert White, Former US ambassador to El Salvador to meet with the president. Convinced by the families the delegation pushed Suazo Cordova to order an investigation of the disappearances. But the delegation left and the President quietly forgot his promise.

In May the families decided to appeal to the Catholic Church. The bishops had expressed deep concern about the increase of fear among the Hondurean people and called on the government to remedy



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the situation. The families requested an interview with the archbishop of Tegucigalpa but without success. They then decided to organise a Mass for the mothers of the disappeared on mother's day and after a long struggle with the administrator of the cathedral he finally complied. One of the excuses he used was that he could also be disappeared because of that.

The pressure of the families began to tell, so that unexpectedly in June, the chief of the security police, Coronel Blas Salazar presented two prisoners, a man and a woman, before the courts who had been disappeared for more than 80 days. He announced that he had 18 other people in a similar situation but would <sup>NOT</sup> present them <sup>UNTIL</sup> when he decided to do so. A short while afterwards another hondurean detained-disappeared was presented in Guatemala saying that he had been secretly detained in Honduras but had repented of his terrorist activities and had got exile in Guatemala.

Using the information publicised by Crnl. Blas Salazar the relatives once again appealed to the Supreme Court, this time elaborating a collective Habeas Corpus but to date the Court has not acted against the Chief of Security. The signal to the Honduran security forces is quite clear. They can do absolutely what they want.

The National Congress in Honduras has been <sup>CAUSE</sup> reluctant to do anything that would ~~be~~ a conflict with the Army but finally presurised by the deteriorating situation they created a special commission to look into the matter of human rights violations in Honduras, whose principal violation is the disappearance of over 200 hondurans and other central americans in the country. COFADEH requested a meeting with that congressional commission but they are still waiting for an appointment. They are not very hopeful that the commission will help them as it was handpicked by the government, but are determined to appeal to any possible forum.

"We don't know what more to do in order to recover our loved ones so we are now appealing to international solidarity". Their indictment of the Honduran Authorities is truly devastating. The constitutional and democratically elected government of Honduras has not been able to defend that which is most basic, human life and the family. The driving motivation of the families committee is expressed in their motto 'For peace and family unity - until we find them'. The humanitarian depth of their struggle is most eloquently revealed by an advertisement paid out of their own pockets expressing their solidarity with the President Suazo Cordova on the occasion of the kidnapping of his daughter Xiomara in Guatemala. It is a most moving document.



The authorities in Honduras say that the victims are all terrorists and the families are defending terrorists.

COFADEH ~~KEE~~ replies that if that is the case why are they not brought before the courts and tried. "Why should they be disappeared?" No one seems to be able to answer that question.

The government also claims that the 'disappeared' have fled the country to Nicaragua, Cuba or Russia. The families demand evidence of that but none has been produced.

This intense drama which now is being enacted in Honduras has and is being repeated in over 12 different Latin American countries. And in most of these countries the most decided response has come from families of the victims such as the Velasquez. That particular situation affects more than 90,000 families all over the continent. Honduras is the latest country to enter the list.

For the last two years all the families have been working together in FEDEFAM (The Latin American Federation of Associations of Relatives of Disappeared/Detainees) which is the organization which they have created to better co-ordinate the work. In FEDEFAM each victim is considered a person ~~fix~~ with a family, a important personal history and a dignity which simply cannot be written off. This is the basis and fundamental inspiration of the struggle. Differing political ideologies, religious beliefs and even nationalities are laid aside in this basic struggle for human dignity.

However extensive reflection on the repressive practice of 'disappearing' political opponents or those that can be supposed to be in that category, leads one to the conclusion on the basis of evidence that it is not a native Latin American invention. Usually National Security considerations are used to justify its use and is a characteristic of US-trained armies in Latin America. Using Pentagon jargon, special task-force groups become paramilitary kidnap, and torture squads in Latin America. In-depth interrogation, behaviour manipulation and Skinner's psychiatry means prolonged torture to produce the desired behavioural change in the victims and terror in the population. So we have secret detention centres, clandestine cemeteries, the use of the hood and so called 'repented terrorists'. Under the aegis of the US, the Argentine military became so expert in the practice that the Pentagon sent them to Honduras ~~in the~~ to organise the present 'preventive counterinsurgency work campaign' under way in the country. Apparently anti-communism even though it has no basis in reality (in Honduras all observers are in agreement that there is no 'communist threat' in the country) can be used to justify any type of barbarity.



Official military terror is now the order of the day in Honduras together with the new Hotels and night clubs to recieve US and visiting military. Reminences of Saigon, operation 'Pheenix' x the Tiger Cages and destroyed vietnamese families. When will the Pentagon learn ? When will the US people fully realise that their money is used in military expenditure to destroy that which is most sacred, human life and the family?

Human Rights workers in Honduras, such as Dr. Ramon Custodio, medical doctor and President of the local human rights committee, Zenaida and other members of COFADEH are under constant attack by the US backed Honduran military. Their lifes are in danger now. What is their crime ? To search for their loved ones and defend them. If that is considered a crime in our western christian culture then something has really gone wrong. The true criminals are seated in very high places who have caused this to happen.

It is about time that ordinary decent people in the US and other countries implicated in the situation get together and stop this state sponsored brutality. That is what FEDEFAM and the latin American Familjes of the Disappeared movement is all about.

A concrete way of doing something about this is to write a letter of solidarity to:

COFADEH  
APARTADO POSTAL 1256  
TEGUCIGALPA DC  
HONDURAS  
CENTRAL AMERICA

Rev. Patrick Rice  
(executive secretary - FEDEFAM)