

Couple says president distorts facts

By KEN DORSEY
Reporter

A married couple from Washington, D.C. returning from Nicaragua claim that the Reagan administration has deliberately misrepresented human rights in Central America.

Tony Equale and Mary Risacher, both who have been in Nicaragua for 11 months and have previous experience in Latin America, told students at an Amnesty International meeting here last week that the accusations made by the present U.S. administration against Nicaragua are distortions of the daily reality there.

The fundamental direction of the Sandinista Revolution is a vigorous response to the two desperate needs of the Nicaraguan people: national independence and an end to poverty of the lowest level, Equale said.

Equale, a 45-year-old auto mechanic who has a long history of working with poor people, has recently worked with El Salvadoran refugees in Honduras. He also works with the Nicaraguan Department of Agriculture as an instructor in a mechanics training school, and with state farms in rice and coffee-growing regions near the city of Matagalpa in Nicaragua.

His wife, Mary Risacher, is a licensed practical nurse with previous teaching experience.

Risacher was in Chile from 1970-1973 and worked with the Salvadoran refugee camps from 1981-1982.

"We came back to the states specifically because we saw the importance of our election in the United States for the lives of the people down there," she said. "We took a couple of months off and came up to let Americans know what's really happening."

According to the September 14 issue of the New York Times, the Reagan administration has spent more than \$1 billion to prop up the Salvadoran government and \$150 million to overthrow the Sandinistas in Nicaragua.

People get confused because the United States is supporting the government in El Salvador against the rebels and it also is supporting the rebels in Nicaragua against the government, Equale said. Generally, people cannot remember which is El Salvador and which is Nicaragua, he added.

While in Honduras from 1981-1982, Equale said he learned first

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hand from Salvadoran refugees he had gotten to know, the kind of tactics the civilian population faced in El Salvador.

"The armies sweeping through the areas killed everything in sight... people, animals, dogs... anything that lived," he said.

The fundamental tactic is to kill the people in El Salvador, Equale said. One such way is through "encirclement" where the El Salvadoran army drives whoever is fleeing to the

the New York Times, 13 individuals, including the commander of a security force unit, were sentenced to up to 17 years for murder, rape, torture and robbery, as a result of one investigation and the appointment of a special prosecutor.

Equale said a human rights rationale for the United States effort to overthrow the Sandinistas hardly squares with efforts by the Reagan administration to shore up the government of El Salvador, which,

Equale said, Nicaragua does have problems with their human rights; all the countries of Central America do, he said.

"I don't want to be lied to though," Risacher said, cutting in. "The deception of the government and the administration in the U.S. helped me to realize that my American values mean a lot to me... I mean, it's my right as an American to stand up and say what I really believe and what I believe in, and that's real important to me."

"We want to come back to the states, but right now we feel U.S. citizens need to be down in Nicaragua to show the people that we support what they are trying to do in building their own new society and that we don't agree with the policy of our administration."

Equale admitted it was frustrating to come back and contradict somebody like Reagan who has so much support in this nation.

"We're a couple of little people," he said. "Who is going to listen to us? My advice is to read as much as you can, don't just listen to Reagan, don't just listen to us. Learn the facts, get the facts yourself."

'Little people' advise others to learn facts, act as citizens

border up against the Honduran army.

When they cannot kill the people in the country or on the border, they arrest them by the thousands and put them in refugee camps along the El Salvadoran border, Equale said. There are 10,000 people in among the camps.

In Nicaragua, soldiers have been punished, Equale said. According to

Equale said, has a horrendous record on human rights.

"Every historian that reads Ronald Reagan's speeches realizes that the man is lying," Equale said. "To distort facts the way he is doing is a lie to the American people in order to present a particular politics with regard to these people."

"Nicaragua is not perfect... we didn't come here to tell you it was."

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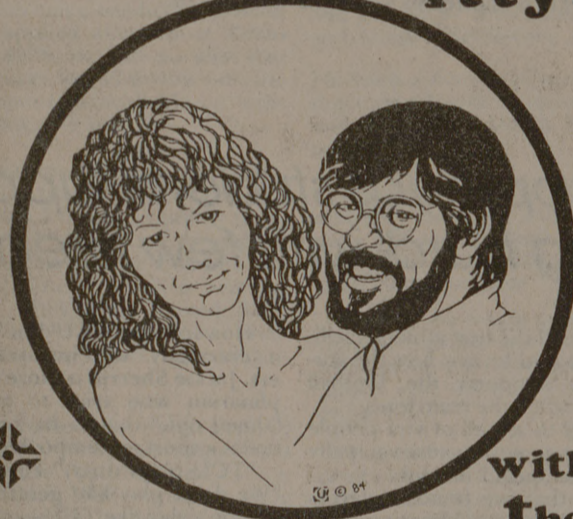


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